

Made in Italy between «invention» and tradition. The hi-storytelling of past advertising and communication campaigns in the context of corporate historical archives and museums

Abstract

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The paper discusses some explorative research investigating the creative re-use of past advertising and communication campaigns in the context of corporate historical archives and museums.

From a preliminary literature review, the research analyzed in the field the experiences promoted by four historical Italian companies, contributing to the visual tradition and heritage of the so-called «Made in Italy». Their own corporate museums and historical archives were examined in depth in order to focus the specific patrimonialization and management processes addressed to reactivate – even in forms which are different from the original ones – the communicative function played by historical advertising billboards, television and radio commercials, photos, packaging, corporate movies.

1 – Advertising and corporate communication from past to present

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The explorative research presented in this paper investigates the creative re-use of past advertising and communication campaigns in the context of corporate historical archives and museums.

The phenomenon of company historical archives and museums is not new in the international scenario (Coleman, 1943; Danilov, 1991, 1992), but rather unique in its genre and strongly emerging in Italy. Indeed, from the nineties and especially in the new millennium, those corporate centers have seen a real effervescence in the country (Amari, 2001; Bonfiglio-Dosio, 2003; Bulegato, 2008), designing a network which has no equal worldwide for the capillarity and relevance of its expressions (Amari, 2001; Bonfiglio-Dosio, 2003; Bulegato, 2008; Gambardella, 2013), contributing to an already copious Italian heritage of archives and museums.

Corporate historical archives and museums, preserving and communicating Italian economic and industrial history, are extending their presence nowadays in most of the country and market sectors[1].

They impose themselves as a distinctive feature of the Italian entrepreneurial tradition, as they involve not only the most ancient private companies and those which are family-owned, but a widening sector of the Italian market players (Bulegato, 2008; Giaretta, 2004; Rossato, 2013).

At the same time, corporate historical archives and museums define a very fragmentary universe and, indeed, a still largely underground dorsal of the so called «Made in Italy» tradition (Martino, 2015). More in general, both the study and the valorization of companies' cultural heritage remained for a long time delimited in professional and specialized contexts, often connected with specific corporate or associative initiatives, to gain only recently a wider disciplinary breadth and attention from academic scholars.

Corporate museums and historical archives can be considered two very atypical institutes in the scenario of cultural heritage. Today the phenomenon especially needs an organic sociological analysis, addressed to explore the crucial identity and memory role played by corporate historical archives and museums both for the single organizations they belong to and for the surrounding territory and stakeholders' community (Martino, 2013, 2015). It seems not less relevant to reflect on the possible contribution of such centers to the sedimentation of a distinctive cultural and visual tradition for Italian companies, in this way filling up with positive values and contents a Made in Italy concept too often reduced to a pure rhetorical and surface communicative phenomenon (Bucci et al., 2011; Ferraresi, 2014; Morace, Santoro, 2014): indeed, they contribute to conserve the territory's cultural memory in a selective and dynamic way, and to transmit

it to the present, in this way documenting a very expressive cross section of the Italian companies' history and communication.

Not by coincidence, the studies investigating corporate historical archives and museums are due to give specific attention to the processes concerning the patrimonialization of the advertising objects and their permanence in the present (De Iulio et al., 2017, p. 176). Such dynamics reactivate – even in forms which are different from the original – the communicative function played by historical advertising billboards, photos, packaging, corporate movies, television and radio commercials, by recirculating those objects and attributing new functions to them from their intrinsic historical and identity value (rather than a purely aesthetic and artistic one) for both organizations and stakeholders.

In particular, the literature review in the sector indicates, even marginally, the experience of some historical archives and museums which show themselves to be very active in conserving and valuing the corporate communication campaigns of the past, to which they dedicate specific spaces and activities (Amari, 2001; Bulegato, 2008; Martino, 2013; Montemaggi, Severino, 2007; TCI, 2008). As much marginal, but in any case, relevant is the mention of the concrete ways in which the memory of past communication campaigns can insert itself in a company's daily life and current activities, offering a precious source of inspiration for those corporate processes and sectors characterized by the highest creative potential, among which communication and marketing, design, research and development (Bulegato, 2008; Gilodi, 2002).

2 – Explorative research on historical archives and museums

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From such a scenario, the following pages discuss the main results of an explorative study investigating the role played by past advertising and corporate communication campaigns in the context of two major institutions conserving and valuing corporate memory and culture: on the one hand, the corporate historical archive, as a privileged source of organizations' memory and intelligence (Bonfiglio-Dosio, 2003; The National Archives, 2009, Wexler, 2002); on the other, the corporate museum, with its natural vocation as *identity medium* (Martino, 2015) and major «communicator» (Hooper Greenhill, 1994; Simon, 2000) of a company's history and cultural identity toward the territory and all the stakeholders (Amari, 2001; Bulegato, 2008; Gilodi, 2002).

For this purpose, the study is based on a review of the international scientific literature on corporate culture and identity, in order to examine different disciplinary approaches to several key topics. In particular, among the most relevant contributions it is possible to find those expressing an emerging attention for the valorization and communication of corporate memory and heritage (Montemaggi & Severino, 2007; Riviezzo et al., 2016; Urde et al., 2007; Wexler, 2002), with special reference to the central role played by corporate museums and historical archives as providers of both corporate and collective identity (Amari, 2001; Bonfiglio-Dosio, 2003; Bulegato, 2008; Gambardella, 2013; Negri, 2003); the research tradition dedicated to the phenomenon of historical-family business and its decisive connections with topics such as corporate culture (Schein, 1985, 2000; Gagliardi, 1995), ethics and longevity (de Geus, 1997; Giaretta, 2004; Rossato, 2013; Stadler, 2011; Zocchi, 2007, 2009, 2010); of no less importance, the studies addressed to investigate, from different disciplinary perspectives, the entrepreneurial and communicative specificities characterizing Made in Italy culture (Bettiol, 2015; Bucci et al., 2011; Ferraresi, 2014; Giumelli, 2016; Morace & Santoro, 2014; Vinti, 2007; Vinti & Bigatti, 2010).

From the hypothesis and the state of art already suggested by previous case studies and research (such as, in particular, De Iulio et al., 2017), the field research analyzed in-depth the point of view expressed by some special witnesses of the phenomenon: curators and coordinators of some historical archives and museums connected to as many Italian historical companies, doing their business in several productive sectors and strongly committed to valuing their own corporate and communication heritage. Of such cultural centers, this study wanted to examine several features such as the presence of documental

sections dedicated to corporate historical communication, the kind of objects they conserve, the specific processes of creation, conservation and management of such collections by specialized professionals, working also in connection with other organizational functions and actors.

Data were collected from a selected group of companies affiliated to the *Museimpresa*[2] association, representing the national network for those Italian companies, which are especially historical and family-owned (Giaretta, 2004; Rossato, 2013), promoting their own corporate museum and/or historical archive. From this context and also on the basis of previous studies by the author (see, in particular, Martino, 2010, 2013, 2015; Martino, Lovari, 2016), it was possible to select a small, but expressive sample of Italian companies committed to activating and cultivating their own corporate identity and heritage (Montemaggi, Severino, 2007; Negri, 2003; Riviezzo et al., 2016; Urde et al., 2007), representing some of the most well-known and appreciated experiences in the sector. Indeed, they distinguish themselves, on the one hand, for a relevant and long-standing associative participation and, on the other hand, for promoting innovative experiences of cultural valorization and communication, which have been investigated in specialized studies dedicated to companies' heritage (Bulegato, 2008; Martino, 2013) and also received specific awards and acknowledgements.

Privileged witnesses were involved from four historical Italian companies – *Amarelli*, *Birra Peroni*, *Ferragamo* and *Pirelli* – promoting a corporate historical archive and/or museum affiliated to *Museimpresa* and standing (with the only exception of *Amarelli*) just among the association's founders (**Table 1**), in this way contributing with a pioneering role to launch a real collective «movement» to rediscover the heritage of Italian companies at the beginning of the new millennium. The four selected corporate contexts are very different one from the other, as they represent the traditional sectors of Italian entrepreneurial excellence, such as especially fashion (*Ferragamo*) and food & beverage (*Amarelli* and *Birra Peroni*, the latter today as part of a large multinational group)[3], as well as other sectors less conventionally associated to Made in Italy concept, but however relevant in the Italian economy (*Fondazione Symbola* et al., 2017), among which in particular those connected to technological innovation (*Pirelli*).

Case study research used multiple sources of evidence. Some focalized interviews (about 45 minutes long) were conducted in November-December with the curators of corporate historical archives and museums by telephone and, in one case, in presence. All interviews were digitally recorded and literally transcribed with the formal permission of the interviewees. Transcripts were analyzed according to an interpretative and thematic approach (Gianturco, 2005).

Table 1 – Companies and privileged witnesses in the research panel

Company	Year of foundation	Main product	Microsite	Interviewee
Amarelli	1773	Flour	Historical Archive and Museum of Licorice	Paolo Sestini
Birra Peroni	1846	Beer	Daniela Bojca, Historical archive and museum	Daniela Bojca
Ferragamo	1927	Shoes	Salvatore Ferragamo Historical Archive and Museum	Valeria Paganò
Pirelli	1872	Tires	Paolo Riccio, Fondazione Riboldi, Vice Executive	Paolo Riccio

Not of less importance, the results of the survey were supported by a detailed context analysis, developed by means of direct observation of the corporate centers investigated in the study, as well as by analyzing the communication materials they conserve, their official websites and the cultural and communication activities they promote around those collections. In this way, it was possible to explore in-depth the processes activated by corporate historical archives and museums to conserve and value, in addition to other kinds of objects and collections they contain, the tradition concerning corporate advertising and communication of the past promoted by single companies or brands. This was possible through several opportunities: from the creation and organization of dedicated historical collections to their permanent and temporary exposure to the public; from safeguarding and research strategies to those promoting

networking and cultural communication activities both on- and offline.

3 – The historicization and patrimonialization of corporate communication

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The four case studies developed in this research made it possible to investigate in the field the special role played by both historical archives and museums as «incubators» and «communicators» of corporate culture and memory: two centers which are due to carry on, even with different prerogatives, a revisiting and creative re-using of a company's identity values, symbols and icons which the past transmits to the present (De Iulio et al., 2017).

In particular, the explorative study aimed at understanding the way corporate advertising and visual tradition could become, both on- and offline, an identity asset to be actualized and valued in the present. From such a perspective, the survey focused on the experiences of some well-known Italian companies promoting iconic advertising campaigns in the past (in particular, *Birra Peroni* and *Pirelli*), as well as today some corporate historical archives and museums distinguishing themselves – as already underlined – for a long-standing associative commitment, as well as for offering quality services to the public and for gaining attention from studies and awards in the sector.

The companies investigated in this study are different for both productive and geographic sector, as well as for the extent of their own cultural policies, promoting the creation of a corporate historical archive: in three cases out of four, this is also integrated by a corporate museum (*Amarelli*, *Birra Peroni*, *Ferragamo*) while, in just one, it is part of a wider corporate foundation (*Pirelli*). Beyond this variety and in line with the suggestions of previous sector studies (Bulegato, 2008; De Iulio et al., 2017), such testimonies converge in indicating some common aspects characterizing the «cycle» promoting a creative re-use of a company's past advertising and communication campaign in the context of its own corporate museum and/or historical archive.

The results of this study suggest, first of all, that a specific corporate communication «style» and «personality» expressed by advertising and visual campaigns can be a decisive key of access to an organization's biography. Indeed, the most representative campaigns and the icons condensing, also on a visual level, corporate heritage and history can become a salient narrative line in order to present to the public the story of an organization, especially when a company's museum and/or historical archive is directly dependent on the organizational function/structure managing corporate communication policies and activities. Such a centrality is common to all historical archives and museums investigated here, dedicating specific documental and exhibitiv sections to corporate advertising campaigns and other communication and visual materials coming from the past:

Throughout the history of *Ferragamo*, it is possible to retrace a multiplicity of narrative paths, which all find representation in the corporate historical archive and museum. One of them narrates corporate communication at large, not limiting itself to the advertising tradition of the brand. Not by coincidence, the museum was born under the corporate communication function (*Ferragamo*).

One of the three sections articulating *Birra Peroni's* corporate museum is particularly dedicated to marketing communication and advertising campaigns of the past. By doing this, we want corporate communication to play a strategic role throughout the company's history, up to electing it as a specific interpretative key also in the experience of guided visits offered to the public. It is a minor, but still relevant, exhibitiv section in our project (*Birra Peroni*).

All our activity is based on the recovery and valorization of *Pirelli's* corporate heritage. The historical archive of *Pirelli* Foundation is made up of about 3.5 linear km of documents, audiovisuals, photos and many other materials concerning corporate communication such as advertising sketches, catalogues, corporate publishing, visuals, communication campaigns celebrating corporate anniversaries of the past (

Pirelli).

In the cultural centers examined in this study, historical advertising is part of a wider heritage concerning corporate communication *tout court*. In particular, the most representative corporate identity symbols and real icons of the past, often impressed in the collective imagination, have a special pre-eminence within the documental and exhibitivive structure developed by corporate historical archives and museums, as testimonies of the past condensing corporate culture and history:

Every time the corporate historical archive and museum promotes an exhibition or another kind of event, we aim to value especially the historical «*Caroselli*». They left an impression in the Italian collective imagination together with *Birra Peroni's* «Blonde», which was invented some decades ago by the well-known advertiser Armando Testa and still remains today our most well-known communicative icon (*Birra Peroni*).

Our corporate museum offers an exhibition of all historical product labels, in some cases we still use today. Furthermore, it conserves a series of historical boxes/tin cans for packaging licorice. We feel especially attached to the ones made of metal: produced for the first time in 1919, they represented an absolute innovation for that time, later re-proposed in the sixties (*Amarelli*).

The rediscovery of corporate history and heritage often tends to mature in an adventurous way and not without difficulties for its promoters. Indeed, as several studies suggest, far from being contained and crystallized in a «reliquary» of the past, corporate memory must be considered as a *social and political process*, constantly negotiated with the stakeholders – who are both internal and external to an organization – interested in affirming their own «vision» of its history (Parker, 2002). On the one hand, organizations create their own collective memory by means of a continuous process of conservation, rewriting and selective cancellation of the past (not without conflicts and internal struggles for power), from the «official» aspects that corporate management is interested in transmitting to posterity (Kransdorff, 1998, 2006; Parker, 2002). On the other hand, the recovery of corporate communication of the past can acquire, in some cases, the form of a passionate collective adventure: a choral experience, often seeing the involvement of the internal community as well as of those external publics which are relevant to the company itself, among which collectors, partners, and long-standing clients.

In particular, previous studies in the sector suggest that organizations tend to rediscover their own historical memory especially when they are near to celebrating relevant corporate anniversaries (especially centenaries) and, in general, when they have to face moments of discontinuity and deep change in their own life (Martino, 2013), requesting a real identity «re-foundation»:

When *Birra Peroni* celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1996, it launched a real «treasure hunt» in order to search for testimonies of the past and to write, first of all, a corporate biographical book[4]. The factory in Bari contributed by sending, among other things, some enormous paper books documenting the company's historical advertising tradition in both the local and national press, as well as sponsorship activities and local events. In the same way, senior management also gathered a collection of all press clippings over time. Last but not least, thanks to communication agencies, which were our advisors, we recovered the historical documentation preparing the advertising campaigns promoted, during the sixties, seventies and eighties, for the several marketing brands belonging to *Birra Peroni's* portfolio (*Birra Peroni*).

In the past when the valorization of corporate heritage was not so trendy as today, my brother-in-law Giorgio Amarelli began selecting some historical documents, starting from the most ancient packaging

boxes and labels conserved by our company, in order to exhibit them to the public. We had spaces full of those documental materials and, after the death of my brother-in-law in 1986, we wanted to follow his idea of creating a corporate museum almost as a form of moral obligation to his work (*Amarelli*).

After the creation of their own corporate historical archive, carried on in general not without difficulties such as the ones described above, the organizations examined in this study then wanted to invest in making the activities concerning the acquisition and organization of the new documental materials more continuous and fluid over time. Indeed, fostering historical corporate heritage especially requires valuing the historical archive's role and strengthening its function as corporate «memory» and «intelligence» capable of preserving and reorganizing the past of an organization, to make it an intangible asset supporting a company's present and future experiences. This opportunity is well represented by the fashion industry, where companies traditionally use historical archives to provide a continuous recovery process of symbols and «citations» of their own cultural identity[5], also in connection with education and professional apprenticeship systems (Bulegato, 2008).

The companies investigated affirm, in particular, that they have a specific internal procedure prescribing to deposit all current documents, produced especially by creative departments, in the historical archive, in order to integrate the new acquisitions in their own corporate heritage according to a continuous cycle:

A specific internal procedure exists to make all communication materials, produced in the different countries where *Ferragamo* does its business, immediately flow into our corporate historical archive. In this way, seasonal advertising campaigns enter in real time into corporate heritage (*Ferragamo*).

The cycle concerning the safeguarding and valorization of historical corporate communication campaigns and objects requires specific activities to conserve and catalog a variety of documental materials. The digitalization process plays a strategic role, influencing upstream the same choice of the kind of analogical corporate documents to be transposed into a digital format (De Iulio et al., 2017, 182), as it depends on the economic and technical-professional resources which are available in a specific moment, as well as on the real state of conservation of the collections.

At the same time, the digitalization and valorization processes concerning corporate historical communication can be supported nowadays by dedicated «networks» and collective platforms promoted in the sector. Among them, it is possible to mention, in particular, the National Archive of Corporate Cinema (ANCI) in Ivrea[6] and its own web-tv channel. Such opportunities were suggested, among the others, by *Birra Peroni*:

Thanks to an agreement with the National Archive of Corporate Cinema (ANCI), about 1,500 corporate films – concerning the historical *Caroselli*, audiovisual commercials and corporate movies conserved by *Birra Peroni*'s historical archive – have been restored, reversed in a digital format and, in this way, saved from deterioration. Indeed, it is necessary to conserve those materials in the right environment, ensuring them for example the right climate conditions of humidity, because most of them are flammable (*Birra Peroni*).

4 – Contexts and tools for a creative re-use of corporate historical communication

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The digitalization process does not limit itself to promoting the conservation and recirculation of historical documental materials, but rather offers new and decisive opportunities to value corporate heritage, by engaging a public which can today be wider and more global in comparison to the past, as it includes in particular the young users of the web (Martino, Lovari, 2016). Indeed, an interactive fruition of Italian companies' heritage is re-launched nowadays by a multiplicity of collective online platforms[7]: in such

initiatives, promoted especially during the last decade (Martino, 2013), single organizations can subscribe and participate, to join an organized network linking companies to a public of curious and passionate people.

However, as clearly suggested by one of the interviews, the web appears particularly sensitive and reactive towards those historical and heritage contents concerning companies and marketing brands. As in the case of *Birra Peroni*, the historical archive tends to act as a provider of historical materials (in particular, images), by making them available both for the internal functions managing corporate and marketing communication and/or for the specialized web agencies, capable of ensuring their online diffusion:

The diffusion of those vintage and historical icons, reminding us of a company's past communication, is really effective on social platforms. For example, by sharing the image of our founder Giovanni Peroni we had enormous success, as it was spread throughout different social networks (*Birra Peroni*).

Thanks to an infinite digital reproducibility, corporate communication of the past, conserved by companies' historical archives, can be actualized and re-used in a creative way in a multiplicity of narrative and relational contexts: among which, corporate sites, web and social networks, advertising campaigns, traditional publishing (corporate books, house organs and magazines, manuals and reports etc.), events (in particular, corporate anniversaries, exhibitions, cultural and formative events), logos and corporate identification system, audiovisual (corporate videos, reportages and fiction), points of purchase and product system (labels, packaging, merchandising, historical collections etc.; Martino, 2013; Martino, Lovari, 2016; Montemaggi, Severino, 2007). Indeed, such an attitude to communicate corporate history according to a *transmedia* approach (Jenkins, 2006), by means of a potentially endless *hi-storytelling* activity, is common to all companies involved in this study, which were selected just for the special attention they chose to pay to corporate communication tradition and heritage within their own historical archive and/or museum and, more in general, in the narrative concerning official corporate biography. In particular, all the companies investigated reserve to historical advertising and communication campaigns a special visibility on their own official website. This is the case, for example, of companies such as *Birra Peroni* and *Pirelli*, showing their own corporate history by means of interactive timelines and online chronologies, braiding several multimedia contents among which images, photos and historical movies. In addition, *Pirelli* also developed an online historical archive, consultable on their corporate foundation's website[8]; a second special project is, then, the one promoting since 2012 a vast scale patrimonialization and digitalization activity of corporate communication, to restore and make available online the 131 numbers of the historical illustrated corporate magazine «*Pirelli: rivista di informazione e di tecnica*», published from 1948 to 1972.

Furthermore, the reference to historical advertising and visual communication is used strategically as a source of inspiration for other kinds of current corporate projects, promoted both on- and offline. On the one hand, the creative re-use of historical campaigns tends to privilege the product system, especially inspiring its packaging and graphic labels; on the other, the citation of the past often extends to merchandising, points-of-purchase outfitting and, not least, advertising campaigns supporting new product launches:

Historical collections reminding us of corporate communication and advertising campaigns of the past are consciously used as a source of inspiration for current communication activities. In particular, we draw from the historical archive in order to support the marketing department when launching new products (*Pirelli*).

Amarelli's historical product labels are in part exhibited in the corporate museum and in part conserved in some dedicated binders, saving them from deterioration. Past corporate iconography is actualized in the

product boxes/tin cans we still sell nowadays, as they are highly requested by the market just to testify a corporate and cultural tradition (*Amarelli*).

Especially on occasion of a new marketing launch, the re-use of historical communication codes and symbols can facilitate the awareness by consumers of a new product and its packaging (Nesurini, 2009):

We found a source of inspiration for current communication activities not only in the old advertising campaigns, but especially in the corporate iconography concerning historical packages conserved by the historical archive. For example, an occasion for working in close synergy with the marketing department was the campaign promoted in 2016 to re-launch *Itala Pilsen*, a historical Paduan brand born in 1919: on that occasion, the historical archive had the task of recovering and regaining, when possible, not only the advertising campaigns of the past, but the historical information at large concerning the brand we wanted to «reawaken» (*Birra Peroni*).

Another privileged context for re-using historical corporate communication is, then, internal relations, involving the various components of a company's community. Corporate communication and the specific storytelling dedicated to its evolution over time can support specific formative and orientation initiatives, aiming to engage employees in corporate values and culture:

We usually narrate the history of our company and its communication to both new and actual employees, by referring to the advertising campaigns we wanted to conserve and digitalize in the historical archive (*Ferragamo*).

Further and prestigious channels valuing corporate communication campaigns of the past are, then, corporate books and biographies, in some cases just dedicated to communication topics. Several projects of this kind have been promoted, for example, by a historical protagonist of the Italian and international advertising tradition such as *Pirelli*:

We conserve more than two hundred original sketches, which have been restored and digitalized. Such a heritage started off in 2015 with a specific book, expressively entitled *Una Musa tra le Ruote*^[9], narrating *Pirelli's* corporate communication tradition from the sixties. In 2017, the new advertising documents we restored were object of another book, *La Pubblicità con la P maiuscola*, retracing the history of *Pirelli's* ads from the seventies^[10] (*Pirelli*).

Not less importantly, companies tend to promote specific valorization activities dedicated to their own historical communication in the context of retrospectives and exhibitions, hosted in the corporate head office as well as in prestigious independent cultural centers. Such an opportunity was reported by several interviewees:

Corporate historical communication campaigns animated specific retrospectives, hosted in *Pirelli* Foundation's head office as well as by independent cultural institutions. For example, in 2011 we organized in the Triennale Design Museum in Milan an exhibition entitled *L'Anima di Gomma*^[11], narrating *Pirelli's* history through corporate advertising campaigns, photos and historical visuals. The event, focusing especially on the relationship between *Pirelli* and fashion, was a very successful cultural project (*Pirelli*).

Together with other companies affiliated to the *Museimpresa* national association, we participated in *50+ Il grande gioco dell'Industria* exhibition^[12], obtaining a great success also internationally, where

Made in Italy's image exercises an enormous and growing appeal. The event was based on a very essential outfitting and on the idea, just as simple, of offering an experience of visit through the most iconic products and objects symbolizing Italian excellence, among which for example *Olivetti's* Valentine typewriter and *Campari's* bottle. *Birra Peroni* joined the exhibition with the advertising topic of the «Blonde», we chose as the icon to tell our brand history worldwide (*Birra Peroni*).

5 – Made in Italy between «invention» and tradition: discussion of the results

□ For all the corporate historical archives and museums investigated, the survey examined a multiplicity of features, with special reference to those conservation and valorization processes concerning corporate historical advertising and visual communication. In this way, it was possible to consider both the kinds of cultural contents offered by those centers investigated and the specific activities managing the historical collections (Bulegato, 2008; Negri, 2003).

The four case histories discussed on the previous pages suggest, with strong evidence, the role of corporate historical archives and museums as major «laboratories» of corporate culture and memory. In this way, they play a crucial identity role that, however, scientific literature limits to suggest on a theoretical level, without investigating in-depth its concrete processes within organizations: aspects that this contribution wanted to observe in the field, through the first-hand experience of those organizations involved in the phenomenon, and from a very specific point of view, such as the patrimonialization process concerning corporate communication of the past and its creative re-use by companies.

Indeed, even if with different prerogatives, the role played by both cultural centers investigated – corporate historical archives and museums – is, first of all, that of depositories of *values, archetypes and identity symbols* for those companies interested in recovering and preserving their own past, as a capital to be re-used in the present: this not only for merely business purposes, aiming to reactivate the original marketing function of those objects, but also as a form of social and identity process aiming to rescue corporate history and memory over time in connection with the stakeholders. Both in Italy and abroad, such an emerging rediscovery of corporate historical communication can be observed especially in the experience of corporate museums: unlike historical archives, those centers distinguish themselves for an explicit exhibitory function and orientation to the public (Bulegato, 2008), often dedicating specific documental sections to corporate historical advertising and communication, in this way making them some of the major keys of access to a company's biography. At the same time, the history of corporate communication represents, in general, a «minor» and ancillary narrative line if compared to other and more official narrative paths focused on corporate history, often braided with that of stakeholders and of the territory (Martino, 2013)[13].

At the same time, this survey confirms and investigates in the field that decisive identity and creative function that sector studies usually attribute to corporate historical archives and museums: within such containers, indeed, corporate past is reconstructed and rewritten in a dynamic, and not at all passive, way (De Iulio et al., 2017, 176; Martino, 2013), starting from the preliminary choice about what to conserve and what, instead, to condemn to organizational amnesia (Kransdorff, 1998, 2006). From such a perspective, it becomes evident that the historical excavating and documenting activities carried on by corporate historical archives and museums do not limit themselves to a form of pure conservation, representation and celebration of the past. On the contrary, especially in very transformative moments investing an organization's life, those centers demonstrate that they support a deep rediscovery of corporate cultural identity (Gagliardi, 1995; Molteni, 2016; Urde et al., 2007), to actualize it to the needs and sentiments of the present.

Not by coincidence, the testimonies gathered in this study suggest that the historical-identity corporate heritage, conserved by both these cultural centers, can inspire in the present some concrete returns on an organization's daily life and communication activities, both traditional and online. A potential interchange

seems to be decisive between the historical archive, on the one hand, and the departments/figures responsible for communication and other kinds of creative activities, on the other: if the latter have to deposit in real time into corporate historical archive those projects and campaigns developed over time, the historical archive is called on to constantly inspire current corporate activities with identity contents and values, belonging to the company's heritage.

Of no less importance, the relevance that the museums and historical archives investigated attribute to companies' historical communication invites us to observe from new points of view a *crucial connection such as the one between corporate communication, culture and longevity*, which has, however, been scarcely investigated by scientific literature. Indeed, those historical companies which are centennial or more, in this way expressing a special capability of enduring over time, suggest a strict tie existing between the institutionalization process involving a company, its own cultural and ethical wealth and, not least, the attitude to communicate to and with stakeholders (Rossato, 2013). Not by chance, especially those studies dedicated to the phenomenon of historical and family-owned companies highlight a special excellence, from the most ancient institutions and companies, in expressing their own identity and involving stakeholders, by means of a corporate communication based on symbolism (or even «iconism») and an in-exhausted narrative of their own self (Giaretta, 2004; Martino, Lombardi, 2015; Piazza, Vinti, 2012; Rossato, 2013; Urde et al., 2007).

In the experience of the corporate historical archives and museums investigated, the recovery and «cult» of corporate symbols, icons and other identity expressions coming from the past can become an irreplaceable source of contents fostering corporate communication strategies, in order to privilege a fundamental principle of consistency and «authenticity» towards the public. Indeed, authenticity must be considered today as a relational concept, referring – rather than to a historical and objective truth – to those meanings and values expressing corporate identity, in which an organization and its stakeholders can recognize and enter into resonance with each other on an emotional and cultural level (Gilmore, Pine, 2007).

At the same time, the case histories analyzed here suggest that corporate historical archives and museums also respond on «cultural» and «collective memory» (Assmann, 2008): in this way, such centers are probably the most choral and reliable testimony of a Made in Italy culture which is more than ever effervescent and elusive, because still to be investigated and mapped from a cultural perspective. Indeed, the widespread network of corporate historical archives and museums existing in Italy and open to the public testify with an extraordinary number of expressions, the economic and social evolution faced by the country, with special reference to some well-known productive excellences such as agro-industrial, design and fashion (Bucci et al., 2011; Ferraresi, 2014). For example, for what concerns the companies involved in this survey, it is possible to think about the enormous popularity of *Birra Peroni's* historical *Caroselli* and «Blonde» myth (Giusti, 2004), capable of representing the change of national history and culture; or about some «cult» communication objects such as the *Pirelli* Calendar, published since 1964 and celebrated, for its fiftieth anniversary, with a dedicated exhibition hosted in the space of *Pirelli Hangar Bicocca*.

More in general, the rediscovery of corporate historical communication and advertising is becoming in Italy a wide-range cultural phenomenon, involving nowadays not only private companies but a multiplicity of organizations and collective networks all over the country. Among the several experiences promoted in the sector, an initiative reaching great success online is, for example, *UPA Advertising Graffiti*: a YouTube channel dedicated to the commercials broadcast since the sixties by Italian televisions, which was launched in 2014 by the major national association of advertising investors[14].

In addition to such a project, it is possible to mention several other cultural and educational initiatives. Some projects aim at disseminating and publicizing online the heritage conserved by companies' historical archives: among them, the *Companies' Archives Porta*[15], promoted since 2009 by the Italian Ministry of Culture, as well as the already mentioned *National Archive of Corporate Movies* (ANCI) in Ivrea, offering a dedicated web-tv channel and interactive consulting of corporate movies produced during

the past century by Italian companies. Unique in their genre are also two other projects promoting corporate cultural and information publishing tradition: the *Index of corporate publishing of Nineteenth Century*[16], launched in 2009 by ISEC Foundation in partnership with the Lombard Institute for Contemporary History in order to catalog corporate house organs and magazines published in Italy from 1930 to 2000 (Vinti, 2012; 2014); and the *Observatory of Corporate Books (OMI)*[17], born in 2012 on the initiative of Verona University with the aim of conserving and valuing several kinds of corporate and cultural books, published by Italian companies.

6 – Conclusions

□

In the New Millennium, the dialectic between memory and communication, in its innumerable facets, is receiving growing attention in human and social sciences (Montesperelli, 2003). Such a scenario sees growing interest in the hundreds of corporate historical archives and museums promoted by Italian companies: two cultural centers which can be considered not at all static «monuments» to companies' and entrepreneurs' memory, but rather real forges of corporate culture and communication, fostering over time also collective memory and, indeed, a distinctive stylistic and expressive tradition for the so much decanted – but also condemned – Made in Italy. Such a phenomenon stands nowadays in a clearly precarious equilibrium between cultural identity of the territory and a pure marketing rhetoric (Morace & Santoro, 2014; Vinti, 2007; Vinti & Bigatti, 2010); between the search for authenticity (Gilmore, Pine, 2007), roots, and on the opposite side the «invention of a tradition» (to mention a classic definition proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger in 1983) carried on by multinational corporations and globalization processes.

It is possible to observe massively all this in the three classic sectors characterizing the Italian productive tradition – agro-industrial, fashion, and design – which distinguish themselves, indeed, as the most represented ones in the variegated national universe of corporate museums and historical archives, as well as in the same prestigious advertising and visual history consecrating the phenomenon of Made in Italy and its image worldwide (Bucci et al., 2011; Ferraresi, 2014). And specifically on such a scenario, that the present study limited itself to sketch in a purely explorative perspective, other and more extended cultural investigations should focus, to explore in-depth the specificities of a Made in Italy which can also be understood as a form of «culture» and «language». Indeed, as a real expressive *encyclopedia* extending from the «great classics» of the past (*Olivetti, ENI, Fiat, Pirelli* and several others) to today, through a very dense network of cross references, mentions and re-elaborated versions aiming at re-visiting and re-contextualizing products, personalities and communicative symbols, already belonging to the collective memory (Vinti, 2007).

Of no less importance, this study suggests that tradition can foster new cultural and communicative initiatives, not necessarily expressing a vintage and nostalgic discourse of the past (Morreale, 2009; Nesurini, 2009; Davis, 1979), or purely marketing and storytelling oriented (Boje, 2008, 2011; Jenkins, 2006), but often animated by conscious identity and cultural purposes by more or less historical organizations, wanting to rediscover and value their own corporate heritage (de Geus, 1997; Giarretta, 2004; Rossato, 2013; Stadler, 2011). In this way, the new hyper-mediated scenario shows, as if by paradox, a central role of those cultural centers coming from tradition: museums, historical archives, as well as libraries, called on to provide a multiplicity of *contents* and narratives expressing the past both on- and offline.

This opportunity is demonstrated by the several companies analyzed here: they do not limit themselves to attribute a central and recognizable place to their own corporate historical archives and museums, but rather aim to promote a concrete innovation of corporate processes with them. An organization's past becomes, in this way, a source of inspiration for new advertising campaigns, publishing, products, as well as a privileged source of cultural contents animating anniversaries, exhibitions and several online

initiatives, involving corporate websites and social networks, as well as independent portals and platforms. Recurring to a neologism, such opposite pushes can be understood under the emerging value of *innovage* (Siciliano, 2013): as a crisis between two words – «innovation» and «vintage» – this concept expresses a strong contemporary tendency to rediscover historical roots while supporting current purposes and relations, in this way using identity rightly as a motor for change.

Dynamics such as the ones described above foster today an image of Made in Italy which is enormously successful worldwide, as several positive trends demonstrate: among these, the data concerning international export, the records in several traditional and innovative productive sectors and, above all, the rising visibility and reputation obtained by the Italian «brand» worldwide (*Fondazione Symbola et al.*, 2017). At the same time, as denounced by several parts, the fascinating kaleidoscope of stories and cultures expressing Made in Italy's essence reduced often to a glossy image phenomenon, promoted by the major companies and multinational groups globally competing, while a fundamental deficit in valuing and communicating continues to afflict those small and medium companies which are custodians of the Italian entrepreneurial tradition (Bettiol, 2015; Calabrò, 2015; Morace, Santoro, 2014). Today digitalization processes promise to overtake such a cultural gap, at least in part: indeed, Italian SMEs and the territory's cultural memory have a new opportunity to express their voice by means of global and potentially low-cost online communication, requesting quality contents and companies' efforts in order to explore and narrate their own history.

□

Footnotes

[1] In particular, the most recent survey taking a national census of the sector (Bulegato, 2008) in 2008 counted a number of 573 corporate museums and collections existing in Italy, in addition to many other exhibitiv centers opened more recently. In addition, during the last two years several thematic studies have been dedicated to specific kinds of corporate museums, such as in particular design (by *Federlegno Arredo, Costruiamo il Futuro* Foundation and Edison Foundation) and those for wine and oil (in partnership between *Vinitaly* and Corporate Books Observatory – OMI Verona).

[2] Born in 2001 in Milan as an initiative of Assolombarda and Confindustria, in 2018 Museimpresa counts more than sixty affiliated companies, representing different economic sectors and country regions. See the corporate website: www.museimpresa.com.

[3] The so called «3 As» or «3 Fs» (food, fashion, furniture) refer to the traditional productive sectors identifying Italian excellence. For an in-depth analysis, see in particular: Bucci et al., 2011; Ferraresi, 2014.

[4] For the corporate historiography (also translated into English), see Brignone, 1995.

[5] Among the several initiatives promoting this sector, it is possible to mention the portal dedicated to the fashion archives of Nineteenth Century, created in 1999 within the National System of Archives in partnership with the National Association of Italian Archives (ANAI). See the website <www.moda.san.beniculturali.it>.

[6] The National Archive of Corporate Movies (ANCI) was established in 2006 in Ivrea, in *Olivetti's* past kindergarten designed by Mario Ridolfi, from a partnership between the Experimental Center of Cinematography, Piemonte Region, Ivrea Municipality and Telecom Italia S.p.A. Among the several initiatives promoted by ANCI, it is possible to mention the creation of a thematic channel on YouTube, entitled *CinemaimpresaTV*, in partnership with the Italian Ministry of Culture.

[7] Among these the ANCI association, already mentioned in the previous note, together with several other experiences already discussed in section 5.

[8] See the corporate website <www.fondazionepirelli.org>.

[9] This book retraces the history of corporate communication, presenting for the first time the whole

archival fund collecting original sketches and drawings produced over the years 1872-1972 (Ginex, 2015).

[10] This book narrates the history of corporate advertising from the seventies through those documents – printed materials, *Caroselli* and television commercials – conserved by the *Pirelli* Group's Historical Archive (AA.VV., 2017).

[11] *L'anima di gomma. Estetica e tecnica al passo con la moda*, June 21 – July 24, 2011, Triennale Design Museum, Milan.

[12] For the contents of this travelling exhibition, see Molteni, 2016.

[13] As is possible to guess, especially those companies with a strong brand image make exception to this rule. At the international level, corporate brand positioning is usually valued in experiential museums, whose storytelling is massively focused on corporate communication and ads (as, for example, in the experience of the *Campari* Gallery in Sesto San Giovanni, near Milan).

[14] See the website: <www.youtube.com/user/UPAadvgraffiti>.

[15] See the website: <www.impresesanbeniculturali.it>.

[16] See the website: <www.houseorgan.net>.

[17] From 2018 Sapienza University of Rome has become partner of the Observatory. See the website: <www.monografieimpresa.it>.

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