Cultivating media relations through corporate memory: the experience of heritage brands

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The rise of heritage branding

“Any brand, but especially those that are struggling, can benefit from going back to its roots and identifying what made it special and successful in the first place. [They] help define these brands today and add value, especially when they are re-interpreted in a contemporary light”.

(Aaker, 2004)

“By brand heritage we mean a dimension of a brand’s identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, and particularly in an organisational belief that its history is important».

(Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007)
Brand heritage mix

Objective of the study

The paper aims

- to investigate what role strategic media relations can play in supporting a heritage branding process

- to explore the ways communication of corporate memory can foster quality and visibility in the media and the cultivation of long-lasting relationships with journalists

RQs
Research questions

RQ1
• What are the most effective communicative contexts and channels supporting a heritage branding strategy addressed to media relations?

RQ2
• What strategic function can be played by heritage branded contents in cultivating quality relationships with the media system?
Methods

Approach

- multi-method
- multi-case study

Stages of investigation

- interdisciplinary literature review
- review of case studies and best practices
- direct observations and analysis of corporate documents, publishing, and communication materials
- in-depth interviews from a selected panel of Italian historical companies in the food & beverage sector
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>YEAR OF FOUNDATION</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>MAIN PRODUCT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amarelli</td>
<td>1731</td>
<td>Rossano Calabro (Cosenza)</td>
<td>Licorice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birra Peroni</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantine Giorgio</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Torgiano (Perugia)</td>
<td>Wine</td>
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<td>Lungarotti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maglio Arte Dolciaria</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Maglie (Lecce)</td>
<td>Chocolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelino</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>Sulmona (L’Aquila)</td>
<td>Sugared almonds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poli</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Schiavon (Vicenza)</td>
<td>Grappa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sella &amp; Mosca</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Alghero (Sassari)</td>
<td>Wine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The historical archive as a content provider

“To have created an historical archive means the opportunity of collecting historical materials, organize them, and to make them available also for the media system”.

“The historical archive is the «acquarium» of our brand storytelling: both public relation and marketing department come and fish from there”.

“In a small company the connection between the press office and the historical archive is direct and immediate. On the contrary, within large companies the press office finds difficult to interconnect with the historical archive and, thus, to collect materials which could be immediately available for communication activities”.

RQ1
The spectacularization of corporate history

“Both the historical archive and museum represent an inexhaustible source. It’s not simple for them, however, to raise media attention: it’s necessary to effectively package the information about such centers. […] We have historical materials in profusion to communicate to the press, but the difficult is to organize it in a way the journalists could find interesting”.

“Using the museum as a communication tool has meant, above all, to bring it outside. At first, it was possible to increase its visibility as digital heritage, by means of both corporate website, restyled and enriching with a museum’s virtual tour, and the communication in the different social networks. Then, three years ago we began to bring the museum outside especially by means of exhibits”.

“We celebrated a brilliant centennial together with employees, journalists, consumers, suppliers. In such occasions, you need to be careful and to not exclude anyone. It was a wonderful and exciting moment for us, a real event: we chose to let the public participate in a ceremony which is actually very intimate”.

University of Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences
“Some companies can prove a long history, some other shorter; the importance is to tell a true story, because only what is true can stand against time, while invented stories are destined to fall, sooner or later. Thus, for resisting in the information market and being attractive for the media system as well as for other stakeholders, you need to be credible”.

“The press demands numbers: if there isn’t a number, there is not a news. At the same time, you need to give the press a story, and it must be an interesting story to tell”.
Brand, territory, Italian character

“Corporate setting is entirely committed to organize activities involving also the external context”.

“Our quality depends on the symbiosis between the company and its town. They are two symbiotic realities, as corporate history is also the history of both Pelino’s family and Sulmona town”.

“One task, for the press office, is to promote strategic partnerships, for example with other organizations sharing some values with us: history, quality, Italian character”.

University of Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences
“Media excite for small realities, which are little known or unique in their own genre. They spontaneously talk about us, want to come and visit, ask if we have news, review our products. Even the financial press contacts us, as we make trend also from that point of view”.

“Saying the truth, the journalists usually attempt to contact us more than the contrary. [...] We limit to make ourselves available when they ask to make a service on the museum. [...] Thus, our promotional activity consists in housing every professional who is interested in our history: we arrange accommodation, a person who could guide them, explain our history, and satisfy all curiosities”.

“In most of the cases, when the media decide to make a piece or a service on our company or museum, they act autonomously and not because we have stimulated them. Of course, the press office represents the first contact and, at a later stage, the structure accommodating journalists and offering them all the materials they need”.

Media relation from a «push>> to «pull>> approach
“To arrive to the international press has been the major satisfaction for us: I’m referring, for example, to the resonance we have had in Japan”.

“The paradox is the following: our excellences are recognized abroad, while in Italy they hardly emerge. This is a very curious situation: the “New York Times” is due to declare our Museum of Wine in Torgiano as the best Italian one in its category”.
When the past makes news

New digital platforms offer companies the opportunity to play an innovative publishing role as culture and information producers, in order to reach a potentially global audience.

Traditional media have become more dependent than in the past to companies and other social sources providing informative contents.

Companies are searching for quality branded contents that could be offered the media system as well as other opinion leaders.
Conclusions

Study pointed out the importance and the specificity of heritage branding to cultivate relationships with mass media and digital influencer.

Can Historical companies PR and communication model be “exportable” and “sustainable”?

Can the rise of “Made in Italy” represent a global heritage brand? what about a possible “Expo 2015 effect” on PR strategies?
Grazie

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