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Product Attachment, Brand Attachment and Extended Self in a Business-To-Business Context: An Inquiry Into Trucks and Truck Drivers

Keywords:
B2B, Extended Self, Product Attachment, Brand Attachment, Truck, Structural Equation Modeling, Phenomenology

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Questa tesi è il frutto di tre anni di intenso studio e di duro lavoro. In uno dei primi seminari a cui ho partecipato mi fu detto che fare il dottorato equivale a fare un viaggio: un viaggio della mente, dello spirito e del corpo. A conclusione di questa esperienza mi sento di aver viaggiato abbastanza sia spiritualmente che fisicamente. Come i pittori attraversano varie fasi artistiche, così io sono partito dal positivismo per passare poi allo strutturalismo, al post-strutturalismo, al post-modernismo, all'antropologia culturale e alla sociologia inglese e francese. Questa tesi testimonia (almeno, lo spero) il viaggio culturale e scientifico che ho percorso in questi tre anni in cui ho avuto modo di innamorarmi delle scienze sociali in tutta la loro affascinante e provocatoria pretesa scientificità. E può essere concepita anche come una sorta di diario di viaggio in cui ho annotato tutti i consigli, i suggerimenti, gli spunti, gli insegnamenti e le critiche delle persone che ho incontrato in giro per l'Italia, per l'Europa e per il mondo.

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1

Introduction

The business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) domains seem to be ever more overlapped in marketing research, theory and practice (e.g. Vargo and Lusch, 2011; Cova and Salle, 2006).

Recent developments of the discipline toward a service centered perspective and the subsequent introduction of the so called service dominant logic - SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Lusch and Vargo, 2008) have strongly contributed to this cultural switch.

In addition, CCT's researchers have recently affected the development of new paths in the IMP frame of references, sparking off a lively debate in search for some commonalities (e.g. Cova, 1994; Easton, 1995; Tikkanen, 1995; Borghini et al., 2010; Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Dubois and Gibbert, 2010; Easton, 2010; Visconti, 2010; Cova and Salle, 2006; Rinallo et al., 2007). Notable examples of this cultural debate can be found especially concerning the postmodern/post-structuralist critique of epistemology and respective research methods (e.g. Gummesson, 2003; Cova and Salle, 2007; Hietanen et al., 2011).

The IMP tradition, focusing on the relationships between companies in business networks (Håkansson, 1982; Ford, 1997) has undeniably contributed to this cultural advances introducing the idea of the firm as a nexus of exchange relationships (Möller and Wilson, 1995) and underlining the importance of the social exchange between actors (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) even outside of any business opportunity (e.g. Cova and Salle, 2000).

But – at the same time – it has strongly contributed to increase the distance between B2B and B2C taking the differences existing between these two domains as a justification for a different perspective when studying the industrial markets (Håkansson, 1982).

Nonetheless, the IMP frame of references can be considered a fertile ground for the application of some philosophical, ontological and epistemological paradigms and respective research methods that have been increasingly applied in consumer research over the last thirty years (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005 for a thorough review on the topic) since both assume a view of markets as socially constructed entities and move toward a more humanistic perspective (Hirschman, 1986).

In fact it is not a chance that several contributions were recently published in the IMM - Industrial Marketing Management - in the attempt to underline how CCT (Consumer Culture Theory) and its more in vogue research methods can contribute to a renewal of the European business marketing approach (notable examples can be found in a 2010 IMM special issue – vol. 39, issue 1).

And again it is not a chance that some scholars have identified in the consumer approach interesting cues and stimuli to rejuvenate the industrial marketing tradition (Cova and Salle, 2003).

Even though - as illustrated above - a humanistic renaissance of the marketing discipline seems coming to the fore in the wake of a generalized cultural turn affecting the marketplace as a whole (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006), just few contributions have empirically shown common consumption patterns in B2B and B2C realms.

According to the current marketing literature it seems that one of the most studied and researched avenue to shorten the distance between the two branches of marketing, is to focus on the relationship as a unit of analysis and apply common theories in different domains (i.e. in B2B and in B2C). Service dominant logic scholars for examples go in this direction (see Vargo, 2009).

In the B2B literature the concept of relationship has been defined in terms of interorganizational (e.g. Ritter and Gemünden, 2003 for an overview on the topic) and/or personal (e.g. Dwyer et al. 1987; Cova and Salle, 2000) interaction(s) between buyer(s) and seller(s) and was conceptualized as the logical divide between industrial and mass consumer markets (Ford, 1997; Håkansson, 1982).

As noted by Cova and Salle (2006) the IMP approach is in contraposition with the one that dates back to Kotler and Levy (1969) that presupposes that in the relationship between demand and supply, one part - the demand - is passive, and the other - the supply - is active.

Coherently with this perspective hence, B2B markets should be regarded as social systems in which actors interact mostly on the basis of mutual trust (Berry, 1995; Anderson et al., 1987; Blois, 1999) and in which personal relationships between buyer's and seller's representatives are a central driver of commercial exchanges (Lian and Laing, 2007).

Few emphasis instead has been posed on the relationship between client(s) and products or product categories in industrial marketing studies and research.

In the consumer frame of reference instead – acknowledging the fragmented nature of mass markets and the idea of the market as a cultural place (see Pañalosa, 2000) - relevant contributions have demonstrated the existence of a strong connection between consumers and products/brands and the influence of this connection on consumers' behaviors (e.g. Fournier, 1998; McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988).

In particular, in CCT's tradition, several contributions have analyzed product possession in anthropological terms. Among the constructs, concepts and theories developed in this research stream, the idea that material possessions can be regarded as extension of individuals' self (Belk, 1988) is one of the most supported. In the words of Belk (1988) "a complete ensemble of consumption objects may be able to represent the diverse and possibly incongruous aspects of total self" (p. 140). And again – quoting Tuan (1980) – he supported the powerful statement "we are what we have and possess".

Hence, in this perspective, to possess pervades the "three basic states of our existence: having, doing and being" (Belk, 1988: 139).

Focusing on product possession as a way to build individuals' identities, the extended self framework has opened the door to a reconceptualization of the dyadic relationship between customers and brands that passes through possession, usage and experience of products (Mittal, 2006).

In B2B literature on the contrary, the product has been basically investigated in its mediating role, i.e. in terms of how it influences content, type and intensity of commercial exchanges. As noted by Metcalf et al. (1992) the characteristics of the product exchanged have a significant impact on the process of interaction between the parties. Nonetheless product importance has traditionally received little attention relative to other aspects of product exchange (Bloch and Richins, 1983).

This premises done, if – as briefly argued above and extensively shown in the literature – the focus on the relationship offers a non repeatable field to bridge the gap between B2B and B2C (Vargo, 2009), what about the relationship between product(s) and customer(s) in the B2B context? Is there any common consumption pattern in consuming business and consumer products? Are industrial products used for self representation

purposes?

In this dissertation the author addresses these issues focusing on a particular B2B product: the truck. The choice of this product category is due to the fact that although trucks must be considered among the industrial products (this point will be deeply argued in the proceeding of this manuscript) they are featured by some consumption related phenomena generally referred as to typical of the consumer sphere such as the existence of product and brand communities, the high experience-content of the product, and a practiced product's personalization among the owners.

In the truck context hence, it seems that there are some anthropological evidences of the link between possession and self (Beaglehole, 1932) even though the domain in which this product should be collocated is undeniably B2B.

Moreover, as noted by Belk (1988), consumer researchers have widely studied automobiles (*lato sensu*) for the high empathetic relationship that the owner establishes with the object as identity builder in social contexts (e.g. see Schouten and McAlexander, 1995 for the Harley Davidson "cult", Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001 and Luedicke, 2006 respectively for the Saab and for the Hummer brand communities or Kressmann et al., 2006 for a study of the effect of self-congruence on brand loyalty among cars' owners).

Hence a principal standpoint of this dissertation is that the truck can be considered a suitable product category where common consumption patterns between B2B and B2C can be found, observed and studied.

The contributions to the marketing discipline and to marketing and consumer research and theory of this doctoral thesis - at least in the opinion of the writer – are several.

First of all it contains a thorough review of the literature to date aimed to understand if the current "mainstreams" in marketing research (namely IMP, CCT and SDL to which some authors have referred to as academic brands – see Cova et al., 2009) offer significant rooms to allow a convergence between B2B and B2C. As this dissertation will propose, the product-customer relationship is revealed as being a fruitful field where thick cross-fertilization between industrial and mass market consumption patterns can be found (at least in uncommon and under researched contexts like the one investigated in this manuscript).

Second, drawing on well established constructs in consumer research – such as product attachment (e.g. Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Schulz et al., 1989), brand attachment (e.g. Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2008; Park et al., 2010), brand loyalty (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1999), the extended self (Sirgy, 1982; Belk, 1988), identity salience (Callero,

1985), product-self congruity (Sirgy, 1982; Belk 1988; Aaker, 1996; Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988; Kleine et al., 1995; Schultz et al., 1989), etc. - the author empirically investigate the existence of some psychological and emotional feelings emerging in the consumption of the product truck.

Hence, some constructs that are well know – and to certain extents inflated – in consumer research are transposed in a B2B context and adopted as suitable lens through which consumption patterns in the industrial realm can be observed.

Third, the core studies composing this doctoral dissertation, are developed using research methods more commonly used in consumer research than in the European industrial marketing tradition: a quantitative enquiry adopts structural equation modeling (SEM), while in a qualitative study existential phenomenology (Thompson et al., 1989) is applied as a reliable methods that can be used in B2B marketing research and as a useful sensitizing device to sense making. The first – being quantitative – is characterized as being more inclined toward a positivistic conception of social sciences in which the researcher tries to find out causal relationships between latent variables (Descartes, 1637): hence is far from being in line with the prevailing approach to marketing research commonly accepted in the IMP group. The second, profoundly interpretivist (but not non rigorous for this reason – see Thompson et al., 1989), is increasingly applied in consumer research as a way to grasp the complexity of the consumption phenomena through consumers' stories.

Fourth, this doctoral thesis offers a locus of investigation that is different from the one that prevails in business to business research: individuals rather than organizations. As noted by Rinallo et al. (2007) most IMP studies investigate networks and relationships among organizations and few attention has been directed towards organizations' workers. The subject of analysis of this study instead are individuals – namely truck drivers – who, to certain extents, share a common worldview co-constructed through a mutual engagement in a common activity (Wenger, 1998).

Summing up, with this dissertation the author tries to actively respond to the call for rejuvenation of the European industrial marketing orthodoxy (Cova and Salle, 2003) by enlarging its domain through the introduction of other than the traditional relationship/network perspective sovereign the IMP school of thought, by using other than the traditional case study method and by focusing on other than the network/relationship unit of analysis.

As far as managerial implications are concerned, this manuscript provides practitioners and professionals involved in the truck industry (truck manufacturers at first) a valuable snapshot of the truck drivers population and provides empirical evidences of the

existence of non-utilitarian benefits and meanings that drivers attach to the product truck. As a third study here proposed will show, practitioners seem to be still not fully aware of the relevance that non utilitarian meaning attached to the product truck have for the drivers (at least some of them).

This raises several issues – of special concern for marketers, advertisers and communicators – that truck manufacturers should start to take into account and to acknowledge in order to effectively operate in markets that are featured by the same characteristics of the Italian one (like Spain as instance).

Its unique characteristics (illustrated in details in Chapter 3) should push companies to set up strategies characterized by what the author of this manuscript has intriguingly called the "squint of Venus": one eye looking to the truck market as B2B by nature; the other looking at the same market adopting a perspective that is very similar to what mass market companies actually do.

Thus should leverage on those non core product attributes, enlarging the scope of marketing encompassing commercial and communication actions as well as new product development strategies traditionally conceived as belonging to the consumer world, and stressing the significance that the product truck has for the users: a significance that stretches its technical functions as a working tool (as the author will empirically demonstrate in the empirical studies composing this manuscript).

This need is compelling not only because of the dramatic downturn affecting the Italian truck market in the last three years (see chapter 3); but also because foreign truck manufacturers selling their products in the Italian market (seven out of the eight crowding the market) seems to do not fully understand differences existing between their home market and the Italian one. Being originally based in markets other than Italy (basically Germany and Sweden) they struggle with a demand characterized by some particular features difficult – if not impossible – to find elsewhere in Europe.

The structure of the manuscript is articulated as follow: chapter 2 contains an extensive review of the literature to date aimed to underline similarities and differences between B2B and B2C marketing and to shed light on possible grounds and domains in which more significant points of convergence can be found in view of a possible unification of the discipline. In a following chapter facts and figures of the European and of the Italian market for trucks are illustrated as well as the relative market share of each of truck producer crowding the Italian market. The fourth chapter in which the research design is illustrated, forego the three empirical studies composing this doctoral thesis divided in as many chapters.

Chapter five illustrates a qualitative study in which existential phenomenology (Thompson et al., 1989) is applied to shed light on the anthropological meaning of "truck consumption".

Chapter six contains a quantitative study in which structural equation modeling (and multi group analysis) is applied to quantitatively test the results reached in the previous research effort.

Chapter seven illustrates the results of an exploratory study in which the characteristics of the market for trucks have been investigated focusing on marketing managers working for truck manufacturers as key informants.

Finally, conclusions, limitations, research and managerial implications are suggested and discussed.

2

Literature Review

AGENDA: 1. Introduction – **2**. B2B vs. B2C: hidden convergences – **3**. IMP and CCT: in search for convergences – **4**. The product in industrial and consumer marketing – **5**. The blurred boundaries of the product truck: B2B or B2C?

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature to date in order to evaluate if the current state of the marketing discipline (considered as an unified corpus of literature) provides a common perspective and suitable frameworks to merge B2B and B2C marketing and their underpinning perspectives and theoretical domains.

More precisely the aim is to evaluate possible convergences and actual divergences among the most famous, acclaimed and influential schools of thought in marketing studies (Cova et al., 2009): IMP (Industrial Marketing and Purchasing), CCT (Consumer Culture Theory) and SDL (Service Dominant Logic). As the author will argue: i) the current literature does not provide a solution to solve the dichotomy between the two branches of marketing; ii) the "in vogue" service dominant logic (SDL) appears to be more a normative and descriptive theory rather than a valuable lens to inform marketing strategies and to enrich the empirical studies in marketing (Brown and Patterson, 2009); iii) some similarities and common denominators can be found between IMP and CCT.

2. B2B vs. B2C: hidden convergences

In one of the most eclectic articles published in the European Journal of Marketing in the last decades, Stephen Brown, under the pseudonym of Alan Smithee, argued that Kotler is Dead! (Smithee, 1997). Nonetheless, although the emergence of cultural and postmodernist paradigms has drastically changed the marketing discipline, the traditional Kotlerian perspective of marketing is still far to be dead. Yet, is evermore criticized and questioned. Forerunning contributions of this critical stream can be found in the IMP approach emerged since its early stages as a non-orthodox school of thought aimed at tracing a clear borderline between B2B and B2C and to challenge the traditional way of studying and approaching industrial marketing (Håkansson, 1982). As a result, the IMP paradigm appeared to be revolutionary and aimed to overturn the constituted equilibrium, focusing on some features of marketing industrial products that have been largely neglected in the traditional marketing - and marketing management - literature (Håkansson, 1982).

Features like the social content of the buyer-seller relationship, the active participation of the buyer in industrial trades, the relative stability of industrial markets, the long-term nature of business relationships, the existence of an atmosphere in which buyer-seller interactions and exchanges take place, etc.

Thus, marketing scholars have started to look at industrial marketing not just focusing on the product/service exchange between buyer(s) and supplier(s) but broadening their perspective encompassing the relational nature and the social content of business interactions (see for example the idea of business network as social systems introduced by Sydow and Windeler, 1998).

Even though the centrality of the relationship has been pinpointed also in the consumer literature (e.g Grönroos, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) business scholars keep on claiming for a clear demarcation of the fields: as Håkansson and Snehota (1995) noted, business and consumer relationships differ in terms of continuity, complexity, symmetry, and informality.

As a result "the prevailing view of the literature supporting the dichotomy rests on the conceptual argument that B2B market characteristics and influences, buyer decision processes, and buyer-seller relationships differ from those found in consumer markets" (Coviello and Brodie, 2001: 383).

As noted by Webster (1978) the differences in the nature of the markets, the products, the demand and - more importantly - in the motives and the buying behavior of

organizations acting as buyers, compared to the motives and the buying behavior characterizing individuals, justify this distinction.

Brown et al., (2007) introduced the idea of continuum to differentiate business and consumer markets and marketing, depicting a conceptual tool labeled as "the b- to – b/consumer market dimensions continuum (see Table 1): according to these authors these two markets differ in terms of contextual conditions, psychological variables, product variables and marketing/communication variables. As far as contextual conditions are concerned, consumer markets are featured by low buying situation risk, market drivers that deal with the self expressive content of consumption and by the pervasive role of the fashion system (McCracken, 1986) and by a purchasing decision process that is entirely headed by the individuals.

On the other side of the continuum, on the contrary, contextual conditions of business markets are buying situations characterized by high risk, that rely on technological/utilitarian drivers and that assume the form of a group rather than an individual decision.

	CONSUMER MARKETS		**BUSINESS MARKETS**
Contextual Conditions	Low	*1. Buying Situation Risk*	High
	Fashion/Self-Expressive	*2. Product Market Drivers*	Technological/Utilitarian
	Individual	*3. Purchase Decision Process*	Group
Psychological Variables	Social	*4. Type of Risk*	Economic & Performance
	Impulse Purchase	*5. Impulsiveness*	Rational Discourse
	External: Peers	*6. Reference Group Influencers*	External: best-in-class; Internal: experts
Product Variables	Product-Oriented	*7. Brand Strategy Approach*	Company Oriented
	Product and Associated Imaginery	*8. Product Value*	Product and Associated Services
Communication Variables	Traditional/Broadcast	*9. Medium*	Interactive/Personal
	Image-Based	*10. Content*	Technical/Pedagogic

Table 1 - The B2B-Consumer market dimensions continuum
Source: adapted from Brown, Bellenger and Johnston (2007)

In terms of psychological variables the type of risk is considered to be social in consumer markets while oriented toward performances in the business ones; the acquiring

process is supposed to be impulsive in consumer markets while is described as being more rational in business markets and, finally, if peers are the main influencers in consumer markets, opinion leaders and internal experts are the strongest influential individuals for industrial commercial transactions.

As far as the third dimension (product variables) is concerned, if the most typical brand strategy approach in consumer markets is product oriented, it is considered as being company oriented in B2B trades; and product value is associated to the intangible/irrational content of the offering in B2C while the concept of product value in B2B is more related to additional services placed aside of the core offer.

Last, if communication strategies in B2C imply mass media and image based content of communications, in B2B personal interaction is the prevailing form of socialization between the company and its clients (actual and prospect) and the content of the communication is more oriented toward technical aspects of the commercial transaction between the parties.

Brown et al. (2007) thus conclude that business and consumer markets are profoundly different (according to the dimensions identified and reviewed) allowing possible "hybrid" market forms along the mentioned continuum.

Nonetheless, although the "dichotomy supporters" seem to be the majority, some authors have identified similarities between the buying behavior of companies and individuals (Sheth, 1974; Zaltman and Wallendorf, 1979; Ford et al., 2002).

And the contrasting conclusions to which the few empirical works that have tried to test the existence or not of the dichotomy (see Coviello and Brodie for a review of the researches published until 2001 on this topic) corroborate what Fern and Brown stated about 30 years ago: "this distinction" (between business and consumer marketing) "is unjustified because it is neither based in theory nor empirically supported" (Fern and Brown, 1984: 68).

However, some authors have argued that consumer goods manufacturers seem to have embraced the marketing concept more completely than their industrial counterparts (Webster, 1978) considering also that some business marketers are more concerned with the specifications of products than with how these specifications respond to customer needs (Hutt and Speh, 1992). As a result, the acceptance of the necessity of formal market research has proceeded relatively more slowly in industrial marketing than it has in the consumer goods field (McTavish and Maitland, 1980).

A partial solution to this academic debate has been recently provided by service dominant logic (SDL) theorists (see Vargo and Lusch, 2004 for the theoretical foundations

of their original perspective) that, in the attempt "to nudge marketing thought away from fragmentation and toward a more unified theoretical conceptualization and framework" (Vargo and Lusch, 2011: 181), have claimed – too simplistically, at least in the opinion of the writer of this manuscript - that "it's all BtoB" (Vargo and Lusch, 2011).

Authors suggest to dissolve the dichotomy adopting the term "actor" instead of both "business" and "consumer", giving birth to the so called actor-to-actor (A2A) marketing. In their frame there is no difference between business actors and consumers since both can be considered "resource integrating, service providing enterprises" (p. 184) and the concept of exchange can be re-conceptualized as an exchange of "services for services".

It is worth to note that in the service dominant logic frame of references the word "service" does not refer to non material products as it is traditionally and currently used, but is defined as "the application of specialized competences (…) for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself. It "reflects the process of doing something beneficial for and in conjunction with some entities". (…)

Thus, according to SDL goods and services are not alternative forms of products. Goods are appliances (…). Service, then, represents the general case, the common denominator of the exchange process; service is what is always exchanged. Goods, when employed, are aids to the service-provision process" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

The adoption of the service perspective and of the actor-to-actor (A2A) orientation, conceptually allows that what has traditionally been thought of as the consumers world, can be equally applied to the producers and vice versa (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). Differences existing between producers and customers (both individuals and companies) are blurred and the exchange between them is conceived as value co-creation.

Moreover, the unification of the fields – consistently with SDL – pass also through the main pillars of the IMP's conception of B2B markets: relationships and networks. SDL in fact, seems to provide valuable conceptual tools for the development of the network based market view, though a transcending meaning of relationship in terms of mutual value-creation (Vargo, 2009) that are retained valuable and applicable both in business and in consumer contexts.

In addition, as noted by Cova and Salle (2008) "service dominant logic moves the orientation of marketing from a "market to" philosophy (…) to a "market with" philosophy" (p. 271).

Thus, considering that the earliest divide between industrial and consumer marketing has been conceptualized focusing on the nature of the markets to which

industrial and consumer goods and services are directed (see Kotler, 1980, McCarthy, 1978, Stanton, 1981), service dominant logic seems to offer some important cues and stimuli to solve the dichotomy, focusing on the process through which value is created.

As recently noted by Gummesson (2011) Vargo and Lusch make less intense the differences between B2B and B2C in pursuit of greater commonalities.

Nonetheless, although the logic behind SDL is intriguing and is gaining increasing attention in academic circles (Ballantyne and Varey, 2008), it cannot be considered fully exhaustive since the "marketing with" philosophy and the underpinning co-production/co-creation of value appears to be more a linguistic game (Brown and Patterson, 2009) that something that can be considered valid in practical and theoretical terms (for a thorough critique of service dominant logic see Grönroos, 2011) and since the notion that both firms and customers are under every circumstances value co-creators is misleading (Grönroos, 2011).

Ford (2011) in the attempt to underline differences and commonalities between SDL's and IMP's perspectives has clearly stated that even if SDL tries to unify the marketing discipline under the same grand theory, it has an implicit orientation towards the consumer/mass market sphere. Moreover, being a "grand theory", it is naturally permeated by the old-fashion normative (Kotlerian?!) perspective of markets and marketing neglected both by the European school of industrial marketing and by the supporters of the cultural perspective of markets, marketing and consumption.

This normative flavor of SDL can be traced in the well known Vargo and Lusch (2004) paper - *Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing* – in which the authors themselves admitted that there is one best way, an all embracing perspective for marketing: SDL (see O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2009 for an insightful critic of service dominant logic).

Given the shortcomings shortly illustrated above we can hence conclude that even if SDL should be undeniably considered as a step forward in providing a solution to the "centuries-old" dichotomy (too naïve perhaps), it cannot be considered satisfactory. Neither in terms of "logic behind the logic" (the way in which the term service has been used by Vargo and Lusch has been labeled as an "ill-defined" concept - O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2009), nor in terms of methodological cues stemming from SDL.

A review of the literature to date in fact suggest that SDL has been mostly applied as a "sensitizing device" (the term is borrowed by Giddens, 1984) rather than as a theory to test with epistemologically similar research methods. As strongly stated by Brown and Patterson (2009) "empirical evidence" (supporting SDL) "is in short supply" (p. 520).

In the same article Brown and Patterson (2009) have criticized SDL making a parallelism between the academic hype around SDL and the Harry Potter fever of the last decade:

> "*That is to say, the incredible rise of Service-Dominant Logic is not dissimilar to Harry Potter fervour. The speed of its uptake, the enthusiasm of its admirers, the controversy it has provoked, the contention that it contains "nothing new", the claim that it is all hype no heft, the paradigm-shifting character of its arrival (just as Rowling reinvented kid-lit, so too V&L reimagined marketing scholarship), the intricate language games it has initiated (for "quidditch" and "muggles" read "operand" and "use value"), together indicate that SDL is the scholarly equivalent of Harry Potter, loved and loathed in equal measure*" (p. 530).

Differently from IMP – in which qualitative case studies are the prevailing research method – and differently from CCT – in which the group of research methods currently adopted by scholars are interpretivist and ethnometodological by nature (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005) – SDL still lacks a clear characterization in terms of method adopted and seems to be difficult to test empirically (Brown and Patterson, 2009).

Greater commonalities instead – the author and the relevant literature on the topic argue - can be found in CCT and its theoretical and epistemological approaches (Gomez Arias and Bello Acebron, 2001).

Differently from SDL's, CCT's scholars (and CCT supporters) have suggested to adopt some interpretivist, post-modern, ethnometodological research methods and paradigms also in business contexts rather than to propose an omni-comprehensive logic able to integrate and synthesize all the branches of marketing and management (Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006).

In particular they claim that in the post-modern era, modern research methodologies cannot grasp the complexity and the beneath evolutionary trends of today industrial markets (Arias Gómez and Bello Acébron, 2001).

In 2003 this aspect has been sharply pinpointed also by Gummesson who argue that "All research is interpretive!" and that research methods currently used in the industrial marketing field do not fit the condition of "complexity, ambiguity, chaos, uncertainty, fuzzy boundaries and continuous change in both technology and the market place" (p. 483) to which B2B firms are subjected.

As a result the interpretive post-modern epistemology(ies) and respective research methods are gradually finding rooms in the IMP group.

Just to cite some examples, Lowe (2001) claimed for the need to acknowledge a post-modern vision of culture in the network approach; Borghini et al. (2004) have adopted anthropological methods to study visitors' behavior at professional trade show; Buchanan-Oliver (2006) has explored the possible application of institutional semiotics (see Arnould et al., 2001) in IMP case studies; Lowe, Ellis and Purchase (2008) have suggested the introduction of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) in IMP research; Visconti (2010) has formalized a model of ethnographic case studies and their relevance in business marketing research; Borghini et al., (2010) proposed the introduction of videography as a way to represent reality in B2B contexts; Easton (2010) proposed critical realism in case study research in business contexts; Geiger and Turley (2003) proposed grounded theory for research in industrial marketing to which Wagner et al. (2010) added also objective hermeneutics; Hietanen et al. (2011) have claimed that business cases - through which the most part of the European industrial marketing knowledge is developed - should be treated as stories suitable for a phenomenological (*emic*) interpretation questioning their reliability in generating theories and managerial implications, etc.

The advent of interpretivism in B2B research is motivated by the increasing acknowledgement by the scientific community that the deductive hypothesis testing design does not grasp the complexity of the problems studied and does not provide satisfactory managerial prescriptions (Matthyssen and Vandenbempt, 2003; Arias Gómez and Bello Acébron, 2001; Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

As far as theoretical foundations are concerned, Cova and Salle (2006) have highlighted some similarities between IMP's and CCT's approach retracing the first twenty years of research in CCT (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Among those, the most important concerns the critical stance in relation to the dominant paradigm of marketing management and the refuse of deductive in favor of abductive approaches when studying market and marketing phenomena. Despite of these crucial similarities and the rising legitimization of CCT's research methods and philosophical standpoints into the IMP community, the two streams are still far. Too far!

Several resistances to this convergence can be found: the persistent and shared idea amongst IMP's scholars that the Kotlerian perspective is still ruling in B2C (Cova and Salle, 2003); the recurrent criticism to post-modern approaches in marketing especially in terms of its inability to provide directions for managers (Gomez Arias and Bello Acebron, 2001); and – as the author of this dissertation argues – the poverty of studies in which constructs, concepts and frameworks developed in the consumer stream are borrowed and applied in business contexts.

3. IMP and CCT: in search for convergences

As shown in the preview paragraph an exhaustive review of the literature to date does not provide a satisfactory solution to solve the dichotomy B2B and B2C marketing. The three mainstream academic brands in marketing (Cova et al., 2009) – namely IMP, CCT and SDL – sound similar concerning how far they are from the traditional (Kotlerian?!) perspective of marketing and marketing management - is the case of IMP and CCT - cross-fertilize each others in terms of concepts - is the case of IMP and SDL - and research methods - is the case, again, of IMP and CCT - but, altogether, do not provide a unique lens that can be used in analyzing B2B and B2C contexts. Even if some conceptualizations can be considered similar (e.g. the centrality of the relationship between the three schools of thought) and some research methods mostly developed in consumer research can be extended when studying business contexts (some contributions were mentioned and briefly reviewed in the last paragraph), business and consumer marketing continue to be too much different to converge and to solve the centuries-old fragmentation of the discipline.

In the proceeding of this manuscript the author argue that one way to solve the dichotomy does not necessarily pass through a thorough unification of the theories and of the epistemological foundations behind them.

Rather, can be found in common research foci and perspectives and in the introduction of concepts and constructs developed in consumer in business research and vice versa. Hence, through what Bartels already in 1974 has called the cross-fertilization of the marketing discipline.

To this aim CCT seems to be a fertile source since does not attempt to provide a universal marketing theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) but provides a family of theoretical perspectives aimed to unveil the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meaning of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) focusing on the micro level of consumption experiences (Holt, 2002). That is, on those experiential, social and cultural dimensions that are not accessible through (or just through) laboratory experiments.

This last aspect represent the thickest *trait d'union* between CCT and IMP scholars since in both schools of thought researchers are more inclined to field work than to laboratory and quantitative tests (Ford, 1990; Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Although - as noted above - a cross fertilization of the fields is already started especially as far as research methods is concerned (e.g. Lowe, 2001; Borghini et al., 2004;

Lowe et al., 2008; Visconti, 2010; Borghini et al., 2010; Easton, 2010, Hietanen et al., 2011, etc.) the adoption of constructs developed or introduced in the marketing literature by consumer researchers in industrial marketing contributions is still rare.

To date just few papers can be found: Cova and Salle (2000) have used the construct of rite/ritual often applied in consumer research (e.g. Belk et al., 1989; Gainer, 1995; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Stanfield Tetreault and Kleine, 1990; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; McCracken, 1986) to understand the nature of social interactions in extra-business relationships in the project business context. Rinallo and Golfetto (2006) developed a framework aimed to shed light on the shaping process of the fashion market drawing upon the post modern constructs of hyper-reality (Eco, 1986; Baudrillard, 1994) and representation (Baudrillard, 1994) well established in consumer researchers (e.g. Firat et al., 1995, Brown, 1995). Rinallo et al. (2010), focusing on trade shows, suggest that tools and conceptual models developed by the experiential perspective in consumer marketing can also be applied to B2B contexts and the same authors (2007) proposed to introduce other than the traditional network/relationship approach in industrial marketing studies, such as occupational communities as co-constructed social systems, to deepen the understanding of buying behavior in organizational negotiations and transaction. Except for the mentioned articles, any other relevant contribution can be found in the current published literature.

These first notable attempts to "import" not only CCT's epistemological foundations and respective research methods in industrial marketing, but also constructs, concepts and frameworks forged in consumer research, signal an increasing cross-contamination of the fields in view of a possible convergence (at least in pioneer investigations of non strictly industrial contexts).

This dissertation – as already mentioned in Chapter one - goes in this direction.

In restoring the centrality of the product in industrial marketing, the author will look at the product not limiting the focus to its utilitarian basic features (as commonly done in industrial marketing studies) but extending its significance to those "hyperreal" features (Baudrillard, 1994) that allow to consider the product as a cultural artifact through which people express themselves (McCracken, 1986) and to which people are emotionally and psychologically attached (e.g. Ball and Tasaki, 1992).

In particular the author will show how the product category here analyzed – the truck – is characterized by a diffused sense of attachment that possessors (truck drivers) develop with it; will identify some possible antecedents of the mentioned attachment; will

determine what are possible outcomes of product attachment and the main drivers of brand attachment.

It hence offer a different perspective – entirely borrowed by consumer studies – in studying product and brand issues in the industrial context.

4. The product in industrial and consumer marketing

Since in the B2B literature the buyer - supplier relationship represents the main unit of analysis (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), the product has been traditionally investigated in its mediating role, i.e. in terms of how it influences content, type and intensity of commercial exchanges.

In the first work of the IMP group (Håkansson, 1982) the product is considered the core of the exchange between the parties. Its significance is regarded mainly along the dimensions of standardization/complexity, relative amount of the purchase (from which respectively the bargaining power of buyers and the bargaining power of suppliers stem from – Lehman and Winer, 2005), novelty/frequency of the transaction and product importance.

Consistent with Metcalf et al. (1992) if the dimensions of standardization/complexity, novelty/frequency of the transaction and the importance of the purchase received great importance in the B2B literature [the project marketing discipline as instance is emerged as an autonomous branch of B2B marketing in response of the need to acknowledge low frequency of transactions, complexity and importance of transactions (see Cova, Ghauri and Salle, 2002)], product importance did not receive the same emphasis. In particular, there is an aspect of product importance that appears to be under-researched and deals with product importance as perceived by the buyer (Bloch and Richins, 1983).

If, in B2B, product importance is generally weighted according to the nature of the problem it is aimed to solve, (namely routine order, procedural, performance and political problems - Lehmann and O'Shaughnessy, 1974) no emphasis has been posed to product importance in terms of personal attachment, non utilitarian product's benefits and the self-expression content of industrial products.

In consumer research instead these aspects constitute the lenses through which the product is investigated: the product is considered a cultural artifact and consumption patterns are analyzed beyond utilitarian motives (McCracken, 1986).

In particular a field that has been object of increasing interest by consumer researchers deals with customers' product attachment; a topic that since a couple of decades ago was almost neglected in the marketing literature (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988).

Product attachment can be generally defined as "the emotional bond a consumer experiences with a product" (Schifferstein and Pelgrim, 2003) that exceed the product's utilitarian benefits and that specifically address the consumers' willingness to use and consume products for self expression purposes (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988).

According to McCracken (1986) not only consumer goods are the locus of self-expression and of symbolic/cultural meanings. Every product serves as media for the expression of the cultural meaning constituting our world. This is coherent with Belk's idea of things that can be considered as extension of the self that are not limited to material and consumer goods but encompasses ideas, experiences, places, tools, etc (Belk, 1988).

Belk himself in 2005 has widened the extended self framework as a solid theoretical lens in investigating the psychological tension of employees towards their workplace (Tian and Belk, 2005).

Assuming this standpoint hence, we can infer that also (some) B2B products can be considered – to certain extents - as media through which actors express themselves, their culture and the culture of the collective(s) to which they belong, can display feeling of attachment, person-object congruity (e.g., Belk 1988; Malhotra 1988; Sirgy 1982; Aaker, 1999) and personality (e.g. Jordan 1997; Govers and Mugge, 2004).

Hence, as the author of this doctoral thesis will argue, it is possible to adopt a perspective of business customers as consumers (or group of consumers sharing some common cultural aspects) and investigate the nature of exchange stressing those product features that deal with the anthropological meaning of possession.

This perspective – the author claim – cannot be applied to the entire range of industrial products given their extreme heterogeneity and the relevance that contextual (i.e. relationship based) aspects play in determining the nature of client-supplier social interaction. Yet can be transposed to other business transactions in markets featured by similar characteristics of both the demand and supply.

The product truck – as already mentioned in the introductory chapter of this manuscript – is revealed as being a suitable product to underline similarities between business and mass markets products, and to adopt a different perspective of product importance as perceived by the buyer.

5. The blurred boundaries of the product truck: B2B or B2C?

Considering what has been stated above the author investigates a product category belonging to the B2B landscape to which buyers/users seem to attribute significant symbolic meanings and a profound sense of emotional attachment: the truck.

The characteristics of the product truck along the dimensions commonly held to differentiate B2B from consumer marketing summarized by Fern and Brown (1984) - market, product, organization of operational set-up and others as well as technical complexity, purchase frequency, service requirement, amount of information search, negotiated prices, relative volume of each transaction, riskiness, etc. (see Table 2) – make its industrial nature indisputable.

Market	Product	Organization of operational set-up	Others
Derived vs. Primary Demand	Technical complexity	Channel length	Message appeal
Elasticity of Demand	Purchase frequency	Promotion mix	Delivery importance
Demand fluctuation	Classification	Reciprocity	Sales force compensation
Number of suppliers	Service requirements	Adequacy of supply	Sales force training
Number of buyers	Amount of information	Degree of integration	Leasing
Number of influencers	Negotiated prices		
Geographic concentration	Transaction volume		
Knowledgeability	Riskiness		
Rationality			

Table 2 – Dimensions of commonly held differences between B2B and B2C
Source: adapted from Fern and Brown (1984)

Is not a chance that trucks are also called industrial vehicles in technical terminology to distinguish them from smaller vehicles (like vans) used for the transportation of goods (labeled as commercial vehicles instead).

Nevertheless, if we focus – as instance - on the number of actors involved in the purchasing process (generally considered higher in industrial than in consumer contexts) its industrial nature is less crystalline.

Previous and highly quoted studies on industrial buying behavior highlighted the fact that industrial purchasing decisions are influenced by several organizational members, and are characterized by the existence of the so called buying center (e.g. Johnston and

Bonoma, 1981; Jackson et al., 1984; Lilien and Wong, 1984; Kohli, 1989).

While these studies are invaluable for industrial marketing pushing researchers to reach a profound understanding of organizational buying process and decisions (not least the social interaction between organizational members), the buying center focused approach to the purchasing process of industrial products [see Johnston and Bonoma (1981) for a robust review on the topic] does not fit thoroughly some business context in which suppliers face a demand characterized by the presence of micro and small companies.

The Italian trucks trade – the author argue and market figures corroborate this standpoint – seems to be to larger extents in contraposition with this approach.

As an evidence, according to the last census of Italian trucking companies (2004) of the 196.086 firms regularly registered to the Ministry of Transportations, 71.7% have a fleet from 1 to 3 trucks; 18.9% from 4 to 10 trucks; 8.4% from 11 to 50 trucks and a residual 0.9% of firms can count on a fleet of more than 50 trucks.

Mono-vehicular companies (those in which the owner of the company and the driver of the truck are the same person) represent 43.8% of the total.

The data shown above suggest that almost a half of the market is represented by customers holding all the buying roles and identities intervening in the purchasing process – initiator, decider, purchaser and user – that are generally considered held by different actors in the purchasing process of industrial products (Lehmann and Winer, 2005). Or, more simply, this means that almost half of the market is represented by clients (consumers) that are at the same time owner and driver of the truck.

As a result the average size of Italian trucks fleets is slightly below five units: as a comparison, in the US market this figure is 28 (see Top 100 Trucking Companies Report).

As far as the first point is concerned the trucking market is characterized for a significant fragmentation of the supply side and for the prevalence of micro-small companies.

<<*If manufacturers have to undertake consumers' or customers' dynamics, is an ongoing debate in this market and represents the main challenge for marketing and sales managers working for truck producers. Difficult even for me that I work in this industry since more than 20 years*>> said M.L. the local CEO of a primary truck manufacturer in an informal colloquium the author had recently.

Given these peculiarities it seems that the product truck encompasses most of the contradictions and unclear boundaries that contribute to de-emphasize the strength of the

dichotomy between B2B and B2C products (and marketing) although trucks are obviously not marketed to the general consuming public.

Investigating truck-drivers in Italy is particularly interesting due to the fact that according to Eurostat (2006) the Italian road freight transport industry is the second most developed among the European countries (after Spain) in terms of number of companies, turnover, employment and investments. The Italian geography (a long boot shaped peninsula) contributes to the importance of national road freight movements, and the subsequent fragmentation of the market into micro enterprises along the country.

Hence, given the peculiarities of the demand - briefly displayed above - that make the Italian market one of the most different and – at the same time – one of the most interesting in terms of commercial exploitation, a deep understanding of the target (that still lacks) is necessary and valuable.

3

The Market for Trucks:

Facts and Figures

AGENDA: 1. Introduction – **2**. The European and the Italian market for trucks – **3**. Market segments at glance – **4**. The first semester 2012 – **5**. Market shares in Italy – **6**. Conclusions – **7**. Appendix

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to paint a picture of the European and the Italian market for trucks in the last few years. A snapshot of the current and recently past market for trucks is valuable for the sake of this dissertation since it helps the readers to appreciate the "freefall" of the demand for trucks' that producers are currently facing and - in view of this – and to understand the urgency for them to develop and/or to rethink their marketing strategies in order to overturn the unsatisfactory market trends.

The examination of the market performances in the time period 2006-2010 shows a drastic reduction of truck sales in 2009 and a slow recovery started already in 2010. In particular data show that the markets performances are significantly worst in those countries characterized by the predominance of small trucking companies and – consequently – by a high fragmentation of the demand (e.g. Italy and Spain).

Those countries instead that can count on the predominance of big trucking companies (France as instance) or on a growing economic climate (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary,

etc.), are resisting better to the economic downturn and are becoming emerging target markets to exploit.

In the proceeding of this chapter the demand for trucks will be represented and analyzed by countries and by market segments.

According to the article n° 47 of the law 285/1992 ("*Nuovo Codice della Strada*" - "The Highway Code") which provides a classification of the vehicles admitted to the circulation on Italian roads and highways, trucks belong to the "N" category, i.e. vehicles for the transportation of goods, with at least four wheels. The "N" category is subdivided in three classes: "N1", vehicles for the transportation of goods up to 3.5 tons (commercial vehicles); "N2", vehicles for the transportation of goods, with a weight between 3.5 and 12 tons; "N3", vehicles for the transportation of goods, with a weight over 12 tons.

Considering that the object of investigation of this study are truck drivers who drive heavy/industrial trucks (greater than 16 tons) the segment of vehicles with a weight up to 3.5 tons ("N1") is not considered in this brief snapshot of the market. The middle segment instead (between 3.5 and 16 tons) is here considered in order to give a thorough representation of the entire market for industrial vehicles.

Differently from the three segments identified by the law 285/1992, data reported and commented in this chapter are first of all presented in their entirety (excluding commercial vehicles, weight lower than 3.5 tons) and then analyzed according to the two class of weight used by *Acea* (*Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles*) to account sales of new trucks sold in the European countries on a yearly bases. The first class – to which the author refers as the "middle segment" – includes vehicles with a weight between 3.5 and 16 tons, while the second one – the "heavy truck segment" – includes trucks with a weight greater than 16 tons.

Moreover, market data are completed by the examination of the market shares held by each truck manufacturer in the Italian market. In this case data are drawn from *Anfia* (*Associazione nazionale filiera industria automobilistica*) and are presented first globally and then subdivided in three classes of weight: from 3.5 to 11.49 tons; from 11.49 to 16 tons; greater than 16 tons (the author cannot provide explanation about the different segmentation criteria used by the mentioned associations). The commentary of the data is enriched by figures and graphs that allow the reader to readily understand the beneath evolutionary trends of the market, while tables of numbers are included in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

2. The European and the Italian market for trucks

The European market for trucks experienced a strong downturn in the last three years: since the record figure of 759,141 new industrial vehicles (over 3.5 tons) registered in 2006, the number dropped significantly in 2009 (403,492, - 45.5% if compared with 2008) for rapidly recovering already in the biennium 2010-2011 (+ 29.8%). As a result, the number of new industrial trucks sold in 2011 is one fifth smaller than 2006 (see Figure 1).

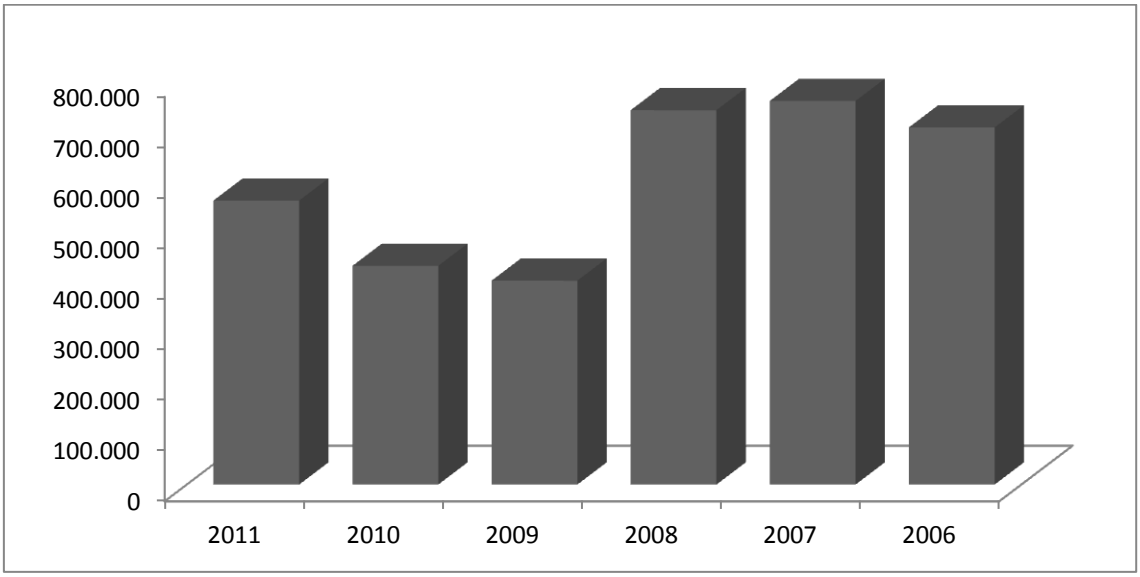

Figure 1 - The European market for trucks (2006-2011) (vehicles>3.5 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

The upturn of the last two years should be primarily attributed to those younger European economies that, if compared with more industrialized ones, were less vulnerable to the financial crisis of the last few years but that are still marginal in terms of relative dimension of the market.

The first group of countries in fact recorded a 47.7% growth against a 27.5% growth of the EU15[1]. The most dynamic countries were Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with sales more than doubled between 2010 and 2011, followed by Hungary (+ 92.9%), Slovenia (+ 65.6%) and Slovakia (+ 57.9%).

1 EU15 area countries are (in alphabetical order): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

In the group of the biggest European economies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and UK) the market that performed better in the two years period 2010-2011 was France (+ 39.4%), followed by the UK (+ 35.5%), Spain (+ 22.6%) and Germany (+ 21.7%).

In the six years period (2006-2010), the "bottom of the barrel" was Spain with a market shrinking of 60.2% followed by Italy (- 43%) and the UK (- 19.8%). France and Germany resisted better to the global financial downturn with market performances respectively of - 8% and - 4,7% (see Figures 2 and 3 below).

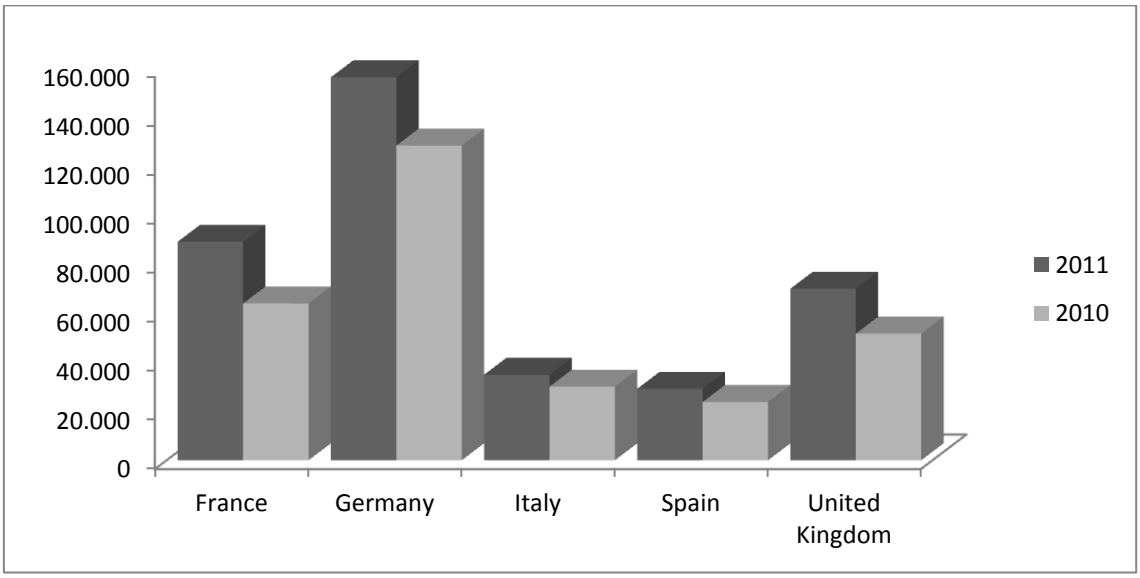

Figure 2 - Industrial trucks registration (2010-2011) in the biggest European economies (vehicles>3.5 tons)

Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

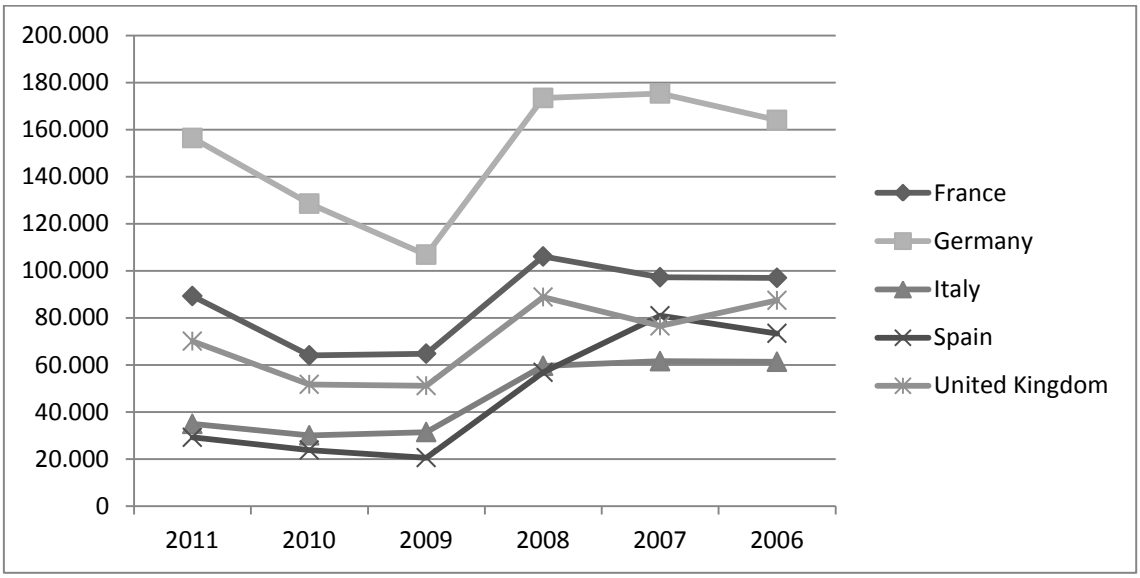

Figure 3 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) in the biggest European economies (vehicles>3.5 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

Nonetheless in 2011 Italy is confirmed as the fourth European market in terms of trucks' sales (it was the fifth until 2007) after Germany, France and the UK and before Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Sweden, Norway, etc. (see Figure 4).

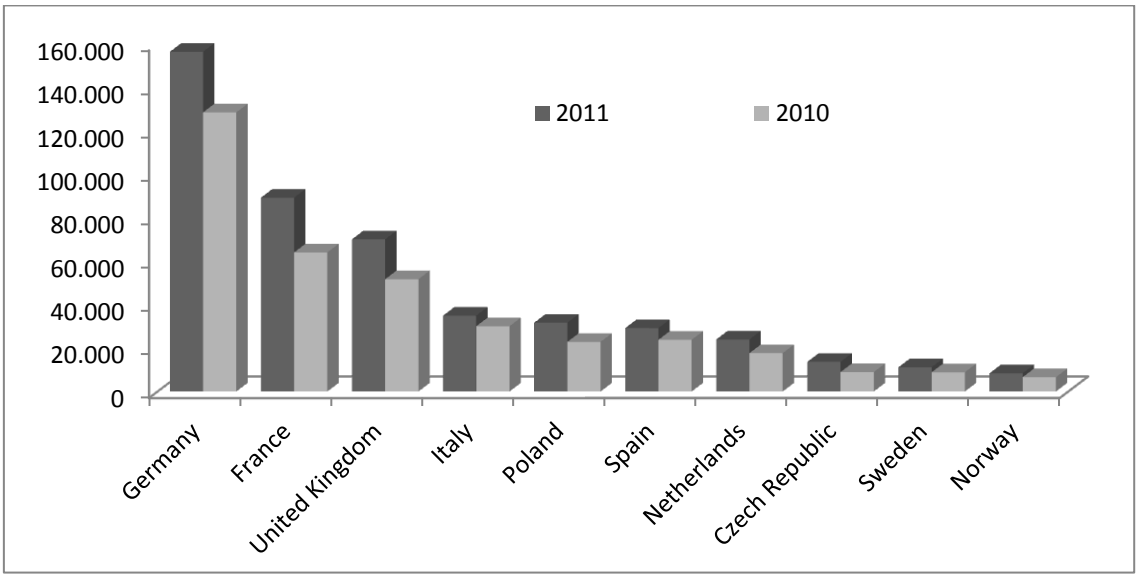

Figure 4 – Top 10 European markets (2010-2011)
Source: Elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

3. Market segments at glance

If analyzed by classes of vehicles, it is possible to note that in the period between 2006 and 2011 the "medium segment" (vehicles between 3.5 and 16 tons) shrank more than the "heavy truck segment" (> 16 tons): respectively - 21.4% the first and - 19.1% the second (see Figure 5 and 6).

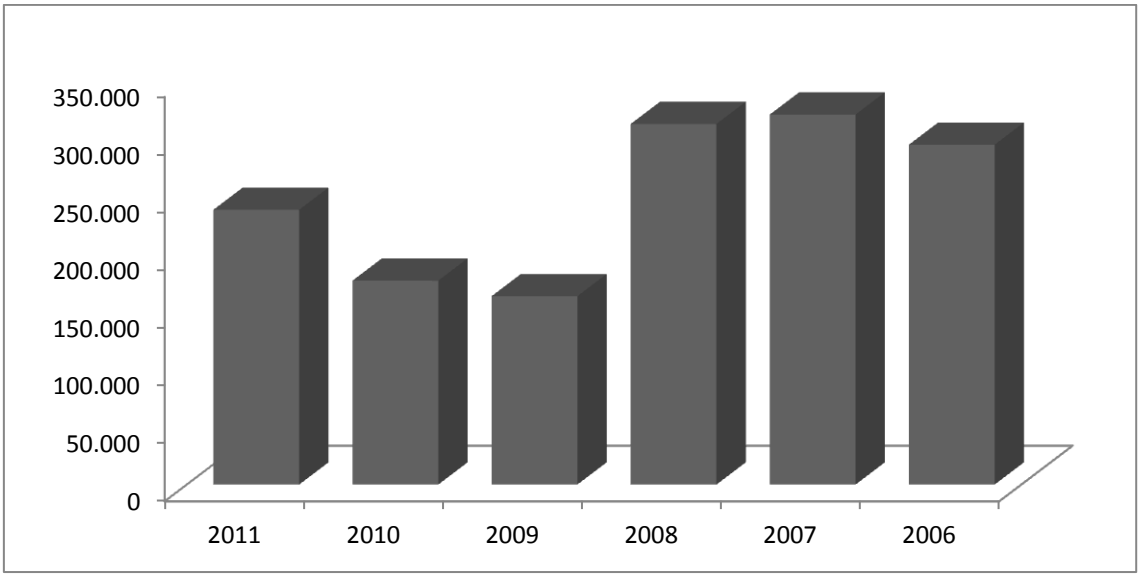

Figure 5 - The European market for trucks (2006-2011) (3.5<vehicles>16 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

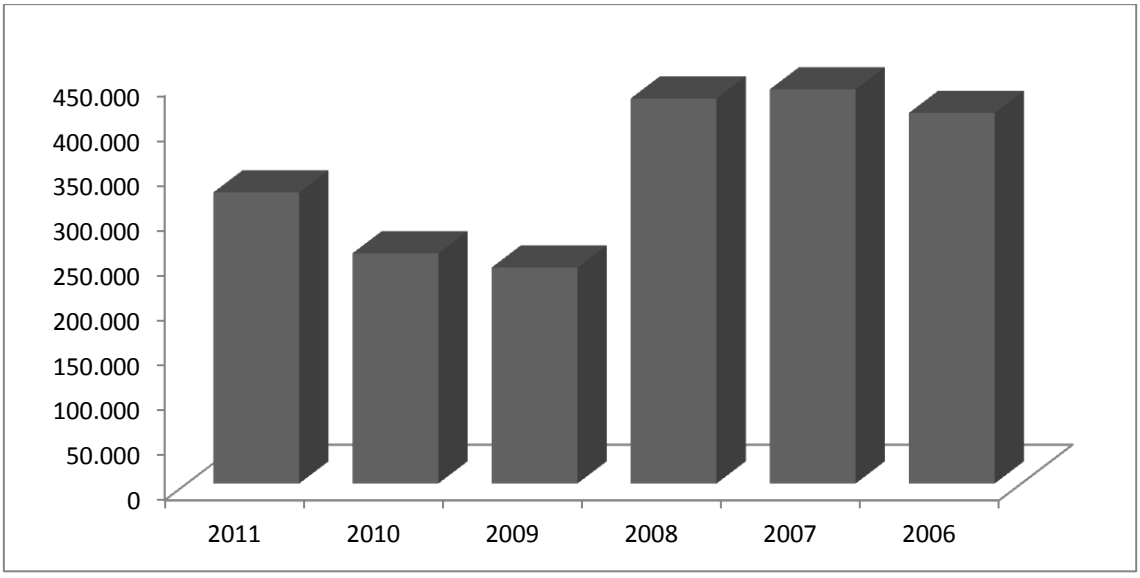

Figure 6 - The European market for trucks (2006-2011) (3.5<vehicles>16 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

In the same period the Italian performance was significantly below the European average with a scarcer performance of the "high truck segment" respect to the "medium" one (respectively - 42% and - 44.6%). In comparison to the other top four European economies (France, Germany, Spain and the UK), the Italian market performed significantly worst, becoming the smallest in the "heavy trucks segment" and the fourth (ahead Spain) in the "medium" one.

As referring to the "medium segment", new trucks sold in Italy in 2011 were 14.4% more than the year before, against + 37.7% in France, + 31% in the UK, + 20.7% in Germany and + 19.1% in Spain. As referring to the "heavy trucks segment" instead, in 2011 the Italian demand grew of 18.8%, significantly less than the UK (42.6%) France (41.8%), Spain (27.4%) and Germany (23.3%) (see Figure 7, 8, 9 and 10).

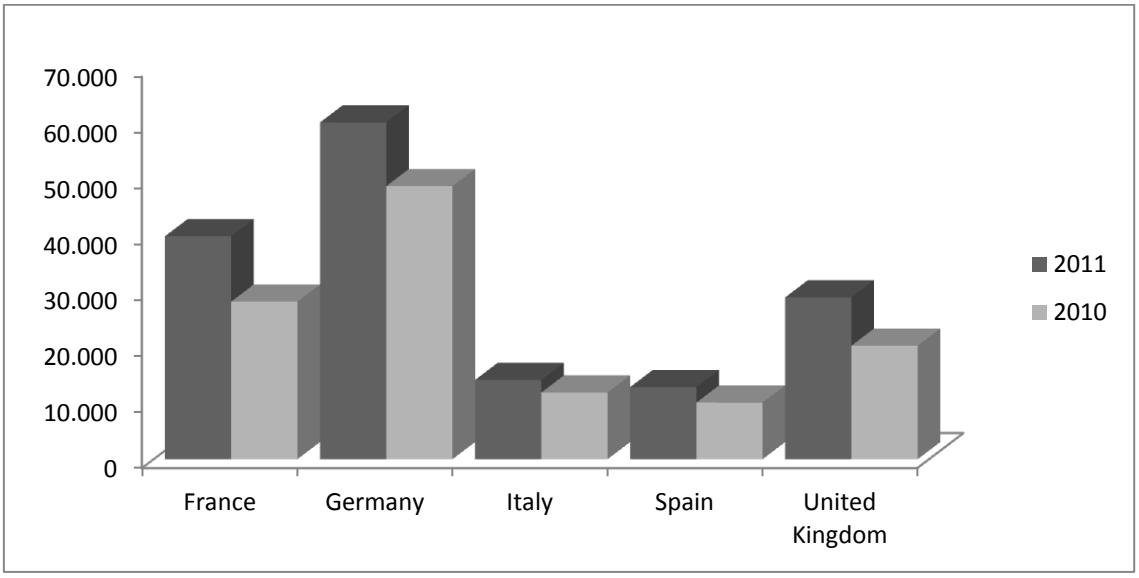

Figure 7 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) in the biggest European economies (3.5<vehicles>16 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

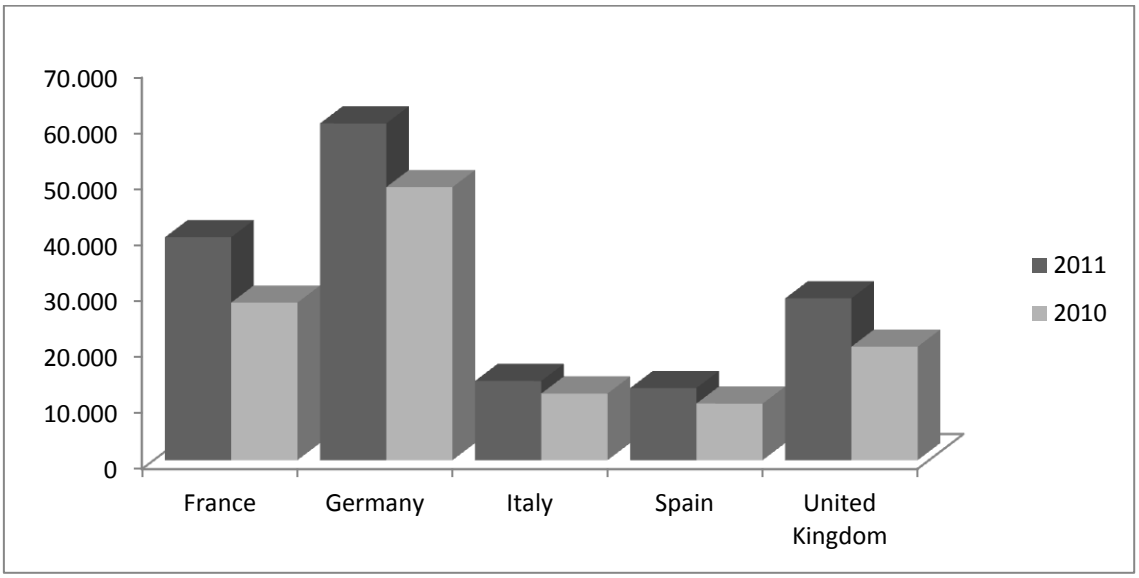

Figure 8 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) in the biggest European economies (vehicles>16 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

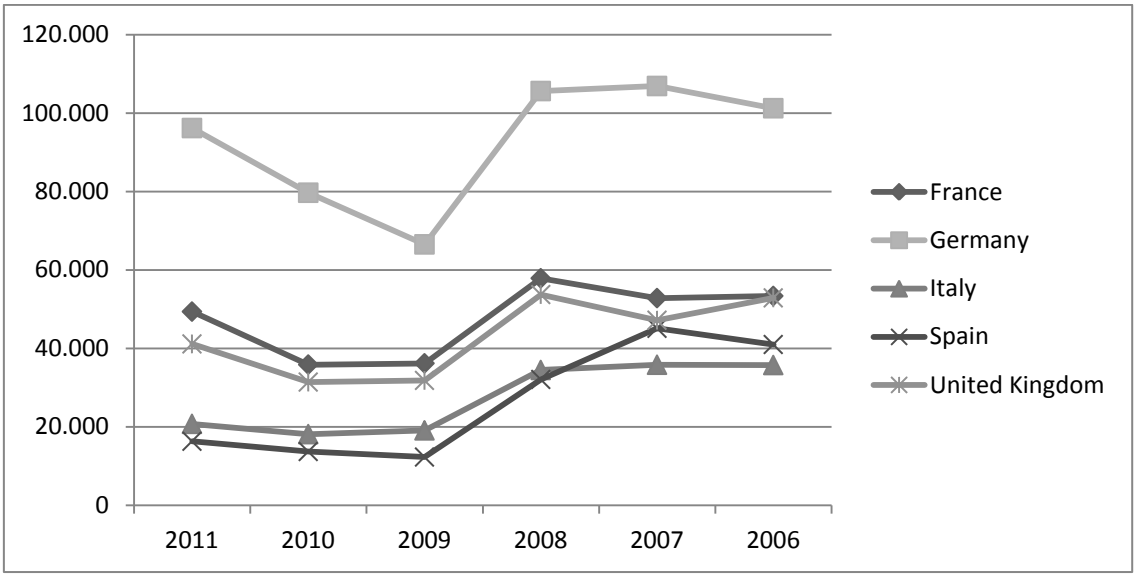

Figure 9 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) in the biggest European economies (3.5<vehicles>16 tons)

Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

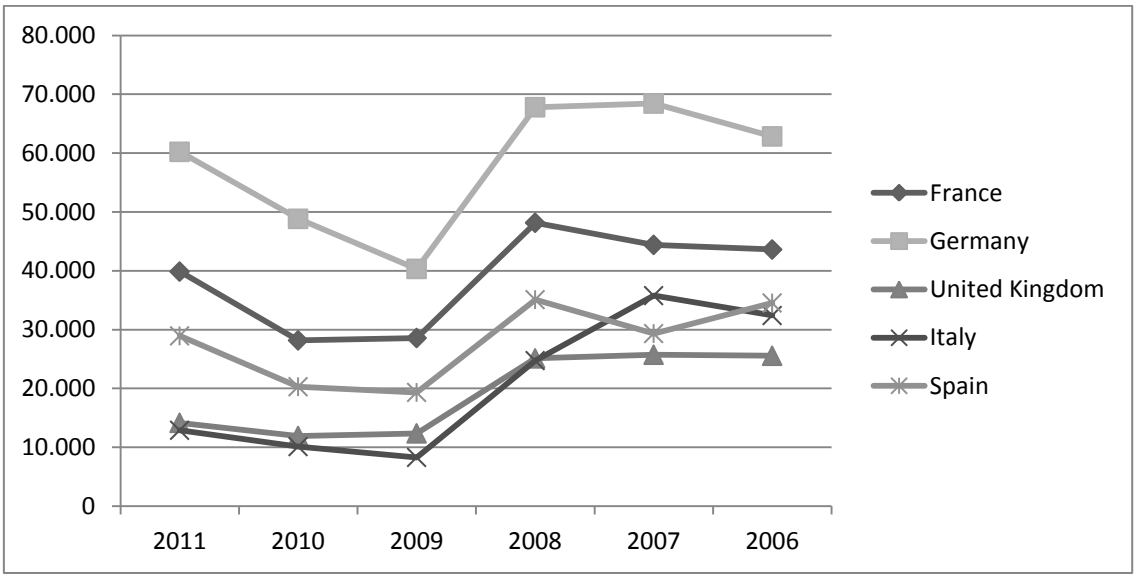

Figure 10 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) in the five biggest European economies (vehicles>16 tons)

Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

4. The first semester 2012

The data of the registrations of new trucks recorded in the first semester 2012 announce another challenging year that trucks producers have to face: in the first six months of 2012 the European market totaled 155,749 new trucks, 5.2% less than in the same period a year before (see Figure 10). While the UK posted a strong growth (+21.5%), the French (-3.2%), German (-4.7%), Spanish (-22.4%) and Italian (-30.9%) markets all shrunk. In particular – once again – Italy and Spain are those facing the most difficult conjuncture compared with other countries (see Figure 11 and 12).

Moreover, in 2012 it is likely that also those economies that years before have sustained trucks' sales in Europe will slow down the pace: i.e. Czech Republic (-5.5%), Estonia (-16.1%), Lithuania (-2.5%), , Romania (-12.3%), Slovenia (-22%), etc.

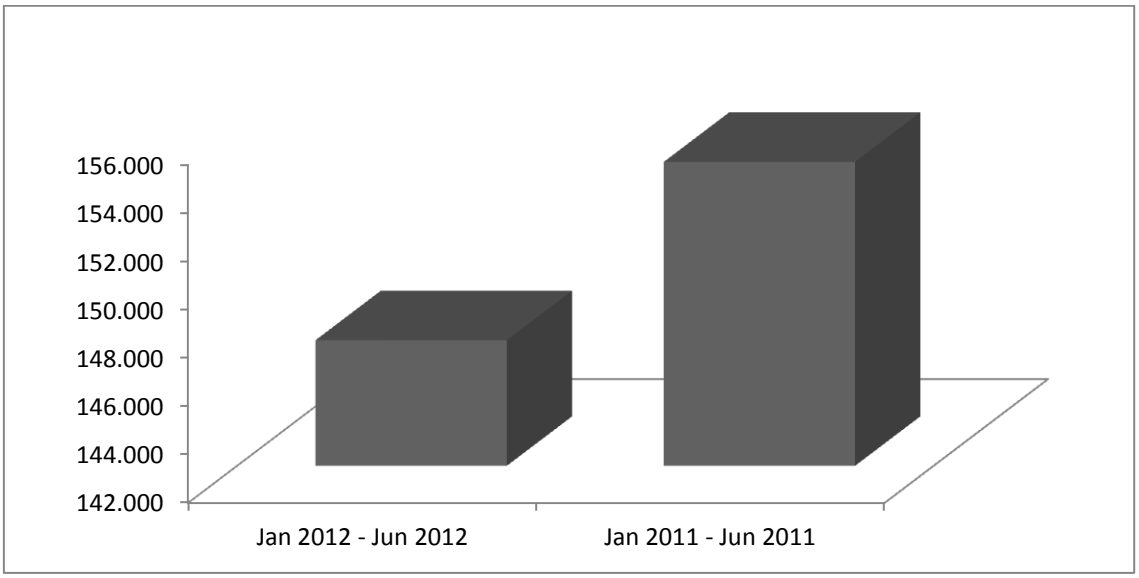

Figure 11 - New industrial trucks (>3.5 tons) registered in Europe in the 1st semester 2012
Source: Elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

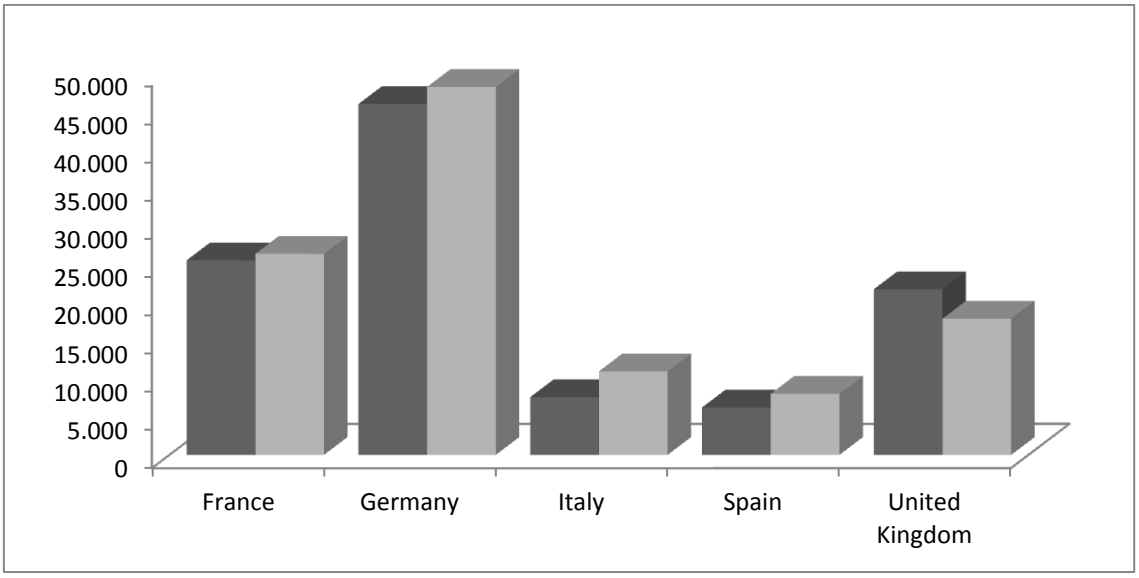

Figure 12 - Industrial trucks registration in the 1st semester 2012 in the top European economies (>3.5 tons)
Source: elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles – data

As far as the "heavy trucks segment" is concerned (>16 tons), in the first semester of 2012 it shrank by 5.4% totaling 109,00 units solf in Europe (see Figure 13). The UK was the only important market to post growth (+ 21.5%). Germany (- 4.7%) and France (- 3.2%) contracted, while Spain (- 22.4%) and Italy (- 30.9%) faced a more severe downturn. The "middle segment" instead (vehicles between 3.5 and 16 tons) shrank by 4.7% totaling 46,749 units (see Figure 14). Also for this market segment the UK recorded the best performance (+ 43%). France grew of 2.2%, while Germany, Italy and Spain reduced the sales compared with the same period of one year before (respectively, - 7.4%, - 35.4% and - 38.1%).

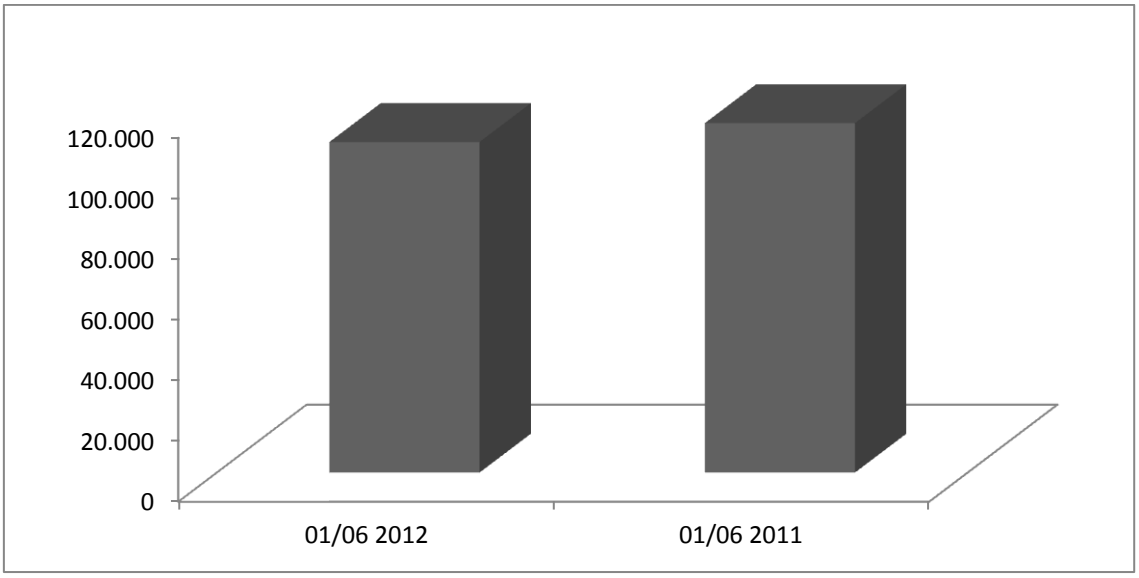

Figure 13 - Industrial trucks registration 1st semester 2012 (> 16 tons)
Source: Elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

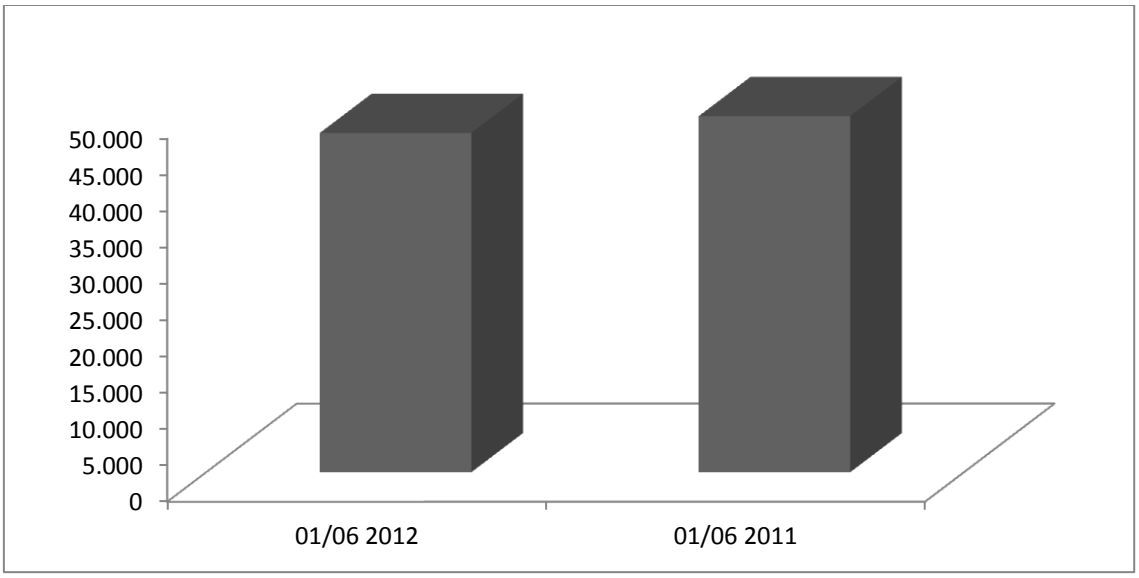

Figure 14 - Industrial trucks registration 1st semester 2012 (3.5<vehicles >16 tons)
Source: Elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

5. Market shares in Italy

The data presented above can be completed with the analysis of the market shares held by each brand crowding the Italian market. Differently from the previous discussion in which data are drawn from *Acea* databases - which is the only institution to periodically account new tucks registered within the European market - market shares held by each

brand in Italy are here displayed drawing on the data annually accounted by *Anfia* (*Associazione nazionale filiera industria automobilistica*) which tracks sales figures divided by manufacturer. Moreover, differently from the previous discussion, data are first of all presented globally (without considering market segments); then are commented splitted in the following classes of weight: between 3.5 and 11.49 tons; between 11.5 and 16 tons; greater than 16 tons. Data are displayed for the time period (2002-2011)[2].

In spite of the deep crises that in the decade 2002-2011 afflicted the market for industrial vehicles (>3.5 tons) in Italy (see previous paragraphs for a brief review of the market trends in the last few years), market shares held by each brand remained more or less stable. At the end of the decade the only brand that was able to significantly enhance its share was Daf (from 5.6% in 2002 to 10% in 2011). Iveco lost 1.3 points, Astra - Iveco Group – a brand specialized in the production of construction dump truck, heavy transport and military vehicles – dropped from a 2.4% market share in 2002 to 0.9% in 2011, while Mercedes Bens and Renault Trucks reduced their relative shares respectively by 2.3% and 1.5%.

Premium priced brands instead – i.e. Scania and Volvo Trucks – resisted better to the market shrinkage: even though they drastically reduced the number of new vehicles sold (in terms of quantities, both halved their respective markets) they both enlarged their shares. Scania rose from 8.4% in 2002 to 9% in 2011; Volvo instead from 7.4% in 2002 to 8.7% in 2011. The trend of each brand's market share is reported in Figure 15.

[2] It is worth to note that overall the data of the registration of new trucks published by Anfia and Acea are not equivalent. The author cannot give explanations of the differences between these two sources of data.

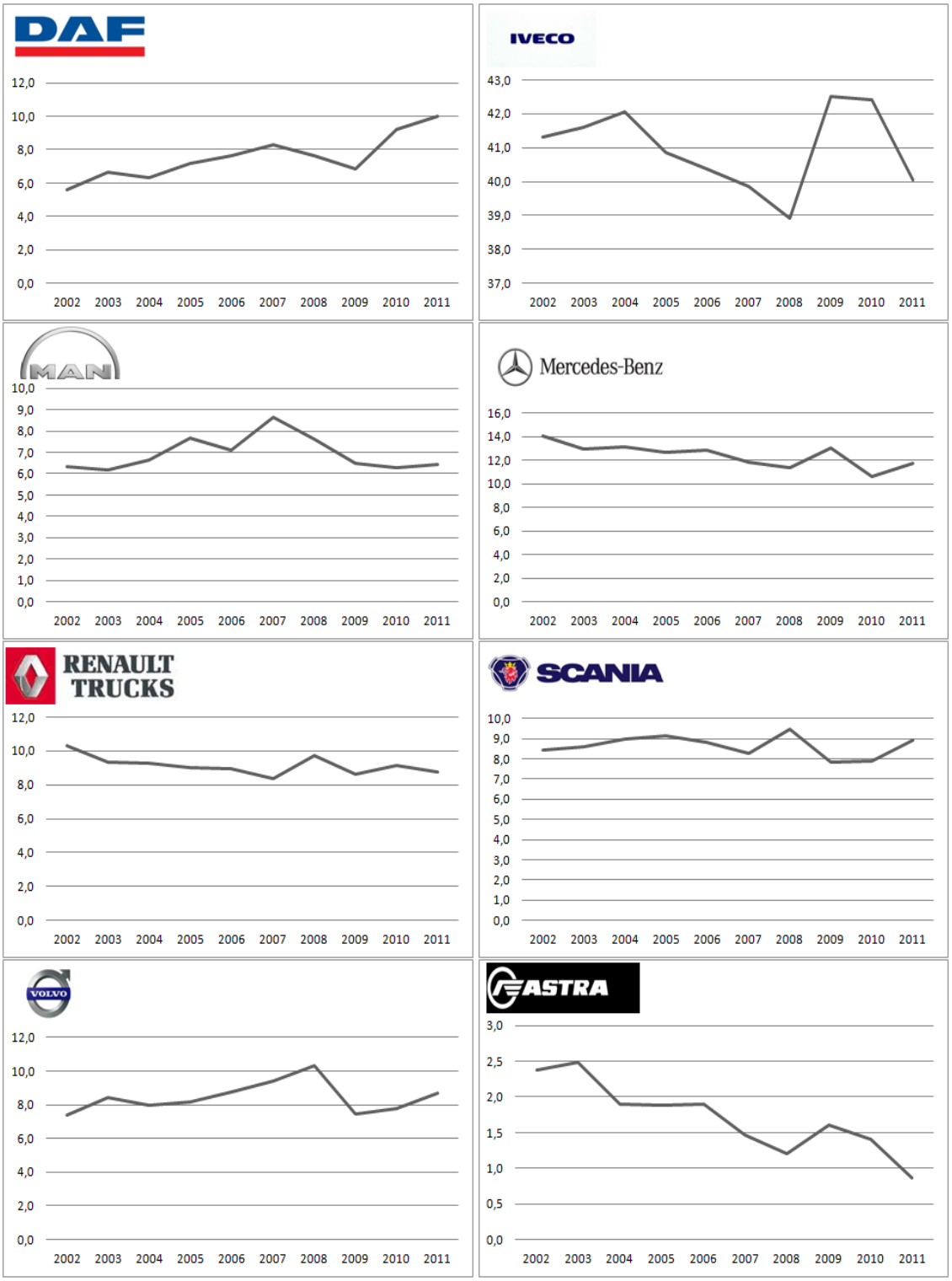

Figure 15 – Brands' market shares (2002-2011) (>3.5 tons)
Source: Elaborations on Anfia data

If analyzed by classes of weight, in the first market segment (vehicles between 3.5 and 11.49 tons) the best market performance must be attributed to Iveco which improved its penetration by 7.8 points from 2002 to 2011. While Man enhanced its positioning in this segment (+ 0.9% in the ten years period 2002-2011) other brands shrinked: Renault Trucks (- 5.6%), Mercedes Benz (- 2.9%), Daf (- 1,5%). Volvo Trucks instead that until 2002 held 0.8% of the total market, does not sell any vehicle between 3.5 and 11.49 tons since 2007. The category labeled as "other brands" (which includes producers – mainly Japanese - that are marginal or non present in the heavy truck segments such as Nissan, Mitsubishi, Isuzu and others), increased the market penetration from 17.5% in 2002 to 19.7% in 2011. Scania and Astra do not produce vehicles in this class of tonnage (Figure 16).

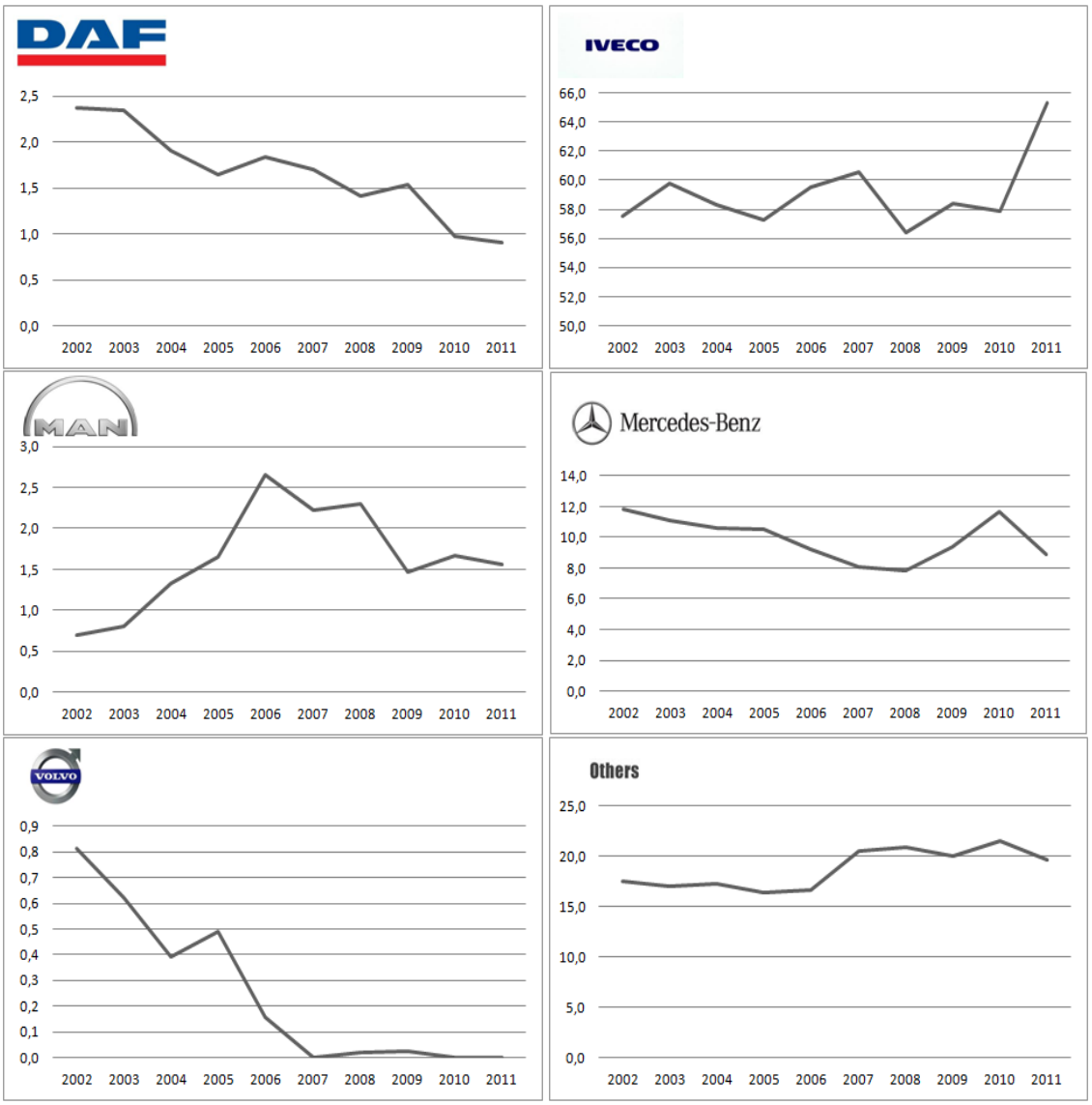

Figure 16 – Brands' market shares (2002-2011) (3.5<vehicles>11.49)
Source: Elaborations on Anfia data

As referring to the "middle weight" segment, although sales figures diminished for all the brands crowding the market (in 2011 the number of new trucks sold in this class of weight is 73.1% less than 2002), some of them were able to enlarge their market share. In particular premium priced brands – that are not prime players in this segment - are suffering more than others: Scania, reduced its share from 0.5% in 2002 to 0.1% in 2011 while Volvo Trucks from 5.5% in 2002 to 2.2% in 2011. Other brands that leverage on a price positioning instead, have reinforced their market power: Iveco which relies on a "best price" marketing strategy, enhanced its share by 4.1% in the last decade (from 58.6% in 2002 to 62.7% in 2011), while Man and Daf doubled or more than doubled their market penetration (Figure 17).

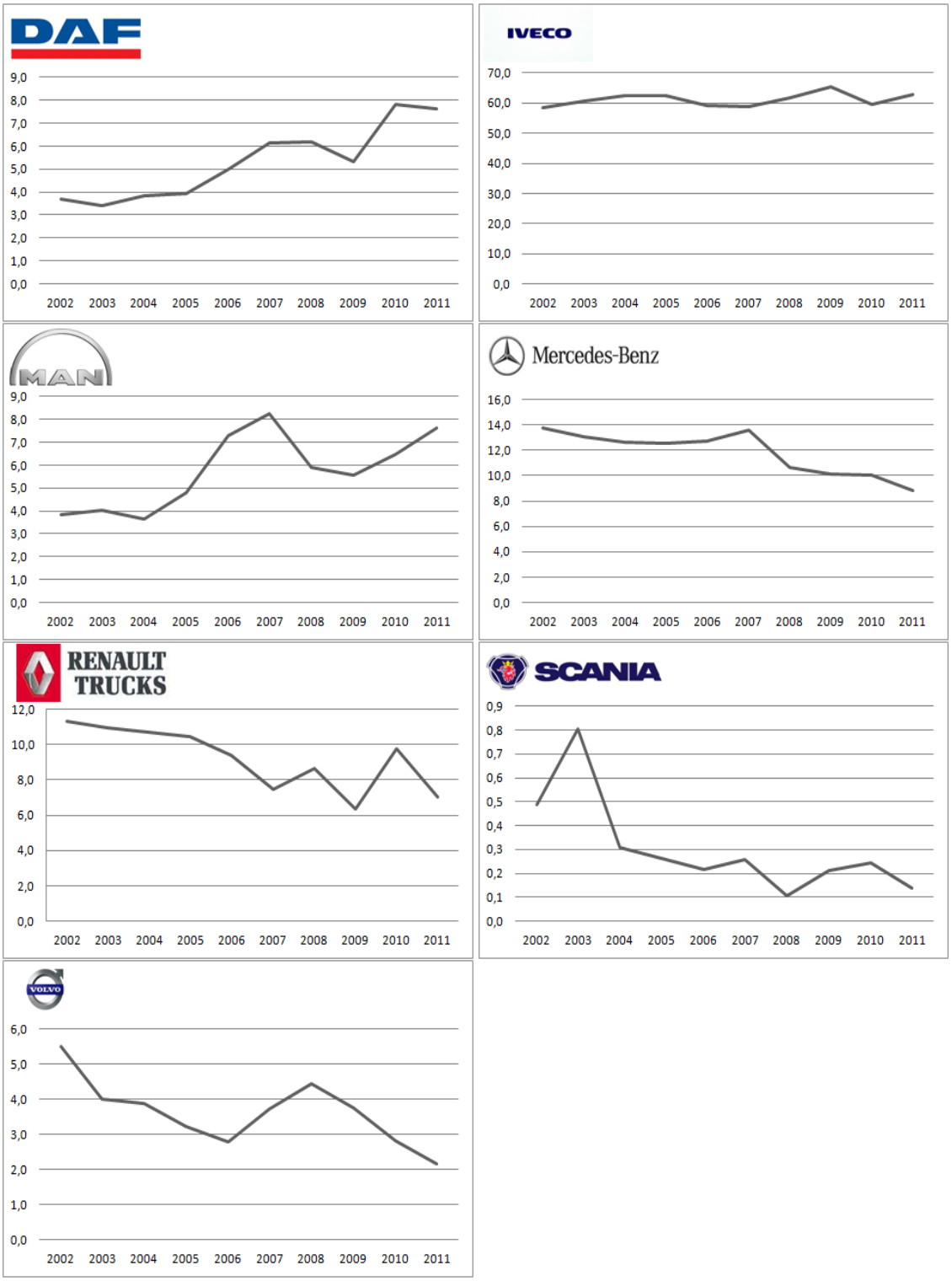

Figure 17 – Brands' market shares (2002-2011) (11.49<vehicles>16 tons)
Source: Elaborations on Anfia data

The "heavy trucks segment" instead (>16 tons) while reducing drastically sales figures overall (the 13,977 units sold in 2011 are less than a half those accounted at the end

of 2002) is more stable in terms of market shares and shows an underlying trend in countertendency with the middle segment.

Among the premium priced brands, while Scania maintained its share (12.3% both in 2002 and in 2011), Volvo Trucks has acquired two points (form 9.7% to 11.7%). Iveco instead – that also in this segment is the best price available – drop by 2.5%: from 33.4% in 2002 to 30.9% in 2011. Among the medium priced brands, Man reduced its share from 8.4% to 7.6%, while Daf posted the best performance almost doubling its market penetration (from 6.9% in 2002 to 12.7% in 2011) (Figure 18).

The "middle" and the "heavy" trucks segments thus - according to the market shares hold by each brand - show different market trends. Even though the sales figures are drastically reduced in both segments (more than halved in both cases), in the first one the demand is moving toward more price oriented choice criterion, while in the second one the price seems to be less relevant. The fact that premium price brands are resisting the crisis, while cheaper brands are reducing their shares, underline a certain rigidity of the demand for top products even in times of financial downturn.

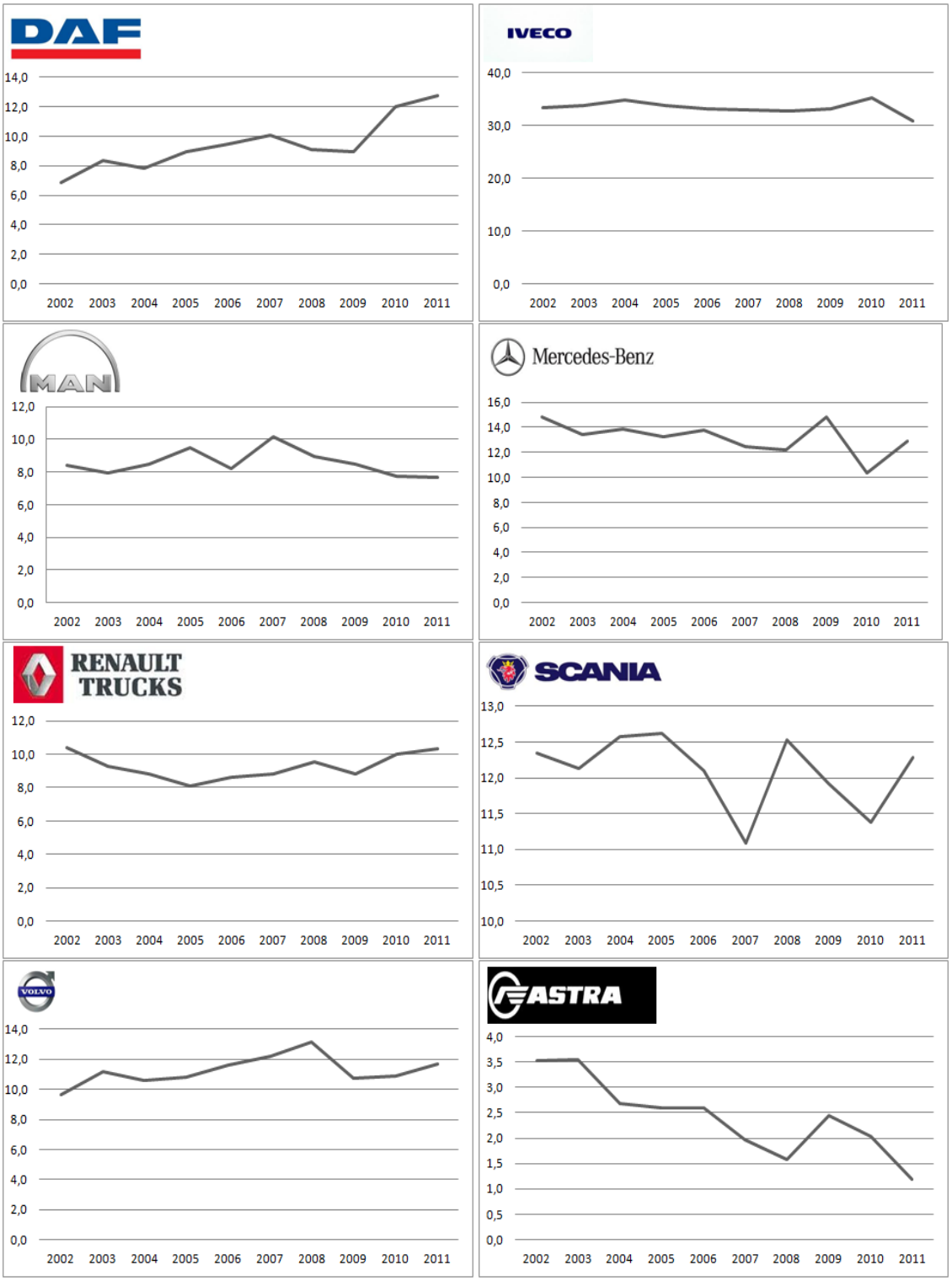

Figure 18 – Brands' market shares (2002-2011) (vehicles >16 tons)
Source: Elaborations on Anfia data

6. Conclusions

The brief snapshot of the European and of the Italian market for trucks shows a difficult conjuncture that truck producers are facing and that is likely they will keep on facing in the next future.

In the time period 2002-2011 new trucks sold overall and divided by market segments are halved or more than halved and are likely to further diminish also in 2012 as the registrations accounted until in the first semester of the current year suggest.

Even though emerging economies are becoming important markets to exploit (Eastern Europe at first) they are still too small in terms of unities demanded. Among the group of the top European economies those that are characterized by a higher concentration of the demand (such as France and Germany) performed significantly better than other countries in which the demand side is characterized by the prevalence of small companies (Italy above all), i.e. by a scarcer concentration of the demand.

It is so evident that are these markets to be of special concern of truck manufacturers and, thus, those in which they have to try to set up marketing strategies and actions that can favor them *vis-à-vis* competitors and overcome the market's stagnation. The analysis of the market shares in Italy underlines a certain stability of the competitive game especially as far as the heavy truck segment is concerned. Even though a certain pressure on prices can be identified, market trends in the last decade show that top tier brands resisted better than other competitors to the market downturn, especially than those positioned in a medium price range. Hence it seems that those brands that can count on a strong brand positioning are less vulnerable to the economic climate (while drastically reducing sales figure). This short review of the Italian market is also valuable to understand the urgency for the implementation of new/different marketing strategies within the Italian market. Even if truck industry experts are suggesting to set up global strategies in sight of the achievement of economies of scales (see Dressler and Gleisberg, 2009) the author of this manuscript suggest that in a market characterized by unique structural features like the Italian one, the marketing strategy that can fit the national demand at best is far from being global; rather is local. In particular the emphasis on non core product's and brand's attributes and the self representational motives behind truck consumption are suggested as suitable inputs to inform successful marketing strategies. The empirical studies which follow give support to this statement.

7. Appendix

	2011	*2010*	*2009*	*2008*	*2007*	*2006*
Austria	13.791	9.623	8.716	16.022	15.690	14.226
Belgium	18.084	13.557	15.034	22.114	21.918	18.551
Bulgaria	n.a.	156	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	13.654	8.945	8.246	18.913	20.151	16.324
Denmark	6.882	4.955	5.927	12.189	12.927	11.187
Estonia	1.440	690	487	2.493	3.315	2.921
Finland	5.775	4.745	5.347	8.119	6.953	6.757
France	89.230	64.031	64.755	106.033	97.213	96.968
Germany	156.379	128.495	106.821	173.386	175.300	164.047
Greece	811	1.924	2.766	4.293	3.696	3.201
Hungary	8.185	4.243	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Iceland	91	67	78	453	836	848
Ireland	2.304	2.097	2.253	7.287	9.741	10.501
Italy	34.913	30.050	31.458	59.591	61.557	61.307
Latvia	2.670	879	551	3.801	6.251	4.073
Lithuania	5.400	2.669	928	6.558	9.685	6.017
Luxembourg	2.478	1.547	1.715	3.377	3.119	2.689
Netherlands	23.961	17.675	21.722	33.993	28.401	36.699
Norway	8.378	6.603	6.920	11.187	10.852	9.777
Poland	31.660	22.831	16.120	38.806	42.816	26.630
Portugal	4.665	5.452	5.581	10.020	9.892	9.493
Romania	3.683	5.276	4.211	21.268	26.490	11.952
Slovakia	6.782	4.295	2.849	8.609	9.803	7.878
Slovenia	2.591	1.565	1.289	4.751	5.043	3.741
Spain	29.190	23.801	20.559	56.804	80.876	73.367
Sweden	11.160	8.849	10.280	12.960	12.432	11.590
Switzerland	7.780	6.093	7.734	9.039	7.686	8.587
United Kingdom	70.065	51.702	51.145	88.803	76.498	87.393
Total	**562.002**	**432.815**	**403.492**	**740.869**	**759.141**	**706.724**

Table 3 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) by country (vehicles>3.5 tons)
Source: Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles

	2011	***2010***	***2009***	***2008***	***2007***	***2006***
Austria	7.345	5.221	4.790	8.590	8.417	7.609
Belgium	10.281	8.026	8.832	12.524	12.562	10.779
Bulgaria	n.a.	78	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	7.629	5.157	5.129	11.404	12.079	9.794
Denmark	3.658	2.741	3.251	6.673	6.891	5.985
Estonia	746	370	256	1.301	1.718	1.534
Finland	3.430	2.878	3.169	4.634	4.174	4.031
France	49.366	35.859	36.177	57.870	52.808	53.355
Germany	96.161	79.668	66.499	105.589	106.876	101.210
Greece	547	1.306	1.877	2.790	2.497	2.187
Hungary	4.301	2.278	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Iceland	55	41	48	275	535	523
Ireland	1.497	1.486	1.561	4.688	6.237	6.789
Italy	20.747	18.130	19.086	34.477	35.820	35.747
Latvia	1.390	469	300	1.990	3.261	2.147
Lithuania	2.762	1.369	514	3.474	5.006	3.124
Luxembourg	1.337	847	925	1.793	1.647	1.424
Netherlands	12.854	9.647	11.759	18.274	15.284	20.004
Norway	5.110	4.078	4.098	6.528	6.261	5.789
Poland	17.105	13.744	9.885	22.405	24.573	15.896
Portugal	2.630	3.143	3.217	5.534	5.645	5.411
Romania	2.081	3.038	2.592	12.506	14.979	7.782
Slovakia	3.691	2.398	1.661	4.842	5.443	4.413
Slovenia	1.382	883	758	2.576	2.717	2.062
Spain	16.300	13.684	12.279	32.067	45.097	40.972
Sweden	6.060	4.801	5.497	6.998	6.710	6.228
Switzerland	4.520	3.544	4.442	5.163	4.396	4.841
United Kingdom	41.125	31.401	31.819	53.709	47.166	52.861
Total	**324.110**	**256.285**	**240.421**	**428.674**	**438.799**	**412.497**

Table 4 - Industrial trucks registration (2006-2011) by country (3.5 tons<vehicles>16 tons)
Source: Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles

	2011	***2010***	***2009***	***2008***	***2007***	***2006***
Austria	6.446	4.402	3.926	7.432	7.273	6.617
Belgium	7.803	5.531	6.202	9.590	9.356	7.772
Bulgaria	n.a.	78	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	6.025	3.788	3.117	7.509	8.072	6.530
Denmark	3.224	2.214	2.676	5.516	6.036	5.202
Estonia	694	320	231	1.192	1.597	1.387
Finland	2.345	1.867	2.178	3.485	2.779	2.726
France	39.864	28.172	28.578	48.163	44.405	43.613
Germany	60.218	48.827	40.322	67.797	68.424	62.837
Greece	264	618	889	1.503	1.199	1.014
Hungary	3.884	1.965	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Iceland	36	26	30	178	301	325
Ireland	807	611	692	2.599	3.504	3.712
Italy	14.166	11.920	12.372	25.114	25.737	25.560
Latvia	1.280	410	251	1.811	2.990	1.926
Lithuania	2.638	1.300	414	3.084	4.679	2.893
Luxembourg	1.141	700	790	1.584	1.472	1.265
Netherlands	11.107	8.028	9.963	15.719	13.117	16.695
Norway	3.268	2.525	2.822	4.659	4.591	3.988
Poland	14.555	9.087	6.235	16.401	18.243	10.734
Portugal	2.035	2.309	2.364	4.486	4.247	4.082
Romania	1.602	2.238	1.619	8.762	11.511	4.170
Slovakia	3.091	1.897	1.188	3.767	4.360	3.465
Slovenia	1.209	682	531	2.175	2.326	1.679
Spain	12.890	10.117	8.280	24.737	35.779	32.395
Sweden	5.100	4.048	4.783	5.962	5.722	5.362
Switzerland	3.260	2.549	3.292	3.876	3.290	3.746
United Kingdom	28.940	20.301	19.326	35.094	29.332	34.532
Total	**237.892**	**176.530**	**163.071**	**312.195**	**320.342**	**294.227**

Table 5 - Industrial trucks registration (2005-2011) by country (vehicles>16 tons)
Source: Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles

	Vehicles > 3.5 t		3.5t < Vehicles > 16 t		Vehicles >16 t	
	01/06 2012	**01/06 2011**	**01/06 2012**	**01/06 2011**	**01/06 2012**	**01/06 2011**
Austria	3.692	3.919	256	350	3.436	3.569
Belgium	4.852	5.769	970	1.113	3.882	4.656
Bulgaria	n.a.	n.a.	-	-	n.a.	n.a.
Cyprus	57	90	15	56	42	34
Czech Republic	3.612	3.824	791	824	2.821	3.000
Denmark	2.051	1.936	189	205	1.862	1.731
Estonia	318	379	44	40	274	339
Finland	1.770	1.730	440	514	1.330	1.216
France	25.446	26.296	5.295	5.181	20.151	21.115
Germany	45.892	48.140	16.518	17.845	29.374	30.295
Greece	100	298	45	142	55	156
Hungary	2.114	1.921	235	160	1.879	1.761
Iceland	23	19	8	8	*15*	*11*
Ireland	724	670	125	200	599	470
Italy	7.549	10.925	2.157	3.338	5.392	7.587
Latvia	701	663	39	36	662	627
Lithuania	1.484	1.522	49	45	1.435	1.477
Luxembourg	574	646	59	61	515	585
Netherlands	6.292	7.019	854	903	5.438	6.116
Norway	3.058	2.702	1.112	1.070	*1.946*	*1.632*
Poland	7.736	8.521	1.004	1.233	6.732	7.288
Portugal	834	1.676	151	387	683	1.289
Romania	1.539	1.754	129	206	1.410	1.548
Slovakia	1.862	2.027	299	297	1.563	1.730
Slovenia	622	797	78	95	544	702
Spain	6.199	7.985	291	470	5.908	7.515
Sweden	2.886	2.965	338	364	2.548	2.601
Switzerland	2.100	2.264	505	494	*1.595*	*1.770*
United Kingdom	21.662	17.822	7.435	5.200	14.227	12.622
Total	155.749	164.279	46.749	49.062	109.000	115.217

Table 6 - Industrial trucks registration (1st semester 2011-2012) by country
Source: Elaborations on Acea – Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles - data

	2002	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*	*2011*
	> 3.5 tons									
Astra	2,4	2,5	1,9	1,9	1,9	1,5	1,2	1,6	1,4	0,9
Daf	5,6	6,7	6,3	7,2	7,7	8,3	7,6	6,8	9,2	10,0
Iveco	41,3	41,6	42,1	40,9	40,4	39,8	38,9	42,5	42,4	40,0
Man	6,3	6,2	6,7	7,6	7,1	8,6	7,6	6,5	6,3	6,4
Mercedes Benz	14,1	12,9	13,2	12,7	12,9	11,8	11,4	13,0	10,6	11,8
Renault Trucks	10,3	9,3	9,3	9,0	8,9	8,4	9,7	8,6	9,1	8,8
Scania	8,4	8,6	9,0	9,2	8,8	8,3	9,5	7,9	7,9	9,0
Volvo Trucks	7,4	8,4	8,0	8,2	8,8	9,4	10,3	7,5	7,8	8,7
Others	4,2	3,8	3,7	3,4	3,6	3,9	3,8	5,6	5,3	4,4
	3.50 - 11.49 tons									
Astra	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Daf	2,4	2,3	1,9	1,6	1,8	1,7	1,4	1,5	1,0	0,9
Iveco	57,5	59,7	58,3	57,3	59,5	60,6	56,4	58,4	57,9	65,3
Man	0,7	0,8	1,3	1,7	2,6	2,2	2,3	1,5	1,7	1,6
Mercedes Benz	11,8	11,1	10,6	10,5	9,2	8,0	7,8	9,4	11,7	8,9
Renault Trucks	9,3	8,4	10,2	12,0	9,9	6,9	11,1	9,2	6,3	3,7
Scania	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Volvo Trucks	0,8	0,6	0,4	0,5	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Others	17,5	17,0	17,3	16,4	16,7	20,5	21,0	20,1	21,5	19,7
	11.49 - 16 tons									
Astra	-	0,0	-	-	-	0,0	-	-	-	-
Daf	3,7	3,4	3,8	3,9	5,0	6,2	6,2	5,3	7,8	7,6
Iveco	58,6	60,5	62,6	62,6	59,2	58,9	61,6	65,2	59,5	62,7
Man	3,8	4,0	3,7	4,8	7,3	8,2	5,9	5,6	6,5	7,6
Mercedes Benz	13,8	13,1	12,7	12,5	12,7	13,6	10,6	10,1	10,1	8,9
Renault Trucks	11,3	10,9	10,7	10,4	9,4	7,5	8,6	6,3	9,8	7,0
Scania	0,5	0,8	0,3	0,3	0,2	0,3	0,1	0,2	0,2	0,1
Volvo Trucks	5,5	4,0	3,9	3,2	2,8	3,7	4,4	3,8	2,8	2,2
Others	2,8	3,2	2,4	2,3	3,5	1,6	2,5	3,5	3,4	3,9
	> 16 tons									
Astra	3,5	3,5	2,7	2,6	2,6	2,0	1,6	2,4	2,0	1,2
Daf	6,9	8,3	7,9	9,0	9,4	10,1	9,1	8,9	12,0	12,7
Iveco	33,4	33,7	34,8	33,8	33,3	32,9	32,7	33,1	35,3	30,9
Man	8,4	8,0	8,5	9,5	8,2	10,1	8,9	8,5	7,7	7,6
Mercedes Benz	14,8	13,4	13,9	13,3	13,8	12,5	12,2	14,8	10,4	12,9
Renault Trucks	10,4	9,3	8,8	8,1	8,6	8,8	9,5	8,8	10,0	10,4
Scania	12,3	12,1	12,6	12,6	12,1	11,1	12,5	11,9	11,4	12,3
Volvo Trucks	9,7	11,2	10,6	10,8	11,6	12,2	13,1	10,7	10,9	11,7
Others	0,5	0,4	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,8	0,4	0,4

Table 7 – Brands' market shares (2002-2011) overall and by class of weight
Source: Elaborations on Anfia data

4

The Research Route

Before introducing the research methods on which this manuscript relies upon it is worth to recall the research question that this effort is aimed to answer. As already extensively argued there's a growing debate about the possibility to unify the discipline of marketing solving the century old dichotomy between business (or industrial) and consumer marketing. A debate that basically consists in the cross fertilization of the two fields of research in the marketing discipline in terms of methods of investigations applied (and relative epistemological foundations) and only marginally in the adoption of constructs and theories of consumption developed in consumer into business research and vice versa.

This dissertation is aimed to shed light on the existence of similarities between (some) industrial and consumer products adopting a perspective of industrial products as cultural artifacts.

In particular, the product here investigated is the truck.

In order to evaluate the blurred boundaries of "truck consumption", the author conducted four studies adopting as many research methods (extensively illustrated in the proceeding of this manuscript): 1) a preliminary exploratory focus group, 1) (existential) phenomenological interviews to truck drivers, 3) a quantitative enquiry using structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis and, finally 4) personal interviews to marketing managers working for truck manufacturers.

Accordingly, the research route started with a focus group with six selected informants aimed to approach the target. Differently from the other three studies conducted, the results of the preliminary focus group are not punctually reported in this manuscript since its main purpose was merely to approach the target, to understand the language their members use and to delineate some predominant categories that could have been fruitfully investigated through a subsequent quantitative enquiry. Moreover the focus group was necessary also in order to define the constructs of investigations and the semantic domain of possible items to include in the questionnaire.

Focus groups are in fact often conducted before the fielding of a large sample survey. This exploratory approach in particular is considered to be suitable and necessary when the researcher needs to select theoretical ideas and hypotheses that he/she is willing to verify with future quantitative research. Hence, are helpful to the construct development process (Calder, 1977). For this purpose, focus groups are usually less structured, participants are allowed to talk more freely to each other and the researcher acts as moderator (Calder, 1977).

The focus group was composed by six truck drivers chosen in order to retain the highest variance: it was composed by three owners and three employees differentiated in terms of range of transportation (short/mid range vs. long range) and for level of personalization of the truck (used as a proxy of the "investing self in object" in describing the level of attachment – see Belk, 1988). In this way the author was able to acknowledge the differences existing between owners and possessors, high and mid/low users, enthusiastic and more utilitarian drivers, etc. Thus he identified possible segmentation variable aimed to enrich the findings of both the qualitative and the quantitative study.

The exploratory focus group was conducted according to Calder (1977); hence as a pre-scientific endeavor "rooted in the creativity of the individual" (p. 357) aimed to favor the construct development process through informants' every day thoughts and accounts.

The purpose of the focus group was threefold: first, to deepen the understanding of target members both in their professional and in their personal lives; second, to estimate what are the meanings that drivers attach to their profession and to their truck; third, to evaluate what kind of relationship (if any) they establish with their trucks. To this aim the interview canvass was designed in order to allow the informants to freely talk about their own experiences (Calder, 1977).

The focus group's verbatim transcripts and field notes revealed a high sense of belonging to the truck driver professional category, diverse meanings attached to the

profession and to the professional choice and a thick overlapping between professional and personal life.

In a further stage of the research path, in the light of the empirical evidences gathered with the focus group, the author has deepen the investigation of the cultural significance of truck consumption and the emotional bond connecting the drivers to their trucks by implying a qualitative study using the existential phenomenological interviews research method (Thompson et al. 1989). Existential phenomenology has been chosen because of its adequacy to generate knowledge about the phenomena studied when the research effort is not aimed to hypothesis testing and when the researcher is basically interested in the experiential meanings of consumption.

Afterward a quantitative survey was designed with the sole purpose to shed light on product attachment, its antecedents and its outcomes and to evaluate the role that brands play in determining the relative level of product attachment. Moreover it was conducted also to reinforce findings of the previous qualitative effort. This quantitative study is also enriched with a multigroup analysis aimed to unveil differences existing between employees and owners. In this research step only constructs and items developed in prior published research were selected and adopted.

Finally, a fourth final study consisted in personal interviews to marketing managers of truck manufacturers aimed to show companies' perception of truck consumption and how they set up their marketing strategies.

The research path and timing are depicted in Figure 1 while each of the mentioned research efforts (except for the focus group as already argued), methodologies applied and findings drawn are described in details in the proceeding of the manuscript (see chapters 5, 6 and 7).

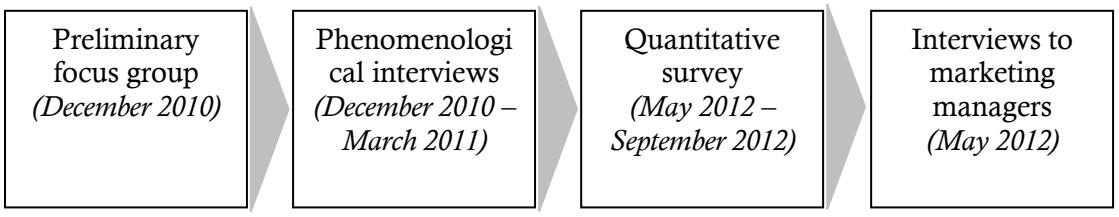

Figure 19 – The research route

5

A Phenomenological Enquiry Into Truck Possession

AGENDA: 1. Introduction – **2**. Existential phenomenology in marketing and consumer research – **3**. The sample: a socio-cultural description – **4**. Results – **5**. Conclusions

1. Introduction

During the preliminary/exploratory focus group (Calder, 1977) a diffused feeling of product attachment among truck drivers emerged. In order to deepen the understanding of product attachment as well as to favor the construct generation process, several in depth interviews with truck drivers were conducted: as the author will show in the following discussion, the interpretation of interviews transcripts - and subsequent findings drawn - suggest that the mentioned attachment can be framed within the extended-self framework introduced by Belk in his acclaimed article published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (1988). More precisely the purpose of this second part of the research process was to identify what kind of symbolic and cultural meanings truck-drivers attach to the product, how the product pervades the three basic states of possession (namely having, doing and being – Belk, 1988) and the meaning associated to truck consumption in the everyday life of the informants. Findings suggested the extended self as a suitable theoretical lens through which categorize the drivers-trucks relationship.

The selection of the informants and the composition of the sample has been done through a snow-ball technique (Goodman, 1961). The final sample was composed of 12 individuals (see Table 8).

All the informants are Italian citizens aged between 23 and 60 years old (the average age is 40). Of these 11 are males and one informant is female; four are singles and eight are married, nine hold a middle school diploma while the remaining three interviewees hold a high school degree. In terms of role nine of them are employees of trucking companies and the remaining three individuals are entrepreneurs in the trucking industry. Nonetheless, even if they own a company they are drivers themselves. The bulk of informants are involved in long range transportations (mostly national and international) and drive every day the same truck.

The only criteria followed for the selection of the informants was to ensure a sufficient heterogeneity of the interviewees in terms of ownership and possession. The group of informants included both truck owners (entrepreneurs) and drivers employed in companies (people that possess a truck but do not own it directly).

The interviews took place within the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011: the average length of each interview was about two hours and a half. Each interview has been recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. The work gave rise to more than 100 pages of field notes and interviews' transcriptions (single spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt). structure, execution and analysis of the interviews were generated through the existential phenomenological interview method following Thompson et al. (1989; 1990). The research method applied is described in the following.

2. Existential phenomenology in marketing and consumer research

As stated by Thompson et al. (1989) existential phenomenology is a research paradigm that blends the philosophy of existentialism with the methods of phenomenology allowing the researcher to grasp a contextual reality as a first person account of experiences.

Existential phenomenology is hence a research method that focuses on the life-world of the individuals: rather than separating and then objectifying aspects of the life world, the purpose of existential phenomenology is to describe human experience as it is lived. In the phenomenological interview, the course of the dialogue is set primarily by the informant, assumes the form of a conversation rather than of a questions-answer session

and the descriptive questions employed by the interviewer flow from the course of the dialogue (Thompson et al. 1989).

A critical aspect in conducting phenomenological interviews regards the question used by the interviewer. These questions are aimed to unveil individuals' own experiences and are not aimed to confirm and/or support underpinning theoretical hypothesis. This is the reason why as prescribed by Thompson et al. (1989) the interviewer should try to avoid "what" and "why" questions since they restrict the answers domain pushing the respondents to focus on causal mechanisms rather than on experiences' accounts.

In phenomenological research the research objective is to give a thematic description of experiences that can be reached through a holistic research strategy aimed to relate descriptions of specific experiences to each other and to the overall context of the life word (Thompson et al., 1989). Coherently with the methodological standpoint of phenomenological research the interpretation of the interviews relies on the *emic* approach, i.e. on informants' own terms and expressions.

The text of the interview is treated as an autonomous body of data and the interpretations given to the data collected do not incorporate hypothesis, inferences and conjectures that exceed the evidences provided by the transcript. Hence, quotes of the interviews' transcripts are generally reported in the research paper. What is allowed to the researcher is the so called *bracketing* i.e. the possibility to relate to respondents reflections trying to grasp – not to impose – meanings emerging from the dialogue (Thompson et al., 1989). As sharply pointed out by Thompson et al. (1989), although existential phenomenology is interpretivist by nature and is not aimed to confirm underpinning research hypothesis or to confirm (or disconfirm) a precise theoretical position, this does not mean that existential phenomenology should be regarded simply as a descriptive method without a scientific status. "Existential phenomenological research is empirical" (Thompson et al. 1989: 142): hence can be tested or judged through the same evaluation criteria by which positivistic research is commonly evaluated and tested. Its evidence is responded description of lived experience.

Coherently with the suggested research design described above the interviews assumed the form of an informal conversation in which informants were asked to freely talk about their job and their truck. According to Thompson et al. (1989, 1990) in order to allow the dialogue to be circular rather than linear the only predetermined question that the researcher should set up in advance is the opening one while other questions flow spontaneously from the course of the dialogue. The opening question was always: "Can you please tell me something about the truck driver's job?" and the role of the researcher

during the course of the interview was basically that of pushing the informant to dig into their lived experiences and try to grasp the experiential/existential meanings of "truck consumption".

The suitability of existential phenomenology in reaching a deep understanding of consumption phenomenon, also testified by the "hype" it has generated in the '90s, is well documented in the consumer literature, especially in the pages of JCR - Journal of Consumer Research (see as instance Fournier, 1988; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Thompson et al., 1990; Mick and Demoss, 1990; Hirschman, 1992; McQuarrie and Mick, 1992, Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Thompson and Haykto, 1997, among the others).

Although phenomenology has been suggested as a fruitful research method to deepen the understanding of network and interorganizational relationships (Cova and Salle, 2003) its application in business research is at least non-existent: a bibliographic analysis of the IMM – Industrial Marketing Management in fact, unveiled that this research method has been applied in only one contribution (Ian, 2006). The lack of interest toward this research method can be perhaps explained considering that being B2B marketing principally focused on the analysis of industrial relationships, its basic locus of investigation are the "meso" (network) and "macro" (business environment) level of interaction and less interest is directed toward the "micro" level (experiential) of investigation.

Moreover the supremacy of the case study method in the European industrial marketing tradition has undeniably inhibited scholars to experiment non orthodox research methods.

At the level of investigation of this doctoral thesis instead existential phenomenology seems to be appropriate since the locus of investigations are not organizations and the interactions between them: rather - as already extensively argued - individuals and their personal feelings.

Hence, the informants accounts treated as autonomous body of data can lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon investigated allowing to grasp the multiple nuances of informants lived experiences.

3. The sample: a socio-cultural description

As already stated in the introduction paragraph the sample of drivers investigated was composed by 12 informants: Table 8 contains the basic information aimed at

representing the composition of the informants. In this section the author will give some more detailed information about each of the informants in order to allow the readers to understand the socio-cultural context that shapes the individual's life world (Fournier, 1998)[3].

	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Education	Role	Range of trasportation	Brand
S. G.	23	M	Single	High school diploma	Employee	Mid/long	Volvo
C. C.	24	M	Single	Middle level school	Owner	Long/International	Volvo
A.P.	51	M	Married	Middle level school	Employee	Long/International	Man
I. S.	40	M	Married	Middle level school	Employee	Long/International	Mercedes
F. G.	48	M	Married	Middle level school	Owner	Long/International	Iveco
M. C.	54	M	Married	High school diploma	Owner	Long/International	Iveco
M. D. D.	29	F	Single	High school diploma	Employee	Short/middle	Volvo
F. B.	50	M	Married	Middle level school	Owner	International	Scania
E. L.	43	M	Married	Middle level school	Employee	Short/middle	Daf
A. M.	60	M	Married	High school diploma	Owner	Mid/long	Scania
L. O.	23	M	Single	Middle level school	Employee	Short	Scania
F. M.	32	M	Married	Middle level school	Employee	Short	Scania

Table 8 – The sample of informants

S.G. is a 23 years old celibate driver who started to work as driver just after finished the high school. He has the passion for trucks since the childhood: his father used to be a truck driver as well, so this passion is described by the informant as a sort of family's legacy. Although his parents have tried to obstacle his decision arguing that with a high school diploma he could aspire for a different job, he has decided to give vent to this passion anyway. He is currently working in a trucking company that delivers groceries and

3 The complete names are not reported in the manuscript. The author took this decision in order to preserve the informants' privacy.

other consumer goods to petrol stations' rest areas all over the country. He drives a Volvo truck and he is very satisfied of its performances. He played an active role in the purchasing process of the truck he drives because the boss asked directly to him which was the truck he would like to have. He is a potential product enthusiast since even if he is an employee, he has decided to personalize the truck with some personal items such as microfiber curtains for the cabin, leather floor mats, some flags on the top and a signboard with his name on the windshield. Truck personalization has been paid by himself. He would like to personalize it more but his boss does not agree. He does not like much the collective dimension of truck drivers (meetings, contests, etc.) but he attends every year the drivers' meeting organized in the village where he lives in the province of Bergamo because the local priest blesses the trucks and he likes this tradition.

C. C. is a 24 years old guy working as truck driver since the age of 21. He has a low education level (he has interrupted his study at the second year of the middle level school), lives in the province of Milan and works for the company that was previously ran by his father. He became a driver after his father died for a cancer; that event was determinant on his professional choice. He decided to work as driver because he was willing to do something for which his father would have been proud of. The company he runs has fifteen employees. He is engaged with his job and has a huge passion for trucks. Nonetheless he has the intention to quit to drive the truck and keep on working on the administrative side of the company soon. This decision is motivated by the fact that he wants to have a kid soon and he is convinced of the impossibility to conceal his life as driver with the role that a father is supposed to hold. He drives a Volvo truck, is very brand loyal - his motto is "there's no truck other than Volvo" – and is a product enthusiast considering the relative high expenditure he afforded to personalize his truck.

A. P. is a 51 years old driver, married, and father of two sons. He lives in the province of Bergamo and he is been doing this job for about 16 years. Previously he used to be a factory worker in the metallurgic industry: he decided to become a driver because of the freedom he enjoys driving and because of the salary that is slightly higher than the average wage of a factory worker. He is not a product enthusiast – he does not like personalizations at all – but he loves his truck anyway. He spend a considerable amount of time and efforts taking care of the truck, even during his spare time. He considers the relationship he has with his truck a sort of friendship and when he talks about it, he often uses metaphors and other figures of speech. He currently drives a Man truck that has personally chosen even if he is an employee.

I. S. is 40 years old, holds a middle school diploma and works as truck driver since 15 years. He is employed in one of the biggest trucking company in Italy. Previously he used to work as bricklayer but was forced to change his career because of a problem to his back. Now he is a driver in love with his job: he works also as driving instructor for new drivers. He likes to define himself a professional of the road, not simply a truck driver. For him driving a truck is extremely exiting but he is fully convinced of the importance of driving safe. The safety argument is predominant in every account about his truck and his professional life. He is engaged predominantly in transportations all over Europe, hence he spend almost the entire week away. He is not in love with trucks and he is basically interested in trucks' safety and reliability. He can be labeled as a rational driver more interested in hard rather than soft product features. He drives a Mercedes Benz truck. He is neither attached, nor loyal to any brand since his main interest is in the technical features and safety devices of the truck.

F. G. is the owner of a trucking company based in the province of Bergamo and he is a driver himself. He is married and has two sons. He represents the last generation of a long family tradition of drivers: the family hence played a great role in determining his professional choice. He can be considered a disenchanted driver: he use to be very passionate but not anymore due to the difficulties of a life spent on a truck and to the downturn that the trucking business is experiencing in the last years. He has a deep feeling of nostalgia for the past and for what the driving profession use to be. He has a personal bond with his truck that is far from being conceived as a real attachment: for F. G., his truck – as well as all the other trucks he owns - represents the tool that allow him and his family to pay the bills, so he does not attach any particular extended meaning. The care he directs toward the truck is more aimed to guarantee the correct functioning of the truck rather than a way to invest himself in the object. He does not like personalizations that defines a waste of money and the main criteria he uses when he needs to buy a new truck is to spend as less as possible.

M. C. is 54 years old man married with a daughter. He owns a company that used to be previously owned by his father. He holds a high school diploma but – as the informant stated –he dreamt the truck since the childhood. He is an extremely functionalist driver: for him the truck is a mere working tool that should be clean and reliable. Nothing else. He sees truck personalization as a waste of money and considers drivers who spend money to change the physical appearance of the truck like kids. Nonetheless he declares to spend a significant amount of time taking care of the truck. For him, taking care of the

truck is more like a hobby. Rather, a sort of moral duty. As far as brands is concerned he is loyal to Iveco because is the less expensive brand compared to others. Money at first.

M. D. D. is the only female composing the sample of informants here analyzed. She is 29 years old, single, owns a high school diploma and works as employee in a trucking company. She became a driver six years ago: this decision was taken because she was employed in the administration of a family owned trucking company where she used to have fun driving trucks in the factory's yard. She was so enthusiastic of her first driving experiences that the decision to get the driving license emerged spontaneously. She is very proud to be a driver even if she feels herself discriminated being a girl in a category that is almost entirely composed by males. She has the passion for performing arts and her dream is to find a job in the show business. Her decision to become a truck driver was in part motivated by the fact that she hopes that being a truck driver she can have some advantages in finding job opportunities as model, dancer or showgirl. But until now it seems that it didn't work out. She is a product enthusiast, she personalized her truck in order to realize a certain fir between her image and the truck appearance. She defines the emotional bond with her truck sentimental.

F. B. is an entrepreneur in the trucking industry. He is the archetype of what in Italian is labeled as "*padroncino*", i.e. the situation in which the driver and the owner of the truck are the same person and the entrepreneur is the only one employee of the company. He is 50 years old, married, with low education. He is mostly engaged in international transportation, drives a Scania and he is not passionate about trucks at all. Like other informants composing the sample here analyzed, he considers the truck no more than a working tool, does not like personalization and the only accessories he has are those concerning the technical functionalities of the truck. He started to work as driver because his father was a driver too, but also because he does not like sedentary jobs. Nonetheless when he talks about his job he displays a sort of tension between positive and negative aspects of his life: as he stated "driving a truck is a job in which you are always in late and you get bored".

E. L. is a 43 years old driver in love with his job and very passionate for trucks. He has personalized his truck but not as much as he would like to. He is potentially a strong product enthusiast but considering that he does not own the truck he currently drives (he is employed in a small trucking company) he does not want to spend too much on aesthetic elaborations of the truck. He started to work as truck driver due to the passion for motors in general and for the freedom he enjoys driving. He is engaged in short range transportation (the longest trip he did in his career lasted for three days), drives a Daf truck

but he is in love with Volvo: he used to have a Volvo truck toward which he nurture a feeling of nostalgia. He is married with children, hold a middle school diploma and he is very passionate about motors.

A. M. is a 60 years old driver and owner of a company he runs with his two sons. He used to work in a company as nuclear electronic surveyor but he quit this job for the passion he has always had for trucks. His father was a driver, so – as the informant said – he grew up breathing the smell of gasoil and trucks' oil. For him driving a truck is an exciting adventure and he still euphoric when he goes away for a few days with his truck. He does not like personalizations but he invests a significant amount of time taking care of his and all the other trucks composing his company's fleet. He displays a strong feeling of attachment with his truck, defined as a journey partner. He currently drives a Scania not because he loves this brand but because – as the informant stated – is a brand easy to resell. His favorite brand is Mercedes.

L. O. is a 23 years old driver, celibate, engaged in short range transportations. He started to work as driver because he is in love with trucks since the childhood but, in spite of this, he hates the profession that he defined too frenetic. He intends to quit the job within a year. For him his truck is not just simply a working tool, but – as the informant stated – is like a dog that must be cared for, cleaned and loved. He drives a Scania and he is very brand loyal. For him "trucks must be beautiful, powerful and Scania". He does not have personalized the truck except for a signboard with his girlfriend name, a Harley Davidson symbol, and a couple of lucky charm native Americans amulets.

F. M. is a 32 years old driver married with kids. He can be defined an opportunistic driver because his professional choice was motivated only by economic reasons: he has decided to become a driver simply because is a well paid job compared to others. As a result for him the truck is no more than a working tool toward which he does not nurture any feeling of affection, he defines his professional life as boring and stressful and he does not display any feeling of attachment to the brand he drives (Scania).

4. Results

The descriptions of each of the informants composing the sample is aimed to grasp the relationship that exist between drivers in terms of motives of attachment and the strict relationship that product attachment has with the reasons of the professional choice. The willingness to become a driver, in most of the cases, emerges during the childhood,

especially when the driver has inherited the profession from the family. In other cases this job is chosen after other working experiences as a way to escape the routine of the factory/office. The transcripts unveil that when the profession is chosen for reasons other than economic/utilitarian/opportunistic, drivers tend to display higher levels of product attachment and – in some cases – more emotional feelings toward the brand. Moreover – interestingly especially as far as generalizability of the results is concerned – there are no significant difference between entrepreneurs and employees (to which the author often refer to as owners and possessors) neither in terms of relative affection to the product and/or to the brand, nor in terms of commitment toward the object (product personalization, personal investment of time and money in product care). Product and/or brand attachment seem so to be tightly linked with identitarian aspects of the driver: those for which the driver identity is more salient (Callero, 1985) tend to display higher feeling of attachment toward the product and the brand than those for which the driver identity is less salient. An identity that very often is formed by the passing of time, since the childhood onward.

As far as product attachment is concerned, the *emic* analysis of the data led to a deep understanding of the respondents' attachment to their truck and to shed light on the nature and on the intensity of the subject-object relationship. Coherently with the basic tenets of existential phenomenology the author did not try to test a theory or to confirm/disconfirm research hypothesis or a precise theoretical position (Thompson et al. 1989).

Rather, the transcripts were interpreted and situated in a theoretical framework treating the texts as autonomous body of knowledge.

In particular interviews data led to a set of predominant thematic categories that allowed to frame them within the extended self framework (Belk, 1988). I.e. in the context studied product attachment is tightly linked with self-expression motives (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988): the truck is associated to symbolic and cultural meanings through which drivers display their selves-concept to others (Belk, 1987, 1988, 1990; Csikszentmihaly and Rocheberg-Halton, 1981; Schulz et al., 1989). The mentioned predominant categories are reported below.

4.1 ***The humanization-personification of the truck***

The prevailing metaphor that has been used by the interviewer in describing their truck and the relationship they have with it, assumed the form of a "subjectification of the object". The affective emotional content of the truck and the symbolic meaningful relationship that truck drivers have with their trucks is often conceptualized as friendship or

marriage. The truck is a trustworthy partner whose trust must be conquered by the driver by the passing of time. It must be loved, respected and protected. The driver-truck relationship is often conceptualized by the respondents as a two-way interaction in which both parties involved have a sort of moral duty or obligation toward each other.

Consider the following statements.

> A. P. «My truck is my partner of adventures. We hang around together, me and him. I feel like being Don Quixote and my truck is Rocinante. He is my horse, my company. If he feels good, I feel good as well. I'm jealous of my truck. I am the only one that can get into it. Even my boss is forbidden to get in».

> C. C. «My truck is my friend … when I'm with my truck - let's say abroad - I never miss my place and my family. He is my best friend. I remember the last year when I spent a lot of weekend with my truck in southern France. I have been traveling almost a year in France and it was amazing because during the summer weekends I was forbidden to travel and I was happily obliged to spend the weekend sleeping on the truck right near to the sea side looking at the sea, eating and drinking something … can you ask something more to your life? If you are not a truck driver you cannot understand what I mean …sleeping on your truck in front of the sea … It's fantastic. Isn't it?»

For the quotes reported above, another relevant theme can be found and isolated: the adventurous image that truck drivers have of their job, the role that the truck plays is allowing them to experience these adventures and the feelings of jealousy they nurture toward the product: sentences like "I'm the only one allowed to get in", "No one can hop on my truck", emphasize the relevance of possession and blur the boundaries of the meaning of ownership.

4.2 The investing self in the object

According to Belk (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) product attachment leads people to invest psychic energy in a product. This energy and its outcomes (i.e. personalization, care, etc.) are regarded as a part of the self because they were generated by or emerged from the self. As shown in the quantitative enquiry the investing self in the object is a strong outcome of product attachment.

The phenomenological analysis of the interviews' transcripts, unveils particular patterns of the investing self in the object.

Taking care of the truck is considered for truck drivers something that goes beyond the maintenance. It is more a sort of moral duty toward the object. A set of actions

that the driver should exert in order to demonstrate reverence, gratitude and respect undertaken not only during the work hours but also during the spare time.

The quotes reported below underline the relevance of the psychic energy that drivers are supposed to invest in the product: an energy that generates the establishment of a relationship that is conceived as being bidirectional. The truck needs to be loved and respected in order to work properly. "Trucks have soul".

> C.C. «If you mistreat a truck it mistreats you in turn. I'm fully convinced of this. Trucks have soul. It happened to me to say "this shitty truck!" and after two hours the truck broke down. It can be a coincidence but I don't think so. I had just withdrawn the new Volvo Anniversary from the dealer that costs like a studio apartment and it didn't perform as it might. I was always saying "shitty truck, damned truck" and after 20 thousand kilometers the engine melt. We spent 60,000 € to repair the damages – obviously I was reimbursed by the producer since the problem was not my fault – and I keep on swearing at the truck. Once received it from the mechanic I keep on having a bad feeling with it. After two weeks the engine breaking broke down and I ended up on a 10 per cent downhill road, a 40 tons load practically without breaks. It was awful. You know what I mean when I say that trucks have a soul? After this experience I have decided to give this new truck that at the time was a top line truck to a driver of my company who immediately felt in love with it. As a result now the truck is in a perfect shape and it never shows up any problem».

An actual manifestation of the investment of the self in the object is product personalization. Sirgy and Danes (1982) defined product personalization as the extent to which a product has personality symbols and associations. Product personalization can be reached through a process that changes the functionality, interface, information content, or distinctiveness of the product in order to allow consumers to set up products that are unique and personal (Blom, 2000).

Personalization can be considered as an outcome of product attachment since it requires a personal investment (in terms of time, efforts and – above all – money) in the product (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). But, at the same time, can be considered an input of product attachment since it contributes to reinforce and to maintain over time the emotional feelings that individuals have toward their products.

In the B2B literature product personalization has been mostly declined as customization and built-to-order production and has been conceptualized as a way that companies can or should follow in order to fit customers' needs (e.g. Fredriksson and Gadde, 2005). This means that personalization has been conceived from the supplier perspective as a marketing strategy that companies can follow in order to improve their competitive positioning and enhance their competitiveness in markets. Product personalization instead is something that is decided and controlled by consumers: although the so called culturally constituted world (i.e. the "fashion system" – see McCracken, 1986)

plays a great role in determining how meanings are located in goods (the truck in this case) personalization emerges spontaneously as an outcome of product attachment and reflects the identity and the self image of the possessor.

> C. C. «My truck is a red mica Volvo with alloy chrome wheels, steel bars and several lights. When I go to truck drivers meeting (once in a while) and someone compliments me for my truck I feel realized. I spent more than 4,500 € to personalize my truck as it is. I bought six lights for the top, sixty new bulbs for the headlights, led circle shaped backlights (I spent 1,400 € only for the last item) and I have assembled an 800 watt hi-fi stereo. If I would never give my truck to someone else I would give it only to A. [A. is an employee of the company that C. C. runs] because he is a driver that can understand the love for a truck. He deserves a proper truck, a truck to be proud of. He always says that if he won the lottery he would spend one million € to assemble the most beautiful truck ever. If you saw my truck you could understand … it's amazing. It doesn't have a drop of grease neither on the trailer … awesome! I use only the sleepers when I drive, shoes are forbidden. And because I smoke there's always a smoke odor exterminator candle in the truck. My truck is my life. Do you know Capriccio? [Capriccio is the nickname of a truck driver who won several prizes in trucks beauty contest for the best truck in Italy. Capriccio drove a truck Scania Atelier 620 Hp with about 165,000 € of accessorizes and technical elaborations. Capriccio has been killed for rivalry in May 2008 by a colleague after a quarrel they had during a contest]. If I would have a truck like Capriccio I would go even in disco with it. I would use it even on Saturday night. Anyway, I do not envy other truck drivers for their particularly beautiful and personalized trucks. You must love the truck you have, even if it is a wreck».

> M.D.D. «I think that the truck should symbolize the driver's identity. If you see my truck it seems to see me. I put some pictures of me on the truck. I have painted my eyes on the hoods and me posing on each door. You can find some pictures on my personal web site or on Facebook. Inside I put red curtains even if my truck is yellow and several fans. I love fans and when I travel I often buy a fan for my truck. I haven't personalized it too much because I transport materials for construction and the truck is always full of dust. But I have plans for the future. Even if the truck is not mine my boss allows me to do whatever I want for my truck».

The transcripts reported above underline two different motives behind product personalization. The first account shows how product personalization can be driven basically for extrinsic reasons: hence as a way to represent the driver's status or as a way to symbolize the distinctiveness of the truck and of its owner. In the second account instead product personalization is conceived as a way to represent the correspondence between the truck and the owner: the identity of the second is transposed to the first and the truck becomes a vehicle to remark the product-self congruence.

Nonetheless, the investing self in the object in this case should not be merely reduced to product personalization. Being the truck a working tool or, more in general, a capital good, it needs constant maintenance requiring efforts (both in terms of time and

economic resources invested) both during the working and the spare time. Consider the following statement of A. M. when describing his activities during his spare time:

> A. M. «I don't have any spare time. Today (Saturday) I will finish around 8 p.m. and tomorrow morning (Sunday) I will be here again because my truck needs some maintenance. I spend almost every weekend here just taking care of the truck. Cleaning, repairing something that is broken, filling liquids, etc. For me Christmas and Easter did never exist. To be a truck driver means be committed to your truck for your entire life. My wife would like me to spend more time with her and her family but it's impossible».

4.3 The tension between emotional and functional meanings

Despite the emotional meanings that truck drivers widely attach to their truck, a tension between these meanings and the functional features of the truck emerges. The love, the attachment, the friendship bonds that the subject establishes with the object seems to be naturally limited by the acknowledgement that «*it's only a machine, anyway*» as F .G. said when describing how he meticulously maintain his truck. The description of personal meanings attached to the truck is often balanced by counter arguments aimed to de-emphasize the passionate view of the truck. Product attachment assumes the form of an intimate-secret relationship that informants dislike to talk about. In their descriptions there is almost always a veil of shame and the difficulty to admit they have feeling with their truck.

Consider the description of F. G. mentioned above:

> «My truck is untouchable. I am the only one that can get in. You cannot find a speck of dust. There's a driver in my company that has a maniacal relationship with his truck. I have difficulties even to convince him to leave it for a while when it needs maintenance. For me is not a piece of scrap cause it allows me to pay the bills at the end of the month. It's only a machine anyway, I care about it of course. Sometimes I talk to my truck, I know is crazy. I don't have an emotional bond with it but if you take care of it, it lasts for longer, fuel consumption decreases as well as maintenance costs».

4.4 Self and work self

As stated by Belk (1987) understanding the extended self helps to learn how consumer behavior contributes to broaden the existence of human beings. In this view, possession is regarded not only as a part of the self, but also as instrumental to the development of the self (Belk, 1988) and to the maintenance of the self-concept (McCracken 1987). In discussing product personalization the author of this manuscript have shown how it is often practiced to make the product self-expressive, i.e. to symbolically represent owner's identity and distinguish him/her from others.

Although the intimate relationship that truck drivers establish with their truck is to certain extent symbiotic, the role that brands plays in shaping the self and in representing the owner's identity cannot be neglected.

> C. C. «Between "Volvers" and "Scaniers" there's the same division you can find between left and right wings, or between Porsche and Ferrari. Who buys Scania is a dude that loves to appear, that wants to let his rumor be heard. It has bright colors, particular headlights, etc. Volvo is a truck that if you make something wrong it suddenly becomes a scrap. If you fix even just a wrong bulb, it changes its performances. Volvo is a truck for elegant drivers that permits only sober personalizations. Is like to see Jennifer Lopez with a sexy dress, a provocative décolleté and a pair of sneakers. It ruins everything! Scania is a truck that can wear also sneakers because it allows more personalization than Volvo. Scania is for people that want to attract attention. Volvo is very elegant instead».

The consumption patterns of trucks are thus a way to express the owner's identity (eventually reinforced through personalization and other aesthetic ornaments) and at the same time to maintain the self.

It is interesting to note that the truck is the sole tool that truck drivers use at work and at the same time is their work place. The negotiation of the work self in this context thus offers unique cues. If Belk (2005) conceived the impetus for bringing possessions to work as a way to overcome feelings of alienation and transience and the home and work selves as competing entities, this seems to be less evident for truck drivers.

Bringing possessions into the truck seems not to be a way to overcome alienation and transience or to conceal the home and the work self. Traces and elements of the home self are brought in the truck only if necessary and having objects that can increase the sense of what Giddens (1984) has labeled as "ontological security" is not considered worthy by truck drivers because it reduces the adventure content of the job.

Consider what A. P. said when we asked him to describe how does he feels when he spend almost the entire week living in his truck.

> «In a truck you don't have your bed, your television, your family, nothing. You are always alone. If you end up in a place where you have never been before - maybe abroad where you have problems with the language - you are obliged to manage such a situation. You can rely only on your truck. It puts a strain on you. Of course the situations can be often hard but when you go back home and you were able to face all the difficulties you had, is a sort of personal victory. You feel alive. If I could add something more to my truck I will never add anything that is not related to the technical functionality of the truck otherwise the job would become easy and routinized».

Truck drivers spend so much time on their truck that the differences between home and work life – and thus between the home and the work self – are blurred. Self and work self - as also confirmed in the next (quantitative) research effort - tend to merge.

If we accept the idea that the more we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes (Belk, 1988) we can easily understand the nature of truck possession for truck drivers, and the salience of the relationship they establish with their truck.

The truck is a product that strongly pervades the three stages of having, doing and being (Belk, 1988). Truck drivers spend at least ten hours per day on the truck[4] and according to the data the author collected (reported in the following of this manuscript) they averagely spend two nights per week on the truck.

Moreover, drivers choose this profession mostly for the passion they have for trucks. A passion that - has shown - often comes from the childhood. We can assert accordingly that in this context self and work self tend to overlap more than in other contexts and that the separation between product and place attachment are less evident.

The truck is at the same time a product and a place around which meanings are constructed by experience (see Tuan, 1974 for a humanistic perspective of locales and places).

> M.D.D. «My truck is my second house. Or rather my first house since I'm always on the truck and never at home. With my first truck I had a relationship that I have no shame to say was sentimental. When my boss decided to sell it because it was old I cried. I have learnt to drive on that truck, I was in love with it. Now I find it hard to get attached to my new truck but I think that I will fall in love with it anyway when I get used to it».

From this last quote we can also appreciate the effect of the loss of possession that as suggested by Belk (1988) should be regarded as a loss or lessening of self and the sense of the past attached to possession that allows people to create, enhance and preserve

[4] According to the European law the drivers' daily schedule is four hours and a half driving, 45 minutes break and other four hours and a half driving. After having totalized a total amount of nine hours driving they are obliged to stop for eleven before starting to drive again.

the sense of identity. The words of A. M. also confirm how the loss of possession of a truck is something that psychologically hurts the driver.

> A. M. «On every truck I had – even those that I used just for a few months – I left a piece of my heart. Between the driver and the truck there's a very affective bond. If I decide to give a truck that use to be mine to an employee of my company I choose the new owner personally. And if I sell it, I oblige one of my employees to go to the reseller instead of me. It makes me feel too sad».

5. Conclusions

The findings drawn in this qualitative study revealed the existence of product attachment and allowed to situate this attachment within the predominant thematic categories constituting the extended self framework. Hence the feelings of attachment that drivers nurture toward the truck pervade the three basic states of possession: having, doing and being (Belk, 1988) with the product serving as identity builder. Drivers tend to mirror their selves and their identities into the product they possess which – in turn – serves as a medium for the maintenance of the self over time.

The basic categories that Belk (1988) himself have used in order to describe the principal manifestation of product possession as extension of the self are recurrent in the interviews scripts as it has been shown in the previous paragraph.

This has several implication for marketing research since – consistent with McCracken (1982) – gives an empirical demonstration that not only consumer goods can serve as vehicles through which human beings display their selves: in particular a B2B good (or a working tool), is revealed as being applied by truck drivers as a way to express their values, their personalities and their own identities. Another important implication for marketing research concern the methodology applied in this research effort: existential phenomenology is revealed as a suitable method that can be applied also in some unconventional context even in the B2B domain.

More in general as the author of this manuscript and co-authors have recently argued (Hietanen et al., 2011) interpretivist research methods can be useful to grasp more in depth the complexity of B2B consumption phenomena as long as the interviews transcripts are treated as self revealing texts, i.e. as autonomous body of knowledge. Lived experiences and first person accounts are more suitable in generating less superficial knowledge, to get more hidden motives of consumption and less evident cultural meanings of the consumption phenomena, even in B2B contexts.

There are no ontological, epistemological and methodological obstacles for not considering existential phenomenology as a suitable research method in case study research (prevailing in the IMP group) especially in those cases in which the process of theory building or theory testing relies predominantly on data collected through personal interviews. The acknowledgment of the "scientificity" of this research method as well as other interpretivist methods not only can stimulate the rejuvenation of the industrial marketing discipline (Cova and Salle, 2003) but can also enrich the industrial marketing domain as a whole adding new perspectives of investigation (also as far as well established research streams such as networks and relationships are concerned) and allowing to focus on other than the traditional "company-centric" unit of analysis.

A possible extension of the study here reported is to investigate the product truck not just as a product but as a place. Trucks are often described as the drivers' place (their second house), are products that physically contain the users and are characterized by the usage of products and artifacts that emphasize the meaning of trucks as places. To this extent a semiotic analysis of symbols, objects and materials that drivers carry on their trucks is suggested by the author as a possible research method through which investigate this phenomena.

As far as marketing implications for practitioners is concerned, the results drawn in this study reveal the importance of identitarian/self related aspects of trucks, the salience of the motives behind the professional choice as drivers of feelings of attachment toward the product and the brand, the multiple nuances of the investing self in the object, the tension between emotional and functional meanings of consumption as well as the blurred boundaries between self and work self. These issues have several implications for marketers: first of all in terms of marketing communication the "hyper real" features of the product truck should assume a primary stance trying to emphasize those product characteristics that are more willing to stimulate identity related perceptions and responses.

Second – as far as the relationships between professional choices and feelings of attachment is concerned - the fact that the most engaged and committed drivers are those that have developed the passion for the driving profession by the passing of time (often since the childhood) suggest for the implementation of some "outward" actions directed on those individuals that are not drivers but would like to be as such in the future.

Technical/functional features of the product seems to be less relevant than others in determining involvement and commitment toward the object.

The findings which stem from the phenomenological interviews are studied more in depth in the next research effort in which possible antecedents of product and brand attachment are identified and evaluated.

6

Product Attachment and Brand Attachment: Antecedents, Consequences and Relationships

AGENDA: **1**. Introduction – **2**. Constructs definition – **3**. Items generation – **4**. Research design – **5**. The measurement model – **6**. Research hypothesis: the structural model – **7**. Results – **8**. Owners vs employees: a multi-group analysis – **9**. Invariance of path estimates – **10**. Invariance of latent means – **11**. Discussion, managerial implications and limitations

1. Introduction

In the first qualitative study - in which existential phenomenology (Thompson et al., 1989) is revealed as a suitable research method in investigating the cultural/social meanings that individuals attach to industrial (B2B) products, a diffused feeling of attachment of drivers towards their trucks is emerged.

The aim of this second study is to quantitatively test the results reached in the first research effort, to evaluate what are possible drivers of product and brand attachment and its consequences, to evaluate what is the impact of product attachment on brand attachment, to quantify the effect of both product and brand attachment on brand loyalty and to evaluate if product attachment affects the investing self in the object (Belk, 1988).

In doing so the author opted for the development of a structural equation model (SEM), since it is more appropriate when the relationship between latent variables have to be tested.

"Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a statistical methodology that takes a confirmatory (i.e. hypothesis testing) approach to the multivariate analysis of a structural theory bearing on some phenomenon" (Byrne, 1998: 3). As noted by Byrne (1998) the term structural equation modeling implies that the causal processes under study can be represented by a series of regression equations (structural relations) and that these structural relations can be modeled pictorially in order to represent the theory under study.

The mentioned structural relations allow the researcher to understand the link (if any and if statistically significant) between latent variables and to appreciate the strength of these links.

In social sciences researchers are generally interested in studying theoretical constructs that cannot be observed directly (latent variables). Being marketing and consumer researchers mainly concerned in studying latent variables (e.g. loyalty, intention, willingness, attitude, satisfaction, attachment, etc.) structural equation modeling has been widely used in marketing and consumer research in measurement and hypothesis testing (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Hence, considering that the central constructs investigated in this doctoral thesis are latent variables (e.g. product attachment and brand attachment), structural equation modeling seems to be the most suitable approach.

The chapter is structured as follows: first of all, constructs composing the study are briefly reviewed; second, validity and reliability of observed and latent variables is verified (measurement model); third hypothesis and relations between constructs are explained (structural model); fourth a multi group analysis is conducted in order to evaluate if differences between employees and owners exist; last, discussion, conclusions, limitations and managerial implications are described.

2. Constructs definition

2.1 Attachment

Before reviewing the meaning and the conceptual domain of the two central construct investigated in this quantitative study (central in this dissertation overall), i.e. product and brand attachment, the broader concept of "attachment" must be introduced.

Attachment is a concept that is still at an early stage in consumer and marketing research and whose properties remain elusive (Park, MacInnis, and Priester 2006, 2009).

On a general level attachment can be defined as an emotion laden target specific bond between a person and a specific object (Bowlby, 1979; 1980). It denotes a psychological state of mind in which a strong cognitive and affective bond, connects an individual with an object or with a subject.

Various behaviors reveal the existence of strong attachment (Bowlby, 1980). On a general level we can state that the stronger is a person's attachment to an object or to a subject, the more is his/her willingness to maintain proximity to the object/subject, to retain it/him/her over time and to direct efforts toward it/him/her. When people do not feel comfortable or secure in certain physical and/or social environments, they often seek physical or psychological protection from the attachment object[5] (Thompson, McInnis and Park, 2005).

The attachment construct has been applied in marketing and consumer research mostly to evaluate the strength and the meanings of the emotional bond between consumers and their products (e.g. Belk, 1988) and/or brands (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) giving birth to a two separated and – the author argue - only marginally converging domains to which scholars refer to as product attachment and brand attachment.

2.2 Product attachment

Several interpretations and definitions of product attachment can be found in the current literature. Ball and Tasaki (1992) defined it as "the extent to which an object which is owned, expected to be owned, or previously owned by an individual, is used by that individual to maintain his or her self concept" (p.158). Schulz et al. (1989) defined it as "a multidimensional property of material object possession which represents the degree of the linkage perceived by an individual between him/her self and a particular object" while according to Kleine and Baker (2004) product attachment is a multi-faceted property of the relationship between an individual or group of individuals and a specific material object that has been psychologically appropriated, decommodified, and singularized through person-object interaction.

[5] This is coherent with the idea of the social actors' search for ontological security also discussed by Anthony Giddens in the *Constitution of Society* (1984).

Schoulz et al. (1989) claimed that attachment is neither a property of the individual, nor a property of the object. Attachment instead emerges at the intersection of the two. The degree of attachment is reflected in thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward a particular object.

Furthermore - as the authors stated - attachment formation is not deliberate, i.e. individuals do not deliberately seek to form an attachment to a particular object. Rather, attachment arises from associations with a consumption experience, is maintained by people over time and is reflected in individual's caring for the object and intention to keep the object for a long time.

Hence, in order to become attached to a particular product, it should provide the owner's or the possessor's with something that goes beyond its utilitarian features.

Consistent with Kleine and Baker (2004) nine characteristics portray attachment: (1) it emerges with specific material objects; (2) it consists in the psychological appropriation of a material object (hence individuals can display feeling of attachment to material objects even though they cannot claim property rights); (3) it can be conceived as self-extension (see the qualitative study – Chapter five - in this manuscript); (4) it is decommodified and singularized, i.e. generate feeling of irreplaceability toward the object possessed and are evaluated beyond their utilitarian features; (5) it requires a personal history between person and possession;(6) attachment has the property of strength; (7) it is multi-faceted; (8) it is emotionally complex; (9) it evolves over time as the meaning of the self changes (see Kleine and Baker, 2004 for a thorough description of each of the nine characteristics listed above).

Nevertheless - as published research have shown - individuals can display feeling of attachment not only toward products, but also toward pets (Hirschman, 1994), places (Altman and Low 1992), experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Kleine and Baker, 2004), celebrities (Thomson, 2006), sport teams (Funk and James, 2006), … and – the author of this manuscript claims – B2B products.

2.3 Brand attachment

Brand attachment has been defined as the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with a brand, involving thoughts and feelings about it and its relationship to the self (Thomson et al., 2005).

This definition involves two unique and essential elements: the existence of a certain connection between the brand and the self (brand-self connectedness) and the

existence of a cognitive and emotional bond, the strength of which evokes a readiness to allocate one's processing resources toward the brand (Park et al., 2006).

Brand-self connectedness reflects the extent to which the brand is linked to the self, given its essentiality in facilitating the fulfillment of certain needs that can have a utilitarian, experiential and/or symbolic nature. The companies' ability to create emotional bonding relationships between consumers and their brands is an important marketing challenge since strong bonding leads to positive outcomes, such as brand loyalty and customers' willingness to pay premium prices (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010).

Although product and brand attachment are very similar constructs – both identify the intensity of the emotional feelings a consumer establishes and experiences with an "object" – they deal with conceptually distinct domains. The first deals with the emotional feeling an individual has toward a particular product or - more precisely – about a particular (branded) specimen that is owned and/or possessed by an individual; the second instead implies that consumers establish a certain emotional relationships with a brand, i.e. towards different product variants or various product categories produced by the same company (Mugge, 2007).

Product attachment and brand attachment are somehow related, because experiencing a strong relationship with a product inevitably affects feelings toward the brand and vice versa.

As far as the connection between these two similar - but different - constructs is concerned, Kleine and Baker (2004) clearly stated that scholars should carefully consider the differences between them as well as possible overlapping between attachment possession and brand meanings.

As Kleine and Baker (2004) argued, brand bonds and possession attachments should not be regarded as the same phenomenon. Brands and tangible possessions differ in terms of irreplaceability and their potential for carrying indexical value.

It is also worth to note that brand attachment differs from brand attitude: if both implies affective responses to a particular brand, brand attachment can be defined a first order construct since it implies the brand's linkage to the consumer self. Hence, the outcomes of brand attachment are supposed to be more significant than those generated by attitude (Park et al., 2006).

2.4 Role-identity salience

Identities answer the question "who am I?" taking into consideration the multiple social groups to which the individual belongs to (Callero, 1985). This definition implies that the concept of identity is multifaceted and multidimensional, i.e. individuals have as many identities, as the social roles they hold.

Callero (1985) affirmed that roles and identities are forged both by the individual him/herself and by the social group(s) to which he/she belongs to. However, a central standpoint in Callero (1985) is that although the identity should be considered a multifaceted entity, i.e. is the result of the sum of the multiple identities individuals hold, these identities operate in a salience hierarchy, i.e. the (multiple) identities can be hierarchically ordered. Callero (1985) posited three main consequences of an individual's role-identity salience: self-definition, social relations with others and behaviors.

The first is a person's self-definition: when a role-identity is salient in a person's life, it is more representative of the self. The second, concerns how the role-identity salience defines a person's social relations with others. This implies that salient identities help others to identify who the individual is. The third consequence instead, regards the linkage between the salience of a certain role-identity and its connected behaviors. So what an individual does or is shapes the individual's behavior.

A concrete example can help the readers to understand the three interrelated phenomena of identity salience: the salient is the role-identity of the writer of this doctoral thesis as PhD candidate, the more this identity will be representative of his self (self definition), the more the others will be able to identify him under this label compared to other professional categories (social relations with others) and the greater will be the author's willingness to actively take part to an academic circle or to defend his works in academic conferences (behaviors).

Kleine et al. (1993) noted that identity salience also comes from "the extensiveness of one's identity-related possessions" and that the more possessions the individual has reflects how important the identity is to an individual (p. 225). In their study on mundane consumptions for example, they find out how the athlete identity is salient in determining the purchasing frequencies of certain sport items. Hence, the more salient is the individual's identity, the more is the willingness that this identity will be reflected on some consumption-related behaviors. A central standpoint in this doctoral thesis is that the more is the salience of drivers' role-identity, the more they show feelings of attachment toward the product truck.

2.5 Product/brand-self congruity

The use and possession of products is a vehicle for self expression (Sirgy, 1982; Belk 1988; Aaker, 1996). People develop strong attachment to products that express who they are as individuals (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988; Kleine et al., 1995; Schultz et al., 1989). In the words of Ball and Tasaki (1992) material possession is a way to express "who I am", "who I was" and "who I'm becoming".

As stated by Tucker (1957) "there has long been an implicit concept that consumers can be defined in terms of both the products they acquire or use, or in terms of the meanings products/brands have for them or their attitudes towards products" (p. 139).

Hence, products help individuals to differentiate themselves from others, displaying some symbolic meanings of self-expression: the more the product can serve as a vehicle for self expression, the higher is the likelihood for the owner to become attached to it.

In the same vein based on a previous research by Malär et al. (2011), self-congruence is a crucial concept that plays a prominent role in creating and strengthening emotional brand attachment. Self-congruence is the fit between the consumers' self and the brand's image (Sirgy, 1982). It can enhance consumers' favorable attitude towards the brand (Aaker, 1999). In general self-congruence was found to have positive effects on emotional brand attachment (see Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Malär et al., 2011).

As noted by Malhotra (1988) researchers have been generally supportive of the hypothesis that consumers prefer, intend to buy or use brands/products which are more congruent with their self concepts.

It is worth to note that, even if in the literature the self concept has been conceptualized in its triadic nature (ideal, actual and social self, see Sirgy, 1980), in this research effort the self is treated as a unidimensional construct measuring only the actual self.

2.6 Product/brand reliability

Although – as stated above - in order to become attached to a particular product, it should provide the owner's or the possessor's with something that goes beyond its utilitarian features, product's usefulness can contribute to reinforce the strength of attachment (Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). As noted by the mentioned authors the product may perform its basic tasks so well that the consumer feel pleasure when he/she uses the product. People can so develop emotional attachment to products as a consequence of their ability to properly perform the tasks that are supposed to carry out. This is even more true in some consumption contexts in which the technical characteristics

of the product or - more in general – of the offering (including also additional services) are considered as the main drivers of customer satisfaction.

Business to business markets for example were found as having these characteristics (see Homburg and Rudolph, 2001). In the context here studied (working tools) since reliability is fundamental in order to stimulate positive customer/user's attitudes and behaviors toward the brand and its products, the adoption of product reliability as a suitable antecedent of product (and brand) attachment is necessary. Obviously, since the product here studied is a working tool it does not make sense to consider product usefulness as possible antecedent of product attachment.

2.7 Experiential significance

Experiential significance – also labeled as emotional significance (Ball and Tasaki, 1992) – is a construct that captures the meanings that consumers attach to a product emerging as a consequence of the experiences that he/she has accumulated during the product life cycle. It has been frequently pinpointed in the literature that also the experiential component of product's usage and possession affect the emotional meanings that customers attach to objects (Hirschman, 1980). As stated by Belk (1988), "possessions are a convenient mean of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of past" (p. 148). Previous researches have shown that "memories" linked to a product to which individuals are attached are important antecedents of the attachment strength, that the strength of attachment is tightly related to the length of ownership and can be seen as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988; Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). A product hence can assume a particular meaning for the owner, can be very dear to him/her, neither for its utilitarian features, nor for the significance it has in displaying a particular facet of him/her self. Yet, is considered important and dear for the memories that evoke to the owners.

2.8 Brand loyalty

A construct related to brand attachment is brand loyalty (Solomon et al., 2002). The strength of an individual's affection toward a brand has a significant impact of his/her loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Hence, brand loyalty can (should) be considered an outcome of brand attachment. In its original formulation brand loyalty has been defined as "the biased (i.e. nonrandom) behavioral response (i.e., purchase) expressed over time by some decision-making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of

such brands and is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes" (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973: 2).

More simply, brand loyalty can be defined as a pattern of repeated purchases of the same brand accompanied by an underlying positive attitude toward the brand (Oliver, 1999).

Consumers who are strongly attached to a brand show loyalty even during times of marketplace failures and negative information about the company or the people who work for it (Ahluwalia, Unnava and Burnkrant, 2000).

However, brand loyalty may not necessarily be due to the experience of an emotional bond.

Hence consumer can show significant levels of brand loyalty even when their affective involvement toward the brand is low or non-existent.

A central standpoint in this study is that brand loyalty can emerge as a consequence of both product attachment and brand attachment since in B2B contexts the concepts of "product" and "brands" tend somehow to overlap and in some cases to merge (see Bennett et al, 2004).

2.9 Product personalization

Product personalization is "a process that changes the functionality, interface, information content, or distinctiveness of a system to increase its personal relevance to an individual" (Blom 2000, p.313).

Product personalization is something that is decided and controlled by consumers: although the so called culturally constituted world (i.e. the "fashion system" – see McCracken, 1986) plays a great role in determining how meanings are located in goods, personalization emerges spontaneously as an outcome of product attachment and reflects the identity and the self image of the possessor.

Through personalization the product becomes self-expressive: it symbolically represents the owner's identity allowing to distinguish him/her from others. By personalizing a product, a person directs time, efforts, and financial resources to the product, i.e. one's invest him/her self in the object (Belk, 1988). Several scholars argued that product attachment is related to the "psychic energy" invested in a product (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Personalization activate a virtuous/vicious circle because – when practiced – it displays higher levels of product attachment and, in turn, contributes to strengthen these feelings of attachment. Nonetheless in this doctoral

thesis product personalization is considered an outcome of product attachment allowing to identify higher or lower levels of product attachment.

3. Items generation

According to Churchill (1979) once the conceptual domain of the latent variables (constructs) under investigation have been clarified and are supposed to have nomological networks (see Iacobucci et al.,1991), the next step consists in the generation of measurement items. Coherently with the measurements' generation process suggested by the same author in his acclaimed article, if the constructs under study are drawn from existing literature and if the observed variables were already tested in published researches, the use of the same measurements is preferable to the generation of new items.

Hence, considering that almost all the constructs forming the quantitative study here presented are drawn from published researches, the author chose to use the same measurement scales and items (partially) which validity and reliability has been already tested. "Product attachment" items were drawn from Schifferstein and Pelgrim (2008)[6].

The four items composing the original measurement scale of "brand attachment" instead were drawn from a recently published article (Park et al. 2010) in the *Journal of Marketing*. The respondents "role-identity salience" were measured picking up some items from the Callero's (1985) scale; items measuring "experiential significance" were drawn from Ball and Tasaki (1992).

Observed variables of "product (and brand) reliability" were drawn from Schifferstein and Pelgrim (2008) considering that the prevailing view in the marketing literature is that attachment goes beyond product/brand utilitarian features (see Schoulz et al., 1989).

As far as "product/brand self congruity" is concerned, items were generated by the author combining different sources from the current literature (e.g. Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Kressmann et al., 2006) starting

6 The article was published in the *International Journal of Design*. The author decided to do not include any items drawn from existing marketing literature (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Sivadas and Venkatesh, 1995) since – as noted by Klein and Baker (2004) – these two scales do not satisfy discriminant validity. Hence, measurement items of attachment developed by Schifferstein and Pelgrim (2008) were judged as more suitable in capturing the meaning of attachment allowing to avoid possible overlapping with those constructs that are generally considered as drivers of attachment, such as memories (included in the Ball and Tasaki's scale) or self-extension (forming the Sivadas and Venkatesh, 1995).

from the assumption that consumption phenomena contributes reinforce and reflects individuals' sense of identity (Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1992; Kernan and Sommers, 1967).

Finally, brand loyalty and product personalization were operationalized by the author and were applied in the structural model not as latent but as observed variables. The operationalization procedures of both brand loyalty and product personalization are described in the following. The eight constructs and relative measurement items are represented in Table 9. All the measurement items are on five points Likert scale from 1 (I totally disagree) to 5 (I totally agree).

ITEMS	CONSTRUCTS (items are on a Likert scale from 1 to 5)
	ROLE-IDENTITY SALIENCE
IS1	I would feel at a loss if I were forced to give my job up
IS2	I don't have any emotional feeling with my profession
IS3	To be a truck driver is much more than simply driving a truck
IS4	To be a truck driver is an important part of who I am
	PRODUCT-SELF CONGRUITY
PSC1	My truck symbolizes my way of thinking
PSC2	My truck represents who I am
PSC3	My truck represents a specific life style
PSC4	With my truck I distinguish myself from other drivers
	PRODUCT RELIABILITY
PR1	My truck is reliable
PR2	My truck always works perfectly
	PRODUCT ATTACHMENT
PA1	I have a personal bond with my truck
PA2	My truck doesn't mean anything to me
PA3	My truck has a special role in my life
PA4	My truck is very dear to me
	EXPERIENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE
ES1	My truck reminds me of important people in my life
ES2	My truck reminds me of important things I've done or places I've been
	BRAND ATTACHMENT
BA1	I feel emotionally connected to the BRAND I'm currently driving
BA2	I have a personal bond with this BRAND
BA3	I feel personally linked to the BRAND I drive
BA4	The BRAND I drive has a special role in my life
	BRAND RELIABILITY
BR1	The BRAND I drive is reliable
BR2	The BRAND I drive is guarantee of perfect performances
	BRAND-SELF CONGRUITY
BSC1	This BRAND is part of who I am
BSC2	This BRAND says something about me to others
BSC3	This BRAND represents a specific life style
BSC4	This BRAND reflects my tastes and my interests

Table 9 – Constructs and items

4. Research design

Data were collected during 2012. The sample of respondents (auto selected) that took part to the survey is composed by 330 individuals (n=330). It is worth to note that the representativeness of the sample cannot be judged since to date any data about the population of drivers from which it is drawn is available. 130 questionnaires (39.4%) were collected online while the remaining 60.6% (200) were administrated directly by the author during trucks' fairs, truck drivers meetings and in selected resting areas.

In order to collect a valuable amount of data, the author developed a sort of media plan aimed at increasing the response rate. The research publicity was necessary in order to guarantee a sufficient number of respondents considering that the target here studied (drivers) is in motion by definition.

As far as the collection of questionnaires through the online channel is concerned, the author could count on the help and partnership of the two leading truck related web portals (www.trasportoeuropa.it and www.camionsfera.it) which gave constant information about the research and provided fixed web banners with direct link to the questionnaire.

Moreover, in order to maximize the response rate, several articles were published in specialized magazines (such as *Truck & Van Driver*, *TuttoTrasporti*, etc.) as well as two radio broadcasting in the well know radio program (at least among truck drivers) "*Uomini e Camion*" (Radio Uno).

The sample of respondents (n=330) is composed as follows: in terms of gender is almost entirely composed by males (327 respondents, 99.1%). If analyzed by nationality, 97.6% (322) are Italians, 1.5% are Europeans (from countries other than Italy) and 0.9% are born in non-European countries. Divided by age 32.1% of respondents is aged between 21 and 30 years old, 32.7% between 31 and 40, 24.2% between 41 and 50, 9.7% between 51 and 60 and the remaining 1.2% between 61 and 70 years old. All the regions by which the Italian peninsula is composed are represented, except for Valle d'Aosta. The most represented regions are Lombardy (18.8%), Emilia Romagna (13.3%) and Veneto (10.9%).

Other demographic information of the sample are education and marital status. As regard to the former, the bulk of respondents own a middle school diploma (55.8%) or a high school degree (39.1%), while as regard to the latter 40.9% are singles, 52.4% are married and the remaining 6.7% are divorced.

The major part of respondents are drivers since the youth age (those that declared to have started the job between 18 and 30 years old account for 90.1% of the sample) and

are engaged in mid-long range transportations: 53.6% of respondents travel in a range between 5,000 and 10,000 thousand kilometres per month and 32.4% more than 10,000 thousand kilometres per month. On a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is "never" and 5 is "always") the mean score of regional transportations is 3.06, while the mean for national and international transportations is respectively 3.27 and 1.7.

In terms of role, 56.3% (186 respondents) are employees while the remaining 43.7% (144) are entrepreneurs/company owners that even if they own a trucking company they are drivers themselves. These figures confirm the peculiar nature of the Italian market in which - as the numbers confirm - almost a half of buyers are drivers themselves.

As far as product personalization is concerned, the bulk of respondents declared they have personalized the truck they are currently driving (62.1%, 205 drivers) and that they have invested a discrete amount of financial resources in personalization: excluding those that have not personalize their truck, the percentage of drivers that have spent more than 3,000 euro in aesthetic modifications of the truck accounts for 40.5% of the sample.

Last, the composition of the sample according to the brand driven is useful since an objective of the study is to analyze the drivers' attachment toward the brand. All the brands sold in the Italian market are represented and are here reported in alphabetical order: Astra (0.9%), Daf (10.6%), Iveco (29.7%), Man (4.8%), Mercedes Benz (12.1%), Renault Trucks (6.4%), Scania (27%) and Volvo Trucks (8.5%).

The basic demographic information of the respondents composing the sample are reported in Table 10.

N = 330	N	%	N = 330	N	%
Gender			**Regions**		
Males	327	99.1	*Abruzzi*	24	7.3
Females	3	0.9	*Basilicata*	7	2.1
Age			*Calabria*	4	1.2
21-30	106	32.1	*Campania*	24	7.3
31-40	108	32.7	*Emilia Romagna*	44	13.3
41-50	80	24.2	*Friuli V. G.*	4	1.2
51-60	32	9.7	*Lazio*	17	5.2
61-70	4	1.2	*Liguria*	7	2.1
Education			*Lombardy*	62	18.8
High School diploma	129	39.1	*Marche*	19	5.8
University degree	2	0.6	*Molise*	1	0.3
Elementary school	15	4.5	*Piedmont*	21	6.4
Middle school	184	55.8	*Puglia*	17	5.2
Marital Status			*Sardinia*	2	0.6
Single	135	40.9	*Sicily*	8	2.4
Married	173	52.4	*Tuscany*	15	4.5
Divorced	22	6.7	*Trentino A.A.*	5	1.5
Age beginning profession			*Umbria*	13	3.9
18-20	176	53.3	*Valle d'Aosta*	-	-
21-30	121	36.7	*Veneto*	36	10.9
31-40	25	7.6	**Brand**		
41-50	8	2.4	*Astra*	3	0.,9
Role			*Daf*	35	10.6
Employees	186	56.3	*Iveco*	98	29.7
Owners	144	43.7	*Man*	16	4.8
Truck Personalization			*Mercedes Benz*	40	12.1
Yes	205	62.1	*Renault Trucks*	21	6.4
No	125	37.9	*Scania*	89	27.0
Personalization spending			*Volvo Trucks*	28	8.5
0	125	37.3	**Average KM/month**		
< 1,000 €	71	22.1	*< 5,000*	46	13.9
1,000 € - 2,000 €	28	8.5	*5,000 - 10,000*	177	53.6
2,000 € - 3,000 €	23	7.0	*> 10,000*	107	32.4
> 3,000 €	83	25.2			

Table 10 – The composition of the sample

5. The measurement model

In SEM terminology a measurement model depicts the link between the latent variables and their observed measures. More simply, the measurement model depicts the link between the construct observed (η) and the measurement items (factor loadings - λ)

and take into account the errors affecting each of the observed variables measuring the latent variable (ε).

In Figure 20 an example of measurement model is depicted where η is the latent variable, λ are the standard loadings, Y are the measurement items and ε are the measurement errors related to the observed variables.

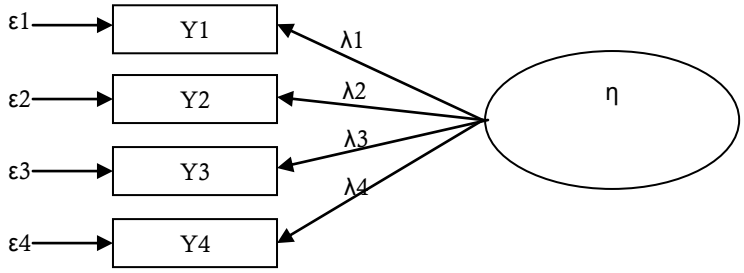

Figure 20 – A representation of the measurement model in SEM

The development of the measurement model is hence a preliminary step that must be processed to evaluate the measurement properties (validity and reliability) of the observed variables, i.e. of the items used to measure a certain latent construct (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1989).

It is so clear that in order to test the measurement model, the constructs that the researcher have to observe as well as the items used to measure them, have to be properly defined *a priori*.

The statistical technique commonly used to investigate the relations between a set of observed (measurement items) and latent (construct) variables is factor analysis.

There are two basic forms of factor analysis: exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

According to Byrne (1998), EFA is used when the link between observed and latent variables are unknown or uncertain. CFA instead, is applied when the researcher has some knowledge (based on existing theories and/or on constructs already established in the literature) of the underlying latent variable structure. Considering that - as already argued in the previous paragraph - constructs and items used in this research effort were almost entirely drawn from existing literature (Churchill, 1979), as well as the relations between them (introduced in the following discussion) the author performed only a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in LISREL using the items measuring the eight constructs investigated: product attachment, brand attachment, role-identity salience, product

reliability, product-self congruity, experiential significance, brand-self congruity and brand reliability.

CFA provides a statistical critical test of the homogeneity of the items used to assess the latent constructs. In particular, the items with good fit may be assumed to yield homogeneous scales of the target constructs; items with significant or slightly different meanings or related to other constructs composing the model under test, tend to be excluded.

The first measurement model was tested with LISREL 8.54 and included all the items composing each of the eight constructs investigated. The goodness of fit statistics revealed indexes that can be improved [$\chi2$=655.65, df=271, p=.000, RMSEA= .066, GFI= .867].

To identify measurement items contributing to poor fit largest negative and largest positive standardized residuals were considered as well as the scores of items' multiple squared correlations. Hence, according to SEM praxis, items with standardized residuals greater than 3 and items with multiple squared correlations below .35, have to be deleted. In particular items excluded from the measurement scale were: one item from the "role-identity salience" (IS2 – "*I don't have any emotional feeling with my profession*"), one item from the "product-self congruity" scale (PSC4 – "*With my truck I distinguish myself from other drivers*"), one item from the "product attachment" scale (A2 – "M*y truck doesn't mean anything to me*"), one item from the "brand attachment" scale (BA4 – "*The BRAND I drive has a special role in my life*") and, finally, one item from the "brand-self congruity" scale (BC1 – "*This BRAND is part of who I am*"). This procedure allowed to obtain a measurement model with a significantly better fit [$\chi2$=312.01, df=161, p=.000, RMSEA= .053, GFI= .917] ($\Delta\chi2$ = 343.64; Δdf = 110).

Once identified (and deleted) items contributing to a poor model fit, the second step was to measure the validity and reliability of each item measuring the latent variables and validity and reliability of each construct composing the model. The first step deals with the analysis of standardized factor loadings and their t-values.

As reported in Table 11 all the factor loadings are above the recommended threshold of .60 (see Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) and all the t-values are statistically significant, i.e. greater than ±1.96 (two tailed).

ITEMS	CONSTRUCTS	Loadings	t-value
	ROLE-IDENTITY SALIENCE		
IS1	I would feel at a loss if I were forced to give my job up	.66	-
IS3	To be a truck driver is much more than simply driving a truck	.64	8.85
IS4	To be a truck driver is an important part of who I am	.72	9.57
	PRODUCT-SELF CONGRUITY		
PSC1	My truck symbolizes my way of thinking	.81	-
PSC2	My truck represents who I am	.88	17.64
PSC3	My truck represents a specific life style	.77	15.08
	PRODUCT RELIABILITY		
PR1	My truck is reliable	.90	-
PR2	My truck always works perfectly	.81	13.32
	PRODUCT ATTACHMENT		
PA1	I have a personal bond with my truck	.70	-
PA3	My truck has a special role in my life	.86	14.20
PA4	My truck is very dear to me	.88	14.44
	EXPERIENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE		
ES1	My truck reminds me of important people in my life	.89	-
ES2	My truck reminds me of important things I've done or places I've been	.72	10.31
	BRAND ATTACHMENT		
BA1	I feel personally attached to the BRAND I'm currently driving	.90	26.64
BA2	I have a bond with this BRAND	.94	21.56
BA3	I feel personally linked to the BRAND I drive	.85	
	BRAND RELIABILITY		
BR1	The BRAND I drive is reliable	.93	-
BR2	The BRAND I drive is guarantee of perfect performances	.87	18.69
	BRAND-SELF CONGRUITY		
BSC2	This BRAND says something about me to others	.81	-
BSC3	This BRAND represents a specific life style	.86	17.78
BSC4	This BRAND reflects my tastes and my interests	.88	18.43

Table 11 –Factor loadings and t-values (items and constructs)

In a second step, error variances and factor loadings are used to evaluate the goodness of each of the mentioned constructs. Two indexes are generally used to assess constructs' validity and reliability: composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE).

CR is a measure of scale reliability; it assesses the internal consistency of a measure. AVE instead, measures the amount of variance captured by a construct in relation to the variance due to random measurement error (see Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

The use of these indexes is preferable to Cronbach's alpha, since the latter will tend to underestimate issues of reliability if the items do not have equal reliabilities, or if the number of items per scale is small (see Gerbing and Anderson 1988; Lee and Hooley, 2005

or see Fornell and Larcker, 1981 for a thorough critic of the its statistical significance in structural equation modeling).

Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for any given construct composing the measurement model are computed as follows (Jöreskog, 1971):

$$(1) \qquad CR = \frac{\left(\sum_i \lambda_i\right)^2}{(\sum_i \lambda_i)^2 + (\sum_i V[\lambda_i])} \qquad (2) \qquad AVE = \frac{\left(\sum_i \lambda_i^2\right)}{(\sum_i \lambda_i^2) + (\sum_i V[\lambda_i])}$$

Where: λ = factor loading of each item; v[δ] = error variance of each item

The recommended threshold are .60 for composite reliability (CR) and .50 for average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

The results reported in Table 12 suggest that all the constructs composing the measurement model respect both the conditions of composite reliability and average variance extracted. The only construct with AVE (slightly) below the recommended threshold is "role-identity salience". The construct can anyway be considered robust since, as noted by Fornell and Larcker (1981), although an AVE smaller than .50 makes the validity of the items and of the construct questionable, if the CR is above the .60 threshold the researcher can conclude that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate, even though more than 50% of the variance is due to error. AVE in fact is a more conservative measure of construct validity and reliability than CR (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

CONSTRUCTS	**CR**	**AVE**
ROLE-IDENTITY SALIENCE	.714	.455
PRODUCT-SELF CONGRUITY	.862	.677
PRODUCT RELIABILITY	.847	.735
PRODUCT ATTACHMENT	.856	.667
EXPERIENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE	.792	.657
BRAND ATTACHMENT	.923	.800
BRAND RELIABILITY	.893	.806
BRAND-SELF CONGRUITY	.888	.726

Table 12 – Composite reliability and average variance extracted (*Thresholds: CR ≥ .60 AVE ≥ .50)*

Once constructs' validity and reliability are verified, the next step consists in testing discriminant validity. Discriminant validity tests whether the focal construct is less than perfectly correlated with conceptually similar constructs (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

For a more stringent test, the researcher should examine whether the average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than the squared correlation between the focal construct and conceptually similar constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Table 13 reports the correlations between each of the constructs by which the measurement model is composed as well as their squared values (in parenthesis).

	CONSTRUCTS	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Role-identity salience	.455	1.00 (1.00)							
2	Product-self congruity	.677	.639 (.408)	1.00 (1.00)						
3	Product reliability	.735	.334 (.112)	.246 (.061)	1.00 (1.00)					
4	Product attachment	.667	.650 (.423)	.709 (.503)	.391 (.153)	1.00 (1.00)				
5	Experiential significance	.657	.420 (.176)	.492 (.242)	.342 (.117)	.618 (.382)	1.00 (1.00)			
6	Brand attachment	.800	.343 (.118)	.428 (.183)	.296 (.088)	.488 (.238)	.409 (.167)	1.00 (1.00)		
7	Brand reliability	.806	.236 (.056)	.249 (.062)	.591 (.349)	.297 (.088)	.258 (.067)	.591 (.349)	1.00 (1.00)	
8	Brand-self congruity	.726	.334 (.112)	.552 (.305)	.256 (.066)	.521 (.271)	.381 (.145)	.801 (.642)	.544 (.296)	1.00 (1.00)

Table 13 – Correlations and squared correlations

The squared correlations between constructs (scores in parenthesis in the table above) are all below the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct: hence discriminant validity is verified and the hypothesized constructs can be retained as part of the measurement model. Constructs composing the mentioned measurement model, factor loadings and items errors are depicted in Figure 21.

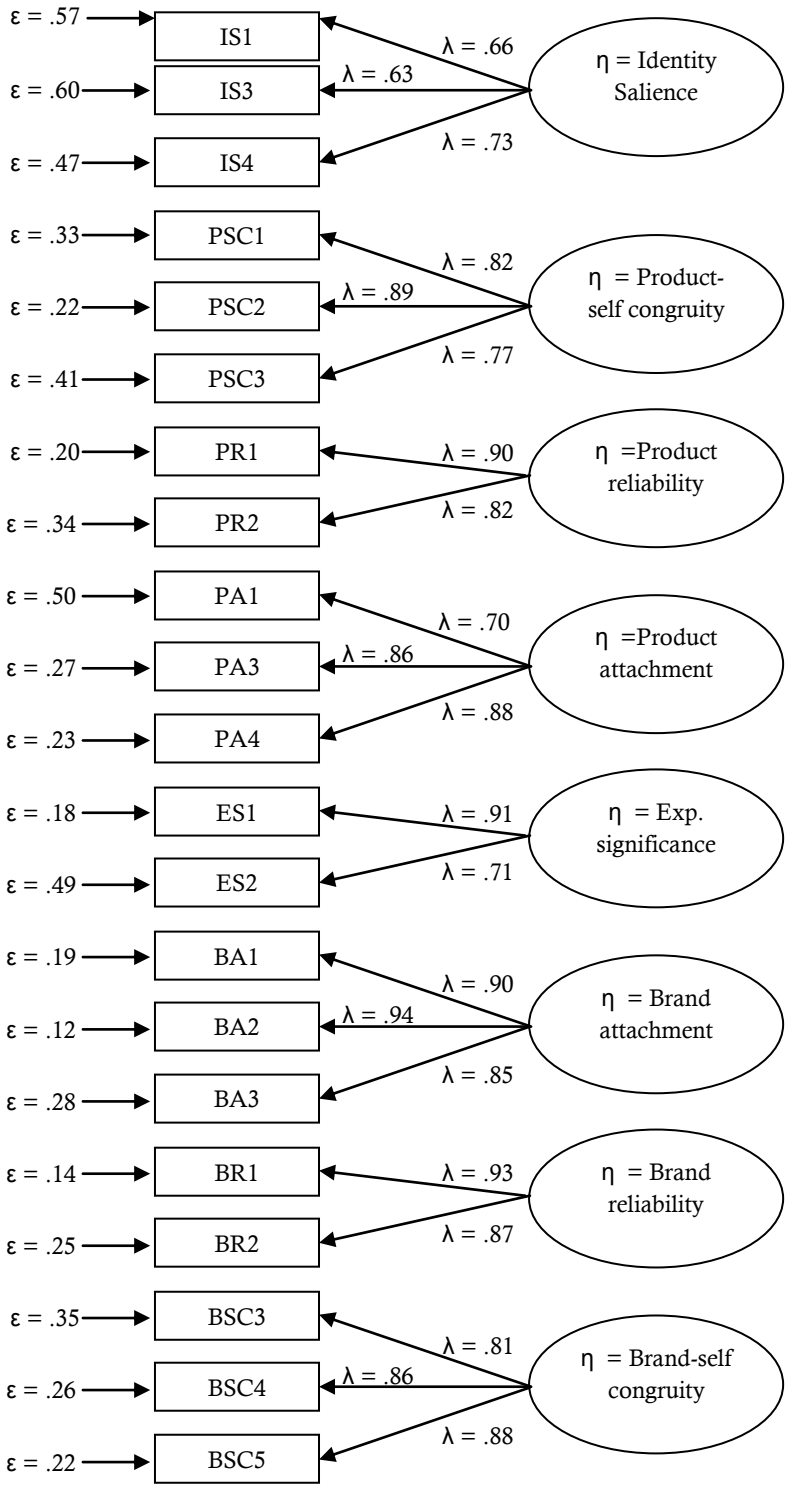

Figure 21 – The measurement model

The goodness of fit statistics reveals a very good fit of the measurement model (especially in consideration of the sample size and the number of parameters estimated): [$\chi 2 = 312.01$;

df = 161; $\chi 2/df$ = 1.93; RMSEA = .053; Model CAIC = 787.945; NFI = .969; NNFI = .981; CFI = .985; GFI = 0.917; AGFI = .881].

The $\chi 2/df$ ratio is below the recommended threshold - $0 \leq \chi 2/df \leq 2$ - (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which synthesize how well the model, with unknown but optimally chosen parameter estimates, would fit the populations covariance matrix (Byrne, 1998), is below .06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) and smaller than less conservative value of this index established in the recent literature (e.g. .07 – Steiger, 2007).

The goodness of fit index (GFI), which tests how much better the model fits as compared to "no model at all" (null model), i.e., when all parameters are fixed to zero (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993: 123), is greater than .90 indicating an acceptable fit (Marsh and Grayson, 1995; Schumacker and Lomax, 1996; Byrne, 1994). The adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) which adjusts the GFI on the basis of model's degrees of freedom, is above .85 indicating - also in this case - an acceptable fit (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Normed fit index (NFI), a statistic which assesses the model by comparing the $\chi 2$ value of the model to the $\chi 2$ of the null model (Bentler and Bonnet, 1980), is larger than .95 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Non-normed fit index (NNFI) which differently from NFI takes the degrees of freedom of the specified model as well as the degrees of freedom of the independence model into consideration, is very close to one (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). Finally, comparative fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990), a revised form of the NFI which takes into account sample size (Byrne, 1998), is also in this case above the recommended threshold of .95 (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

A summary of the goodness of fit statistics, the value assumed by each of the mentioned fit indexes, as well as the literature addressed to evaluate the "goodness" of the measurement model are synthetically reported in Table 14.

Indicators	Score	Range	Authors	
χ 2/df	1.93	$0 \leq \chi 2/df \leq 2$	(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)	Good
RMSEA	.053	< .06	(Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007)	Good
GFI	.917	> .90	(Byrne, 1994; Marsh & Grayson, 1995; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996)	Acceptable
AGFI	.881	> .85	(Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003)	Good
NNFI	.981	Close to 1	(Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989; Hu & Bentler, 1999)	Good
NFI	.969	> .95	(Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989; Hu & Bentler, 1999)	Good
CFI	.985	> .95	(Hu & Bentler, 1999)	Good

Table 14 – Goodness of fit statistics and literature addressed

6. Research hypothesis: the structural model

In the previous paragraph constructs' and measurements' validity and reliability have been assessed. The goodness of fit statistics and the tests conducted on the constructs (CR, AVE and test of squared correlations) revealed the robustness of measurement model.

A first (minor) finding of this study can hence be underlined: constructs developed and tested in consumer research (such as product attachment, brand attachment, product-self congruity, brand-self congruity, experiential significance, etc.) make sense also in the trucks context, although the product truck cannot be considered as belonging to the category of "mundane products" commonly taken into consideration when anthropological and psychological meanings of consumption and possession are investigated (see for example Kleine et al., 1995; Kleine et al., 1993).

Hence, research hypothesis can be put forward as follows, based on the literature on the topic.

Kleine et al. (1993) demonstrated that the salience of individuals' identity is a determinant of their consumption-related behavior. We can so infer that the "role-identity salience" can be an important determinant of the attachment toward a product also in the truck context.

H1. *Role-identity salience is positively and significantly related to product attachment*

There is a general consensus in the current literature that consumers develop strong feelings of attachment toward those products (or product categories) that allow them to express who they are as individuals (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988; Kleine et al., 1995; Schultz et. al, 1989; McCracken, 1986; Malhotra, 1988). On the basis of this stream of literature (generally focused on mass market consumption phenomena, *emphasis added*) it is possible to assume that also some business to business products (the truck in this case) are chosen because of the congruence of the product (and its characteristics) and the user's self.

H2. *Product-self congruence is positively and significantly related to product attachment*

Feelings of attachment emerge when the product provides the owner or the possessor something that goes beyond its utilitarian features. Nonetheless, it has been empirically demonstrated that product's usefulness can contribute to reinforce the strength of attachment (Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). Product reliability in particular can be an important source of attachment for those objects whose primary task is to perform at best (working tools in general, the truck in this context).

H3. *Product reliability is positively and significantly related to product attachment*

Products are often the locus of memories. As stated by Schultz et al. (1989) attachment arises from association with consumption experiences. Previous studies have found or have stated that the experiential component of product's usage and possession affects the emotional meanings that customers attach to objects (see among others Hirschman, 1980; Belk, 1988; Ball and Tasaki, 1992).

H4. *Experiential significance is positively and significantly related to product attachment*

Other two research hypothesis are formulated in order to identify possible drivers of brand attachment. Product attachment is here considered as to be determined by some identitarian motives, i.e. "role-identity salience" and "product-self congruity", by some cognitive reasons, i.e. experiences and – finally – by some product specific features, i.e. product reliability.

Although published contributions have shown the myriad of possible antecedents of the emotional attachment to brands (Thomson et al., 2005), considering that brand attachment is a second order construct in this doctoral thesis, only two antecedents are

considered: the first identitarian, "brand-self congruity"; the second product related, "brand reliability" (both with the same semantic meanings of the antecedents of product attachment).

The choice to do not formulate other possible antecedents is due to the need to reduce the questionnaire length since in preliminary tests, the questionnaire's length were found as a major issue for the target studied.

As far as brand-self congruity is concerned, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) for example have empirically shown that brand-self congruity is a strong antecedent of the affection toward brands (conceptualized as brand love in the article mentioned) in the context of packaged consumer goods.

Other two research hypothesis can be added:

H5. *Brand-self congruity is positively and significantly related to brand attachment*

H6. *Brand reliability is positively and significantly related to brand attachment*

As noted in paragraph 2 in which the core constructs composing the model are described, the relationship between product attachment and brand attachment as well as the distinction between them is somehow vague in the literature (Kleine and Baker, 2004).

A standpoint of this doctoral thesis is that brand attachment is a consequence of product attachment, i.e. the emotional feelings that drivers nurture toward the product generate feeling of affection also toward the brand (see Bennett et al., 2005 for an empirical demonstration of the relationship between product's experience and brand attachment in the B2B context). Hence:

H7. *Product attachment is positively and significantly related to brand attachment*

Last – but not least – the effects of product attachment and brand attachment on brand loyalty are evaluated. In particular, the author expects that accordingly with the current literature (see Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006 as instance), product attachment and brand attachment are both positively and significantly related to brand loyalty.

H8. *Product attachment is positively and significantly related to brand loyalty*

H9. *Brand attachment is positively and significantly related to brand loyalty*

As far as brand loyalty is concerned, considering that the sample (and the population from which it is drawn) is composed both by employees and owners (the former are non purchasers but can be in some cases influencers, the latter purchasers instead), the author decided to do not consider "brand loyalty" as a latent variable; rather, it has been operationalized as an observed variable. In particular a synthetic indicator of brand loyalty was operationalized starting from the answers given by respondents to the following three questions: 1) "What brand was your previous truck?" 2) "What brand is the truck you are currently driving?" 3) What brand would you like to have in the future?". The brand loyalty indicator has been construed as follows (indicating different level of loyalty). If the respondent have declared that he/she used to drive the brand "A", is currently driving the brand "B" and would like to have the brand "C", a score of 1 was assigned (lowest level of loyalty); if the respondent have declared that he/she used to drive the brand "A", he/she is currently driving the same brand but would like to have the brand "B", a score of 2 was assigned (discontents); the score 3 was assigned to those respondents who declared to drive the brand "A" in the past, are currently driving the brand "B" and would like to drive the same brand in the future (new loyal). If the respondent have declared that he/she used to drive the brand "A", is currently driving the brand "B" and would like to have the brand "A", a score of 4 was assigned (nostalgic loyal); finally the score 5 (highest level of brand loyalty) was assigned to those respondents who mentioned the same brand to all the three questions. The composition of the sample according to the level of loyalty is represented in Table 15.

	N	%
(1) - Lowest Loyalty	75	22,7
(2) – Discontent	54	16,4
(3) – New Loyal	32	9,7
(4) – Nostalgic	71	21,5
(5) – Highest Loyalty	98	29,7
TOTAL	330	100,0

Table 15 – Composition of the sample according to the level of loyalty

As already mentioned in the first pages of this chapter, and according to the results emerged in the qualitative research effort previously accounted, a possible outcome of product attachment is product personalization (Blom, 2000: 313). By personalizing a

product, individuals invest energy (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981) and the effect of the energy invested can result in the strengthening of the object-subject relationship.

Although the concept of "investing self in the object" has been more often conceptualized as investment of psychic energy (Belk, 1988), in this research the author operationalized product personalization in terms of the amount of financial resources used to change the physical appearance of the truck. Product personalization – like brand loyalty - is so considered an observed variable. The score 1 was assigned if respondents declared they didn't spend anything to personalize the truck; 2 was assigned to those that have invested less than 1,000 €; a score equal 3 was assigned if resources invested in product personalization were between 1,000 and 2,000 €; 4 was assigned to those respondents that declared to have spent an amount of money between 2,000 and 3,000 €; 5 instead was assigned to those who declared to have spent more than 3,000 €. The composition of the sample according to the expenditure in product personalization is reported in Table 16.

	N	%
(1) - 0 €	125	37.3
(2) < 1,000 €	71	22.1
(3) 1,000 € - 2,000 €	28	8.5
(4) 2,000 € - 3,000 €	23	7.0
(5) > 3,000 €	83	25.2

Table 16 – Composition of the sample according to the investment in personalization

The last research hypothesis can hence be added:

H10. *The financial investment in product personalization is positively and significantly related to product attachment.*

It is worth to note that statistically being both brand loyalty and product personalization operationalized as observed variable in the model the error variance of each has been fixed at zero while the item intercept has been fixed to one.

The structural model and research hypothesis are depicted in Figure 22.

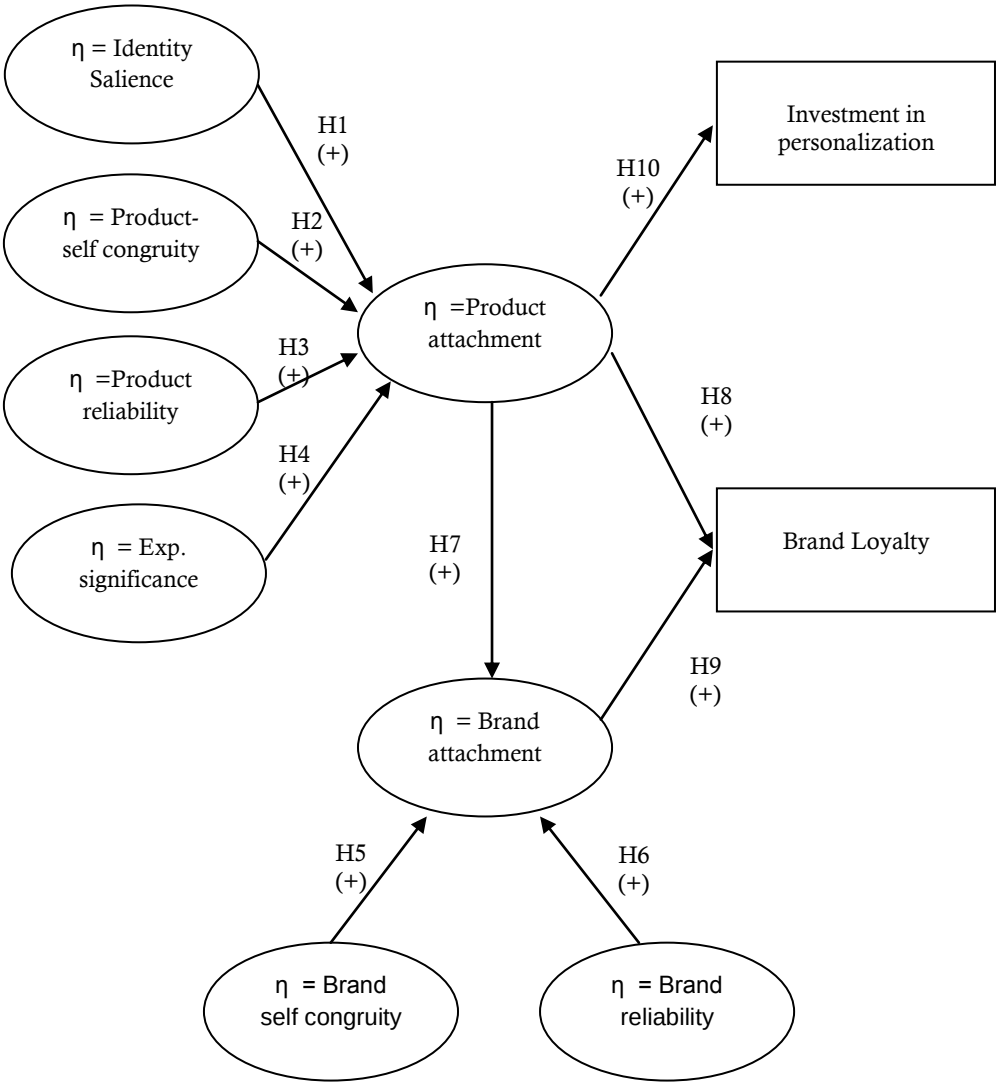

Figure 22 – The structural model

7. Results

The results of the structural model indicate that the model fits the data well. All the antecedents of product attachment hypothesized predict product attachment positively and significantly ($t = \pm 1.96$): role-identity salience ($\gamma = .23$; $t = 2.96$), product-self congruity ($\gamma = .34$; $t = 5.62$), product reliability ($\gamma = .15$; $t = 2.27$) and experiential significance ($\gamma = .24$; $t = 4.76$).

The structural model hence, provides support for the first four research hypothesis (H1-H4).

In particular, the strongest antecedent is product-self congruity ($\gamma = .34$), followed by experiential significance ($\gamma = .24$), role-identity salience ($\gamma = .23$) and product reliability ($\gamma = .15$).

The percentage of variance of the product attachment construct explained by the four hypothesized antecedents accounts for 68.2% (squared multiple correlations for structural equations)

The strength of each of the standardized path estimates (γ estimates) underlines the importance of the truck as a self-representational product and the importance of cognitive aspects of consumption in generating feelings of emotional attachment toward the product.

Surprisingly instead – at least in the context here investigated – product reliability were found as having a positive and significant effect on product attachment, but marginal if compared with the other hypothesized drivers of emotional attachment to the product.

This finding suggests that for some products (the truck as instance) feelings of attachment emerge also as a consequence of the product's ability to perform at best; hence, attachment does not emerge only if the product provides the owner/possessor something that goes beyond its utilitarian features (Schoulz et al., 1989). Yet, product reliability is not sufficient alone but should be complemented with some non core product attribute (self representational meanings as instance).

Also the hypothesized antecedents of brand attachment were found as being positively and significantly related to the mentioned construct, providing support for H5 and H6: brand-self congruity ($\gamma = .64$; $t = 10.56$) and brand reliability ($\gamma = .31$; $t = 4.58$).

The percentage of variance explained is 68.8%. Also in this case – as underlined for the antecedents of product attachment – brand reliability is resulted positively and significantly related to brand attachment even though identitarian features of the brand, i.e. the ability of the brand to realize a fit between the brand itself and the owner/possessor's actual self, is revealed as being the main source of emotional attachment toward the brand.

As regard to the relation between product attachment and brand attachment, the first was found as being a positive and significant antecedent of the latter, providing support for H7 ($\beta = .13$; $t = 2.16$).

This finding sheds light on the importance of the emotional feelings toward the product as a way to determine positive feelings toward the brand. The fact that product attachment is a driver of brand attachment – the author argue – is partially due to the experiential nature of the product here studied. This basically means that the experiences that drivers live with their truck are gradually transferred to the brand by the passing of time.

Moreover, this result is in line with the idea (supported by some brand-skeptic authors at least in the industrial setting) that branding in B2B should basically rely on tangible brand features, with the product at first place. As noted by Webster and Keller (2004) industrial firms may shift more on the product offering rather than on the intangible meanings of the brand since the product is the main source of brand equity and – at the same time – the only things to which industrial buyers care about (see Cova and Borgini, 2006 for an interesting buyer focused perspective on branding in industrial markets).

With respect to the hypothesis pertaining the relationship between product and brand attachment on brand loyalty (operationalized as observed variable), H9 is supported ($\beta = .70$; $t = 10.21$), H8 is not. Even if the statistically significance of the standardized path estimate is respected ($t = - 2.06$), the path is not positive as hypothesized (- .18).

This finding is extremely interesting since it is in contraposition with the established view in the consumer literature according to which marketers should try to stimulate consumer-product relationships to make their customers loyal (see Whang et al., 2004).

In the trucks context instead, the results of the structural model here built suggest that product attachment is negatively and significantly related to brand loyalty (here intended in its behavioral meaning), i.e. although people tend to be attached to their product, this emotional feeling does not lead to repeated purchasing behavior (or intention to repurchase) or willingness to chose the same brand in the future.

Product attachment hence, seems to be - to some extents - an obstacle to the establishment of brand loyalty.

Last, the relation between product attachment and the investment of the self in the object (measured by the amount of financial resources invested in product personalization, observed variable), H10 is supported ($\theta = .66$; $t = 7.07$). This finding is coherent with Belk (1988) according to which the investment of the self in the object is a tangible manifestation of individuals' attachment to those products toward which they nurture feelings of

attachment. Hence, the more drivers are attached to their truck the more they tend to invest financial resources to make their trucks self-expressive.

Standardized path estimates as well as the statistical significance of each of the structural relations hypothesized are reported in Table 17 and depicted in Figure 23. The correlation matrix is reported in Table 18.

The goodness of fit statistics reveals a robust structural model: [$\chi 2$ = 419.66; df=207; RMSEA = .055; Model CAIC = 688.796; NFI = .963; NNFI = .977; CFI = .981; GFI = 0.900; AGFI = .867].

HYPOTHESIS	STANDARDIZED PATH ESTIMATE	T-VALUES	HYPOTHESIS TEST
H1 – role-identity salience -> product attachment	.23	2.96	Supported
H2 – product-self congruity -> product attachment	.34	5.62	Supported
H3 – product reliability -> product attachment	.15	2.27	Supported
H4 – experiential significance -> product attachment	.24	4.76	Supported
H5 – brand-self congruity -> brand attachment	.64	10.56	Supported
H6 – brand reliability -> brand attachment	.31	4.58	Supported
H7 – product attachment -> brand attachment	.13	2.16	Supported
H8 – product attachment -> brand loyalty	- .18	- 2.06	Not supported
H9 – brand attachment -> brand loyalty	.70	10.21	Supported
H10 - product attachment -> invest. in personalization	.66	7.07	Supported

Table 17 – Standardized path estimates and t-values of the structural model

	RIS	PSC	PR	PA	ES	BA	BR	BSC
RIS	1.00							
PSC	.457	1.00						
PR	.653	.341	1.00					
PA	.731	.481	.642	1.00				
ES	.393	.330	.335	.247	1.00			
BA	.636	.381	.423	.492	.348	1.00		
BR	.300	.570	.236	.247	.588	.266	1.00	
BSC	.459	.802	.353	.556	.253	.408	.543	1.00

where:
RIS: Role-identity salience
PSC: Product-self congruity
PR: Product reliability
PA: Product attachment
ES: Experiential significance
BA: Brand attachment
BR: Brand reliability
BSC: Brand-self congruity

N.B. The squared correlations are all below the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct

Table 18 – The correlation matrix

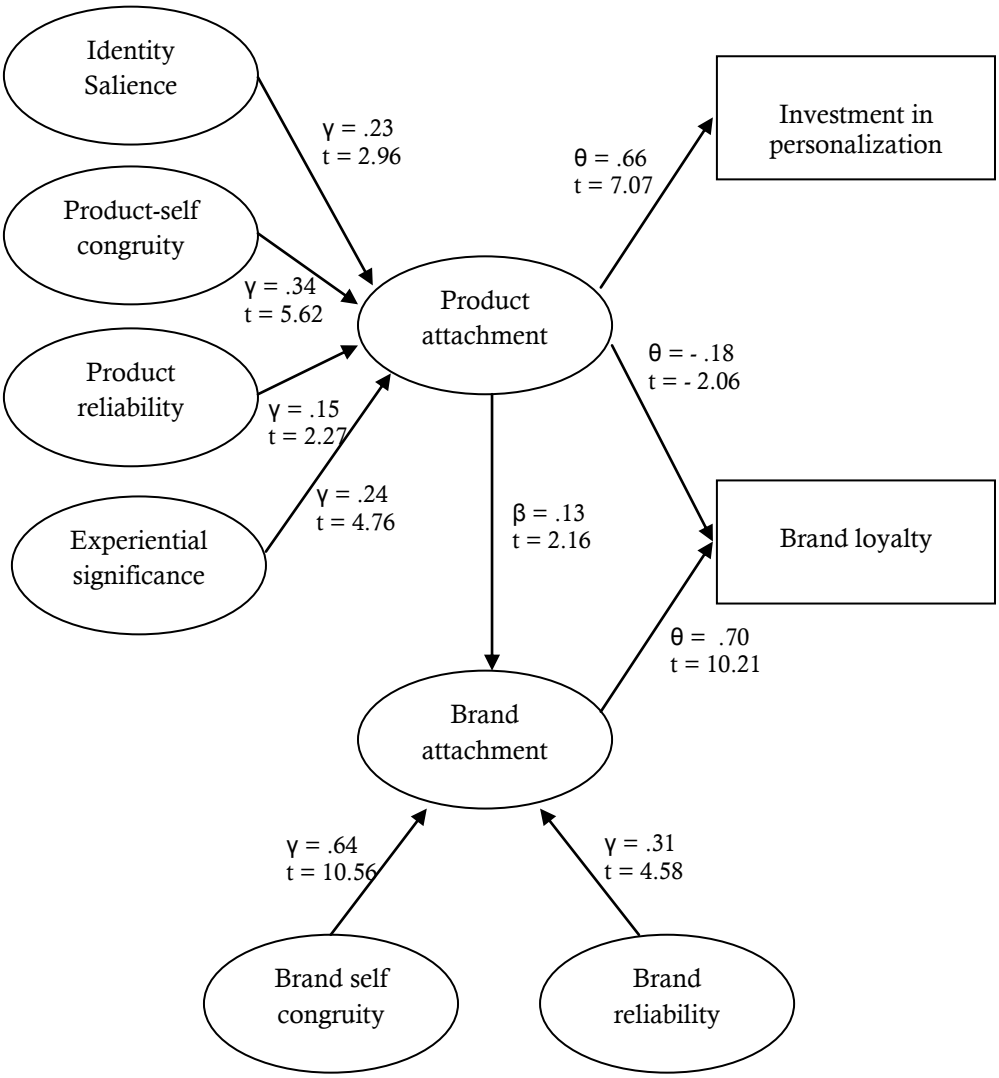

Figure 23 – Results of the structural model

8. Owners vs employees: a multi-group analysis

The sample of respondents investigated in this study can be divided in two clusters: "employees", i.e. individuals working as salaried drivers in trucking companies and "owners", i.e. individuals who own a trucking company but are drivers themselves.

The aim of this second part of this quantitative study is to investigate if there are significant differences between these two groups. Hence - according to Byrne (1998) - the central concern is whether or not components of the measurement model and/or of the structural model are invariant (equivalent) across groups, i.e. whether measurement invariance across groups should be assessed (multigroup invariance).

In seeking evidences of multigroup invariance, researchers are typically interested in solving five interrelated questions (Byrne, 1998: 259):

1) do the measurement items (λ) operate equivalently across different groups (owners and employees in this case)?

2) is the factorial structure of a theoretical construct (η) equivalent across groups?

3) are causal relations (β) invariant across groups?

4) are the latent means of the constructs composing the model different across groups?

5) does the factorial structure of a theoretical construct replicate across independent sample of the same population?

The assessment of measurement invariance can/should be done in all those cases in which the researcher assumes that some comparisons between groups is of importance, and the presence or absence of group differences has some meaningful substantive implications (Vandenberg and Lance, 2000). The same authors pinpointed that tests of measurement equivalence require that (a) the measure of interest is perceptually based (e.g., satisfaction, cohesiveness, commitment, etc.); (b) the measure comprises multiple manifest indicators (e.g., multiple scale items); (c) the items are combined additively to operationalize the underlying construct; (d) evidence exists of the measure's psychometric soundness beyond the preliminary stages of scale development; (e) the concern is with effect indicators and not causal indicators (see Bollen and Lennox, 1991); (f) the common factor model holds for describing relationships among items; and (g) the term groups refers either to independent groups or to the same group measured longitudinally on multiple occasions (Vandenberg and Lance, 2000: 10).

The analysis of multigroup invariance is very popular in marketing studies especially as far as the cross-validation of measures and/or structural relations in different cultural settings is concerned (see Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998).

However multigroup analysis can/should be conducted in all those cases in which the population studied can be segmented according to one or more segmentation variables (e.g. gender, age, education, etc.) that can be more or less influential in determining certain behaviors.

In the case here studied the author is interested in understanding whether observed and latent variable have the same meaning for the two groups by which the sample studied is composed (namely "employees" and "owners"), whether the aforementioned groups differ in terms of latent means and – finally – whether the structural relations are different across them. In doing so a multigroup analysis of invariance has been carried out (partially) following the procedures suggested by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) to assess measurement invariance in cross–cultural consumer research.

According to Byrne (1998) a prerequisite to testing for measurement and/or structural invariance is to consider a baseline model for each group by which the entire sample is composed. The first step is so the evaluation of the measurement model's differences between the groups: "employees" (n= 186) and "owners" (n= 144).

Any structural relation is analyzed in this first step since the author is first of all interested to give answers to the fist two questions suggested by Byrne (1998), i.e. evaluate differences between factor loadings across groups and assess the across group equivalence of latent variables.

As far as the first point is concerned the baseline model for "employees" (left side) and "owners" (right side) are pictorially reported in the next page (Figure 24).

The goodness of fit statistics of both the sub-models reveal a good fit (Table 19) - especially in consideration of the number of observations for each sub-sample – as well as the values assumed by the factor loadings in both groups.

The score of GFI is below the recommended threshold: in fact – as already stated in the previous discussion – this indicator is very sensitive to sample size. All the other statistics of fit instead are in line with the recommended and commonly accepted thresholds.

Indicators	EMPLOYEES (n=186)	OWNERS (n=144)	Range
$\chi 2$	268.04	233.21	-
Df-degrees of freedom	161	161	-
$\chi 2/df$	1.66	1.44	$0 \leq \chi 2/df \leq 2$
RMSEA	.060	0.056	$\leq .06$
GFI	.879	.866	$> .90$
NNFI	.970	.970	Close to 1
NFI	.948	.942	$> .95$
CFI	.977	.977	$> .95$

Table 19 – Goodness of fit statistics: employees vs. owners

Following Byrne (1998) and Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), once the baseline model has been tested for both groups (preliminary single group analysis), the test of invariance across group can be conducted.

In particular, according to Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), since the objective of this statistical analysis is to explore the basic structure of each construct across groups (employees and owners), examine differences and similarities of structural relations in different groups and make comparisons of means across groups, different tests of invariance have to be conducted. Configural invariance to explore the constructs' structure across groups; metric (or partial metric) invariance and scalar (or partial scalar) invariance to compare the latent means across groups and – finally – factor variance invariance to evaluate structural relationships in different groups of respondents.

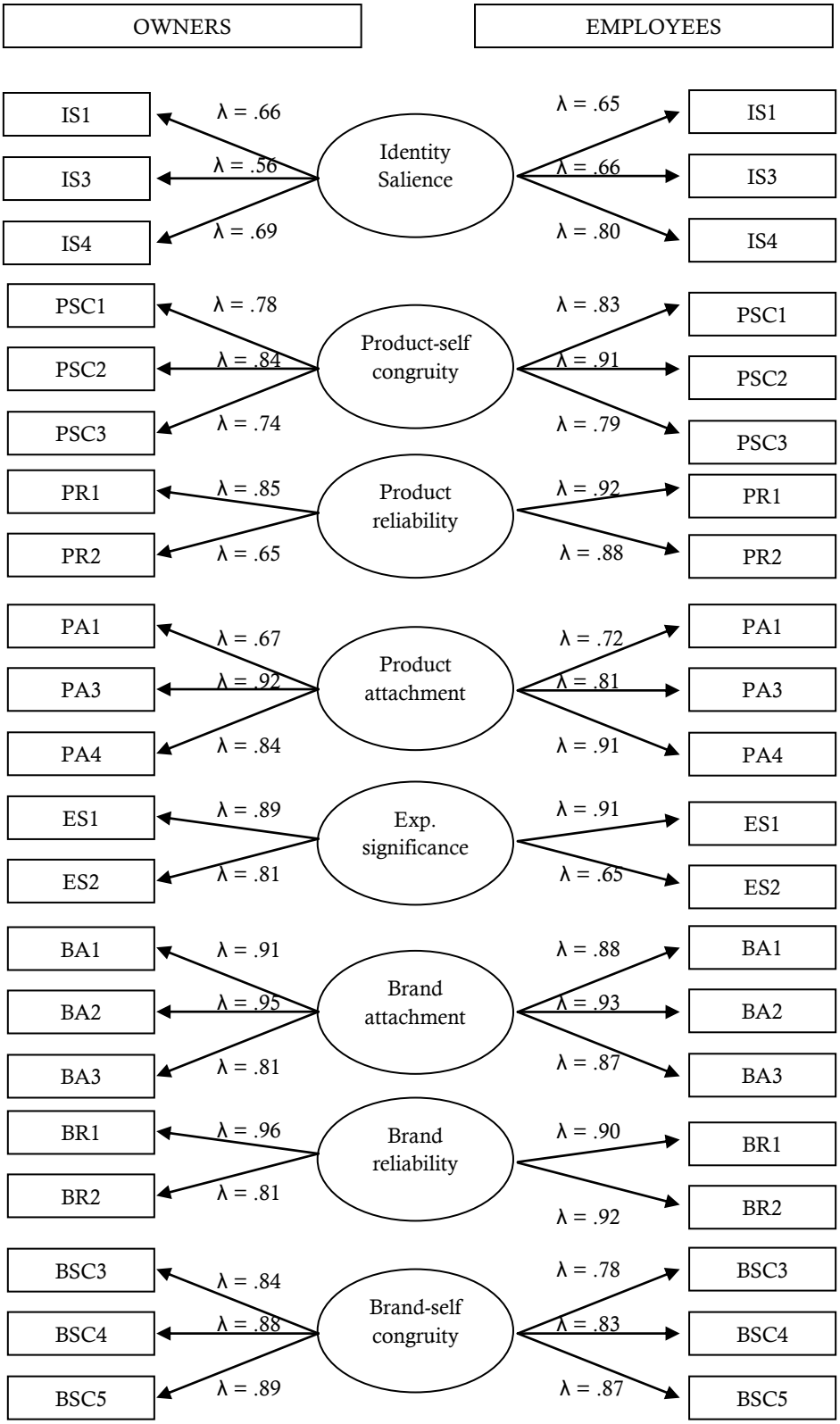

Figure 24 – Measurement model for owners (left) and employees (right)
N.B. All t-values are above 1.96 (two tailed)

Multigroup analysis was performed with LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993) and maximum likelihood estimation procedures. The evaluation of models fit has been anchored to the following stats and indicators. the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, Browne and Cudeck, 1993), the comparative fit index (CFI, Bentler, 1990), the non-normed fit index (NNFI, Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1989; Hu and Bentler, 1999) and the model CAIC. Values below .06 for RMSEA, close to .95 for CFI and close to one for NNFI indicate good model fit. As far as model CAIC is concerned, the model with the lowest value is preferred.

The meaning and the rationale of each of the aforementioned statistical test of invariance (i.e. configural, metric, scalar and factor variance invariance), as well as the results of each of tests conducted are reported in the following discussion.

8.1 Configural invariance

Configural invariance is a test of a "weak factorial invariance" null hypothesis (Horn and McArdle, 1992) in which the same pattern of fixed and free factor loadings is specified for each group. This basically means that items measuring a certain latent variable should exhibit the same configuration of salient and non salient factor loadings across different groups (Horn and McArdle, 1992; Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998).

Configural invariance must be established in order for subsequent tests to be carried out. "Configural invariance is supported if 1) the specified model with zero loadings on non target factor (if any) fits the data well in all groups (global goodness of fit statistics), 2) all factor loadings are significantly and substantially different from zero, and 3) the correlations between the factors are significantly below unity" (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998: 80).

As noted by (Vandenberg and Lance, 2000) if configural invariance is supported this means that respondent groups were employing the same conceptual frame of reference and thus might be compared with reference to measures that reflect equivalent underlying constructs. Moreover, if configural invariance is supported, further tests of additional aspects of measurement invariance can be processed: if test of configural invariance is rejected it makes no sense to conduct tests of group differences when the constructs that are being measured differ across groups.

The empirical results of the study here reported suggest that the fit of the configural invariance model is satisfactory: $\chi 2$ (322) = 501.26; $p < .000$; RMSEA = .058 (acceptable fit); NNFI = .970; CFI = .977. The model CAIC is 1,738.691. The fist condition that should be acknowledged in order to give support to configural invariance is

supported, i.e. the specified model with zero loadings fits the data well in both group (as the aforementioned global goodness of fit statistics confirm).

In line with the recommendations given by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) also the other two conditions are respected: all factor loadings are different from zero (all above .60) and significant (t-value> ±1.96), and the correlations between the factors are significantly below unity.

Since the condition of configural invariance is supported the author can state that constructs forming the measurement model can be conceptualized in the same way across groups, i.e. independently from the role (employee or owner) that respondents hold.

8.2 Metric invariance

The second step in the assessment of measurement invariance is metric invariance. The condition of metric invariance is a prior condition that should be satisfied if the researcher is interested in comparing constructs' latent means across groups. Metric invariance provides a stronger test of invariance by introducing the concept of equal metrics across groups. If measurement items are metric invariant differences of items' scores across groups can be compared, indicating cross-group differences in the latent variable. Since the factor loadings contains the information about how changes in latent scores relate to changes in observed scores, metric invariance can be assessed by constraining the loading to be the same across the groups (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Full (or partial) metric invariance must be established in order for subsequent tests to be meaningful.

The hypothesis of full metric invariance was hence tested by constraining the matrix of factor loadings to be equal across groups. The test led to a non significant increase in $\chi 2$ between the model of configural invariance and the model of full metric invariance ($\Delta\chi 2 = 16.96$; $\Delta df = 13$). The critical value of $\chi 2$ for 13 degrees of freedom (p=.05) is 22.36 (>16.96). As far as other statistics of fit are concerned, RMSEA did not change (.058), indicating also in this case an acceptable fit, NNFI increased (.970) and CFI remained almost the same of the configural invariance model (.976). The model CAIC is 1,667.265.

The statistics reported above indicate that the imposition of additional constraints (equal factor loadings across groups) resulted in a better model. Hence, the condition of full metric invariance is supported and more restrained models can be tested.

8.3 Scalar invariance

Alongside with metric invariance, when a research objective is to compare differences in latent means across groups, scalar invariance must be assessed.

Scalar (or intercept) invariance indicates that observed scores are related to the latent scores, i.e. individuals who gave the same score on the latent construct would obtain the same score on the observed variable regardless of whether or not they belong to a group or another. Scalar invariance implies that group differences in the means of the observed items are due to differences in means of the underlying constructs that the mentioned items measure. Scalar invariance is thus assessed by imposing equality of means on the model of (full or partial) metric invariance (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998).

Adding this additional constrain to the full metric invariance model (supported) the condition of full scalar invariance was not supported.

Although the indexes of fit statistics are satisfying (RMSEA = .059; NNFI = .969; CFI = .974; model CAIC = 1,606.832), the difference in chi-square between the full metric and the full scalar invariance model is statistically significant at p = .05 ($\Delta\chi2 = 27.95$; $\Delta df = 13$). As already reported above the critical value of $\chi2$ for 13 degrees of freedom (p=.05) is 22.36 (< 27.95).

The modification indexes indicated that the intercept for the third item of the "role-identity salience" construct (IS4), the third item of the "product attachment" construct (A4) and the third item measuring "brand-self congruity" (BSC5) stood out. By relaxing these constrains the model yielded to a significant improvement of fit and – above all – to a non statistical significant difference in $\chi2$: ($\Delta\chi2 = 15.54$; $\Delta df = 10$). The critical value of $\chi2$ for 10 degrees of freedom at p=.05 is 18.31 (> 15.54). The model fit is acceptable: (RMSEA = .058; NNFI = .970; CFI = .976; model CAIC = 1,614.821). Partial scalar invariance is supported; full scalar invariance is not.

8.4 Factor variance invariance

After the assessment of scalar invariance (partial in the case here reported), the researcher should address issues of factor variance invariance (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Unless specified otherwise, in multi-group analysis LISREL assumes that what it did in group one (employees in this case) is imposed on group two (owners).

Thus, the variances estimated in group one are imposed on group two in order to evaluate if there are differences in homogeneity of the latent variables in the groups.

Invariance of factor variance indicates that the range of scores on a latent factor does not vary across groups. Thus the hypothesis of factor variance invariance is supported.

Adding the restriction to factor variances in group two resulted in a model with the following statistics of fit: RMSEA = .059; NNFI = .969; CFI = .974; model CAIC = 1,581.206). The difference in chi-square with the previous restricted model (partial scalar invariance) is not significant ($\Delta\chi2 = 15.39$; $\Delta df = 9$ – critical value at p=.05 = 16.92).

A summary of the nested models of measurement invariance and of their fit statistics is reported in Table 20.

	χ2 (df)	**Δχ2 (Δdf)**	**RMSEA**	**CAIC**	**NNFI**	**CFI**
Configural invariance	501.26 (322)		.058	1,738.691	.970	.977
Metric invariance	518.22 (335)	16.96 (13)	.058	1,667.265	.970	.976
Scalar invariance	546.17 (348)	27.95 (13)	.059	1,606.832	.969	.974
Partial scalar invariance	533.76 (345)	15,54 (10)	.058	1,614.821	.970	.976
Factor variance invariance	554.54 (353)	15.39 (9)	.059	1.521.206	.969	.974

Table 20 – Model comparisons for the measurement model

9. Invariance of path estimates

Once the invariance of the measurement model has been satisfied the next step consists in the evaluation of invariance of path estimates across groups. The invariance of the measurement model in fact is a prerequisite for any examination of structural invariance.

The aim of this second test of invariance is to evaluate if a structural model that has been specified in one sample (i.e. in group one, employees in the case here described) replicates over a second independent sample from the same population (i.e. in group two, trucks' owners in this case) (Byrne, 1998).

In particular starting from the baseline structural model already tested on the entire sample of drivers previously investigated (see paragraph 6), the research question that the author tries to address can be stated as follows: are there significant structural differences between employees and owners?

The original study comprised a sample of 330 truck drivers. For purposes of cross-validation the sample was split into two groups: employees (n=186) and owners (n=144). The first sample (employees) was used as the calibration sample, i.e. imposed on group two. The second sample instead (owners), was used as the validation group.

According to Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), when the purpose of the study is to relate constructs among different groups, full or partial metric invariance has to be satisfied. Nonetheless, when more restricted models were found as invariant, i.e. factor variance invariance, more "conservative" nested models are preferable to assess the invariance of path estimates across groups.

Hence, the factor variance invariance is assumed as the baseline model to test for the invariance of path estimates. Starting from the mentioned model, the author followed the methodology proposed by Durvasula et al. (1993).

It consists in the specification of an unconstrained model, in which the factor structure (item-to-factor loadings) and the correlations among the constructs are allowed to vary across the samples.

This model is then compared to a constrained model, in which the factor structure is declared invariant across samples (Bollen 1989; Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1983). If the fit of the unconstrained model (as given by $\chi 2$) is not significantly different from the fit of the constrained model, then the factor structure does not differ across the samples. The unconstrained model's $\chi 2$ value was 726.04 (df = 462; $\chi 2$/df = 1.57), and the constrained model's $\chi 2$ was 730.23 (df = 472). This difference is not statistically significant [$\Delta\chi 2$ = 3.79; Δdf = 10 – critical value (p=.05) = 33.95] (see Table 21). Hence there are no differences across groups and the model is best estimated constraining the path to be invariant across groups. It is worth to note that fit statistics indexes (RMSEA, NNFI and CFI) are satisfying if compared with their recommended thresholds even though the dimensions of sub-samples is not particularly relevant. These statistical indicators in fact – as already extensively argued in previous paragraphs – are strictly dependent upon the number of observations composing the samples.

	$\chi 2$ (df)	**$\Delta\chi 2$ (Δdf)**	**RMSEA**	**CAIC**	**NNFI**	**CFI**
Path Loading Free	729.88 (463)		.050	999.875	.965	.968
Path Loading Invariant	733,67 (473)	3.79 (10)	.058	983.674	.966	.969

Table 21 – Test of invariance of path estimates

The standardized structural weights for the constructs composing the structural model tested on group one and two are shown in Table 22. Since - as argued above - there are no differences across groups and the model is best estimated constraining the path to be invariant across groups, data presented in table are not represented divided by groups.

It is worth to note that standardized structural weights reported were estimated taking the factor variance invariant model as baseline.

Thus, they are the best estimates of the true structural weights since are not affected neither by differences in item factor loadings across groups, nor by factor variances. Also t-values are added in order to appreciate the statistical significance of structural path between groups (only standardized structural weight that are statistically significant across groups are considered for comparisons).

PATH	CONSTRAINED MODEL	
	STD. PATH	T-VALUES
Role-identity salience -> product attachment	.25	3.38
Product-self congruity -> product attachment	.41	5.76
Product reliability -> product attachment	.10	2.05
Experiential significance -> product attachment	.31	4.97
Brand-self congruity -> brand attachment	.65	10.96
Brand reliability -> brand attachment	.20	4.31
Product attachment -> brand attachment	.10	2.18
Product attachment -> brand loyalty	-.13	-2.31
Brand attachment -> brand loyalty	.58	10.13
Product attachment -> invest. in personalization	.34	6.51

Table 22 – Structural weight and t-values across groups (critical t-value ± 1.96)

As it is inferable from Table 22 above all the path are statistically significant (all above ± 1.96) and are in line with the results obtained from the general structural model in which differences between employees and owners are overlooked. Hence, identitarian and cognitive antecedents are more relevant than utilitarian motives in determining product and brand attachment for both groups (employees and owners) and the relation between product attachment and brand loyalty has negative sign.

10. Invariance of latent means

The last test of invariance that have to/can be assessed is the invariance of latent means. As stated by Byrne et al. (1989) in order to test for mean invariance across groups, the invariance of measurements and of the structure of the model across groups must be verified. Considering that previous tests of measurement invariance were supported (configural, metric, partial scalar and factor variance invariance), as well as the invariance of paths estimates, latent means invariance can be tested.

Most applications of structural equation modeling focus on the covariance part of the model. In such cases, the model assumes zero indicator intercepts and zero latent means.

However, in multigroup analyses researchers are interested in the means and intercepts (Bollen, 1989). Analyses of invariance of the latent means tests for differences between groups in the latent means. The validity of testing group differences in manifest scores depends on whether the assumptions that underlie such comparisons are correct, i.e. that both factor loadings and item intercepts are equal (i.e., metric and scalar invariant). Thus, a manifest mean difference can be caused either by a latent mean difference or a difference in the loadings, intercepts, or both (Millsap and Everson, 1991). Therefore, a test of a latent mean difference requires the equality of both the factor loadings and item intercepts (Cole and Maxwell, 1985; Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998).

The invariance of latent means is hence estimated taking the scalar invariant model (full or partial) as a baseline; differences in latent means between the two calibration and the validation group are evaluated for each latent variable by constraining them to be invariant and then freeing them across groups: differences in $\chi 2$ indicate variance or invariance of latent means. If the increase in $\chi 2$ is not significant, it indicates that allowing latent means to be variant does not improve model fit significantly. Free and constrained latent means are reported in Table 23.

	χ2 (df)	Δ χ2 (Δdf)	RMSEA	CAIC	NNFI	CFI
RIS LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
RIS LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	520.76 (338)	.27 (1)	.057	1,649.414	.971	.976
PSC LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
PSC LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	524.13 (338)	3.64 (1)	.058	1,652.777	.970	.976
PR LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
PR LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	524.42 (338)	3.93 (1)	.058	1,653.067	.970	.976
PA LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
PA LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	527.56 (338)	7.07 (1)	.058	1,656.209	.970	.976
ES LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
ES LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	521.09 (338)	.6 (1)	.057	1,649.738	.971	.976
BA LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
BA LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	527.32 (338)	6.83 (1)	.058	1,655.973	.970	.976
BR LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
BR LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	522.96 (338)	2.47 (1)	.058	1,651.608	.970	.976
BSC LATENT MEAN FREE	520.49 (337)		.058	1,655.934	.970	.976
BSC LATENT MEAN INVARIANT	528.54 (338)	8.05 (1)	.059	1,657.185	.970	.976

Table 23 – Invariance of latent means

where:

RIS: Role-identity salience
PSC: Product-self congruity
PR: Product reliability
PA: Product attachment
BA: Brand attachment
BR: Brand reliability
BSC: Brand-self congruity
ES: Experiential significance

As it is possible to observe from the Table above the only latent means that are invariant across groups are "role-identity salience" "product-self congruity", "experiential significance" and "brand reliability" (the critical value of chi-square at p = .05 for one degree of freedom is 3.84). For the other constructs the latent means are statistically significant. Reviewing kappa estimates from the LISREL output and considering that kappa parameters were estimated for the owners group (the employees group is taken as the reference group) findings reveal that truck's owners have significant higher levels (differences in means value are positive) of "product-self congruity", "product reliability", "product attachment", "brand attachment", "brand reliability" and "brand-self congruity". Differences in latent means and t-values are reported in the Table 24 below.

	Δ Latent mean	t-value
IDENTITY SALIENCE	.096	.547
PRODUCT-SELF CONGRUITY	.321	2.120
PRODUCT RELIABILITY	.206	2.142
PRODUCT ATTACHMENT	.350	2.691
EXPERIENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE	.149	.776
BRAND ATTACHMENT	.423	2.761
BRAND RELIABILITY	.214	1.806
BRAND-SELF CONGRUITY	.499	2.859

Table 24 – Kappa estimates (critical t-value ± 1.96)

11. Discussion, managerial implications and limitations

The findings of the extensive study here reported confirm and enrich the results reached with the previous phenomenological enquiry (see chapter 5). Thus a deep and diffused sense of attachment of truck drivers toward their trucks emerged. In details, constructs and psychographic measurement scales developed and tested in consumer research were applied to study the emotional meaning of possession in a B2B context. In particular the author have shown that the main antecedents of product attachment have a cognitive ("experiential significance") and identitarian ("role-identity salience" and "product-self congruity") nature, while more utilitarian product meanings, i.e. "product reliability", are less relevant in generating feelings of attachment in truck users.

What stated for the antecedents of product attachment is valid for brand attachment as well. Thus, the identitarian features of the brand ("brand-self congruity") are more powerful precursors of the emotional feelings that drivers nurture toward the brand than more functional attributes do ("brand reliability"). All the latent variables composing the measurement model are sufficiently robust (see composite reliability, average variance extracted and squared correlations tests) indicating the suitability of the constructs used in this research to be applied in context other than the consumer sphere.

Furthermore, product attachment is revealed as a driver of brand attachment indicating that when the product truck assumes cognitive, identitarian and utilitarian relevance for the owner, the relationship that the driver establishes with his/her truck becomes the main source of the emotional attachment toward the brand. Product attachment and brand attachment were tested also as possible sources of brand loyalty. In

particular, product attachment is found as negatively related to brand loyalty, contrary to brand attachment that is positively and significantly related to brand loyalty instead.

Hence, product and brand attachment - even though are positively related to each other - have a completely different effect in determining repeated choices of the same brand. Last, as other studies have shown or stated, product attachment leads to the investment of the self in the object, here operationalized as the amount of financial resources invested in truck personalization.

These findings are of extreme usefulness for companies operating in the truck industry. Not just because the emotional importance of the product truck is empirically demonstrated (this is the first study which empirically gives support the century old adage that drivers love more the truck than the wife!) but also – and especially – because the results drawn allow practitioners to understand what are the main drivers of attachment both toward the product and toward the brand.

The managerial implications of these results are easily understandable: if truck manufacturers want to stimulate their clients to be attached to the truck and to the brand, marketing managers and product developers should try to emphasize the identitarian content of the offering and give less emphasis to functional/utilitarian product and brand attributes (probably taken for granted in today's market).

In setting up their communication and branding strategies, truck manufacturers should pay more attention to these particular facets of product importance trying to emphasize not only "hard" attributes (such as fuel consumption, warranties, prices, etc.), but also leverage on "soft" attributes that strongly affect customers' preferences and choices.

In particular – as noted above – in those highly fragmented markets, such as the Italian, characterized by the prevalence of micro and small trucking companies, a deep understanding of this psychological and emotional content of truck consumption can result as a crucial facilitator of commercial exchanges and a source of differentiation and competitive advantage. Sales people, service centers and all the other actors that in some way participate to the selling and after selling process, should be able to take into account that although the truck is – as argued above – undeniably a B2B product, the customers' perception of product importance goes far beyond "neoclassical" motives.

The comprehension of these issue can result particularly relevant for those brand that are trying to refresh their market positioning, and, more in general, for all those truck manufacturers that are suffering more than their competitors the market's downturn.

The result of this study also offer interesting managerial implications for the demand side (trucking companies). Stimulating drivers to become attached to their trucks can perhaps result in lower maintenance costs and – in the long run – in a longer product life cycle. This can generate consistent savings for the company considering that maintenance costs represent on average 12.6% of trucking companies' total costs (Ministry of Transportations, 2004).

Another important research contribution of this study is related to the results of the multigroup analysis: findings display only marginal differences between employees and owners, suggesting that the results of the overall structural model are valid for both market segments. Even though in terms of latent means owners were found as more product and brand attached than employees, the fact that the test of invariance of path estimates did not lead to statistically significant differences across groups, suggest that the results reached in the first part of the research reported are valid for drivers in general regardless of property rights.

Hence, feelings of emotional attachment toward the truck and the brand, deals more with possession rather than with ownership.

From a managerial perspective these findings are probably more significant than those drawn in the first part of the structural equation model. In markets featured by the same or similar structural conditions of the Italian's, i.e. the extreme fragmentation of the demand, the prevalence of micro/small over large companies, and the big number of drivers-entrepreneurs, marketing efforts can be indiscriminately directed toward both employees and owners – or more in general to both direct purchasers and users – since these two groups show similar (if not identical) feelings and behaviors. The distinction between these two groups is in fact an important input in setting up viable and effective marketing strategies that truck manufacturers carry out in Italy (and in other similar market) in consideration of the influential role that employees play along the diverse step of the purchasing process of a truck.

Several limitations of this study can be identified: the first, deals with the specificity of the research setting. The survey was conducted focusing only on drivers working in the Italian market; hence in a market that can be considered more an exception that the rule. The specificity of the context in which the research has been carried out hence, represents a strong limit for the generalizability of the results.

Second, the latent variables hypothesized as possible drivers of both product and brand attachment, are just some of multiple constructs suggested and tested in past research available in the current literature and cannot be considered fully exhaustive of the complex

range of cognitive, identitarian, utilitarian, experiential, etc. motives behind the emotional bond between subjects (drivers in this context) and their objects (their trucks).

Third, brand loyalty was not measured as a latent variable but as an observed variable operationalized by the author as repeated purchase (or intention to repurchase) the same brand. Although this decision was to certain extents mandatory in consideration of the fact that the absolute majority of the sample is represented by employees - people that do not provide themselves to the purchasing process – the author did not use items and scales already established in the current marketing literature.

Fourth, the relatively small number of participants to the survey (mostly due to the difficulty of collecting data on a professional category that is in motion by definition) do not allowed a comparison across groups divided by brand driven. If divided by brands in fact the dimension of each sub-group is not sufficiently big to satisfy conditions of validity and reliability of statistical estimates. Hence, differences existing between brands in terms of higher vs. lower level of both product and brand attachment are hidden and cannot be analyzed.

Last, the product truck probably offers a unique and unrepeatable research context in which similarities between industrial and mass market products consumption can be observed. Other B2B goods are probably featured by lower levels of attachment and/or by different antecedents of emotional feelings toward the product and the brand.

In spite of these limitations this study, like other rare contributions issued in the B2B stream of research, offers empirical evidences of common consumption patterns in B2B and in B2C contexts. It hence contributes to the growing debate about a possible convergence of the two branches of marketing (Cova and Salle, 2006) through the adoption of constructs, concepts and research methods developed (or mostly used) in consumer research in business marketing.

Further research is needed to evaluate if similar consumption patterns can be found in other B2B contexts and if the finding here drawn can be observed also in other markets, featured by a different structure of the demand side.

7

The Practitioners Perspective

AGENDA: 1. Introduction – **2**. The informants – **3**. How practitioners see the product truck – **4**. How practitioners see the Italian market – **5**. Conclusions

1. Introduction

In the two empirical studies illustrated before, the author have shown the non utilitarian meanings of the product truck, shading light on its uniqueness in the wide range of B2B/industrial products. In both the phenomenological and in the quantitative enquiry the locus of analysis were drivers (employees and owners), i.e. the demand. In this third (and last) empirical effort instead, the locus of analysis is not the demand anymore; rather, the supply side. In particular, the aim is to complete the picture that has been painted in the previous discussion trying to grasp the practitioners point of view, their perceptions about what the author of this doctor thesis has labeled as "the blurred boundaries of truck consumption" (B2B vs. B2C) and their first-person point of view of the characteristics of the Italian market (and how this market specific features affect viable strategic postures).

Hence the target studied here are chief marketing officers (or other key marketing persons) of truck manufacturers selling their products in the Italian market.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study and the small number of potential informants, the research approach that has been chosen is that of the one-to-one qualitative interview to key informants (marketing managers in this case). This is the approach that was also undertaken in recent studies exploring similar issues in the B2B context (Kuhn et al., 2008; Persson, 2010; Veloutsou and Taylor, 2012).

Moreover, considering that the theoretical background as well as the literature addressed have been already extensively reported in previous discussions, in this chapter the author will simply show discursively the marketing managers point of view trying to underline areas of convergence and/or divergence with findings drawn in the core studies of this doctoral thesis. The objective of this third study is hence neither to generate nor to confirm existing theories; rather is to give a different perspective (the supplier perspective) in order to confirm the theoretical lens through which the product truck is investigated in this manuscript (beyond utilitarian meanings), to underline the peculiarities of the Italian market as a first-person practitioner point of view and to evaluate how these issues jointly impact on viable marketing actions and strategies.

The major part of the interviews were realized during the 2012 truck drivers week end in Misano Adriatico, the most important industry meeting annually organized in Italy. This research setting was chosen because it allowed the researcher to reach the target of investigation with minimum efforts since all the brands crowding the Italian market were present with a flagship stand (with few notable exceptions).

All the interviews were video recorded since they will be part of a videographic project (in progress) that the author is carrying out to shed light on product enthusiasm and on the semiotic of personalized trucks.

The interviews followed a semi-structured questionnaire.

2. The informants

The sample of informants is composed by four chief marketing officers, one commercial director and one business retail developer working for truck producers brands. In particular brands that were involved in this third study are six out of the eight selling their products in the Italian market: Iveco, Man, Daf, Mercedes Benz, Scania and Volvo Trucks (in alphabetical order). The remaining two brands Renault Trucks and Astra were excluded; the former because is part of the Volvo Trucks group (recently merged); the latter because is specialized in the production of construction dump truck, heavy transport and military vehicles.

The dimension of the sample is far from the recommended number of 12-20 interviews generally considered sufficient in qualitative research (see Kuzel, 1992) but can anyway be considered satisfactory in consideration of the dimension of the population investigated (n=8) and according to the aim of the study that – as stated above – is

exploratory by nature and is aimed not to theory development or theory tested. Rather is basically aimed to represent the supplier point of view in order to evaluate the consistency of findings drawn in the previous two studies.

The results are presented in the following according to two predominant and interrelated thematic categories: the nature of the product truck and the characteristics of the Italian market. In particular the aim of this research effort is to understands how the very nature of the product and market specific conditions, influence viable strategic marketing postures that truck brands can/should undertake.

3. How practitioners see the product truck

The prevailing view among key marketing professionals is that the truck is undeniably a B2B product but is featured by certain characteristics that make this product particularly challenging in terms of marketing strategies and actions. In particular the acknowledgement of these features and a growing interest among the clientele in non core product attributes is generating a shift in the offering of truck manufacturers (at least for some of them) and in the marketing strategies that are set up.

Some trucks manufacturers are becoming familiar with the emotional/experiential meanings that the product truck has for the owner and the acknowledgment of these issues is strongly influencing also new product development processes.

Man for example is trying to extend the customer base by developing products that can be appealing also to those market segments that are not merely interested in technical features of the product and that give more emphasis on self representational motives behind truck consumption.

> Alessandro Smania (Chief Marketing Officer, Man): «we are surely in the context of B2B goods because our clients use our products for working purposes and not for leisure. Nonetheless, the fact that they spend the major part of the day on the vehicle - that as a result becomes a sort of second house - generates the establishment of an affective relationship between drivers and their trucks. And this has a strong impact of marketing strategies carried out. Man is historically concerned with the product itself and with the achievement of the best results in terms of product quality, like every German company. But in the last few years we are trying to change our offering emphasizing more the emotional content of the truck: to this aim we have recently launched a new product line (S line) in which emotional aspects are emphasized as well as the possibilities of personalization. The marketing objectives that with the S line we would like to achieve in the next feature is to convince non-Man clients to look at our brand in a different manner: not just focusing on its technical characteristics. Especially those that are not merely interested in a transportation vehicle to which

hook up a trailer, but are also interested in a vehicle that can become a passion allowing them to emphasize the emotional dimension of their business».

Other brands instead (such as Daf and Mercedes Benz) are trying to strengthen their brand positioning leveraging on core product attributes and emphasizing the utilitarian content of the product: in particular vehicles efficiency - in terms of fuel consumption, durability and reliability - and value added services (extended product) are the basic marketing leverages through which they are trying to characterize their positioning in the marketplace.

Mauro Monfredini (Chief Marketing Officer, Daf) «we sell working tools. More precisely we sell a product than can be conceived as being both a working tool and a commodity. Today the truck is a working tool that must be sold combined with an extensive range of additional services. The client is not just interested in the product itself: he/she necessitates also some services (financial services, technical assistance, maintenance, spare parts, etc.). Our product is famous. The new ATE (Advanced Transport Efficiency) is a product that is acknowledge as being the most efficient vehicle on the market in terms of fuel consumption».

Maurizio Pompei (Commercial Director, Mercedes Benz) «our products and services are customized to our clients needs in order to allow our sales force to approach the final client proposing solutions in line with his/her expectations and needs. To this purpose financial and post sales services are particularly relevant given the characteristics of the product we sell and of the customers we serve. Industrial vehicles must assure safety, low fuel consumptions and low pollution emissions. The main responsibility of Mercedes Benz can be summarized in these three issues: in the development of technologies that allow to maximize safety, and to minimize consumptions and emissions. The new Actros for example is best in class in terms of safety, allows to reduce fuel consumptions up to 7% and has a Euro 6 engine».

And again, other brands that can count on a premium price positioning (such as Scania) seem to be more aware of the emotional/experiential content of the product truck and are ever more emphasizing the non material components of their offering. Customers are seen as brand advocates and marketing efforts are basically aimed at strengthening the relationship between the brand and the customer base.

Giangiacomo Roseo (Chief Marketing Officer, Scania) «the truck market is B2B by nature because our products are sold to companies that have to generate cash flow with their machines and recovery the investments done. In the case of the brand Scania, there is a relationship with the final client that luckily in many cases goes beyond the B2B paradigm. I would not say B2C but much more "person to person". Very often we can count on a long term relationship with our clientele and events like the truck meeting of Misano Adriatico are a fruitful way to strength this relationship. Just to give you an example, during this meeting we don't have a flagship stand but only a small stand in which we sell our merchandising. The only real marketing effort we did during this event was to organize a dinner with those Scania drivers that were accepted to

expose their customized trucks. We don't need a flagship stand because are our customers themselves that allow the brand to circulate in occasion like this one».

From the quotes reported above it is possible to infer that truck brands can be displayed along a continuum anchored by utilitarian/hard product features on one side (e.g. Daf or Mercedes Benz) and by hedonistic/soft product features on the other side (e.g. Scania). Non utilitarian product features acknowledged by the customer base are hence a strong leverage of product differentiation and - at the same time - an important driver of brand positioning. Even though marketing managers seems to be concordant in defining the product truck as a working tool or as a B2B product and in acknowledging the need to enrich the core offering with additional services and or with less tangible elements, only few of them are actually leveraging on the emotional content of the brand and of the product to make their customers loyal or satisfied. The emerging marketing strategy that Man is currently carrying out – as reported above – is to reposition the brand by enriching the brand proposition with some attributes that historically do not belong to brand itself but are considered fruitful to enlarge the customer base.

Volvo Trucks instead, focusing on the characteristics of the product as "the drivers' second house", is facing the challenge of developing working tolls that can fit drivers needs and wants. Hence is trying to acquire a brand positioning that does not pass through neither hard nor soft attributes, but on a deep knowledge of the final user.

Giampaolo Dal Lago (Business Retail Developer, Volvo Trucks) «Our marketing strategy is now focused on reaching a deep understanding of the final user not only as a way to re-address our marketing efforts and investments, but also to inform new product development processes. I can tell you an example: trucks' cabins are currently designed in order to fit the physical characteristics of the "typical driver", that is, of a man with the average physical characteristics of the US soldiers that joined the army during the Vietnam war. At that time – I don't remember the real measure – but let's say that the typical man was 1.75 meters height and 80 kilos weight. Truck manufacturers used these measure as the main input of the engineering process of the internal part of the truck, such as the driving position, the distance between the seat and the steering wheel, etc for many years. After about 40 years from the end of the Vietnam war, this profile is changed quite a lot: US soldiers are on average taller and fatter and – as a result – the cabins are not designed to fit the drivers' physical characteristics at best. What we are trying to do is more or less the same: we are trying to understand drivers' habits both in their work and in their home life in order to grasp the complexity of consumption (in the broader sense) of this professional category and use all the information we can acquire to inform our marketing strategies. Truck brands still rely on a stereotyped idea of the driver as a rude boy, whoremonger and alcoholic. Drivers are changed drastically in the last 20-30 years: they are now more educated, more skilled and more demanding. To sum up this is the main concern of Volvo Trucks for the next future: to know the user at the best in order to design products that can really satisfy him/her and set up the right marketing strategies on the basis of these information».

A renewed attention to the trucks' final users is driving the marketing strategies and actions undertaken also by non premium priced brands. Iveco for example is setting up some marketing programs generally considered as belonging to the consumer sphere such as web based communications and direct marketing, de-emphasizing the importance of the sales force and adopting more customer centric perspectives.

> Antonio Santoro (Operational Marketing Director for the Italian Market, Iveco) «the truck market is a B2B one; the purchasing process is typically business: is rational and not emotional. The customer have to be fully aware of how much money he/she can earn and save buying a product rather than another one. But in order to communicate the set of values that underpin the brand you have to look toward the final user: that is, you have to assume a consumer stance. We are working hard in this direction and we are growing very much using this strategy because our clientele is growing as well. Drivers are increasingly using the web to address their purchasing process as well as other channels different from the traditional "old-style" dealers and resellers. We are doing a lot of marketing activities borrowed by the food industry aimed at making our marketing effort as a whole more direct».

The interviews' transcripts reported above, although signify different marketing strategies and postures that truck brands are carrying out, underline a paradigm shift within the industry that consists - assuming a broader stance - in extending the core offering: not limiting the focus on product attributes *stricto sensu* but enriching the market proposal with value added services in some cases (e.g. Mercedes Benz and Daf) or leveraging on the significance that the product has for the owner/user in some others (e.g. premium brands such as Volvo Trucks or Scania). The marketing perspective that most practitioners in this industry are holding is ever more "consumer" and far from the "classical" B2B paradigm.

A paradigm shift that, as previously underlined, is partly independent from issues related to brand positioning, pricing policies and the characteristics of core targets served.

Yet is more related to the need to revamp product importance for the buyer/user and leverage on this importance to inform not only marketing actions, tactics and strategies but also new product development processes.

3. How practitioners see the Italian market

As frequently reported in the text of this doctoral thesis the characteristics and the specificity of the Italian market play a great role in shaping viable marketing strategies and in make them profoundly different from those carried out in other European and non European markets. In particular the predominance of micro-small over large firms, the high

number of mono-vehicular companies and, thus, a strong presence of the "driver-entrepreneur" actor (difficult to find elsewhere), are all conditions that require truck brands to adopt country based strategies and to customize the offering in order to meet the features of the actual and potential customer base.

Marketing managers interviewed in fact are concordant in saying that the structural features of the Italian market require to adopt strategies specifically designed to meet the national demand. In particular two main structural features are identified as to typical of the Italian market: the low rate of concentration and the morphologic features of the landscape as determinant of customers' needs and thus of the demand they express.

> Alessandro Smania (Chief Marketing Officer, Man): «the principal characteristic of the Italian market is fractionation. There is a huge number of companies with small truck fleets. In the current economic scenario small companies are obviously suffering more than big firms. Hence if we want to preserve our competitiveness and our market share we have to think about solutions that can fit the current customers' needs: financial solutions, consumptions, operating costs, etc. At present we sell integrated solutions that consist in a package of services completing the core offering: our slogan is: "don't think, just drive. We think to all the rest"»

> Maurizio Pompei (Commercial Director, Mercedes Benz) «the main structural characteristics of the Italian market is the low concentration. This characteristic is neither a quality, nor a drawback. In Italy the biggest share of the demand is represented by the so called "*padroncini*", i.e. drivers who are trucks' owners at the same time. This obviously generates the need to set up marketing, commercial, communication and product strategies customized. As instance it obliges truck's producers to assure a capillary presence on the territory in order to reach the final client. Nonetheless the difficult economic scenario that trucking companies are facing today is generating a tendency toward concentration pushing small companies to set up federations or consortium that allow drivers and companies to realize economies of scale without renouncing to their independency. An additional consequence stemming from the low concentration of the demand is related to the influence that the employees play in the purchasing process of new trucks is small companies. This requires to look also toward the final user and not just to companies as in other markets».

From the quotes reported above it is interesting to underline how the fragmentation of the demand affects the structure of the commercial network and the modalities by which the sales force is organized. The logic of key account management generally used in B2B trades (see Pardo, 1997) does not fit the conditions of the Italian market obliging truck brands to assure a capillary coverage of the territory. As the Chief Marketing Officer of Daf said, the sales force is organized according to the important of the client: key customers (those with big truck fleet) are managed directly by the headquarter without intermediaries, while the management of the relationships with smaller customers is delegated to autonomous dealers.

> Mauro Monfredini (Chief Marketing Officer, Daf): «the typical Italian customer is the so called "*padroncino*". Still today micro-small companies account for about 60-70% of our sales. These customers and the relationships with them are managed by dealers and their sales force. Bigger truck fleets instead are managed directly by the commercial branch with the support of the Daf headquarter in order to provide the client the right package of services (especially financial services). In this market context marketing basically means to give support to the sales force. Since 2000 we are engaged in a program of customer care and customer satisfaction specifically designed to tackle the specificities of the Italian demand».

Furthermore, given the small dimension of trucking companies, and the importance of the capillary presence of the territory to ensure a certain level of sales, dealers and the sales force assume a bargaining power (see Lehman and Winer, 2005 for a review of the power relationships across sales channels) difficult to find elsewhere, both in Europe and outside.

> Giampaolo Dal Lago (Business Retail Developer, Volvo Trucks): «the most challenging issue in the Italian market is to guarantee a capillary presence all over the territory. The deep economic crisis that the sector is facing since 2009 caused and is causing the bankruptcy of some Volvo Trucks dealers. This phenomenon, that can be seen as a normal consequence of the economic downturn, represents our main trouble. In fact, considering the small dimension of trucking companies and the role that the sales force plays in strengthening the relationship between clients and the brand, the lost of a dealer inevitably means the lost of a certain percentage of buyers. In some regions for example we were obliged to financially save some dealers in order to preserve and guarantee our presence in those regions».

Besides the characteristics of the demand, another structural condition that strongly affect marketing performances in the Italian market is related to the morphologic conditions of the territory. Considering that the majority of players crowding the Italian market are local branches of foreigner brands (six out of eight) this require companies not only to find the best way to commercialize their products in a market characterized by a big number of customers with very small fleet, but also to develop products that can fit the technical needs of actual and potential customers.

> Mauro Monfredini (Chief Marketing Officer, Daf): «our Dutch colleagues struggle to understand the Italian market. In Holland trucking companies are bigger and the way in which marketing strategies are designed is completely different. But I think that the differences are not related just to the characteristics of the final client; rather are also related to the morphologic characteristics of the Italian landscape. Differently from Holland that is a flat land, Italy has a long and tight territory with a lot of mountains and hills. Consequently, besides to carefully evaluate the market, we have to understand our customers' needs and propose them solutions that can allow them to work effectively in such a territory».

> Giangiacomo Roseo (Chief Marketing Officer, Scania): «the Swedish headquarter sometimes does not fully understand the Italian market. Just an example: the greatest part of the trucks we sell in Italy have the V8 engine that is extremely powerful if

compared with the six cylinder. In Sweden the V8 engine is considered a luxury, a vehicle that companies buy for symbolic purposes rather than for actual needs. For our Swedish colleagues Italy is the country of the beaches and cities of art; they are not aware that Italy is 70% Apennines, Alps and mountains. Moreover the characteristics of the Italian demand make marketing extremely difficult if compared to other European markets».

5. Conclusions

The aim of this third (and last) exploratory study was to depict the practitioners perspective regarding the characteristics of the product and the structural features of the Italian market. The interviews transcripts revealed some predominant thematic categories that allow to give support both to the particular perspective that the author assumed to investigate the dynamic of consumption of the product truck in this doctoral thesis, and to the need to adopt a different perspective when approaching markets – like the Italian one – featured by certain structural conditions that contributes to question the nature of the truck as a B2B product. As the prevailing view among marketing managers confirm, although the product truck is undeniably B2B the very characteristics of the Italian demand alongside the peculiar features of the product truck, require a strategic marketing postures difficult to detect in other business markets and in other market contexts within the same trade. Some marketing managers have clearly stated that the experiential, emotional and cognitive aspects of truck's consumption are increasingly taken into account as a way to overcome the downturn of the market, to reposition the brand and/or to extend the customer base.

Others, in the same vein, argued that these aspects constitute the core brand proposition and, thus, represent the main pillars of brand competitiveness. These evidences underline not only the consistency of the perspective adopted in this manuscript but also how this perspective is of topical interest in the current competitive arena.

Furthermore, the quotes reported in the previous paragraphs contribute to underline one of the principal tenets of this doctoral thesis: the difficulty to place with sufficient confidence the product truck in the domain of B2B products as well as the challenge of setting up effective marketing strategies for a product whose nature is far from being crystalline. It is not a chance in fact that some marketing managers are increasingly adopting marketing programs and strategies borrowed by mass market/consumer industries. Other interesting topics emerged during the interviews with marketing managers.

First, the cross fertilization between marketing knowledge and product development: the acknowledgement of other than the utilitarian reasons behind truck consumption is affecting the design process of new trucks and their characteristics and is becoming a factor of differentiation through which market segments can be identified and defined.

Second, the role that the commercial network plays in managing the relationships with client that, in the Italian context, is exacerbated if compared with other markets.

Third, the influential role that the driver plays in the purchasing process of trucks that – once again – is difficult to find in markets characterized by highest concentration rates.

As far as research limitations of this exploratory enquiry are concerned, it is important to remember that this study was neither aimed at theory testing, nor at theory building. Rather, was simply aimed at giving the practitioners point of view in order to understand if the research perspective adopted in the manuscript is consistent and if the findings emerged can be considered of interest or not from a managerial standpoint. Hence the main limit of this study is related to its "scientificity" and to the lack of a clear research question to answer. Nonetheless, the interviews conducted can be considered a preliminary step of more rigorous studies to shed light on some areas of interest. For example, the influential role that the driver plays in the purchasing process of new truck emerged in some of the interviews conducted, is already the object of investigation of a further study (in progress, thus not reported in this manuscript) that the author is currently carrying out. In particular this further research effort is aimed at understanding under which conditions the employees act as influencers of the purchasing process of product and brands and which are the moderating variables that enable and constrain the mentioned influence.

8

Conclusions

The extensive literature reported in this doctoral thesis suggests that the path to allow a convergence between the two branches of marketing (B2B and B2C) is still long.

Even though Vargo and Lusch (2011) have recently claimed that "It's all B2B!", this proposition sounds more like a call of duty for those who are fiercely against SDL rather than a concrete attempt to provide theoretical foundations and empirical demonstrations of a possible convergence of the fields. The three mainstream schools of marketing though - IMP, CCT and SDL – while representing an undeniable step further if compared with the old style, kotlerian/normative perspective of marketing in their own locus of investigation (IMP in industrial contexts, CCT in consumer behavior, SDL in service marketing), are still too far to provide a solution to the century-old dichotomy.

In spite of that, several contributions were issued in the B2B domain – sometimes provocatively (e.g. Cova and Salle, 2006), sometimes too naïvely, is the case of this doctoral thesis perhaps – to stimulate scholars to provide ideas, suggestions and cues in sight of a unification of the field.

To this aim, the most important contributions to date are those in which a cross fertilization is proposed in terms of research methods and relative epistemological foundations. In particular, the increased acceptance amongst industrial marketing scholars of the interpretive paradigm in their studies (Gummesson, 2003) and the awareness of the need to rejuvenate the European industrial marketing tradition (Cova and Salle, 2006 and Cova et al., 2009), generated a cultural turn in business marketing studies. As a result, research methods wide spreading in consumer research such as semiotics (Buchanan-Oliver, 2006), ethnography (Visconti, 2010), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992),

critical realism (Easton , 2010), hermeneutics (Wagner et al., 2010), etc. are gradually finding rooms in the IMP group.

Other contributions instead were issued with the aim to provide a possible solution to the B2B vs. B2C contraposition, focusing on the centrality of the relationship as a unit of analysis in both consumer and business context (Vargo, 2009) or on the nature of the exchange in both contexts (Vargo and Lush, 2008; 2011). But, in the opinion of the writer and of more influential commentators (see Brown and Patterson, 2009; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2009; Grönroos, 2011), these contributions can be considered more a "pebble in the pond" rather than concrete advances of the marketing discipline.

Thus, the state of the art of the marketing discipline as a whole, is still far to provide a solution to solve the B2B vs. B2C dichotomy. As a result the prevailing view of the literature rests on the conceptual argument that B2B and B2C markets are different (Coviello and Brodie, 2001).

This doctoral thesis proposed a possible solution to the B2B vs. B2C dichotomy that does not pass through a thorough unification of the fields; rather in the adoption of research methods, theoretical constructs, locus of investigation etc. developed in consumer into business research and vice versa. The focus on the product (rather than on the traditional network-relationships perspective) and on the micro level of investigation (individuals instead of companies), the adoption of interpretive (existential phenomenology in this case) and/or of positivistic methods other than the traditional case study (structural equation modeling) and the usage of constructs well developed in consumer research (attachment as instance), were found as applicable also when studying consumption phenomena in industrial contexts.

In particular, the product has been investigated not in its mediating role, i.e. in terms of how it influences content, type and intensity of commercial exchanges, as it is traditionally studied in business marketing; yet, is approached as a cultural artifact through which people express themselves (McCracken, 1986). In fact, according to McCracken (1986) not only consumer goods are the locus of self-expression and of symbolic/cultural meanings. Every product serves as media for the expression of the cultural meaning that constitutes our world. Hence, also some B2B products (trucks in this case) can be considered as media through which actors express themselves, their culture and the culture of the collective to which they belong, and toward which they can display feeling of attachment. In this manuscript it is empirically demonstrated the suitability of a perspective of business customers as consumers and the consistency of an anthropological perspective of the phenomenon of consumption also in business environment.

Moreover - as far as research methods are concerned - existential phenomenology (Thompson et al., 1989) is revealed as being valuable to grasp the complexity of consumption in a B2B setting.

Findings drawn in the qualitative study revealed the non utilitarian meanings of truck possession and allowed to situate this meanings within the extended self framework (Belk, 1988): thus, it has been empirically demonstrated that even the usage and possession of an industrial product, of a working tool can serve as media through which people forge their own identities.

The results of the phenomenological enquiry were then deepened quantitatively by applying structural equation modeling and underlining the consistency of constructs developed and tested in consumer research - such as product attachment (e.g. Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Schulz et al., 1989), brand attachment (e.g. Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2008; Park et al., 2010), brand loyalty (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Oliver, 1999), the extended self (Sirgy, 1982; Belk, 1988), identity salience (Callero, 1985), product-self congruity (Sirgy, 1982; Belk 1988; Aaker, 1996; Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988; Kleine et al., 1995; Schultz et al., 1989), etc. - in the realm of B2B goods.

This allowed to bring out - for example – the scarce relevance that hard product and brand features/attributes have in generating feelings of attachment toward the product/brand although the product investigated is a working tool that individuals do not use for leisure or for other than working purposes. In particular identity related motives were found as powerful precursors of positive feelings of attachment toward both the product and the brand, rising several important considerations as far as managerial implications are concerned.

Finally, the results of the third exploratory study in which the practitioners perspective is depicted, gave support to the particular perspective that the author assumed to investigate the dynamic of consumption of the product truck in this doctoral thesis.

A main limitation of this dissertation probably concerns the choice of the product investigated that seems to be too well chosen to disconfirm the thesis that also B2B products can be approached form an anthropological perspective of possession.

The product truck is not a "typical" B2B product considering the strong experiential content of the product itself, the level of commitment and involvement drivers have toward it (demonstrated by the existence of product and brand community, the diffusion of practices of product personalization, the existence of trucks' beauty contest, etc.) and other product specific features described in previous chapters.

This raises several concerns about the generalizability of the results as well as about the possibility to replicate this study shading light on the meanings of possession of other industrial product. For example, it is surely less likely that workers in the metal industry have the same feeling of attachment toward the lathes they use daily. Or at least that the love people nurture toward their working tool is expected to be not so common and diffused as it is among the members of the drivers' category. Future researches which try to investigate the meanings of usage and possession in other industrial context or – more broadly – of other working tools, are so more than welcome.

The second important limitation of this dissertation concerns the market investigated. As shown in chapter 3 and in chapter 7, the Italian market for trucks is featured by some structural characteristics which make it different if compared with other European and non-European markets: the low rate of concentration and the predominance of mono-vehicular companies contribute to de-emphasize the B2B nature of the product truck and to fade the difference between consumers and clients. Marketing managers are in fact concordant when saying that marketing actions and strategies set up in Italy are completely different from those developed in other countries and that the specific characteristics of the Italian demand are impossible to find elsewhere.

Thus, findings and managerial suggestions drawn in this dissertation have to be considered country specific and cannot be extended with sufficient confidence to other business environment.

In spite of these limitations, this doctoral thesis – at least in the opinion of the writer – should be considered a substantial attempt to pro-actively respond to the call for rejuvenation of the European industrial marketing orthodoxy (Cova and Salle, 2003) and a step further along the long and steep way that brings to the unification of the marketing discipline.

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