The use of Mafia stereotypes in marketing: A study into consumers’ perceptions and willingness to buy

Mafia stereotypes referring to Sicilian organized crime organization have been used by some businesses to market their product or services. Although these practices are not unethical, the use of these stereotypes is questionable considering the history behind this criminal organization, that is responsible for hundreds of killings. So far, research has not studied consumers’ perceptions towards these products and services, their willingness to buy them, and the rationale behind their decision as to whether to buy them or not. As such, this paper aims to fill this gap in scholarly literature. This research was carried out through a concurrent parallel mixed method, based on a survey of 152 British consumers recruited through Prolific. This study suggests that even products that are not deemed to be unethical could promote ‘political’ reactions from consumers. However, additional research is required to understand political consumerism choices related to these products and services.

Keywords: political consumerism; Mafia stereotypes; mixed method; concurrent-parallel mixed method.
Introduction

According to the UN, an organized crime group is “a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences […] in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit” (United Nations, 2015, p. 5). One particular type of organized crime group is the Mafia which, according to Varese (2010), tries to take control of different markets in a given domain. In order to do this, the Mafia uses violence and collects information for later use. The term ‘Mafia’ is traditionally associated with a variety of Italian organized criminal groups, such as Sicilian ‘Cosa Nostra’, Camorra, ‘ndrangheta, and Sacra Corona Unita. It would therefore be more appropriate to use the plural Mafias (Calderoni, 2011).

This term has become widely known across the world through movies such as The Godfather and, more recently, through businesses and services marketing products that make references to the Mafia. For instance, Coldiretti – the Italian farmers’ organization – provided a list of products; examples of which included a recipe website (http://www.mamamafiosa.com), a recipe book (The Mafia Cookbook), pasta sauces, restaurants (La Mafia se sienta alla mesa), a website selling candies (www.candymafia.com), spices (Palermo Mafia shooting), sauces (Wicked Cosa Nostra, Sauce Maffia), and more, all branded with names related to the Mafia (Coldiretti & Ixè, 2016). Even though the use of this name for marketing purposes is not prohibited and the type of products and services offered cannot be considered unethical, the use of these names may be considered questionable as a result of the killings that have been attributed to Mafia groups over time. Research studying the boycotting of food products that counteract Mafia organizations has been recently published (Rivaroli, Ruggeri, Novi, & Spadoni, 2018; Rivaroli, Ruggeri, & Spadoni, 2019), however, so far,
no research studying consumers’ perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes for commercial purposes has been carried out (excluding the work of Bregoli and Ceruti, 2016, which analyzed this in the context of tourism). This paper, therefore, seeks to fill this gap. In order to do so, literature on political consumerism, considered to be “consumers’ use of the market as an arena for politics in order to change institutional or market practices found to be ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable” (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013, p. 39) was deemed suitable content for use. Within this area of research, several socio-demographic characteristics have been applied in order to better understand political consumerism (Llopis-Goig, 2013; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Zhang, 2015). By taking this into consideration, along with the need to shed light on this phenomenon, a focused examination of one of these characteristics seemed an appropriate avenue to take - namely gender - in order to further investigate the topic. Indeed, as previous research has shown, political consumers tend to be female (Llopis-Goig, 2013; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Zhang, 2015). Due to the lack of previous studies on this topic, this exploratory research aimed to study consumers’ perceptions towards and willingness to buy products and services that use Mafia stereotypes in their marketing. In particular, this research answered the following questions:

**RQ1:** What are consumers’ perceptions towards businesses that use Mafia stereotypes in their marketing?

**RQ2:** Would consumers be willing to buy products and services that use Mafia stereotypes in their marketing? What are the reasons behind their willingness to buy?

**RQ3:** Are there any gender differences between men and women with regards to: 1) their perceptions towards businesses that use Mafia stereotypes in marketing; and 2) their willingness to buy?
The paper is organized as follows. The study begins with a literature review on political consumerism. Thereafter, the paper describes the mixed method adopted to answer the aforementioned research questions; specifically outlining the fully mixed concurrent dominant design used. Empirical results from the qualitative and quantitative strands of research, as well as the mixed results, are then presented. Finally, theoretical and managerial implications, along with suggestions for future research, conclude the work.

**Political Consumerism**

Political consumerism is considered to be a way by which consumers can serve a cause, together with green consumption, ethical consumption, voluntary simplicity, etc. (Bossy, 2014). Political consumerism, in particular, has been defined as “consumers’ use of the market as an arena for politics in order to change institutional or market practices found to be ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable” (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013, p. 39). According to this view, political consumerism is made up of different types of actions, among which are ‘boycotts’, i.e. negative actions represented by the conscious refusal to buy products that, for instance, damage the environment or endorse or originate from companies that lack Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Burke & Milberg, 1993; Carrigan, Szmigin, & Wright, 2004; Creyer, 1997; Hoffmann & Hutter, 2012; Klein, Smith, & John, 2004; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Lindenmeier, Schleer, & Pricl, 2012; Papaoikonomou, Valverde, & Ryan, 2012; Smith, 1990) and ‘buycotts’, i.e. positive actions through which consumers buy products and services in order to reward organizations for their ethical practices (Burke, Eckert, & Davis, 2014; Papaoikonomou, 2013).

Among the common factors unifying consumers who actively carry out these practices, research has highlighted that consumers practicing political consumerism tend
to be female, educated, young, and with a high disposable income (Llopis-Goig, 2013; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Zhang, 2015). In addition to this, it has been acknowledged that political consumerism allow consumers to: 1) express the values they believe in (such as fairness and justice); and 2) promote alternative ways of consumption by politicizing the act of buying in order to search and promote other types of consumption (Bossy, 2014; Gotlieb, 2015; Rivaroli et al., 2018). According to the issues that a consumer considers important and those that affect his/her behavior, Ben-Porat, Shamir, and Yuval (2016) have identified three types of political consumerism: environmental political consumerism, in which consumers pay attention to environmental issues in their decision-making; social political consumerism, in which consumers consider social issues, such as child labor or sweatshops; and religious political consumerism, in which religious aspects affecting consumption are taken into account. Hence, political consumerism allows a person to represent their concerns towards a wide range of issues, ranging from environmental to social issues (Gotlieb, 2015). This view was also suggested by Bossy (2014), who proposed that political consumerism should be viewed as a continuum between social concerns on one side, and environmental concerns on the other. In doing so, it is then possible to consider political consumers as those who, for instance, consume Fair Trade products, green products, etc.

The range of variance in the products/services to which consumers can orient their consumption choices means that researchers can include more and more objects under the political consumerism ‘umbrella’. One emerging example can be considered the food products offered by Libera Terra, which are produced on land confiscated from the Mafia. Consumers who buy these goods are therefore supporting a culture of legality against organized crime (Rivaroli et al., 2019). For this reason, it is believed that research on consumers’ perceptions towards products and services applying Mafia
stereotypes is suitable for study under the umbrella of political consumerism. In particular, by studying these perceptions, along with consumers’ willingness to buy these products and their rationale for wanting to buy or not buy them, this research will shed light on an area of political consumerism that, thus far, has not received any attention from scholars, i.e. political consumerism choices by consumers who may not want to demonstrate any direct or indirect support towards organized crime groups. In addition to this, as it has been acknowledged that political consumers tend to be mainly female, in this study the differences in perceptions and willingness to buy was further investigated in relation to gender.

**Methodology**

This research was carried out using a mixed method study, in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed in order to answer the set research questions and explain the results obtained from one type of data through the results of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Seeking to mix two different methods, this research was based on the pragmatist worldview -(Feilzer, 2010) and a fully mixed concurrent dominant design was applied, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously and one research design (in this study, the qualitative strand) was given more weight (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). As such, using mixed method notation, this research design can be represented as QUAL + quan.

As in other mixed method studies (Arnon & Reichel, 2009; Daley & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), data were collected through a survey-that which was made up of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were measured using a
5-point Likert scale based on the likelihood of respondents eating in a restaurant (La Mafia se sienta alla mesa, “Mafia sits at the table”, an Italian restaurant chain based in Spain) and the likelihood of them buying a product (tortellini). Here, 1 = very unlikely and 5 = very likely; a scale adapted from the work of Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991). Respondents were asked: “please select how likely you are to eat within the following restaurant” and “please select how likely you are to buy the following product”.

Immediately after both questions, respondents were presented with an image of the restaurant (the image used can be found at this link: https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/caso-diplomatico-madrid-i-ristoranti-mafia-1096041.html) and an image of the tortellini (the image used is image three in the gallery found at this link: https://www.corriere.it/foto-gallery/cronache/14_marzo_20/caffe-mafiozzo-sigari-capone-ristoranti-cosa-nostracoldiretti-quei-brand-schiaffi-all-italia-1afa721a-b019-11e3-a027-9deb5b03f50b.shtml?refresh_ce-cp). After viewing the pictures, respondents were presented with an open-ended question asking them to explain their choice (“Please explain your answer to the previous question in the box below”). Demographic questions concluded the survey.

- In order to reduce bias, the pictures’ sizes and colors, - were changed to black and white and their size was made uniform - (Couper, Tourangeau, & Kenyon, 2004). Moreover, following suggestions - from previous research (Schaeffer and Dykema, 2011), - larger boxes were used for open-ended questions.

- The survey was administered online through Qualtrics, and respondents were recruited through Prolific academic (https://www.prolific.ac/) in order to maximize the number of potential respondents. The survey was administered to a convenience sample
of UK residents who had to be 18 and be a resident in the UK at the time of the study (Table 1). Each participant was rewarded £1.25, corresponding to £5 per hour. The researcher requested completed answers from 160 members of Prolific, obtaining a total of 152 valid answers.

*** INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ***

The answers to the survey were downloaded onto a spreadsheet for analysis. The answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed on NVivo11 using structural coding, which is rendered applicable when - the coding is driven by the research questions - (Saldaña, 2009). In addition to this, initial coding seeking to analyze qualitative data in order to identify similarities and differences in codes, followed by pattern coding that allowed for the reduction of the identified codes into a smaller number of themes, was applied (Saldaña, 2009). In doing so, answers to RQ1 and RQ2 were found. While answers to the closed-ended questions were analyzed on SPSS, codes obtained from the analysis of answers concerning perceptions towards businesses using Mafia stereotypes were re-coded quantitatively, i.e. a number from 1 to 7 was assigned to each code identified from the qualitative analysis (1 = no perceptions; 2 = ethically negative; 3 = wrong negative; 4 = business negative; 5 = neutral; 6 = relatively positive; 7 = absolutely positive). This code was then used to create a new variable in SPSS by checking, for each answer received, how it was coded in NVivo11 and then assigning the quantitative code accordingly. For instance, if the answer of a respondent was coded “wrong negative”, then the number ‘3’ was assigned to that same answer in the SPSS file, and this was done for all answers. Following this, - descriptive statistics
were calculated, means were compared through t-tests with bootstrapping, and correlation analysis was performed.

Findings

In this section, results from the qualitative and quantitative strands of research are presented. These are then merged in the discussion section.

Qualitative findings

The analysis of qualitative data enabled the categorization of respondents’ views on the use of Mafia stereotypes in business on a continuum ranging from no perceptions on one hand, to absolutely positive perceptions on the other (Figure 1).

*** INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE ***

In the sample studied, there were some people (22 individuals) who had no perception of the use of Mafia stereotypes for business purposes. Out of these respondents, only 3 stated that they had never come across the use of these stereotypes and that this was the reason why they did not have any opinion with regards to this. The other respondents in this group only stated that they did not know what to think about this.

With regards to respondents who had negative perceptions (75 in total), 24 mentioned ethical reasons in their answers; 26 mentioned that using these stereotypes was wrong, without giving any additional explanation; and 25 people based their answers on business-related reasons. The respondents that had negative perceptions based on ethical reasons tended to refer to the history of the Mafia as a criminal
organization and, in some cases, they explicitly stated that it was ethically or morally wrong to use such stereotypes. On this point, for instance, two respondents wrote:

Stupid, the kind of thing that idiot hipsters think is cool and edgy. To me it just shows that they are naïve idiots who don't care about the actual suffering of people affected by organised crime. (Participant 1)

I disagree with the use of the word 'Mafia' to sell products. It's wrong, morally, as the Mafia have been associated with so many bad things. (Participant 22)

However, in this group of respondents, there were people who felt that the use of these stereotypes would promote a culture of criminality and violence and, in a way, show indirect support to the real criminal organization. For instance, some respondents mentioned:

They are trading on an association that glorifies crime and violence and I would not support such businesses. I consider it unethical. (Participant 117)

I think it's bizarre, stupid even. I don't understand why anyone would support a criminal organization. (Participant 109)

However, not all respondents who had negative perceptions based their reasoning on ethical considerations. Indeed, 26 respondents stated that they considered this practice wrong and that it should not be allowed. For instance:

It shouldn't be allowed at all. (Participant 123)

I think it's cheap and tacky. (Participant 55)

Finally, out of the respondents who reported negative perceptions, 25 had negative perceptions related to the product or the business using it. Indeed, respondents
alluded to the negative meaning that would be passed on to these products and services. For instance, some respondents stated:

I think it would be detrimental to their business. Mafia is associated with bad press, negativity, violence and crime and as such the use of the word would reflect badly on their products or services. (Participant 61)

I think that a business should carefully consider what implications this might have on their enterprise. Mafia would invoke different responses and feelings that might be detrimental to the success of the business. It should not be used and I view it as bad taste. (Participant 115)

At the center of this continuum, some respondents (14 individuals) also reported neutral perceptions. In particular, a common element emerging from this data was that people who held these perceptions felt that the use of these stereotypes was only done for marketing purposes, and some people were linking the Mafia to popular media (e.g. movies), rather than to a criminal organization. For instance:

It's just a brand name. The Mafia is more associated with films in the UK, I think, than with a real thing. (Participant 58)

It reminds me of a Bob’s Burgers’ episode where they find out a Mafia hit took place in the restaurant and Bob doesn’t put up the plaque because he thinks it's a gimmick and then Jimmy Pesto invents a Mafia hit in his restaurant and gets more custom despite his inferior food. It's a gimmick basically. (Participant 78)

At the other end of the continuum, positive views were held by 41 respondents. As with those who reported negative perceptions, it was possible to identify two different levels of perceptions: relatively and absolutely positive. Those who had relatively positive perceptions (27 individuals) mentioned cases in which they would find the use Mafia stereotypes suitable. In particular, they would accept the use of these
stereotypes if it was done in a fun way, dependent on the product/service being
promoted and on its target market. For instance, some respondents said:

They can use it [*the idea of the Mafia for business reasons*] as much as they like, no problem. If it's used for inappropriate products like baby food or headache tablets they're unlikely to be successful. Video games, TV shows, even a clothing line would be better suited to that word. (Participant 144)

I can see that maybe it would attract some customers, but would likely put as many off. So it could be used for a company that was trying to attract a certain set of customers. I wouldn't be attracted to some product that used the name. However if it was a good product, then I might still buy it, disregarding the use of ‘Mafia’ in the name or advertising. (Participant 147)

It depends on what context. If it is light-hearted and fun then yes this can be done well. (Participant 80)

Finally, respondents who held absolutely positive perceptions (14 individuals) mentioned the fact that businesses using these stereotypes did not have any connection to the real criminal organization and, for some respondents, using these stereotypes would allow organizations to cultivate a positive image of strong, successful men. For instance, some respondents mentioned:

I don't have a problem with it [*i.e. the use of Mafia stereotypes in business*]. They aren't really the Mafia and it's only a product. (Participant 53)

A strong guy smoking a cigar with a nice suit on and with a lot of money. Girls would like to be around him. (Participant 111)

Quantitative findings

In general, the degree of the respondents’ willingness to buy tortellini (M = 1.93; SD = .964) and to eat in the restaurant (M = 2.49; SD = 1.179) were low. In particular, with regards to tortellini, 112 respondents (73.7% of the sample) chose low levels of
willingness to buy; while only 11 respondents (7.3% of the sample) said that they would be willing to buy the product; and 29 respondents (19.1% of the sample) chose the neutral option. With regards to the restaurant, 79 respondents (52% of the sample) said that would not be willing to eat there; 22 respondents (21.7% of the sample) said that they would be willing to eat there; and 40 respondents (26.3% of the sample) chose the neutral option.

In order to answer Research Question 3, a t-test for independent samples with bootstrapping was carried out. In order to do this, answers to the questions on respondents’ willingness to buy tortellini and their willingness to eat in the restaurant were used together with the quantitative codes created from the qualitative answers on perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes in business. The results of the t-test with bootstrapping can be found in Table 2.

*** INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE ***

With regards to respondents’ willingness to buy tortellini and their willingness to eat in the restaurant, the results show that there is no significant difference between the mean values of males and females. On the contrary, with regards to the perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes in business, the means of the two samples were significantly different. It is thus reasonable to assume that gender has an impact on perceptions of Mafia stereotypes. Indeed, males and females displayed slightly different scores (males: M = 4.18, SE = .24; females: M = 3.45, SE = .19). The mean difference, 0.73, BCa 95% CI [.15, 1.34] was significant: t(141.41) = 2.35, p = .02. In order to assess whether a relationship between gender and perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes in business existed, a correlation analysis based on Spearman’s coefficient
was carried out. This relationship was negatively significant ($r_s = -.178; p < .05$) meaning that there is a relationship between females and negative perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes in business.

In addition to this, a correlation analysis using Spearman’s coefficient was performed in order to assess whether or not a relationship existed between gender, perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes, and willingness to buy tortellini and eat in the restaurant. However, none of the correlations were significant. This suggests that there may be different variables at play compared to those investigated in this study. These may demonstrate a significant relationship between willingness to buy tortellini and willingness to eat in the restaurant in question.

*** INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE ***

*Merged Findings*

As this study was conducted using a mixed method, the results were merged in the interpretation stage of the study by comparing them in a summary table (Table 4) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)

*** INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE ***

As shown, both sets of findings for RQ1 showed that respondents in the sample had different views with regards to the use of Mafia stereotypes in marketing. In particular, the qualitative data showed that respondents’ views were quite nuanced, especially within the negative and positive categories. The quantification of qualitative codes made it possible to calculate percentual frequencies, which show the fairly even split of answers across categories. One of the reasons for these results is the fact that
some of the respondents seemed to have a romanticized view of Mafia, i.e. considering it as a phenomenon typical of movies or something reminiscent of the past. On this point, one respondent wrote:

I think popular culture such as *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather* has romanticised society's perception of the Mafia significantly. To me, having so many products name themselves with ‘Mafia’ is hardly surprising. (Participant 136)

As far as RQ2 is concerned, the quantitative findings showed that, overall, both willingness to buy tortellini and willingness to eat in the restaurant were low. In order to understand the reasons behind these results, qualitative answers were also analyzed. For both the tortellini and the restaurant, graphical elements (i.e. the brand name or the logo) were the most cited. To exemplify these points, some respondents wrote, with regards to tortellini:

It is just crazy. I wouldn't buy anything where the manufacturers thought it was appropriate to associate the product with a weapon. What on earth has the Mafia to do with pasta or the quality of pasta? (Participant 16)

It looks odd and unnecessary to have the gun on the packaging. It does not look like a modern or reputable brand. (Participant 3)

Similarly, for the case of the restaurant, two respondents wrote:

I would not enter a restaurant with Mafia on the window. (Participant 74)

I don’t like the name it brings up negative thoughts. (Participant 38)
The second reason most frequently used to explain respondents’ low willingness to buy tortellini and/or eat in the restaurant was ethical motivations. In particular, respondents saw the use of these stereotypes as a way to glorify a criminal organization and, for some of them, it was important not to show support to this. A reason for this could be that the glorification of a criminal organization contrasted with respondents’ personal values, which is one of the reasons why consumers decide to practice political consumerism (Bossy, 2014; Gotlieb, 2015; Rivaroli et al., 2018). Respondent disapproval was highlighted in some quotes related to both the tortellini and the restaurant. For instance, in the case of the tortellini, some respondents wrote:

A product with Mafia- and violence-related imagery implies an acceptance of violence. It might be reasonable to assume the producer considers this violence reasonable and I don't want to support that. (Participant 120)

It is clearly wrong to glorify the Mafia in this way and use it as a selling point for a product from Sicily. It's just a bit weird. (Participant 146)

Similarly, in the case of the restaurant, some respondents wrote:

Even if La Mafia has no direct involvement with the Mafia, I do not approve of Mafia activity and feel that eating there would be a tacit approval. (Participant 120)

The La Mafia in the window puts me off, as it either implies glorification of the criminal enterprise, a theme relating to that particular type of criminal enterprise, or ownership by the criminal enterprise, none of which I typically aspire to support. (Participant 102)

Finally, for RQ3, the quantitative findings highlighted a significant relationship between gender and perceptions towards Mafia stereotypes in business and evidenced a gender difference -. This has been confirmed through the analysis of qualitative data. Indeed, male perceptions were equally split between positive (32) and negative views (30). On
the contrary, female perceptions were much more unbalanced when it came to negative perceptions (45) versus positive perceptions (10). A possible reason behind this gender difference could be that men may be more drawn towards the image of a mafioso as these individuals have, in fictional media, tended to be depicted as successful people. For instance, one male participant referred to the image of a mafioso when expressing his thought about the use of Mafia stereotypes in business:

A strong guy smoking a cigar with a nice suit on and with a lot of money. Girls would like to be around him. (Participant 111)

It thus seems that some men see these stereotypes as a way of transferring the macho image of the product/service to themselves. On the contrary, women tend to be more considerate of the suffering related to the Mafia as a criminal organization. If this is true, then we could assume that in this sample men are more influenced by fictional media than women, thus holding a romanticized view of the Mafia. The majority of women may have been more influenced by non-fictional media and, as a result, hold an image of the Mafia that is more similar to reality, leading them to be less accepting of the use of Mafia stereotypes in business. Hence, these results support, to a certain extent, previous research on political consumerism which has shown that females are more likely to be political consumers (Llopis-Goig, 2013; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Zhang, 2015).

Considering the exploratory nature of this research and the findings presented, it is possible to introduce some propositions that future research could further test:

P1: Acceptance of Mafia stereotypes for business purposes varies according to gender;

P2: Perceptions of the adoption of Mafia stereotypes for business can be categorized into a continuum, from no perceptions to absolutely positive;
P3: Perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes in business are influenced by the type of information sources used by a person to get information on the Mafia and other criminal organizations.
Conclusions

This research is, to the best of the author’s knowledge, the first attempt to study consumers’ perceptions towards the use of Mafia stereotypes for commercial purposes. Although this is a new area of research, this study has shown that there are ethical reasons underpinning consumers’ acceptance of these stereotypes. As such, the main contribution of this study is related to the fact that political consumerism should not only focus on more traditional issues, such as environmental or social issues (e.g. child labor or sweatshops), but it should also focus on a new area represented by legality issues. It is important to expand the focus of political consumerism in order to take into consideration these issues and better understand consumers’ perceptions towards organized crime and towards legality more broadly. As a result, the definition of political consumerism proposed by Stolle and Micheletti (2013), should be expanded so that it encompasses these issues of legality. In doing so, an emerging sub-area of political consumerism, one focused on legality, could be investigated in more detail.

From a practitioner’s point of view, this research can be used by non-profit organizations promoting legality and fighting organized crime. Indeed, it suggests that these organizations should be more strongly communicating the issues related to the development of organized crime, especially to audiences living in countries that have been less affected by organized crime. In this way, it would be possible to raise awareness of the problem and, at the same time, debunk the myth that Mafias are only found in movies and that Mafiosi are successful people. This should influence consumers’ acceptance of the use of Mafia stereotypes in marketing and change the marketing practices of the businesses using them. In particular, communication campaigns could be planned to raise awareness of organized crime and consider the inappropriateness of the use of Mafia stereotypes for business purposes. In addition to
this, non-profit organizations could plan more broader social marketing campaigns attempting to discourage consumers from buying products and services adopting those stereotypes. To carry out these two activities, it would be necessary to plan actions specifically and respectively orientated towards men and women, due to the different perceptions that these two groups hold regarding the use of Mafia stereotypes for business reasons. The aforementioned communication campaigns developed by non-profit organizations could be created in conjunction with public sector organizations so that these types of campaigns are not overlooked. Moreover, public sector organizations could prohibit the use of Mafia stereotypes in marketing through the introduction of laws or other legal requirements in their countries. Finally, businesses that wish to adopt these stereotypes should carry out market research in order to understand current and potential consumers’ views. Indeed, there may be people who would boycott the products and services offered by the business (if the business has a portfolio of brands) because they do not wish to support the use of these stereotypes in any of these brands. Moreover, businesses should consider the impact that the adoption of these stereotypes may have on female consumers as their use may disincentivize women from buying products and services commercialized through these stereotypes.

**Limitations and future research**

Considering the exploratory nature of this research and the use of a convenience sample, the results cannot be extended to the whole population of the UK. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the data in this research was collected from respondents residing in the UK at the time this research was conducted. As the UK is not a country that is heavily affected by organized crime, it is thus possible to assume that the answers provided were affected by this and by the extent of the knowledge (or lack thereof) that respondents had regarding the Mafia phenomenon. For this reason, we could assume
that different results could be obtained if similar research were to be conducted in
countries in which organized crime is more widespread, such as Italy. Hence, future
research should therefore replicate this study in different countries to see if results are
consistent. Moreover, considering the lack of research on this topic, future research
carried out through in-depth interviews would allow for a deeper understanding of the
issues studied here and would also facilitate the study of the sources of information used
by consumers and their impact on consumers’ perceptions towards Mafia stereotypes. It
would then be possible to understand whether or not there are any differences between
those who rely on non-fiction media in comparison to those who mainly rely on
fictional sources of information, such as movies.

In this study, a fully mixed concurrent dominant design was used. However,
considering the wide range of mixed methods available, it would be worth adopting a
different type of mixed method design, such as a sequential mixed method (qual →
QUAN), in order to develop a scale with which to measure Mafia acceptance and Mafia
stereotype acceptance among consumers.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that only consumers’ perceptions have
been investigated, while actual behavior has not been taken into consideration. As a
result, future research should address this and should be focused on consumers who
have actually purchased products and/or services that have used Mafia stereotypes in
their marketing. In doing this, it will also be possible for researchers to understand
whether or not the attitude–behavior gap exists in the case of these types of products
and services. It will also be possible to re-assess whether or not gender and perceptions
towards the use of Mafia stereotypes in business are related to willingness to buy
tortellini and willingness to eat in the investigated restaurant, as this study has
highlighted. Furthermore, this study focused on perceptions towards Mafia stereotypes
and gender as two variables that correlate with willingness to buy tortellini and willingness to eat in the investigated restaurant. Not all of these relationships were significant, however, and so it is not possible to be certain that no other variables had a significant correlation, such as income, education, product/service price, or perceived quality. Hence, this research is not conclusive in the presentation of factors that may affect willingness to buy products and services that actively use Mafia stereotypes in their commercialization. Thus, future research should study the correlation between other different variables and consumers’ willingness to buy these products and services.

A final limitation refers to the possible social desirability bias that may have affected respondents’ answers. Indeed, considering the sensitive topic under investigation, it is impossible to guarantee that respondents did not provide the answers that they thought would be more socially acceptable to the researcher.
Reference list


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