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**Brand Heritage in foreign
markets positioning: a multiple
case study of the brand heritage
– Country-of-Origin interaction
in Italian firms**

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Abstract (ENG)

In the current globalised markets, products and services are becoming progressively more homogeneous, and brands must increasingly rely on distinctive and difficult to imitate resources that can provide them with a sustainable competitive advantage. Among these, brand heritage has attracted growing attention both from scholars and managers, for its ability to communicate authenticity, reinforce credibility all while creating meaningful differentiation. Meanwhile, companies operating abroad often benefit by the Country-of-Origin (COO) effect, which shapes consumers' perceptions through associations with a product's country of origin. Although both concepts have been investigated independently, limited attention has been given on understanding how brand heritage supports international positioning and how it interacts with the COO effect in foreign markets.

This thesis addresses that gap by investigating how brand heritage contributes to international brand positioning and by examining the mechanisms through which it complements the COO effect. This research was conducted through a qualitative multiple-case study approach, that involved nine Italian heritage brands operating across different industries. In particular, empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with company marketing managers and museum directors, and then further enriched with secondary sources, like corporate archives, official websites, and historical documentation. Lastly, the data were analysed using the Gioia methodology that allowed to develop a structured theoretical framework based on the real experience of the participating brands.

The findings reveal that brand heritage represents a strategic resource

whose value is not bound to the domestic context but can be effectively transferred across international markets. To do so, heritage is preserved internationally through its core elements, which are history, identity and values, what is adapted is its communication, that is selectively tailored to be relevant to cultural differences and market-specific expectations. The study also demonstrates that brand heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect interact as complementary and mutually reinforcing resources. Specifically, the findings suggest that the Made in Italy image facilitates initial market acceptance by inspiring a sense of trust and quality in the consumers, then it is brand heritage that provides a deeper and more distinctive narrative to ultimately strengthening long-term international positioning. By integrating these two perspectives, this research aims to contribute to the literature on international branding while also offering practical insights for managers to actively leverage brand heritage and build resilient global brands.

Abstract (ITA)

Nei mercati globalizzati attuali, prodotti e servizi stanno diventando sempre più omogenei tra loro, e i brand hanno sempre più bisogno di risorse distintive e difficili da imitare e che possano offrire loro un effettivo vantaggio competitivo. Tra questi, il “brand heritage” (eredità storica del marchio) sta diventando di grande interesse sia per studiosi che per managers, grazie alla sua capacità di comunicare autenticità, rafforzare la credibilità, e creare una significativa differenziazione. Contemporaneamente, le aziende che operano all'estero spesso beneficiano del “Country-of-Origin effect” (COO), che influenza la percezione dei consumatori attraverso associazioni con il paese di origine del prodotto. Sebbene entrambi i concetti siano stati studiati singolarmente, limitata attenzione è stata rivolta alla comprensione di come il brand heritage supporti il posizionamento internazionale e come esso interagisca con il COO effect nei mercati esteri.

Questa tesi intende indagare come il brand heritage contribuisca al posizionamento internazionale del marchio e ad esaminare i meccanismi attraverso cui esso si rapporta al COO effect. Questa ricerca è stata condotta attraverso un approccio qualitativo con più casi studio, che ha coinvolto nove marchi italiani con patrimonio storico, operanti in diversi settori. In particolare, i dati empirici sono stati raccolti tramite interviste semi-strutturate con responsabili marketing aziendali e direttori di musei, per poi essere ulteriormente arricchiti con fonti secondarie, come archivi aziendali, siti web ufficiali e documentazione storica. Infine, i dati sono stati analizzati utilizzando la metodologia Gioia, che ha permesso di sviluppare un quadro teorico strutturato sull'esperienza reale dei marchi partecipanti.

I risultati dimostrano che il brand heritage rappresenta una risorsa

strategica il cui valore non è vincolato al contesto domestico ma può essere efficacemente trasferito in diversi mercati internazionali. Per farlo, il patrimonio viene mantenuto invariato a livello internazionale attraverso i suoi elementi fondamentali, che sono storia, identità e valori; ciò che viene adattato è la sua comunicazione, per essere significativa anche di fronte a differenze culturali e a diverse aspettative specifiche di mercato. Lo studio dimostra inoltre che il brand heritage e il COO effect interagiscono tra loro come risorse complementari e si rafforzano reciprocamente. In particolare, i risultati suggeriscono che l'immagine del Made in Italy facilita l'accettazione iniziale nel mercato estero ispirando un senso di fiducia e qualità nei consumatori, è successivamente il brand heritage a fornire una narrazione più profonda e distintiva che rafforza infine il posizionamento internazionale nel lungo termine. Con queste due prospettive, questa ricerca intende essere un contributo alla letteratura sul branding internazionale, offrendo al contempo spunti pratici ai manager per valorizzare attivamente il patrimonio del brand e costruire marchi globali resilienti.

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Introduction

Global markets have become increasingly complicated and dynamic due to the growing number of offerings (Day, 2011), in fact, competitors offer extremely homogenous products to customers, that perceive them to be essentially equivalent in quality and features (Reinman et al, 2010). In addition, “*the destructive effect of technology-empowered customers, the proliferation of media, channel, and customer contact points*” (Day, 2011) has been challenging the achievement of a sustainable competitive advantage for companies on global markets. The problem is that consumers are confronted with an enormous number of brands offering comparable products and services, moreover with technological development they are constantly exposed to them, making it progressively more difficult for companies to establish a real connection with their audience and consequently a distinctive positioning in the market.

Because of this, differentiation has become one of the primary strategic priorities for brands operating internationally. The goal is to build a sustainable competitive advantage allowing the brand to tailor its specific positioning in the market and to be highly recognisable in the minds of the consumers (Kotler& Keller, 2011: p 275). As Kotler and Keller explain in their work, “*brand positioning should have both rational and emotional components*” to win the head but also the heart of consumers. To do this, strong brands often try to build an emotional relation with their audience. In addition, the scholar explains that a person’s emotional response to a brand depends firstly on brand’s authenticity which can evoke trust, affection and strong loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2011: p 290).

Among the different intangible resources available to brands for

achieving this goal, brand heritage has emerged as a highly valuable strategic asset for building a distinctive market positioning. Rather than presenting the brand's history as a simple memory of the past (Balmer, 1994), heritage provides a *“unique identity rooted in the brand's track record, longevity, core values and use of symbols”*, allowing to communicate authenticity and consistency over time (Urde et al. 2007). As markets become increasingly crowded, consumers are exposed to countless similar offerings and seek increasingly trust and uniqueness (Balmer, 2013) from companies. So, brands are leveraging more frequently their heritage as a source of competitive advantage (Sacco and Conz, 2022), by embedding it in their marketing strategy to evoke relevant associations for consumers and stakeholders, strengthening the brand-consumer relationship (Balmer, 2013).

In this sense, heritage is not a mere communication tool but if effectively integrated into brand management, it can become a resource for supporting long term positioning since a brand's historical identity is really difficult for competitors to imitate (Balmer, 2013; Urde et al., 2007). Brand heritage transforms the past into a contemporary asset still relevant for present generations, enabling brands to create meaningful value both for consumers and its own identity (Balmer, 2011; 2013).

This strategic value of brand heritage becomes even more important in international markets (Wong, 2005). In global scenarios, consumers may experience uncertainty towards unfamiliar brands because they lack knowledge about them and receive asymmetric information regarding their products (Erdem and Swait, 2004), but branding, in particular with a well-established heritage, serves as a signal of product positioning, a differentiator and a mechanism of control across markets (Wong 2007). In these circumstances, brand heritage sustains international positioning because *“by sharing a brand's past and core values it helps to develop*

an emotional relationship with the stakeholders” (Napolitano et al., 2020). Heritage storytelling allows companies to communicate the symbolic meaning embedded in the brand and this narrative is capable of engaging consumers while simultaneously reinforcing differentiation from competitors (Napolitano et al., 2020; Balmer, 2013).

However, communicating brand heritage internationally comes with some significant challenges. Because of the “*distance*” among different markets, which is reflected in cultural, economic, administrative and geographic differences (Ghemawat, 2001) companies must understand whether to standardise or adapt the brand image to various local regions (Hsieh& Lindridge, 2005). Cultural differences continue to play a fundamental role in shaping consumers’ perceptions and responses and because of this a complete standardisation may not always yield good results (Douglas and Wind, 1987). A compromise approach could be the one of tailoring advertising of goods and services on a global scale, still giving attention to details relevant for different local markets (Robertson, 1995). Consequently, brands should balance the preservation of an authentic and coherent narrative of their heritage and core values, with the adaptation of its communication to local cultures, to ensure that the brand remains both globally consistent and locally relevant.

In addition to this, another factor that significantly influences consumers’ perceptions in international markets is the Country-of-Origin (COO) effect. When evaluating unfamiliar brands, consumers rely on an extrinsic cue that helps them to perceive a product of higher quality and reduce uncertainty because of the country of origin of a specific brand (Verleg and Steenkamp, 1999). In fact, country associations can evoke perceptions related to quality, authenticity and status, ultimately shaping consumers’ purchase intentions (Tarabashkina et al., 2024).

In this context, the Italian origin of a brand plays a relevant strategic role. The concept of “Made in Italy” has been internationally associated with positive attributes like craftsmanship, aesthetic refinement and design excellence (Temperini et al., 2016) which provide an additional source of credibility and differentiation (Godey et al., 2012). Consequently, combining a well-established brand heritage with Country-of-Origin effect, they can further strengthen each other and influence significantly consumers’ perceptions of authenticity and brand value. Because of this, understanding how these two strategic resources interact and reinforce each other to shape international brand positioning represents an important area of investigation.

Although both brand heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect have been already studied, previous studies have mainly investigated these two constructs independently. Brand heritage studies have explored its strategic role, as well as the importance of preserving and communicating it to consumers (e.g. Urde et al, 2007; Balmer, 2011; Balmer, 2013; Burghausen & Balmer, 2014; Montemaggi & Severino, 2007). While Country-of-Origin effect investigations have been predominantly focused on its definition and influence on consumers’ perceptions and purchase intentions in international markets (e.g. Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Tarabashkina et al., 2024; Andèhn et al., 2016; Godey et al., 2012).

On the other hand, limited attention has been given to understanding how companies can strategically leverage their brand heritage as a positioning asset in foreign markets and in addition, how its interaction with the COO effect contributes to international brand positioning, in particular when the country of origin is deeply interconnected in a brand heritage like it happens in many Italian brands. Also, there is limited empirical evidence on how firms communicate internationally their history,

whether to adapt or not the storytelling or other communication channels, while simultaneously benefitting from the COO effect.

On the base of this gap, the research wants to investigate how companies can strategically leverage brand heritage for positioning in international markets and how COO interacts with this process. To achieve this objective, the thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

“How can brand heritage act as a strategic lever for brand positioning in a foreign market? How does the Country-of-Origin effect interact with brand heritage in a foreign market?”

Although the empirical findings will emerge from the qualitative analysis, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how companies can strategically leverage brand heritage to support international brand positioning. More specifically, it is expected to identify the main mechanisms through which brand heritage is preserved and communicated across foreign markets, as well as the practices adopted to balance global brand heritage consistency with local adaptation. In addition, the study is also expected to offer insights on the way in which the Country-of-Origin effect can support brand heritage in strengthening international brand positioning.

To address the identified research gap and to answer the proposed research question, this thesis adopts a qualitative research approach based on multiple-case studies. Nine Italian heritage brands that operate in different sectors, were selected to have a comprehensive understanding of how companies strategically manage brand heritage for international positioning and how the Country-of-Origin effect interacts with this process. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with company representatives and then supported

with secondary sources, including websites, archival material and social media, allowing a more comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

Then, the data collected were analysed using Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012) that provides a systematic approach to develop theoretical concepts from qualitative evidence. Through this Methodology, recurring themes were identified that allowed to develop a cross-case analysis with the aim to answer the research question, the role of brand heritage in foreign markets and its interaction with the Country-of-Origin effect.

To present in a clear and coherent way the research process and findings, the thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter reviews the existing literature on international branding, brand heritage and Country-of-Origin effect, providing the theoretical foundation of the thesis. The next chapter presents the research methodology, the data collection process and introduces the analytical approach adopted. Then from chapter 3 to 11 the nine brand heritages interviewed are presented and each company is analysed in respect to its heritage's role, its heritage communication in foreign markets and the interaction with the COO, in particular the "Made in Italy" label. Chapter 12 develops the cross-case analysis based on Gioia Methodology, discussing the findings in relation to the research question. Lastly, the thesis is concluded by summarising the principal findings and discussing both the theoretical and managerial implications and acknowledging eventual limitations of the study.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Background

1.1 Branding in international marketing: definitions and challenges

1.1.1 A definition of “brand”

In the competitive market's landscape, where the main goal is to reach the highest profits and where the competition is always increasing it is fundamental to have a well-recognised brand. A brand can be defined as *“a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”* (Kotler and Keller, 2011).

However, the definition of a brand cannot be completed without the introduction of two other complementary dimensions: brand identity and brand image. Then a third crucial element must be introduced: positioning. Rather than being a constitutive dimension, it is a key strategic approach used to relate the brand's identity to its image, defining how the brand should be perceived on the market.

According to Aaker (1996), brand identity is defined as *“a unique set of brand associations that a firm aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to the customers from the organisation members.”* Essentially, the brand identity represents how a company *wants* to be perceived.

On the other hand, Keller (1993) states that *“brand image refers to the set of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in memory”*. This represents how consumers *actually* perceive the brand.

Consequently, it is clear how brand identity and image are deeply

correlated. As said before brand identity represents the intended meaning of the brand from the company's perspective, while the brand image is the perceived meaning that consumers have of it. So, the aim is to make them aligned, which means that the brand image should be a correct "reflection" of the brand identity. To achieve this, the identity should be effectively communicated to the consumers, so that they can understand and accept it.

On the other hand, a discrepancy between these two elements signals a failure in communication, the result is a perception different from the desired one, which can damage the brand and reduce the trust between it and its customers.

Given the importance of correctly communicating the identity to shape correctly the image in the consumers' mind, it is necessary to introduce an important strategic marketing tool: positioning. Kotler and Keller (2011) explain that "*positioning is the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market*".

So, positioning is a strategic choice made by the company to demonstrate and correctly communicate the "promise to the consumers" (identity). The result of these choices is the perception of the brand in the consumers' mind (image).

So, this helps to understand that the aim of a good brand is not only to deliver a specific message and to increase the company's credibility on the market, but also to connect the product or service to the buyer and eventually to create loyalty.

Kotler's view on branding is still relevant today as it was when he first introduced it. However, in some specific markets, the focus has shifted more in delivering an experience rather than the product itself. To avoid

over generalisation, it is necessary to make a clear distinction.

In many markets, like the B2B sector (business-to-business, where the final customer is another business) or the commodity one, the purchasing decision is still based on the product's core functionality and the competitive price. In these cases, the traditional brand definition of Kotler can be perfectly applied.

Conversely, there are other highly saturated markets, usually B2C (business-to-consumer, the final buyer here is an individual, not another company), such as fashion, hospitality, luxury goods, design, lifestyle and so on, the product itself is only the starting point. Here, the company must create an emotive bond to make the consumer loyal: the brand has to add value to the product through the experience, which becomes a key tool to communicate, emotionally connect with the targets and create fidelity.

To understand how to build this experience and position the brand effectively, we must introduce the crucial concept of strategic marketing. Again, Kotler underlines that any strategy must be shaped by the environment in which it operates. He states that internal factors such as the existing strategy and positioning are important and a starting point, but they are not enough on their own if external dynamics such as market share, economic cycles, industry structures and cultural conditions, are not taken in account as well. This is in fact has been recently confirmed by Roberts, Silk and Wind (2020): they highlight those strategies designed without a deep understanding of the external variables as well, are likely to fail in practice. This in particular has gained a more accurate significance in the current global competitive market, where companies have to deal with many different environments.

This perspective highlights the importance for a company to differentiate itself by shaping its own distinctive space on the market to distinguish itself from the competitors.

Firms have been pursuing this differentiation through various strategic approaches, such as competing on the price, offering new improved product features, or providing more tailored and personalised customer service. A brief description of the most common ones will be given starting from Kotler and Keller (2011) work:

- *Product Differentiation*: many products can be differentiated in form, features, customisation (meeting customers' requirements), performance quality (level at which the product's primary characteristics operates), durability, reliability, repairability and style (products look)
- *Service Differentiation*: when the physical product cannot be differentiated, the key is to add value to the services and improving their quality. For example, adding features like ordering ease, fast delivery, assisted installation, customer training and consulting and maintenance or repair service and easy return procedure
- *Price Differentiation*: it does not mean only having the lowest price, but it means to having a coherent quality-price ratio that allows consumers to grasp the quality and position of the product on the market itself.
- *Design Differentiation*: as competition intensifies, design is a potent way to differentiate and position a brand. Design is the totality of features that affect how a product looks, feels and function to a consumer. It offers functional and aesthetic benefits and affects both the rational and emotional sides. This revolves

around the necessity to recognise the importance to consumers of how things look and feel.

With this last type of differentiation, it is introduced the emotional side of the consumers, the need that they have to create an emotive connection also with the brand itself. However, in today's heavily saturated markets, where products may appear similar and replaceable, even tangible advantages like a superior design are often quickly copied. So, even if design is a good starting point, a company should not stop here but it needs to further deepen its level of differentiation.

This is where the focus of this thesis lies: the idea that its intangibles elements are what truly makes a brand stand out in the long run. These elements, such as the symbols, values, and narratives, shape the core identity of the brand itself and they are what allow to build a connection that competitors cannot easily replicate.

1.1.2 The role of storytelling in building a brand reputation

Because the above mentioned intangible dimensions of the brand have become particularly critical, we must introduce a factor that plays a fundamental role in influencing consumers perception and consequently the brand's potential success: storytelling.

“A story is a journey that will move the listener, and when the listener decides to go on that journey, they will feel something different, and the result is persuasion or even an action” (Aaker et al., 2012)

Storytelling is the strategic tool used to convey those brands' core symbols and values, transforming abstract concepts into a narrative that consumers can understand and embrace.

In fact, summarising a few definitions in the marketing literature, storytelling is usually defined as the use of narrative patterns to communicate a brand's identity, with its values and vision. (Lin and Chen, 2015; Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2017). It persuades the consumers in believing that a specific brand has similar values to them and because of that they choose to trust it rather than another one. Unlike traditional advertising, which is based on a simple introduction of the product features, storytelling helps to communicate the brand leveraging on a cultural and emotional context. This suggests that it can be defined as a persuasive tool since narratives can generate loyalty and differentiation.

Because of storytelling being able to build trust and brand reputation by leveraging one emotion, it can be associated with experiential marketing (Zainurossalamia et al. 2021).

To make a better understanding of it, "*experiential marketing is a marketing strategy which views the consumers as emotional human being who are concerned to achieve pleasurable experiences*" (Schmitt, 1999), the goal of this marketing is to allow consumer experience the values of the brand and to build a connection with it.

Storytelling belongs to this type of marketing: the goal of these stories is to shape how consumers feel, think and act. But to guarantee a real long-term impact, the story must be coherent and integrated in the brand's culture, defined as "*the shared experiences, stories, beliefs and norms that characterise a brand*" (Kotler and Keller, 2011: p. 45), so that the consumer can associate it correctly with the perception that he has of the brand itself. This allows the creation of consistency between the message and the reality of the facts.

However, according to the literature, narratives and storytelling were treated unscientifically, and a little attention was given to them until the

last decade when the influence of storytelling in marketing increased and gained legitimacy. Marketing managers have started to utilise the stories to communicate with customers and build emotional connections between consumers, brands and products.

A relevant and explicative example is *Dove with its Real Beauty Campaign*.

Dove's vision is based on the belief that beauty should be a source of self-esteem and not of insecurity. Consequently, their mission is to help women all around the world to develop a positive relationship with their aspect, helping them to increase their self-worth and to reach your potential (Dove official website, 2026).

Coherently with their values, Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign was first launched in 2004. It is a really good case of brand storytelling because it shifted the marketing focus away from traditional product features but rather into the area of cultural values. The campaign touched the core of an important social problem: the conflict between unrealistic media portrayals of beauty and women's self-perception. Dove built its entire narrative around this conflict (Dove official website, 2026).

The campaign's impact was immediate and profound and through releasing short films like *Real Beauty Sketches* (2013), it was able to go on for years making women feel seen and understood (Dove official website, 2026).

In particular, focusing on this short film, *The New York Times* (Vega, 2011) explains that it shows a forensic sketch artist who is asked to draw a series of women based only on their description, and then again but this time according to a description made by another woman. In every

instance, the sketch described by another point of view is more flattering than the auto described one.

The three-minute version has been viewed more than 7.5 million times on the Dove YouTube channel, more than 2,000 people “liked” the video on the Dove Facebook page and more than 1,000 have shared it (The New York Times, Vega, 2011).

Dove, by being coherent with its values, generated a powerful emotional connection, positioning itself as a brand that sought to make women "feel more beautiful"

In this scenario, as just demonstrated with this to examples, Hofman-Kohlmeyer (2017) stresses that storytelling can connect physical products to consumers’ feelings and emotions. Brand story also can give to the product social meanings and symbols, other than the more concrete practical functions. So, giving to consumers well-told brand stories can make the brand much more attractive for them.

In fact, brand stories are narratives that gives meaning to its identity and values. They bring together its origins, evolutions, innovations and long-term visions in a way which resonates and feel coherent with the audience. Marketers use storytelling to communicate information about the brand or product, allowing the consumer to focus on a specific message making it easy to understand and elaborate. To make them engaging, stories typically should contain an unexpected or unusual twist, and the end so it is often best remembered. However, brand stories need to be evaluated as credible by the audience to be successful, if not credible the goal to put the brand in a positive light fails and it gets exposed to criticism (Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2017).

From what has been previously introduced, storytelling happens to be a process contaminated by psychology. As Escalas (2007) demonstrates, stories are processed differently in the human brain if compared to plain facts or data. Storytelling is able to generate positive feelings in customers, making the brand feel special to them and eventually leading to higher awareness and brand trust.

As Mandung (2024) suggests in its work, storytelling is not just a mere marketing tactic but more of a psychological bridge to our fundamental human needs for connection, identity, and community. When the storytelling techniques are applied effectively, they can create *“meaningful consumer-brand relationships that foster loyalty beyond traditional product satisfaction”* (Mandung, 2024). If brands are able to align with the consumer’s values, emotions, and cultural background, they can build a loyal customer base becoming a significant part of their life narrative. *“This perspective shifts the focus from transactional marketing to relational marketing, where the emphasis is on building relationships through authentic, emotional, and culturally relevant narratives”* (Mandung, 2024).

To sum up, there is no doubt that the brand stories have an important input to brand-building process. A well-created story exerts influence on product knowledge and raises positive emotions, consequently highlighting product differences and reduce consumers’ price sensitivities. All this leads to establishing a specific reputation of the brand on the market making it highly distinctive from the competitors.

However, it still remains a fact that this strategy has to be carefully managed: its effectiveness depends on the credibility of the story itself, considering its coherence with the brand identity and the perception of it by the consumers.

1.1. 3 The brand's role in international marketing

After investigating how storytelling strengthens brand reputation and builds consumer trust, it is now important to understand how these same principles should be applied across borders.

In international markets, a brand's identity, credibility, and consistency of their narrative become a key asset, allowing them to position themselves strategically while differentiate form the competitors.

As we have previously understood, branding is recognised as a powerful strategic tool for marketers, and with globalisation, foreign markets are becoming more accessible and available. So, accordingly to this, a brand becomes a strategic tool for firms not only for domestic markets, but also for international markets (Wong, 2005).

In particular, Wong (2007) affirms that branding plays multiples roles in the international marketing strategy, as a differentiator, a coordinator of marketing mix activities, and a mechanism for control across markets. This means that branding acts as a central driver of international marketing, serving not only as a differentiating tool among competitors but also as a mechanism for coordination and control across diverse and dispersed markets.

Moreover, in a foreign environment a brand can also function as a source of credibility, because it is able to reduce the sense of uncertainty of those consumers who lack direct experience with the company, while also conveying a sense of reliability and trust. A strong credibility allows consumer to develop trust even when they lack contact or knowledge of the brand. In their work publish in 2004, Erdem and Swait state that *“when consumers are uncertain about brands and the market is characterised by asymmetric information, brands can serve as signals of*

product position. As a signal of product position, the most important characteristic is its credibility.” In particular, they define brand credibility as “*the believability of the product information contained in a brand, which requires that consumer perceive that the brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised*”. Consequently, brand credibility acts as a reliable signal that simplify consumers choices. In a market characterised by asymmetric information, the consumer does not need to analyse every single product; instead, they can use the brand's credibility as a decision-making shortcut, trusting that the promise will be continuously delivered.

However, we must notice that international branding is different from branding in domestic markets. Firstly, because of the macro marketing environment (culture, legal, technological and economic aspects). These differences raise the problem whether the brand needs to be adapted to the overseas characteristics (Wong, 2005). On this regard, Hsieh and Lindridge (2005) further highlights that when dealing with the concept of international branding, it rises the dilemma whether to standardise or adapt the brand image to the various local markets. The scholars state that when working on an international scale it is important to avoid that a brand image is too tied to a specific given culture, otherwise it will fail to adapt to different circumstances, because the same emotional construct that characterise the brand image may be portrayed very differently in different cultures.

So, corporations have to balance maintaining a coherent global brand identity while simultaneously trying to adapt to local expectations. This challenge arises also because consumer perceptions differ significantly between markets. In the domestic one, perceptions are often relatively homogeneous, as they are built upon shared cultural references and direct experience with the brand. In international markets, consumers lack this

direct contact, and their perception is built also through different cultural values, bringing them to interpret the brand image differently.

For these reasons, finding an equilibrium between global standardisation and local adaptation is essential because it demonstrates that international branding requires a careful balance in maintaining a coherent global identity while allowing culturally appropriate local expressions.

To do what has been just stated, we must notice the importance of having a strategy in branding during internationalisation. On this regard, Douglas, Craig and Nijssen (2001) stress the importance of it: *“building a coherent international brand architecture is a key component of the firm’s overall international marketing strategy”*. In fact, branding provides a structure to leverage strong brands into other markets and to integrate in them. Developing a coherent brand image and identity is fundamental to sustain recognition in different environment, all while still adapting to cultural expectations if necessary.

To conclude, the brand’s role in international marketing goes beyond differentiation from competitors and gaining visibility. It becomes more of a strategic mechanism for building credibility, reducing uncertainty, and ensuring coherence of the core identity of the brand across different markets. It is the ability to balance adaptation and consistency that allows the brand to preserve its identity while achieving global goals.

1.1.4 The challenges of branding in international marketing

Internationalisation made the role of branding increasingly complex as firms have realised that a successful domestic branding strategy often cannot be simply replicated abroad. The main challenge can be said to lie

in the “distance” between the different markets, which is not only the geographical one.

To better explain this, Ghemawat (2001) has articulated the famous CAGE framework, which introduces the distances that a company has to consider when trying to enter a new market. They are: Cultural, Administrative, Geographic and Economic distances.

Briefly,

- Cultural distance means *“differences in religion beliefs, race, social norms, and language. They are all able of creating distance between two countries”*, since *“a country’s cultural attributes determine how people interact with companies”* (Ghemawat, 2001).
- Administrative (or Political) distance is based on *“historical and political association shared by countries; they greatly affect trade between them”*. *“Policies of individual governments pose the most common barriers (like tariff, trade quotas, restriction and preferences for domestic competition) to cross-border competition”* (Ghemawat, 2001).
- Geographic Distance: it is not only the physical distance from a country, but also *“the physical size of the country, access to waterways and ocean, topography and transportation and communications infrastructure”* (Ghemawat, 2001).
- Economic Distance: *“the wealth or income of consumers is the most important economic attribute that create distance between countries”* (Ghemawat, 2001). For example, rich country will trade with other rich countries, while poor countries with richer ones.

Moreover, recent years have been characterised by economic instability, geopolitical shifts, and rapid technological change, all of which have made for firms' international expansion increasingly complex to navigate.

All this challenges lead to the most common dilemma that companies have to face: which type of strategy is it better to adopt between standardisation or adaptation?

On one hand, the "*globalisation of markets*" thesis, whose father was Levitt (1983), advocates for radical standardisation. It argues that technology was creating a homogeneous global consumer, allowing firms to sell the same standardised product and message everywhere, without the need to tailor it for each global market. This clearly allows to reduce marketing cost and to achieve economies of scale. On the other hand, Douglas and Wind (1987) quickly responded to Levitt by pointing out that this was a "myth". They argued that "*standardisation may work for some companies and product lines, for other companies and other product markets adaptation to local or regional differences may yield better results*". So, cultural and legal specificities remain powerful forces to carefully analyse and, sometimes failing to adapt to local preferences would lead to market rejection.

This decision represents the biggest challenge in international marketing. However, the debate has evolved from understanding which strategy is better to choose, to rather try to a balance these two together: the concept is called "glocalisation". Robertson (1995) defined this term as "*the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global, or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets*". In simpler words, it is a strategy that consists of thinking and planning on a global scale but acting and adapting that strategy on a local scale.

This glocal approach highlights why it is crucial for a brand to become flexible. While it is important to maintain a coherent core identity, it is necessary to simultaneously make adaptations for each foreign market. This is essential to meet the expectations of each local consumers and to avoid the brand to be mistakenly perceived due to various cultural and market differences.

In addition, to remain relevant to consumers over time, branding cannot be considered as something static, but rather, as an ongoing process that needs to adjust to evolving contexts. Brands, however, should be able to move at the same pace with their environment, while preserving the coherence of their core values.

This ability to continuously evolve, in recent years has become even more evident after disruptive events like global crises and in particular, rapid technological development. They have altered the stability of international markets, forcing firms to increase their strategic flexibility to face uncertainty (Nilssen and Nyu, 2020). In particular, digital transformation created a more conscious consumer with accelerated expectations, since they have more instruments to identify incoherence in brand identity across markets (Stonehouse and Konina, 2020).

Dalwadi (2013) in fact, noted how globalisation has created an unprecedented paradoxical scenario: while on one hand we have global *“brand symbolic of sweeping-change (Intel, Microsoft), on the other we have others that reflect timelessness and simpler value (Coca-Cola, Levis)”*. *“This leads to the so-called yin and yang of the 20th century: technology and humanism side by side”* (Dalwadi, 2013).

In response to this volatility brands increasingly exploit their past with narratives to evoke emotional attachment: this happened because of the

consumers desire for more authenticity in a global and dynamic market (Jensen et al., 2019). “*The past has become a hallmark of contemporary marketing and consumption*” (Dam et al., 2024). Brands want to evoke feelings in the consumer base by connecting the present and the past and recalling memories

So, what we can conclude is that in a global scenario, the real possibility to have success lies in the brand’s ability to adapt across different countries, all while remaining true to its core identity.

1.2 Brand Heritage

The definition of brand explains the importance of having an identity to communicate, while storytelling highlights one of the most effective ways through which the identity is transmitted to the stakeholders. The first concept overlaps with building an history and a reputation, while the second one is important to actually show and share the heritage that the brand has built in the years.

However, the challenges of globalisation have made more complex internationalise the brand within its identity and reputation. In fact, as brands expands globally, they must try to preserve the coherence of their core values while adapting to different cultural contexts. This has made also heritage an increasing challenging strategic asset to manage. So, the real challenge is to understand how to leverage these heritage assets in favour of the company in an international landscape. In this regard, corporate heritage embodies both the values and history of an entire organisation and brand heritage uses these same elements to build a stronger connection with consumers.

The idea is to lie these theoretical foundations with the purpose of researching how brand heritage contributes to strategic positioning,

particularly in an international landscape. The aim is to understand how a good and strong heritage, and the reputation built from it, may allow brands to occupy a specific space in consumers' minds and how the positioning correlated to it can also strengthen the brand's ability to expand across international markets.

1.2.1 Definition of Corporate Heritage and its characteristics

Today, many companies are leveraging their corporate heritage as a form of competitive advantage, particularly in response to the growing consumer demand for authenticity, trust and uniqueness (Balmer, 2013; Sacco and Conz, 2022). This can happen because if heritage is embedded in marketing strategy, it can help to evoke vivid and relevant associations for consumers and stakeholders, strengthening the brand-consumer relationship (Balmer, 2013). In this sense, heritage is not a simple and nostalgic reference to the past, but a strategic asset that connects the past with present while also highlighting a meaning of uniqueness and differentiation of the brands from others.

However, to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to introduce the concept of Corporate Heritage. Before defining it, corporate heritage refers to an organisation's heritage, which may or may not be actively used in corporate branding. It is distinct from the marketing of cultural heritage sites or artefacts, although some corporations can acquire a form of cultural significance that goes beyond business and becomes part of a community's or nation's identity. (*Balmer, 2015*)

This introduction is important to clarify that corporate heritage is not an external resource that can be exploited, but rather internal dimension rooted in the organisation's cultural, story and identity.

So, corporate heritage should not be mistaken for mere history. It is

much more than the mere chronological accumulation of past events, it appears as a living and evolving identity, in which the past interacts continuously with the present and the future while adapting to each generation. Burghausen and Balmer's definition (2014) highlights this concept:

“All the traits and aspects of an organisation that link its past, present, and future in a meaningful and relevant way. Thus, it refers to some aspect of an organisation's past that is still deemed by current internal and/or external stakeholders to be relevant and meaningful for contemporary concerns and purposes but concurrently perceived as worth to be maintained and nurtured for future generations; it is the selectively appropriated and valorised past of a company or ‘all that is (still) relevant’ in the light of contemporary concerns and purposes.” (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014b).

Another formulation by Burghausen and Balmer (2014b) enriches the definition by describing corporate heritage as *“all the traits and aspects of an organisation that link its past, present and future in a meaningful and relevant way. Thus, it refers to some aspect of an organisation's past that is still deemed by current internal and/or external stakeholders to be relevant and meaningful for contemporary concerns and purposes but concurrently perceived as worth to be maintained and nurtured for future generations.”*

In this definition, the scholars stress the importance of selecting those specific traits that should be preserved of the history of a company and then reinterpreted by the current stakeholders to remain relevant generation after generation. This process suggests that heritage is never static, but it varies according to what contemporary audiences sees as valuable.

To clarify how corporate heritage can be identified and managed, in its work, Balmer (2013) proposes six characteristics that must be present in an organisation for it to be considered as having a strong corporate heritage:

1. *Omni-temporality*

Corporate heritage interacts with past, present and future. This temporal overlap explains why heritage institutions endure and remain meaningful over time. From this it is possible to deduce that the identity of a corporate and its trait can be perennial. This characteristic is really important because it shows how a corporate heritage institution have endured and remained meaningful.

Corporate heritage is “super-historic” offering existential anchors for both the organisation and its audiences. In practice, this means that heritage is able to resist short-term trends and remaining adaptable.

2. *Institutional trait constancy*

For corporate heritage to be meaningful there must be meaningful trait consistency on one or, ideally, two or more dimensions of the 11 identified here:

- (1) ownership: the ownership structure of a company, for example, family-owned, can contribute to shaping a distinctive corporate heritage when it has remained stable over time.
- (2) organisational-type: some organisational types like mutuals, partnerships, co-operatives, or unlimited companies can also develop a distinctive heritage identity when they have endured over time.
- (3) organisational rationales/cultures and ethos: the underlying purpose or *raison d'être* of an organisation can also contribute to shaping a

distinctive corporate heritage, always if it has endured over time. Some institutions possess a clear and lasting organisational ethos or culture that defines their heritage.

(4) product and service focus: another way to build a distinctive corporate heritage is through the core manufacturing/service creation competency of the organisation itself, if it remained enduring over time.

(5) manufacturing processes and the delivery of services: the process underlying the manufacture of products and services can accord an entity with a specific corporate heritage over time.

(6) quality levels: being known for pursuing certain quality levels for an enduring period of time can give to the company a distinctive corporate heritage

(7) location: an entity's strong association with a specific location can also contribute to shaping an organisation's corporate heritage. In particular, this dimension results to be really important for the thesis: location-based heritage conveys credibility and identity and in foster markets this can be a synonym of authenticity and strengthen differentiation. This will be further explored also with the comparison with the country-of-origin effect

(8) group and class associations: organisation can develop a specific corporate heritage when their social orientations and relationship with some communities are lasting over time.

(9) design and style: the preservation and continuity over time of distinctive design elements (vis-à-vis products, graphic design, architecture, livery, etc) can also contribute to corporate heritage. This also relates to coherent visual systems that represent the brand's identity.

(10) sensory utilisation: sensory elements such as sound, scent, touch, vision and taste, whether combined or individually used, can as well be part in shaping a distinctive corporate heritage, becoming part of the brand identity over time.

(11) corporate communications: the pursuance of communication practices (advertising, corporate PR) and integrated communications strategies can also provide a specific corporate heritage if maintained over time.

However, not every company with a long history automatically can be said to possess heritage. History simply records events, while heritage build and conveys identity over time. The importance of these traits evolves with context and time. Some aspects are visible and tangible, others constructed or even re-interpreted by managers, confirming that corporate heritage is a dynamic and evolving construct rather than a fixed condition.

3. External and internal tri-generational heredity

Balmer argues that if key identity traits have endured for at least three generations, around fifty years, the criterion of corporate heritage can be applied. This generational continuity symbolises stability and shared meaning, however there are different ways to inherit this heritage, not only as mere history but more like meaningful identity traits that should be preserved and/or re-elaborated to be transmitted to future generations.

4. Augmented role identities

Corporate heritage identities incorporate multiple layers of different identities: temporal, territorial, cultural, social, and ancestral. These layers enrich institutional identity and link companies to the groups, societies and places they represent in multi-generational terms. Heritage institutions embody social and cultural meanings that contribute to collective identity, that is why many corporate heritage entities are significant symbols of places, peoples and cultures.

5. Ceaseless multigenerational stakeholder utility

This criterion is based on the corporate marketing logic: meeting stakeholders wants and needs so that there is mutual benefit for customers and the corporation too.

In short, once an institution no longer has a utility to one generation of customers and other stakeholders, even if has been valuable to former generations, then it will, most likely, wane and ultimately expire.

So, a corporate heritage institution should have the continuous ability to meet the wants and needs of successive generations of customers and other stakeholders all while ensure the authenticity of the corporate heritage

6. Unremitting management tenacity

The preservation and communication of corporate heritage require assiduous management. In fact, institutional success and corporate survival are core tenets of management. Heritage necessities of custodianship which is essential to prevent the erosion of meaning over time.

All together, these six dimensions show that corporate heritage is not a passive legacy to be passed on but rather an active and strategic resource. It conciliates history and memories with innovation all while offering continuity and reassurance to many generations of consumers in a market defined by change.

The growing recognition of the importance of the temporal dimension in the heritage branding owes much to the work of Balmer, Greyser and Urde (2006; 2007). Their studies reveal that heritage contributes to

shaping the brand's identity offering reassurance and continuity to consumers among many competitors in a market constantly changing. In competitive and global contexts, this continuity becomes a way for a heritage-based brand to position itself in the consumer's cultural memory, evoking stability and trust across borders.

1.2.2 Definition of brand heritage and its characteristics

“Having understood the importance of a company's historical roots, it becomes clear that analysing its past can also reveal directions for its future” (Balmer, 1994).

This idea underlines a crucial distinction, which is that while history simply records what has happened, heritage interprets that history giving it meaning and relevance for contemporary purposes. The same applies to brands, when viewed through the lens of heritage rather than mere history, they gain the ability to connect their origins to the present and, also, to be relevant in the future (Urde et al., 2007).

After making this important distinction, Professor Urde, Balmer and Greyser (2007) provide one of the most complete definitions of heritage brands:

“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. A heritage brand is one with a positioning and a value proposition based on its heritage. To make heritage part of a brand's value proposition is a strategic decision. We believe “heritage brands” constitute a distinct branding category, with its own set of defining criteria and a specific approach for effective management and leadership.”

So, they defined it as a brand whose identity is rooted in its longevity, values, symbols and, above all, in the organisational belief that its history matters. In fact, making heritage part of a brand's value proposition is a strategic choice because it allows it to transform the past from a passive legacy into an active managerial tool.

As the authors argue, the relevance of heritage lies in its capacity to invest its historical traits with meaning to create value over time. A brand's historical traits have to be continually reinterpreted and enriched with new significance to be still relevant in the present and then in the future (Urde et al., 2007). The ability of the brand to adapt to different generations is what strengthens the relationship with its community.

That being said, now it is important to introduce those specific characteristics that indicate whether and how much heritage may be present or potentially found in a brand.

To investigate this, we are leveraging again on the work of professor Urde, Balmer and Greyser (2007).

1. A company with a track record for delivering value to customers and non-customer stakeholders over a long time.

“By track record we mean demonstrated performance - proof - that the company over time has lived up to its values and promises” (Urde, 2003).

In fact, what really matters is a company's ability to consistently deliver value to its customers and other stakeholders. When this happens over time, it generates credibility which allow the generation of a genuine sense of legacy which also reinforces trust in the long run.

2. A company with longevity

Longevity may not be sufficient on its own to make a brand result a

heritage brand, but it reinforces the perception of continuity, especially in family-owned or multi-generational corporations where traditions are transmitted across many CEOs over time.

3. A company with long-held, articulated core values guiding its corporate behaviour and its choices regarding policy and actions.

Continuity and consistency of core values become part of the organisation's culture, guiding both its internal decisions and external relations. When such values remain consistently held, they become embedded in the corporate heritage and, eventually, part of its heritage identity.

4. A company whose past is reflected and expressed in communications especially via the use of symbols

The fourth characteristic lies in the symbolic communication of the past. Heritage brands often use symbols, like logos and designs that over time evolve into cultural identifiers that embody the brand's identity.

5. A company which considers its history important to its identity

Heritage brands recognise their own history as a mean to identify who they are and what they do. For these companies, history is not just a record of their past, it's an active force that actively shapes how they operate today, and in particular, how to take future strategic choices.

In this sense, heritage becomes a constant dialogue between past and present. It is much more than mere nostalgia or longevity; it is an active process that the brand undertakes to preserve and reinterpret core elements to remain relevant and meaningful over time. When managed with this intent, heritage does much more than building trust, it nurtures

identity and consolidate trust with the consumer base, while also sustaining differentiation in an increasingly globalised market.

1.2.3 Heritage marketing: how to leverage heritage to get competitive positioning

After defining both corporate and brand heritage, now it becomes essential to understand how companies can strategically use them to achieve a competitive position in the market.

First, it is clear is that heritage in the marketing strategies of organisations evokes vivid and relevant associations for consumers and stakeholders, strengthening the brand-consumer relationship (Sacco and Conz, 2022). In this sense, heritage becomes an important resource capable of shaping perception, long-term differentiation and positioning of the brand.

Once again, Urde, Balmer and Greyser (2007) emphasise that heritage can become a source of value creation when used as a tool for distinction and authenticity.

The authors argue that:

- Heritage can serve multiple strategic purposes: it enhances distinctiveness in positioning, for example allowing firms to justify higher prices and margins
- Companies with a strong heritage should leverage it because it is valuable to consumers, distinctive for the brand, and difficult for competitors to imitate: it adds depth, authenticity, and credibility to the brand's value proposition.
- Heritage strengthens trust and loyalty also among non-customers stakeholders. Moreover, heritage fosters internal cohesion,

enhancing employees' sense of belonging and pride in being part of a brand "bigger than oneself."

However, the real value of brand heritage lies in how the brand translate the heritage itself into actual impact: so, how effectively it can generate tangible value. Here is where heritage marketing plays a central role.

As Garofano, Riviezzo and Napolitano (2020) explain in their work, *"heritage marketing is a strategic choice that firms intend to follow to not let their history fade into oblivion, by sharing their past and core values of the brand to develop an emotional relationship with the stakeholders"*. This strategic sharing of the brand's legacy creates shared values with the consumer and enhances the brand itself with an aura of authenticity. This transforms heritage into a powerful competitive and communicative advantage.

This use of heritage, in particular, enables firms to communicate a clear sense of identity and to convey stable values especially in areas marked by uncertainty (Balmer, 2011). In this sense, it can function as a narrative framework through which brands express continuity and reliability, helping brands to appear resilient in a context where change is constant.

In fact, as Sacco and Conz (2022) highlight, heritage marketing involves the shaping of a tailored communication strategy to create a deeper connection with consumers by sharing knowledge about the brand and offering experiences. This process contributes to building a corporate image and strengthening relationships with both customers and stakeholders (Balmer, 2013).

Heritage marketing can be implemented through various strategies: such as the creation of company archives or museums, the organisation of

commemorative events, or the realisation of products inspired by past models (Montemaggi & Severino, 2007). These activities are not simply celebratory but have the aim to recall memories and transform them into present engagement. Heritage, to be effective, must “*celebrate a particular past through the lens of the present*” (Balmer, 2011).

In particular, according to Napolitano, Riviezzo and Garofano (2020), heritage marketing is about identifying the most evocative elements of a company’s history, to build narrative capable of engaging the stakeholders. To actually concretise this strategy, the authors have introduced the Heritage marketing mix: a kit with the tools for narrating history divided in four categories:

1. Narration through words, images and sounds

Here “*the power of narration comes from words, images and sounds, both singularly or simultaneously used to convey different narratives for each target*”. The tools here range from autobiographies or historical monographs, usually published to celebrate anniversaries, to visual storytelling like historical advertising, videos or documentaries. Moreover, in the current digital age, these narratives are shared through social videos and online communities, like blogs, where the enthusiasts and collectors are the main conveyor of them

2. Narration through products and brands

Companies can narrate their history through tangible assets like iconic products, packaging, merchandising, limited edition, but also distinctive competences or productive processes. Another modality of heritage marketing leverages on the brand, in particularly using the nostalgic effect and positive association related to a specific period to revitalise historical brands with modern features. The idea here is to “*tell the story of a company, starting from the iconic product, which becomes the*

mentor” or the physical statement of the brand’s story.

3. Narration through places

This category involves physical spaces where the memory is preserved and displayed. The company archive is the “mine” of history, because it contains all documents and sources that testify the story. Then, the corporate museum is considered the main tool of heritage marketing: *“it’s the place where all the pieces of the company’s memory, generally retrieved from research in the archive, are brought back together to create a sequence of memories with a powerful communicative impact.”*

Moreover, when there are not ‘ad hoc’ spaces to display the story of the company, historical headquarters or factory tours are valuable tools as well for immersive experiences.

4. Narration through celebrations and relationships

Finally, heritage can be narrated through anniversary celebrations (usually of the first 100 years of the company, a symbolic moment to remember the story and from which take inspirations for the future), expositions, convention, workshops and other cultural events. This dimension also includes the membership to association of historical companies, like Museimpresa (the Italian association of corporate museums and archives), which allows firms to share values and reinforce their prestige through networking (Museimpresa official website, 2026).

To conclude the authors, add that the effectiveness of the Heritage Marketing Mix depends on the ability to create a “red thread” that connects all these instruments. By building narratives that link corporate identity to community values (Boccardi et al., 2016), companies not only preserve their legacy but also reinforce their connection with stakeholders in contemporary markets. In doing so, heritage marketing,

uses the traces of the past and makes them become a successful strategy for the future.

1.3 Heritage as a driver of consumer trust in internationalisation

After analysing how corporate and brand heritage can be strategically used through heritage marketing to create differentiation and competitive advantage, it is now important to understand how these same dynamics influence consumers' perception and contribute to building trust, and international growth. Heritage, in fact, acts as a resource capable of generating credibility and emotional connection over time: this also allows the brand to position itself strategically in the mind of the consumers and consequently, in the market against its competitors.

So, because of this peculiar role played by heritage, it becomes a symbol of reassurance and more important of reliability, particularly in an increasingly global and uncertain context, where consumers are constantly exposed to new brands and narratives.

Starting from this perspective, the next part of this chapter explores how heritage operates as a driver of consumer trust and as a key element for brand differentiation in international markets. The intention is to understand how the heritage related values can strengthen a brand's reputation and support its expansion into culturally diverse environments.

1.3.1 Brand trust and the perception of authenticity

In the context of brand heritage, authenticity plays a decisive role in how consumers perceive and trust a brand, especially when crossing national borders. As Balmer (2013) suggests, heritage brands that have stood the

test of time, and consequently appear as stable entities, are of special value because they act as existential anchors in an increasing volatile world. This longevity allows them to convey a sense of continuity and identity across successive generations of stakeholders and by remaining faithful to their core traits and values over time, brands can build a relationship of mutual trust with consumers, who are most likely to perceive them as more authentic.

To further examine the notion of brand authenticity, Bruhn et al. (2015) identify four key dimensions, which fully resonates with the concept of heritage. They are continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. Continuity expresses the ability of a brand to remain consistent over time, while originality is what allow to reach a unique differentiation from competitors, also through continuous innovation. Finally, reliability becomes fundamental in fast-changing market, while naturalness refers to the way the story is told, remaining coherent to reality. In this way brand heritage becomes an important leverage for inspiring trust and promoting a perception of authenticity among consumers. This perception of authenticity is particular critical during the internationalisation process, as it serves as a universal language that mitigates the perceived risk of a foreign brand.

Another study confirms what just explained: Fernandez and Collin Lewis (2019) agree on the fact that perceived authenticity fosters brand trust: if a brand is perceived as able to fulfil its “brand promise”, then it will also be perceived as authentic and trustworthy. Consumers tend to rely more on brands they see as genuine, transparent, and consistent over time. The strategic value of heritage lies precisely in the ability to create mental associations between the brands and those values that matter to an individual.

From this perspective, Rindell and Santos (2021) find that authenticity can be assimilated to a *“social construction, imbued with personal memories and expectation, as well as shared symbolic aspects”*. Heritage brands emerge as authentic thanks to the interplay between historical continuity and the meanings consumers co-create through memories, expectations and shared social conventions. This is a semiotic process that turns the brand’s past into lived relevance.

In particular, Xie, Batra and Peng (2015) explain how this narrative of authenticity can help a brand in becoming global and transcending national borders: consumers adopt a piece of history or a peculiar symbol of another culture, that they find also meaningful within their own cultural framework. This concept can be sum up by the scholars’ citation: *“By blending global with local elements, the perceptions of nonlocal brands can make local consumers enjoy the pleasure of global citizenship while enabling them to maintain a strong links with their local identity, thus providing desired balance”* (Xie et al., 2015). So, brands that integrate their local cultural heritage in global markets, facilitate the building of deeper and *“multi-cultural”* relationships in foreign markets.

At the same time, authenticity cannot become a constraint. Han, Newman et al. (2021) show that an excessive reliance on heritage can backfire when product innovation and development clashes with what consumers perceive as the brand’s “original” essence. Ironically, it can happen that in some scenarios, the efforts to improve a product lower interest among consumers because they consider it to be unfamiliar. So, the challenge, is to balance tradition and evolution: preserve what defines the brand’s core while keeping it relevant to contemporary expectation.

We can say that heritage and authenticity are inseparable elements in the

way in which a brand's identity is shaped, because together they can influence how consumers remember and will recognise a brand. This link becomes even more relevant in international contexts, because both heritage and authenticity help brands to remain coherent across cultures while offering to consumers a reassuring sense of continuity and familiarity.

According to Akaka and Alden (2010), brand heritage acts as a “Global Brand Positioning” (GBP) tool, where authenticity is used by the firms to “*communicate similar meanings across different countries and cultures*”. This symbol, that represents the identity of the brands are used by firms to “*connect their brands with consumers across the globe, so that they became common symbols in the global market*”. In this way the authors argue that brands can integrate local cultural signs and symbols with global messages to reach a wider and international audience, all while overcoming the liabilities of foreignness. “*This is a process in which firms and consumers interact and collaborate to co-create brand meaning*”

A brand that succeeds in controlling this balance manages not only to stand out in global markets but also to build an emotional and trustworthy relationship with all the diverse stakeholders.

1.3.2 Heritage as cultural and symbolic assets and differentiation in foreign markets

In a global context increasingly characterised by homogenised products and hyper competition, heritage represents one of the most powerful cultural and symbolic assets that a company can possess to sustain genuinely differentiation. It acts as a repository of meanings that connect organisational identity with collective memory and cultural continuity.

As Hakala, Lätti and Sandberg (2011) explain, brand heritage embodies both cultural and corporate heritage: *“brand heritage is seen as a composite of the history, as well as the consistency and continuity of a company’s core values, product brands and use of symbols”*. Heritage allows firms to capitalise on their origins, core features and beliefs sharing them across markets: it reinforces the brand’s symbolic capital and communicates depth and credibility across different cultures. Thus, heritage act as a strategic resource for differentiation in global markets, all while strengthening the brand identity in the eyes of international consumers.

However, it is important to note, as Pecot et al. (2022) underlines, that perceptions of brand heritage are inherently shaped by the cultural context, since *“differences in values placed on the past and the framing effect of national history on perception of a brand’s history should lead to cross-cultural differences in perceptions and the use of brand heritage”*. What the scholars meant is that that the symbolic meaning of heritage is not universal, but it should be reinterpreted and translated across societies, so that brands can still express their national identity while also aligning with the different cultural values.

To deepen this concept, the scholars analyse how cultures can perceive time differently. In Christian/Muslim cultures, time is predominantly perceived as linear, where the past is often viewed as "behind" and separate from the present. Conversely, in many Eastern cultures (influenced by Buddhism or Confucianism), time is viewed as cyclic. Northern Americans and Europeans have a monochronic view of time (like doing one thing at a time), while Latin American and the Mediterraneans have a polychronic view, where events overlap (Pectot et al, 2022). Hofstede and Bond in 1988 were the first to introduce the concepts of Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation. In long-term

oriented cultures (South Korea and Japan) tenacity and adaptability are highly valuable, and longevity is often seen as a sign of resilience. In contrast, short-term oriented cultures (U.S.A.) tend to value immediate gratification and current trends, and so emphasising the past this may be more complex, since brand should demonstrate that they are not obsolete but rather still relevance to the present moment. (Pecot et al. 2022).

Consequently, also the perception of longevity changes across nations, depending on the nation's historical background: a 40-year-old institution might be seen as "historic" in a young nation, whereas in Europe it would be considered merely contemporary.

Clearly, these differences in relation to time change also the way different cultures perceive the concept of history because the meaning of the past is culturally constructed, and the value given to history varies across countries. As Pecot et al. (2022), again highlight, cultures with long historical traditions associate heritage with prestige and authenticity, other future-oriented cultures may perceive it as outdated.

So, differences in the way in which culture perceive time, as well as variations in symbolic codes, deep-rooted values and collective memories, represent an important challenge for brands that rely on heritage. These factors influence how consumers interpret a brand's past and the meaning associated to it. For this reason, to avoid misinterpretations across cultures, heritage brands need to align their symbolic meaning to different countries' values in which they decide to operate, all while allowing the brands to express fully their national identity. This ability to reinterpret themselves while still expressing their core national identity is what enables global brands to sustain differentiation across diverse markets.

In this regard, Ahmad Taha (2023) reinforces the idea that heritage is a dynamic cultural asset capable of connecting societies. As the author states, branding heritage is able to integrate all different aspects of a culture and functions as an “ambassador” traveling beyond its place of origin to fit into other cultural contexts. It represents the traditions and beliefs of its nation in other lands and contexts. Heritage, in this regard, can be seen as a symbolic bridge between cultures. Through it, brands can express their authenticity and lived experience to the different cultural frameworks they interact with, strengthening also acceptance.

Moreover, heritage functions as a strategic lever for differentiation in foreign markets. It helps brands communicate qualities like authenticity, stability and continuity, that feel honest and trustable, making the brand stand out from its competitors that find difficult to replicate its characteristics.

So to sum up, global heritage brands differentiate themselves from others because of their ability to manage a delicate balance. They always communicate coherently their core values while understanding the specific cultural context in which they operate to adapt to it.

1.4 Country of origin effects and brand heritage

After having tried to understand how heritage operates as a strategic and symbolic asset for positioning and differentiation in international markets, it becomes relevant to further investigate how cultural associations linked to a brand’s origin and location influence consumers in foreign markets as well. While corporate and brand heritage derive from a company’s history and identity, brands’ perception can also be shaped by their geographical provenance.

In this regard, it is important to introduce the Country-of-Origin Effect

(COO), which represents the perception of a product or a brand according to the country of origin. Like heritage, this association can influence consumers' evaluation regarding quality and authenticity. This often act as a shortcut in the decision-making processes of the customers, in particular in foster markets where consumers may lack of direct familiarity with the brand but regardless making them choose its product just because they know the provenance of it (i.e. Made in Italy effect).

So, the aim is to analyse the COO, its similarities and differences with brand heritage in order to understand if it can serve as a balancing tool between a brand's national image and its international one. It is crucial to understand how the internal identity (heritage based) and the external perception of the brand can interact in shaping brand value on a global scale. In particular because brand heritage is internally managed, while COO effect is an external reflection of the consumers perception, and because of it not fully controlled.

1.4.1 Definition of Country-of-origin effect and its characteristics

The Country-of-Origin Effect (COO) is generally thought of as a *“phenomenon that occurs when consumers infer that the characteristics of a country transfers onto a product.”* (And  hn et al. 2016). In other words, what the scholars mean is that if a country is associated with a peculiar trait, the consumer will be inclined to think that also the product or brand from that country will share the same attribute or at least be affected by it.

So, this mechanism influences how a country's identity is filtered into a consumer's mind, affecting its perceptions, how they evaluate a brand, and eventually the purchase intentions. This process illustrates how the image of a nation, its cultural footprint and values, shapes the way

consumers assess the quality and authenticity of goods produced there. As Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) point out, the COO effect is not merely another cognitive cue, instead it serves as a powerful informational stimulus that shapes product evaluations by linking them with sensory, affective and ritual associations. “*It can associate the product with status, authenticity and exoticness*” (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). This highlights that perceptions of origin can operate both rationally and emotionally in shaping consumer judgments.

Scholars have generally identified three key components of the COO cue, in particular leveraging on the work of Essousi and Merunka (2007), we can describe the dimensions:

1. *The country of design*: which is the country where the product is conceived and generally the country it is associated with. It evokes connotations of creativity and aesthetics, enabling the brand image to be projected across international boards.
2. *The country of manufacture or assembly*: this refers to the country in which the product is manufactured or assembled. Typically linked to perceptions of technical precision, craftsmanship, and reliability, it is what represent the perceived capacity of the origin country to manufacture a specific product category.
3. *The country of brand origin*: a brand can use the image of the origin country to build its identity, regardless of the place of manufacture or design. So, this embodies symbolic and emotional meanings such as tradition, prestige, and authenticity.

Together, these elements build the perceived “origin image” of a brand, shaping how consumers interpret its value and positioning in the market.

Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) explain that the COO functions as an information processing model of consumer decision making: in particular when direct experience or information is limited, the Country-of-Origin functions as an extrinsic cue, meaning an external signal not related to the product's physical characteristics, but that regardless influences the consumer's perception. In particular:

- *Cognitive mechanism* is related to the country of origin as being a signal for product quality such as reliability and durability
- *Affective mechanism* confers the country of origin with emotional value for the consumer, giving to the brand or product symbolic and notional benefits, including social status or national pride
- *Normative mechanisms* are based on consumers holding social and personal norms related to the country of origin. For example, even if living in a foreign country, purchasing domestic products may be regarded as a positive for the domestic economy

So, what was previously discussed shows that in international contexts, where risk and uncertainty are high, consumers often rely on the country's reputation as a mental shortcut to evaluate trustworthiness and quality. In fact, for example, Italian brands are known as synonym of quality in fashion and design, or Swiss brands in watchmaking. So, again, as stated by Andéhn et al. (2016), it is easy to understand how the COO effect is tightly bound to the country image. The writers use the concept of image described by Akira Nagashima (1970): "*ideas, emotional background and connotations associated to a concept*" (here the country) to explain how these ideas are transferred to a product simply because it is "made in" a specific country. So, cultural meanings and national expertise are transferred to the products themselves.

Also, as Hamzaoui Essoussi, Merunka and Bartikowski (2010) further

demonstrate, when there is congruence between the perceived national image and the brand's characteristics, there is reinforcement both in credibility and in perceiving authenticity. This congruence fosters a deeper sense of consumer trust which consequently supports long-term loyalty. Such connection is particularly important in culturally distant markets where the local familiarity with the brand is lower.

So, we can conclude that the COO effect rather than serving as a simple geographic label, it represents a dynamic cultural resource that bridges the gap between a nation's identity and a brand's credibility. International brands, by leveraging on their country's culture, can transfer upon themselves and their offerings perceptions of quality, reliability, and social value. In this sense the reputation of a country can become a strategic marketing lever for internationalisation. This means that COO effect goes beyond a simple association with provenance. Rather it represents a form of cultural capital that actively drives how brands are differentiated and perceived as authentic in international markets. In this sense, COO effect helps the brand to position effectively on the market, while also fostering an emotional connection with consumers across different cultural contexts.

1.4.2 Similarities and Differences

Both Brand Heritage and the Country-of-Origin Effect (COO) operate as powerful cultural and symbolic tools that influence how consumers perceive authenticity, quality, and trust. As Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) explain, brand heritage is a dimension of the brand identity found in its history, longevity and core values. It is able to evoke in the consumer long-term consistency, credibility, and emotional attachment. Because of that heritage can provide a basis for distinctiveness in positioning and generate a competitive advantage that is difficult to

imitate by competitors. Similarly, Usunier (2006) highlights that COO effect functions as associative signals through which consumers associate a product or brand with the country where it is manufactured. The association transfers national characteristics or trait to the products themselves (i.e. Italy is famous for its quality in craftsmanship and fashion, this trait is associated to the products and brands as well).

In both cases, perception is rooted in cultural meanings and values that go beyond the mere functional value of the offering, reinforcing the brand's symbolic capital and potential differentiation in global markets.

However, while both “tools” share this cultural and emotional foundation, they differ substantially in their nature and controllability. The COO effect is defined as an exogenous cue, it comes from external perceptions shaped by stereotypes or generalisations about a nation's image: *“every place has an image, and that more importantly from the marketing perspective, unlike brand or corporate images, those of nations and other places are not directly under the markets control”* (Dinnie, 2003). On the other hand, brand heritage is an endogenous construct: *“heritage is woven into the fabric of an organisation, its culture, its memory”* (Urde et al. 2007). Heritage has to be uncovered, activated and nurtured (Urde et al. 2007) by the company itself, therefore it is deliberately built, managed, and communicated internally with the aim to strengthen the brand authenticity and strategic positioning. It represents an internal narrative that leverages history and tradition as a marketing resource, rather than a passive reflection of national image.

Recent research by Tarabashkina et al. (2024) shows that provenance cues, and in particular the Country-of-Origin shape consumer perceptions through both emotional and symbolic mechanisms. When consumers do not have direct familiarity with a brand, especially in culturally distant markets, *“they frequently use COO as a cue to make*

inferences about product quality, safety or status” (Tarabashkina et al., 2024)

So, if COO relies on external associations with the territorial identity, on the other hand, heritage brands construct authenticity internally, through the consistent communication of organisational core values and legacy.

Form this last point we can argue that, despite their differences, the two phenomena can also be complementary. Godey et al. (2012) argue that the integration of brand heritage with COO cues can amplify perceived authenticity and trust towards a brand, in particularly when the brand’s cultural identity aligns with the country’s reputation. These interactions are of particular importance for global brands, COO effect can significantly influence how brand value is perceived, which mean that marketing managers should carefully evaluate and assess the factors that may increase this value (here brand heritage) and incorporate it with the COO effect.

In light of this, those strategies that combine brand heritage and national reputation can help brands to keep their internal identity consistent with the way they are perceived in foreign markets. Over time, this alignment can strengthen their distinctiveness and build a more meaningful connection with consumers in international markets.

If the COO effect mainly concerns how a brand’s origin is interpreted by the world, on the other hand, brand heritage concerns more closely to the brand’s identity and historical continuity. Understanding how to co-work these two dimensions is essential for an effective global positioning. This combination allows firms to leverage both external reputation and internal legacy as mutually reinforcing sources of trust and distinctiveness.

1.5 Theoretical Connections and Outline of The Research Question

The theoretical analysis conducted in this chapter has been made to outline a logical framework for the main research of the thesis. The connection started from the definition of a brand and its fundamental role in international marketing and then all the complex challenges posed by globalisation. In this scenario, storytelling was introduced as a marketing tool for communicating the brand values and identity with the consumers. However, the brand's ability to generate trust and differentiate itself should be based on assets much more difficult to imitate.

So, the investigation has focused on two of this so-called “assets”, two symbolic and cultural ones: Brand heritage and Country-of-Origin Effect.

On one hand, we have defined heritage not as simple historical legacy, but more as a strategic and endogenous resource actively managed by the brand itself. Through heritage marketing, the company is able to leverage on its past to communicate authenticity, stability and lasting coherent values. Its historical identity becomes a competitive advantage that allows the brands to position themselves on the market and to build trust with consumers. Heritage acts as a reputational lever strengthening the relationship with the stakeholders.

On the other hand, the Country-of-Origin effect was analysed as an exogenous construct: an external perception of a brand bound to the image of its origin country. It acts as a mental shortcut, especially in foreign markets, for consumers to infer quality, status and reliability, since they associate those peculiar traits of a nation to the brand or

product manufactured there.

As highlighted in the last section, although brand heritage and COO effect are distinct in nature and controllability (the first internal and manageable, the other external and uncontrollable), both operate as powerful cultural tool that leverage on consumer's emotions, influencing brand perceptions.

Therefore, the objective of the thesis is to investigate if brand heritage is able to act as a lever for internationalisation of a brand and to help position it in international markets as well, with it also the similarity with the COO effect and to which extent they can cooperate.

This leads us to the formulation of our research questions:

“How can brand heritage act as a strategic lever for brand positioning in a foreign market? How does the Country-of-Origin effect interact with brand heritage in a foreign market?”

Chapter 2 - Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate the role of brand heritage as a strategic asset that drives not only internationalisation, but also the positioning on foreign markets, as well as its interaction with the Country-of-Origin Effect.

Given the exploratory nature of the research the study follows a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of companies that effectively interpret and actively leverage their brand heritage (Creswell, 2013; Saunders et al., 2023)

For this reason, the approach is based on a multiple case study (Stake, 1995; Malhetra 2017), where all the brands chosen are characterised by a strong and well-established heritage. Each case study has been interviewed to gather insights directly from the managers and professionals, directly involved in the brand communication strategies, allowing a better understanding of the topic from an operational perspective. Then the primary data have been supported by secondary sources related to the brands selected.

Lastly, the data are analysed through the Gioia methodology, a qualitative approach that enables to build a theoretical framework starting from the actual data collected, allowing to fully exploit the informants' insights (Gioia et al., 2012).

This chapter will be a breakdown of the methodological process followed to reach the final findings, starting from the context of analysis and then the criteria of sample selection, till the process of data collection and the

coding procedure adopted.

2.2 Context of Analysis

The context of analysis of this research is situated in the Italian landscape, which is characterised by a strong culture and tradition in many sectors, which can contribute to the shaping of brand heritage. In particular, the context chosen is the one of companies characterised by a strong and well-built brand heritage which also operate in globalised markets. In this scenario, brand heritage emerges as a relevant tool to establish meaningful connection with consumers.

The Italian context represents a particularly relevant setting for studying brand heritage, since it is characterised by a strong industrial and cultural tradition where history craftsmanship and identity play a central role.

This is reflected in the official register “Historic Trademarks of National Interest” promoted by the Italian Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy. In particular,

“The Growth Decree (Decree-Law no. 34 of 4/30/2019 converted with amendments by Law no. 58 of 6/28/2019) has established that the owners or exclusive licensees of trademarks registered for at least fifty years, or for which continuous use for at least fifty years can be demonstrated, used for the marketing of products or services made in a nationally excellent productive enterprise historically linked to the national territory, can obtain the registration of the trademark in the Register of Historical Trademarks of National Interest, established at the Italian Patent and Trademark Office” (Associazione Marchi Storici, 2026)

The register includes hundreds of companies with a long-standing presence and a recognised historical identity. In particular, as for April

2026, 1021 brands are registered, of which 379 belonging to the food sector (Ministero delle Imprese e del Made in Italy, 2026). The 88% of the firms enrolled belong to the manufacturing sector (Associazione Marchi Storici, 2026).

In addition, the sector overview provided by the site of “Marchi Storici” divide the Italian Market, in four main sectors named as “The 4 A’s of Made in Italy” (last data from June 2024):

- Automation (20% of listed brands)
- Agrifood (49% of listed brands)
- Fashion (13% of listed brands)
- Furniture (18% of listed brands)

These key sectors of the Italian landscape are traditionally associated with strong brand identities built over time and there is a strong link among products, territory and history that often become a defining element of brand positioning.

Within this landscape, Italian companies with a long-standing heritage represent an ideal sample for the study of how historical identity and national reputation can strategically interplay to shape the positioning on international markets.

2.3 Data Sample

This section will introduce the sample selected for the multiple case study and will outline the criteria guiding its composition. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the selection process was conducted with the aim to identify companies that are relevant to the research objectives and that were able to provide rich and meaningful insights.

2.3.1 Case selection

The companies included in this study were selected through a purposeful sampling approach to identify meaningful cases for empirical evidence (Patton, 2014). Given the qualitative nature of the research, the focus was on selecting cases that would provide rich information for a deeper understanding of how brand heritage drives positioning in international contexts.

Brands were selected according to a set of criteria designed to ensure coherence with the conceptual framework of the study.

First, the selected brands had to qualify as “brand with a heritage” meaning that they must have a rooted identity in an historical background of set of values, traditions and practices that are actively maintained over time (Urde et al., 2007).

In this sense, the brands selected should treat heritage as a strategically relevant resource (Balmer, 2013).

Second, the brands should fulfil the “tri-generational or 50-year corporate heritage requisite” (Balmer, 2013). Meaning that their key identity traits have endured over time. This criterion allows us to focus on brands that have a sufficiently consolidated and recognisable heritage.

Third, the selected companies should engage in communication strategies or marketing campaigns related to heritage to mobilise and promote it, i.e. Archives, Museums or digital channels through which storytelling emphasises heritage (Napolitano et al. 2020)

Fourth, all the brands have a presence in foreign markets, ensuring coherence with the research questions focusing on brand heritage as a

driver for positioning in international markets.

Finally, to minimise industry bias, the brands were selected across different sectors. The selection process was supported by secondary sources such as companies' website, social media and professional networks like LinkedIn.

2.3.2 Sample Description

A total of sixteen companies were initially contacted, of which nine agreed to participate in the study. So, the final sample is composed of nine Italian companies operating across different sectors, all characterised by a strong and well-established brand heritage and an active presence in international markets.

The shared characteristics of the brands ensure coherence with the research objectives, as all cases present a strong historical identity and a consistent use of heritage in communication activities.

The sample's constituents have a long history of more than fifty years, which have allowed them to develop a recognisable identity over time. Their presence in international markets allows to investigate how heritage is leveraged in foreign contexts, where cultural distance limits brand familiarity.

The selected brands include:

1. Barilla
2. Riso Scotti
3. Olivetti
4. Pomellato
5. Kartell

6. Gruppo Cimbali
7. Campari Group
8. Acqua di Parma
9. Amaro Montenegro

The choice of including companies from different industries, from food beverage to design, luxury and manufacturing, allows to understand on deeper and broader level how brand heritage is strategically levered across various contexts.

An overview of the selected brands and details about the informant are provided in Table 1.

<i>Amaro Montenegr</i>	1885	Herbal liqueurs	Family owned	381	401	Camilla Menarini	Global Brand Manager	F	1
<i>Acqua di Parma</i>	1916	Luxury fragrances	Non-family owned	97,1	133	Alice Federici	Content Manager	F	3
<i>Campari Group</i>	1860	Spirits and aperitif beverages	Family owned	3650	4837	Federica Pappalardo	Brand Manager	F	3
<i>Gruppo Cimbali</i>	1912	Professional espresso machines	Family owned	255	818	Barbara Foglia	MUMAC Director	F	2
<i>Kartell</i>	1949	Design	Family owned	97,8	114	Elisa Storace	Museum Curator	F	18
<i>Pomellato</i>	1967	Luxury jewellery	Non-family owned	218	423	Anonymous	Head of trade marketing	/	10
<i>Oliveri</i>	1908	Internet of things and big data	Non-family owned	111	277	Luigi Emanuele di Marco	Heritage Manager and Social media specialist	M	5
<i>Riso Scotti</i>	1860	Rice production	Family owned	320	278	1. Giulio Reggiani 2. Laura Quattrocchi	1. Brand Manager 2. Head of PR	1. M 2. F	1. 3 2. 32
<i>Barilla</i>	1877	Pasta production	Family owned	5,08	N.d.	Alberto Costella	Export marketing and trade associate director	M	15
Company	Year of foundation	Core business	Ownership	Turnover, mln\$ (last available 2024)	Employees	Informant	Role	Gender	Years of experience

Tab. 1

Sources: Official website (year of foundation and core business); Orbis (ownership, turnover and employee); Informant (role and gender); LinkedIn (years of experience)

2.4 Data Collection

The empirical investigation is based on a combination of secondary and primary data sources to ensure both theoretical grounding and empirical depth. This allows to answer the research question with first-hand evidence gathered directly from relevant actors actively operating on the market.

2.4.1 Primary Data

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants from selected companies. This method is widely recognised as the most suitable for qualitative research, since it allows for consistency across cases while still being flexible in the interaction with the respondents. (DiCiccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This type of conversational format facilitates a reflective exchange of information, since the interviewed are asked to articulate and elaborate their knowledge. This aspect is relevant to uncover shared patterns and specific characteristics of the brand's use of its heritage.

The selected informants occupy roles closely related to brand management and marketing communications in their respective organisations, such as marketing managers, brand managers and museum directors. Their position is particularly relevant for the purpose of the study, as they are directly involved in the definition, interpretation and communication of the brand identity. Because of their higher experience in the field of brand heritage, their perspective allowed to gather data that

reflect the actual process behind leveraging heritage as a strategic asset.

In particular, this approach is based on an interview protocol, which is a predefined set of questions that guide the flow of the interaction towards the specific topics of interest. The complete interview guide is reported in Appendix A.

The interview protocol consisted of seven opened questions aimed at exploring the role of brand heritage in international markets. The questions were organised into key thematic sections aligned with the research objectives; they are:

- *Section A: The Internal Dimension: Heritage Management*
- *Section B: The International Dimension: Expansion and Adaptation*
- *Section C: Interaction between Heritage and Country-of-Origin effect*

In the first section the goal was to investigate the internal perception of the brand's history and the tools used to communicate it to the consumers. With the second section the focus was on understanding the heritage role on international markets, and so specifically the fundamental role that brand heritage plays in increasing awareness in distant markets. In this section also, it was important to understand the communication strategy, whether it was standardised or locally adapted, as well as the main barriers and difficulty faced on properly conveying the history.

The last section focused on the role of Country-of-origin effect, and since the sample is all made of Italian companies, on the "Made in Italy" together with its relationship with Brand Heritage.

The interview structure was developed to investigate several interconnected dimensions of the phenomenon, ensuring comparability across cases while leaving the respondents free to elaborate on aspects that are particularly relevant to their experience.

Lastly, interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, to have vis-a-vis interaction with the professional and a more flexible and natural exchange, as well as to be able to investigate also aspects outside the interview protocol.

This approach made it possible to collect rich qualitative material, capturing similar patterns and company peculiar traits.

Information about the interviews and transcripts length are disclosed in table 2.

Tab. 2

Company	N° Interviews	Transcript length (pages)
Barilla	1	9
Riso Scotti	1	12
Olivetti	1	7
Pomellato	1	5
Kartell	1	7
Gruppo Cimbali	1	2
Campari Group	1	2
Acqua di Parma	1	9
Amaro Montenegro	1	8

Sources: Personal elaboration of the author

2.4.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data were used to build the theoretical framework of the study and to contextualise the analysis.

Industry reports and database like Orbis were used to gather specific information on a firm-level like annual revenues, number of employees, ownership structure and industry classification. Moreover, to implement the interviews and support the primary data were also consulted:

- Official websites, both of the brands and of the museums/archives if presents
- Social media pages (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) to extrapolate examples of public campaigns representative for the argument treated
- LinkedIn both of the informants and the Brands
- Articles, Newspapers and similar official sources

These materials contributed to support primary data interpretation (Singh, 2014)

Tab. 3

Company	Secondary Sources
Barilla	- Company website - Brand's social media accounts (LinkedIn, Instagram)
Riso Scotti	- Company website - Brand's social media accounts (LinkedIn, Instagram)
Olivetti	- Company website - Brand's social media accounts (LinkedIn, YouTube, X and Threads) - History dedicated website - Archive's website - Podcast on Spotify "OLiverse"
Pomellato	- Company website - Brand's social media campaigns (LinkedIn, Instagram) - Portfolio of iconic products (iconica

	ring)
Kartell	- Company website - Museum website - Company portfolios (mobile componibile, first chair – philippe stark collab) - Brand's LinkedIn
Gruppo Cimbali	- Company website - Museum Website - Brand's social media campaigns (LinkedIn, Instagram)
Campari Group	- Company website - Brand's social media campaigns (LinkedIn, Instagram) - Gallery website
Acqua di Parma	- Company website - Brand's social media (Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube) - 110th anniversary instagram campaign - Six pills campaign instagram - Product lines
Amaro Montenegro	- Company website - Brand's social media (Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube) - Iconic bottle - 2017 renewed iconic bottle

Source: personal elaboration of the author

2.5 Data Analysis

In the first phase of the analysis, single cases were developed for each company, to explore how brand heritage is interpreted and used within each specific context. Then, in the second stage, a cross-case analysis was conducted with the Gioia Methodology, which is a systematic approach for developing new concepts and designated to bring “qualitative rigor” during the conduction and presentation of the research

(Gioia et al., 2012).

This second methodology is particularly suited for studies based on qualitative evidence, as it allows the researcher to progressively show its path from raw data to theoretical evidence. This evidence brings also credibility to the findings, since all the logic being them is disclosed.

The starting point of this methodology is the importance of grounding the analysis on interviews conducted to specifically suited and designed informants. In fact, these individuals are considered “*knowledgeable agents*’, namely, people in organisations that know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions” (Gioia et al., 2012). It means that these experts can explore and explain their role and experience in a valuable way. This implies that in the early stages of the analysis, priority must be given to the respondents, preserving their original answers to the interviews’ questions and their own interpretations.

However, after the interviews, the first step of the analysis begins as an individual examination of each case, in order to understand how brand heritage is interpreted and used singularly in each company. A dedicated chapter for each brand is elaborated to capture in dept the specific characteristics of each case before moving to the comparative analysis.

Then, the analytical process follows a structured cross-case analysis dictated by the Gioia methodology. Here, the first step is the “*1-st order analysis*”, starting from the informant’s own words, the recurring expressions in the various interviews are grouped into labels that reflect the meaning given by the respondents. Here the goal is still to preserve their original language as much as possible. This stage often results in a large number of initial categories (Gioia et al., 2012).

Because of that, it is necessary to move towards a “*2-nd order analysis*”, which represents a second order level of interpretations. The first-order codes are examined to identify patterns and similarities and then they are further aggregated into broader themes that reflect the interpretation of the researcher across interviews (Gioia et al., 2012).

In the final stage of the analysis, the second order themes are grouped again into the last few broader dimensions. This step allows to identify more evident patterns that connect the themes emerged and to capture the core aspects of the phenomenon. These aggregate dimensions help to organise the findings into a coherent conceptual structure that is the base for interpreting the results (Gioia et al., 2012).

The Gioia methodology allows to maintain a clear connection between data and interpretation, making all the analytical process more transparent and so more credible.

2.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to outline the methodological approach adopted for the study, explaining both the data collection and the methodology applied.

A qualitative approach was chosen to better explore the role of the brand heritage and its relationship with the country-of-origin effect. This was feasible through to the semi-structured interviews that allowed to gather detailed insights from companies with a strong history and an international presence.

Then the Gioia methodology made possible to move from the informants' words to more theoretical and abstract concepts, all while keeping transparency and coherence during the analytical process.

The methodological choices were chosen to be consistent with the exploratory nature of the research and for providing a solid basis for the analysis of the findings.

Chapter 3 - Acqua di Parma

3.1 Company Overview

Acqua di Parma is known to be one of the most famous expressions of Italian luxury craftsmanship, since it reflects “*the essence of the Italian Art of Living*” (Acqua di Parma official website, 2026). The Maison was founded in 1916 in the city of Parma by Baron Carlo Magnani, an intellectual and anti-conformist aristocrat from a noble Emilian family (Acqua di Parma official website, 2026). He developed Acqua di Parma to offer an alternative at the opulent and luxurious French perfumes that at the time saturated the market. As a counter trend the Baron wanted to create something different, a fragrance that embodied a lighter and refreshing alternative: he wanted to resemble the feeling of the Italian sun on the skin that he missed during his travels. (Interview Acqua di Parma, April 2026; Acqua di Parma official website, 2026). The result of this vision was “Colonia”, the iconic signature perfume of the brand still produced today.

Today the brand, however, to balance iconic tradition and creative evolution, has expanded its products portfolio, from the original Colonia to the more recent “Blu Mediterraneo”, “Signature of the Sun” and latest “Buongiorno” line. Alongside the luxury fragrances it has introduces home fragrances like the “Art of living” luxury design objects (Interview Acqua di Parma, April 2026; Acqua di Parma official website, 2026).

This portfolio diversified is built with the aim of remain relevant to contemporary consumer preferences while remaining coherent with the heritage of the brand (Urde at al, 2007).

Initially, the commercial distribution of Colonia began through an unconventional channel, which were the sartorial boutiques. The tailor

custom made products were sprayed with the perfume and this allowed clients to associate Colonia to high luxury tailoring. This association served as the narrative for building the brand's identity and to establish a narrative of craftsmanship that has survived over a century.

Over the decades, the Maison has transitioned from a niche Italian fragrance brand into a globally recognised brand. Today, it is present across Europe, USA and some regions in South America, Sud Africa, Asia and even in Middle Orient (Kuwait, Qatar and Emirates) (Acqua di Parma official website, 2026).

The products are distributed on a global scale using exclusive international retail channels, such as department stores and also single brand dedicated boutiques that try to merge the italianness of Acqua di Parma with peculiar cultural traits of the market in which they operate. This are the so called "local tributes". For example, a boutique in Shanghai may have wallpaper inspired by the culture of the place. (Interview Acqua di Parma, April 2026).

As for the ownership and governance, Acqua di Parma underwent significant structural changes. Since the foundation year the brand operated without a centralised corporate structure, it was in the hand of the founder at the beginning who only sold the product to elite tailor shop.

It is only in in 1993 (Il sole 24 Ore, 2015) that the Maison entered the internationalisation expansion phase, when three entrepreneurs, Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, Diego della Valle and Paolo Borgomanero, bought the brand and positioned Acqua di Parma globally as a symbol of sophisticated Italian elegance (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

After that, in 2001 the brand was acquired by LVMH group and with the new owner it finally reached the global scale (LVMH official website,

2026). However, even if integrated into this massive french group, Acqua di Parma was able to maintain its peculiar Italian traits and characteristics intact.

Today, the company is as a key player in the niche global fragrance market (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026) because it was able to successfully adapt to the current market trends while remaining coherent to its original identity.

3.2 The Role of Brand heritage

From the Interview with the Content Manager, it emerged that in Acqua di Parma heritage is considered an active and evolving resource that guides strategic decisions (Urde et al, 2007). In particular, the Maison is highly aware of its really strong heritage but considers fundamental also to live in the present and to continuously innovate (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

For them heritage, it is not merely a story to tell, it guides all their choices at the level of creating new fragrances, products and even every strategic decision behind the communication of the image of the brand itself. *“Surely, it is a heritage that we want to guard, but it guides all our strategic decisions”* (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

Moreover, they truly want to *“maintain their icons, but with the capacity and possibility to reinvent them with new interpretations”* (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026), however always remaining faithful to their identity and values.

The best example of how the brand treats its historical legacy as an active force to shape new products is the management of the core fragrance Colonia. This fragrance has maintained its original olfactory formulation since 1916 but in 2025 it was launched an Eau de Perfume

version of the eau de Cologne that slightly modifies the olfactory pyramid, but without distorting the original essence (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). In doing so, the iconic Colonia was able to be kept relevant for the current market demands without becoming obsolete. This is a way to nurture the brand heritage while sustaining long-term consumer trust.

As for the physical manifestation of the heritage, the brand relies on symbols that express the identity of the Maison, since they remained unchanged from the foundation (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). These types of symbols evoke the story and values embedded in Acqua di Parma, like the craftsmanship and Italianness.

For example, the iconic bottle, as represented in figure 3.1, features a distinct Art Deco design inspired directly by the Italian Deco period, serving as a strong reminder of the brand's aesthetic roots. This visual symbol is paired with the signature yellow colour palette, that carries historical significance for Parma, the city where the Maison was founded, and for the facades of the building that during the Farnese period were painted of this colour which still persists to these days (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). In figure 3.2 we can see the facades, while in figure 3.3 it is shown the official Instagram page of the brand, which is permeated by the symbolic colour yellow.



Figure 3.1. The iconic Colonia bottle.
Source: Acqua di Parma official website.

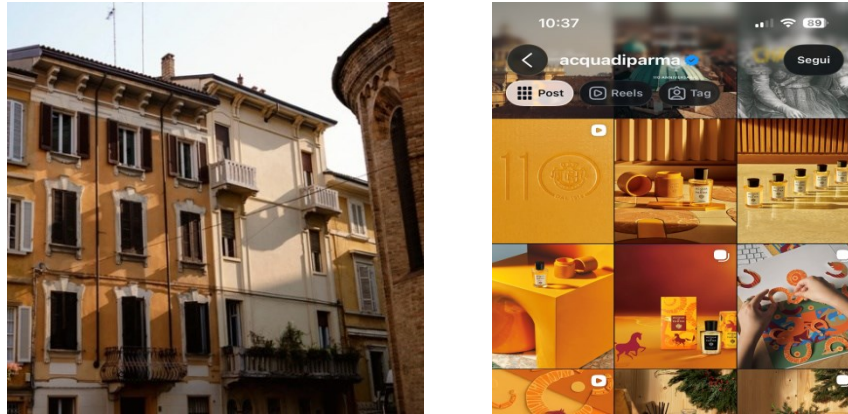


Figure 3.2 and 3.3. Acqua di Parma's yellow signature, left on facades while right on official Instagram profile.

Sources: Acqua di Parma official website and Acqua di Parma official Instagram.

This colour is also used for the hat boxes (figure 3.4) that the boutiques use as packages for the perfumes and design pieces. The boxes serve as a reminding to the origin of the perfume and its distribution: it was originally sold in tailor shops and sprayed on the tailor-made suits. Moreover, these packages being still manufactured completely by hand from local suppliers, strengthen furthermore the value of craftsmanship that has always been at the base of Acqua di Parma (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).



Figure 3.4 and 3.5. The iconic Hat Box and leather perfume case

Source: Acqua di Parma official website.

Last but not least, the logo chosen is the coat of Marie Louise Duchess of Parma, wife of Napoleon. The Duchess played a significant role in promoting perfumery in the region, and by choosing her crest, the brand provides a cultural link to the historical parmesan heritage in the

perfumery (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

With these tangible symbols, Acqua di Parma keeps consolidating its strong heritage which allows to maintain its brand identity vital and contemporary. Through its brand heritage the Maison is also able to carve in the market a premium positioning and strong trust with the costumers (Urde et al, 2007).

3.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

As for the communication of brand heritage in international markets, Acqua di Parma applies a “glocal approach”, which reflects *“the aspirations of a global strategy, while the necessity for local adaptations and tailoring of business activities is simultaneously acknowledged”* (Svensson, 2001).

In fact, the core brand narrative, consisting of the foundation story and its deepest values, are kept completely standardised across borders. The Maison is particularly careful not to alter its historic identity, but to suit localised preferences it makes temporary adaptations to its communicative campaigns for making its heritage more understandable to culturally distant audiences.

For example, during important commercial periods like the Ramadan or Chinese New Year, in its narrative campaigns the brand introduces traditional symbols related to these festivities to give the perception to be closer to the customers of these cultures. Clearly this is made without distorting its true symbols and heritage (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

Another way that Acqua di Parma has to connect with the foreign markets is by introducing the “local tributes” in the boutiques in a certain country (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). As already cited, for example

in a boutique in China it is possible to find object of designs or maybe wallpapers that recall specific symbols and respect of that culture. In fact, in figure 3.5 and 3.6 it is shown the Guangzhou boutique, in China, where Italian elements merge with custom vases echoing ming dynasty porcelain. Also, when launching new products in foreign countries, the Maison usually collaborates with local and international artists by asking them to reinterpret the story of the brand, without changing it. (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).



Figure 3.5 and 3.6: Guangzhou Boutique

Source: Instagram official profile, posted November 20th, 2024

An example is the really recent collaboration, with the artist Laura Gonzalez, that was asked to reinterpret the design of the bottle, candle and box hat of a fragrance according to her own sense of art (Acqua di Parma Instagram, 2026). The goal is to create a bridge and a collaboration between the Italian culture, which always remain the main core of the narrative, and the local culture of the country where the brand operates. The Maison must be perceived as Italian and authentic, but it must also be culturally understandable. (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026)

The main communication channels of the international storytelling include, as we have just seen the curated boutiques, and digital platforms like social media, that allow to reach every customer globally.

Really explicative was the last campaign made through January and

March 2026 for celebrating the 110th anniversary of the Maison. The brand launched a new cinematic campaign called “The Art of Living Italian” starring Michael Fassbender and Sabrina Impaccitore (Figure 3.7 and 3.8), with the intent of reflecting *“the beauty of Italy that reveals itself through the layers, rituals and time”* (LVMH, 2026). This campaign is composed on six episodes to explore *“all the values dear to the Maison, from finding beauty in small rituals and gestures to the understanding that refinement and simplicity are one”* (LVMH, 2026; Instagram 2026).



Figure 3.7 and 3.8: “The art of living Italian” campaign

Source: Instagram official profile, posted January 22nd, 2026 (left) and February 19th, 2026 (right)

The element of the “Italiannes” is fundamental for the brand, and this whole campaign was made to explain internationally the real story and the importance of the heritage of Acqua di Parma. It is this sense, it is the “italiannes” and the embodied authenticity in it, that allowed the brand to differentiate itself from the competitors.

However, we must notice that despite these integrated strategies the brand still faces difficulties in communicating exactly this “italiannes” abroad. In the interview were reported some examples of cultural barriers that arise when the Maison tries to explain the Italian identity of the

brand. Like explaining to China, the meaning behind “*Dolce far niente*”, in Italy it means the “joy of doing nothing” and pausing to enjoy a moment of peace. This for example is a really culturally distant concept for China, that absolutely do not value leisure time (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026)

Another example of justifying barriers occurs when Acqua di Parma tries to transmit values fundamental to the brand but that can be described only by untranslatable Italian words, like “*sprezzatura*”. This term evokes the ability of Italian to make complex craftsmanship appear simple and natural. Explaining this term internationally is really complex since it requires extensive contextualisation (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

So, Acqua di Parma demonstrate that it is fundamental to protect the historic identity of the brand to appear authentic and distinctive from the mass market. But on the same time, heritage cannot simply be communicated passively, it has to be necessary reinterpreted and adapted among different cultures to effectively reach the costumers.

3.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

The relationship between Acqua di Parma and the County-of-Origin effect represents a strong case where endogenous legacy and exogenous national reputation strongly align. In particular, from the interview emerged that the boundary between the “brand’s own sense of “Italiannes” and the broader one embedded in the “Made in Italy” is blurred, because it seems that the two dimensions overlap and mutually reinforce one another.

The “Made in Italy” effect in international markets acts as a strategic asset that confers symbolic meaning of sophistication and fine aesthetics

to the products that is associate with (Temperini et al, 2016). So, this appears to facilitate the communication of the history of a brand that already leverages on these values, because the “Made in Italy” effect helps to mitigate the initial liabilities of foreignness.

In fact, this “Italianness” is a globally recognised lifestyle, that many foreign consumers appreciate and would positively engage with. So, the presence of this lifestyle in Acqua di Parma’ s heritage amplifies the perception of authenticity and quality that already surround the brand.

The Maison, however, tries to build its international positioning in subtle but authentic Italian characteristics and lifestyle, strictly avoiding the superficial and stereotypical representation of Italian culture abroad. The brand invests considerable effort in explaining the real meaning behind Italian habits, making even specific marketing campaign on this. It is the case of the previously cited “Art of Living Italian” campaign, where the brand transforms its products into an invitation to experience the true Italian lifestyle (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

However, the real connection between heritage and “Made in Italy” effect is the way in which Acqua di Parma manufactures its products. In fact, the Maison does not own a mass-production factory but instead, it operates through a network of highly expert artisans from all over Italy (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

For example, when a fragrance is created the ingredients are chosen among local ones, and according to the technique use to distillate the fragrance, the artisans are selected only after a highly rigorous research process. The same happens even for creating the element of designs used for the marketing campaigns. For the launch of the Buongiorno collection, the Maison found on social media a really small atelier of a ceramist in Messina and commission to him a hand-crafted ceramic sun to represent and promote the collection (Interview Acqua di Parma,

2026).

In the end, it is really complicated understanding if it is the heritage that leverages on “Made in Italy” or vice versa, because both of them mortality reinforce each other. Basically, Acqua di Parma promotes and preserves the Italian manufacturing tradition which is at the core of “Made in Italy” effect. And, on the same time, this effect is what makes easier the international understanding of the brand heritage.

3.5 Conclusion

The information collected through the Interview with Acqua di Parma offer a significant insight into the use of brand heritage as a strategic lever for international positioning. In fact, the Maison successfully demonstrate that longevity and historical legacy, if managed as an endogenous asset, can actually foster competitive differentiation and consumer trust on international markets (Urde et al, 2007).

The key is to continuously balance history and heritage with market driven innovation, like the perfect example given by the original 1916 Colonia formula, whose olfactory formula was recently reinterpreted to make it remain contemporary (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). As Acqua di Parma has demonstrated, to remain successful a brand has to transform its past legacy into an asset for future growth.

As for the communication, this case has highlighted the complexity of implementing an effective communicative strategy abroad, because of the cultural diversity of the foreign markets. It is not enough to adopt a passive and standardised approach in telling the story of the brand, but rather it is important to adopt a more flexible and adaptive approach (Svensson, 2001).

As demonstrated by the brand, the “glocal” approach used, allows to

maintain the core of the narrative untouched and original, while temporary adaptations and specific symbols are introduced in the local marketing campaigns (Robertson, 1995), with the aim to reduce cultural distance.

However, the complexity of this approach was pointed out by the barriers encountered in the communication strategy, like the cultural and linguistic differences (Ghemawat, 2001) that make particularly challenging to explain Italian concepts like “Dolce far Niente” or “Sprezzatura” to foreign customers that lack contextualisation of the origin of these terms, as well as knowledge of Italian history (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

Finally, Acqua di Parma also revealed the powerful and mutually reinforcing relationship between the endogenous heritage of a brand, and the exogenous symbolic capital embedded in the country-of-origin effect (Godey et al, 2012), specifically the “Made in Italy”. The brand does not leverage passively on the superficial stereotypes of the “Made in Italy” effect, but rather enhances the symbols already ideally connected to this label, like manufacturing, authenticity, elegance and sophistication (Temperini et al, 2016), intertwining them with its own heritage. The Maison storytelling is centred in a tale of the origin of the brand itself nuanced by the importance of the authentic manufacturing model and local craftsmanship (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026).

Acqua di Parma effectively preserves and promotes the traditional expertise of the Italian excellence, and by establishing this strong harmony with the made in Italy effect and its heritage, it is able to create a deep emotional connection with customers across international markets.

Chapter 4 - Amaro Montenegro

4.1 Company Overview

Amaro Montenegro is one of the most recognisable symbols of the Italian spirits industry. Rooted in its core values of “authenticity” and “friendship”, the brand is represented by its highly recognisable motto “Sapore Vero”. In addition, it is characterised by a really strong historical legacy because it was created in 1885 in the city of Bologna by the “*rebellious spirit*” of Stanislao Cobianchi (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026; Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026).

The founder was born into a noble bolognese family, that imposed to him strict religious rules, but he refused them and embarked on a long journey across the globe. After learning the art of liqueur making, demonstrating remarkable skills both as an alchemist and herbalist, he returned to Italy and initially established the “Cobianchi Stanisalo Distilleria a Vapore” (Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026). Here Cobianchi dedicated years of study and experimentation on complex botanical macerations, and finally he invented the herbal liquor originally named as “Elisir Lunga Vita”, whose recipe has remained secret to these days. Only eleven years later, in the occasion of the marriage of princess Elena del Montenegro and prince Vittorio Emanuele III, the founder decided to dedicate its liquor to the princess and so, to rename it as “Amaro Montenegro” (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026; Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026).

Then after this “rebranding”, over the course of the twentieth century, the value of the Amaro was further strengthen by participating in numerous international expositions, from Bruxelles, Marseille, Praga, Hamburg to Amsterdam, accumulating a highly decorated collection of prize medals, that established its credibility and authenticity on the market (Amaro

Montenegro official website, 2026).

The uniqueness of Amaro Montenegro lies not only in its historical origins, but also in its distinctive production process. The liquor is created from 40 selected botanical herbs, from different parts of the world, that determines the three main aromatic categories of the Amaro, a sweet part, a citrus one and lastly a more bitter-herbaceous one. (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026; Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026). Through traditional herbal extraction techniques and artisans' expertise, the production process combines the aromatic herbs to reach six notes with different peculiarity, some are more tropical other more herbaceous. The production culminates with the addition of the seventh note, the so-called “Premio”, a micro-distillation of five top secret herbs, with a very high alcohol content that gives to the product its unmistakable taste and scent (Interview Montenegro, 2026).

Thanks to this peculiar process Amaro Montenegro became one of the most recognised brands on the Italian liqueur tradition, and still to these days it represents the flagship brand of the broader Montenegro Group. The corporate group is a highly diversified industrial entity, and it maintains a wide portfolio divided in two primary business areas, a specialised spirits division and a premium food division (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). According to the interview with the Global Brand Manager, it emerged that approximately, the 65% of the Group's turnover derives from the spirits division, of which Amaro Montenegro is the main one, and the remaining 35% comes from food products.

Currently, the brand has expanded beyond its domestic markets and has established a strong presence in numerous international markets. While the brand has a unique brand awareness in Italy, it is now implementing an internationalisation process in many culturally diverse geographic

areas. First of all, Amaro Montenegro has a relatively strong presence in several European countries. Then, US has been considered to be the second most important market for the brand worldwide. It is also present in Australia and Asia, the brand even has a specific division currently working on the APAC (Asia-Pacific) market (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

In all these markets Amaro operates in a business-to-business (B2B) type of distribution. In particular the brand targets buyers of large-scale distributors and then the so called "On Trade" channel, which involves all the Horeca channels, like for example restaurants, bar, evening venues and clubs (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). The final goal is to reach the final consumer through these intermediaries while promoting authenticity and quality that define the brand.

4.2 The Role of Brand heritage

For Amaro Montenegro, brand heritage is considered an *"intrinsic component of company's DNA, in the sense that it guides them for their strategic decision making"* (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). Their 140-year history is part of who they are, deeply rooted in their know-how, and it ensures that the contemporary marketing activities and product innovations never betray the original identity of the brand.

As explained in the Interview, however, Amaro Montenegro has evolved its communication themes over the last forty years to embrace contemporary ideals such as friendship and human connections, but all this while strictly preserving the main core value of "authenticity" (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). The commitment to this value of realness is explicitly expressed by the historic brand's payoff "Sapore Vero", where the word "True" reminds the consumer of the consolidated

history and unique quality of the brand (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

The tangible manifestation of Amaro Montenegro's heritage relies on symbolic and distinctive artefacts that have remained constant over time. The primary asset is the iconic Amaro bottle (figure 4.1), which features a distinctive flask-shaped design to evoke the idea of an alchemical potion. This shape was appreciated from the very beginning and has remained substantially unchanged over time (Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026). Then, in 2017 the bottle underwent a modernisation to keep it relevant according to the contemporary consumers' tastes (figure 4.2), however the brand wanted to preserve the original proportions that Stanislao Cobianchi first designed. To further highlight the longevity of the brand, this last restyling incorporated the founding year into the logo, transforming it in "Amaro Montenegro 1885". The bottle also features specific embossing in high relief, both the 1885 date and Stanislao Cobianchi's personal signature serving again as a reminder of the liquor's origins.



Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2: Old Amaro Bottle (left) and Actual Amaro Bottle after 2017 restyle (right)

Sources: Author's elaboration based on a screenshot from the official 2016 "Eroi Veri" Tv campaign available on the official Amaro Montenegro YouTube channel and on images from the official Gruppo Montenegro website (spirits section)

To complete the bottle design, the label shows a curated collection of prize medals won during various universal exhibitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026), like the one of Marseilles, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Paris (Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026). This represents a visible record of historic excellence as a tribute to the longevity of the quality that characterises the product.

Amaro Montenegro currently does not have a public museum, but it leverages its historic production plant in San Lazzaro, where the aging cellars of “Vecchia Romagna” are filled with original resting barrels. This place is used to organise exclusive guided tours for international bartenders and partners so that they can directly experience the tangible heritage of the brand (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

Lastly, Amaro’s heritage can be found in the traditional storytelling of the production process which consists of a series of meticulous steps unfolding over a strict six-month timeline, from the arrival of the 40 botanic herbs to the final bottling stage. The narrative surrounding this production process, together with the secret recipe, has contributed to shape Amaro Montenegro’s image as a refined, high-quality and authentic product till these days. Moreover, the previously cited “Premio”, has been romanticised as the “tear of Princess Elena” and this anecdote reconnects the brand to the origin of its name giving a sense of continuity and historicity to its heritage (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

The combination of historical narratives and tangible symbols give the brand a strong competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to replicate (Urde et al, 2007).

4.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

When communicating its historic legacy abroad, Amaro Montenegro faces significant differences in consumers behaviours across international markets, and so, even if the core history remains the same, the brand has to carefully tailor and adapt its commercial consumption strategy (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

In the Italian landscape, the product enjoys almost absolute awareness because the culture of the amaro consumption as a digestif is rooted on a deep level. Abroad, instead, this consumer habit does not exist, which creates a significant cultural and market barrier at once. To overcome this challenge Amaro relies on a customised drinking strategy as an internationalisation tool. In particular, the brand tries always to remain loyal to its traditional consumption model of serving the liquor “*neat with ice*”, but now it extensively uses the “mixology” strategy, where some cocktails’ recipes are proposed both on social media campaigns. (Figure 4.3 and 4.4) and on the official website (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026; Amaro Montenegro official website, 2026)

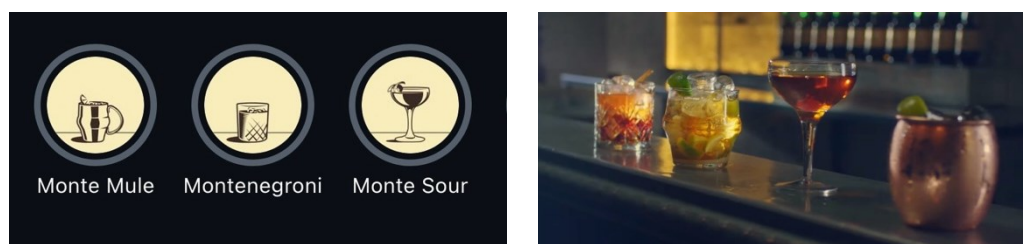


Figure 4.3 and 4.4: Evidence Stories on Mixology contents (left) and screenshot from “Product Story” international digital campaign

Sources: Official Amaro Montenegro’s Instagram page, retrieved June 17th, 2026; “Product Story– Chapter 3” retrieved on Official Montenegro YouTube channel, posted 8 years ago

However, the primary vehicle for communicating this heritage to international markets is through a mix of digital storytelling and

professional trade engagement. In particular, for the storytelling, the brand has launched on its official YouTube channel a 3 chapters product narrative video that retraces the history's brand (figure 4.5), visually presenting the original alchemy themes (figure 4.6), the secret production process and the core brand values, like friendship (figure 4.7). This campaign was launched in Italy and then in foreign countries too, like in Us. Here, working with the local business unit, the campaign was slightly modified to make it more appealing for US consumers.

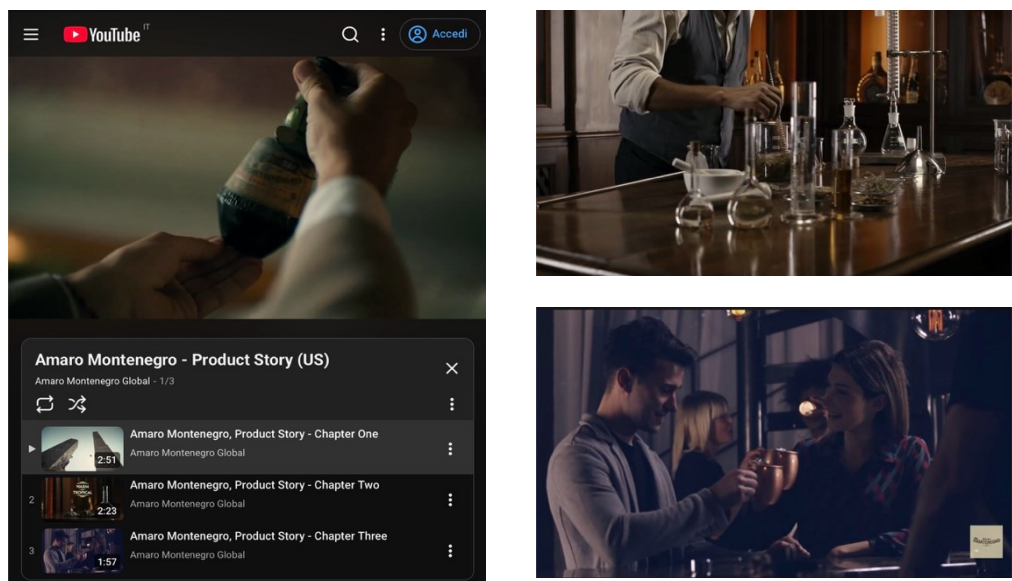


Figure 4.5, 4.6, 4.7: “Amaro Montenegro - Product Story”

Source: Playlist “Product Story” retrieved on Official Montenegro YouTube channel, posted 8 years ago

Offline, the brand drives its international heritage by educating the specialised B2B trade sector and local bartenders, rather than relying on a mass-market advertisement. As said in the Interview with the global brand manager, the product is currently in a primary distribution building phase in foreign markets, and to directly engage the “On Trade” supply chain, Amaro utilises intensive masterclasses, during which the brand leverages its historic longevity and production care to establish strong credibility (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

Then, remaining coherent to its core value of friendship and human

relations, to foster a unified global community of bartenders, it fosters also an annual cocktail competition called "The Vero Bartender", and in the end each year a winner is selected (Instagram, 2026). It has become a globally recognised competition and Amaro has officially opened a dedicated Instagram page (figure 4.8) For example, for the 140th anniversary the bartenders that participated were asked to imagine the future of mixology other 140 years later (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). This is a way to elegantly play with brand's timeline and generate engagement and trade loyalty.



Figure 4.8: Official Instagram page “The Vero Bartender”

Source: Amaro Montenegro official “The Vero Bartender” Instagram profile, retrieved June 17th, 2026

However, translating this strong legacy into culturally distant markets is really challenging. First of all, many of the historic anecdotes that characterise Amaro's Italian history, like renaming the liquor in honour of Princess Elena of Montenegro, may carry romantic meaning in Italy but abroad they lose all their profound meaning becoming pretty much irrelevant. Because these historic narratives do not resonate in culturally diverse markets, the brand deliberately presents a more synthetic version

of its history focusing more on the high quality of the product and the values of authenticity and friendship (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

4.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

According to the Interview with Amaro Montenegro, there is a close and mutually reinforcing relationship between its brand heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect, in particular “The Made in Italy”.

In particular, the Global Brand Manager explicitly defined the “Made in Italy” label as “*the brand’s main business card*” when entering in a new market. In international markets where there is lower brand awareness, the national reputation of Italy acts as an immediate exogenous cue that helps establish an initial sphere of trust and interest (Tarabashkina et al, 2024). Once this initial trust is securely forged, then the individual corporate identity of Amaro Montenegro enters immediately behind it, and through its unique bottle and dense historical longevity, it converts a more general curiosity into a stronger brand loyalty.

Again, from the interview emerged that being authentically Italian opens the doors to Amaro’s international distribution channels initially, providing a baseline of guaranteed prestige, manufacturing care and quality (Temperini et al., 2016). Then following the lead of the characteristics bound to the “Made in Italy” label, the brand’s 140 years old heritage is activated to deepen the relationship with its foreign consumers. In particular, the brand heritage narrative aligns perfectly with the meaning associated to the “Made in Italy”, and this allows the international consumers to easily connect the brand to the broader concepts of authentic Italian quality (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

In addition, the brand leverages a unique consumer segment abroad to further enhance this cultural connection. In particularly diverse markets, like Australia, the local immigrant Italian community serves as a vital ambassador for the company. The classic “Sapore Vero” payoff and the cultural habit of the digestif reminds them of home and this encourages them to purchase the liquor as an emotional tie with Italy. Clearly, this behaviour serves to the brand as a “word of mouth” channel helping Amaro to overcome the initial awareness barrier of the market (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

Overall, the alignment between the brand heritage and the broader prestige bounded to the Italian provenance allows Amaro Montenegro to minimise market barriers and to secure a distinctive positioning abroad. The brand is able, in this sense, to successfully transform its historic and geographic background into a powerful driver of international growth.

4.5 Conclusion

What emerged from the Interview with Amaro Montenegro is the strategic importance of the brand heritage as an active driver for international market positioning (Urde et al. 2007). Other cases have presented the importance of communicating effectively the heritage directly to the final consumers (B2C model), but this specific case highlights its efficacy also in the business to business (B2B) model. The brand’s strong historical legacy provides a solid foundation of authenticity and quality that resonate with each individual that interacts with Amaro Montenegro, both distributors and final consumers.

This can happen because the brand successfully leverages its historic milestones and unique manufacturing process to reinforce contemporary organisational credibility and defend its global competitive advantage. In particular, international success depends on the brand’s ability to

maintain a standardised narrative of the core history, while adapting to the consumption habits of each local market (Svensson, 2001). A perfect example of this adaptability is the “Mixology” approach used in foreign markets, where the culture of the digestif is not present. The mixology strategy not only allows the Amaro to be combined with other mixers to create cocktails but also engage bartenders with the “The Vero Bartender” competition (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). It is this strategic flexibility that successfully transforms the brand historical longevity into a contemporary asset.

Finally, it has once again emerged the mutually reinforcing relationship between the Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage (Godey et al, 2012). The “Made in Italy” label serves as the primary business card (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026) to help the brand to establish an initial level of consumer trust. However, what makes the difference with its competitors, it is the brand’s true and authentic history that ensures the creation of a solid, long-term customer loyalty.

Amaro Montenegro illustrates how a brand can actively leverage both its heritage and its geographic origin to secure a distinctive and hardly replicable positioning on a global scale.

Chapter 5 - Riso Scotti

5.1 Company Overview

Riso Scotti is known as one of the companies in the Italian agrifood sector with more legacy and history, with a long standing family tradition and a strong connection to the Italian rice-growing heritage, it was able to remain relevant thanks to its continuous product innovation. The company was born in 1860 as a small rural mill dedicated to the grinding of rice in Marudo, a small town near the province of Pavia (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). Then, the mill was later moved to Villanterio, another small town near Pavia, and in 1890 the firm “F.lli Scotti” was founded. However, it is only in 1953 that the company was brought to Pavia, where three years later would become “Riso Scotti S.p.A.” (Riso Scotti official website, 2026).

The choice of the geographical location was spontaneous, but the success of the company was due to the fact that this was one of the primary regions dedicated to intensive rice cultivation (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). Over its 165 years of continuous existence the company underwent a profound multigenerational evolution, transitioning from an artisanal mill to a successful modern industry.

Riso Scotti has always been characterised by an enduring family-owned ownership structure. The leadership has seen the succession of six generations of the Scotti family, today the President and CEO is Dario Scotti (Riso Scotti official website, 2026), who represents the modern driving force behind the recent industrialisation and highly diversification of the products portfolio (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). This multigenerational family-owned business has allowed the brand to preserve organisational longevity and consistency over time, maintaining also the company tied to its territory of origin, which has become an

important part of its identity as well.

In terms of the contemporary portfolio, firstly, the company over time was able to transform the rice from a standardised agricultural commodity into a complex system of innovative food solutions (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). The traditional vacuum-packed raw rice remains the core product of Riso Scotti, but the company has currently diversified its portfolio to meet the modern consumers' lifestyles. The products offered include a wide range of rice-based savoury snacks, vegetable-derived drinks and plant milks like rice and grain-based beverages, functional condiments like rice oil and rapid ready-to-eat meal solutions designed for increasingly time-conscious consumer (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026; Riso Scotti official website).

Important to notice are the introduction of two of the main Riso Scotti's innovations, the carton cases and the vacuum-packaging. The cardboard boxes were first introduced in 1957 with an iconic design (figure 5.1), today famous is the blue box (figure 5.2), to underline the switch from craft business to industry (Riso Scotti official website, 2026). As for the vacuum packs, the company was the first one to introduce it forcing the competitors to later adopt them too.



Figured 5.1 and 5.2: Riso Scotti's carton boxes

Sources: Riso Scotti official website, retrived June 17th, 2026

Today, Riso Scotti has established a robust footprint, generating a substantial 35% of its total turnover in foreign territories (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). In particular, the company today is officially present in over 85 countries worldwide. However, important to notice is that the brand identity of the firm varies significantly across different markets. For example, in the Adriatic area and in some Eastern European regions it has a highly consolidated presence. In 2005 it has established “Riso Scotti Danubio”, a dedicated subsidiary in Romania which marks the beginning of the internationalisation process. On the other hand, in more distant or newly activated markets, Riso Scotti operates as an ambitious market follower (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). However, the ability of the company to impose its presence in international markets is due to the combination of the strong local roots of the company, which are always at the centre of its heritage, with an increasingly global orientation.

5.2 The Role of Brand heritage

Within Riso Scotti, history is not considered as a constraint requiring static conservation, but rather as an active and endogenous resource that drives contemporary strategic choices (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026; Urde et al, 2007). The Head of the Press Office explained that “*history is a heritage to guard for, but more than anything it is a resource that has guided both in the past and still today many strategic decisions*”. The heritage of the brand has been maintained with great continuity till 1860 and for more than six generations, it is based on some core values like the belonging to its origin in the Pavese territory and the attention to the quality of the raw materials. Instead of keeping the company trapped in the past, it has always been the brand heritage to push the company toward constant innovation. It is this internal DNA that has allowed the company to transform itself to keep pace with the contemporary times,

and evolving from a small artisan mill to the current successful firm. So, the heritage was never simply called “a memory” but rather it has been “*precisely a base on which to build a development in all senses*” (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

The physical manifestation of Riso Scotti’s heritage relies on marketing tools designed to communicate the authentic history both to domestic and international consumers. The company is currently organising a corporate museum, “La Galleria del Riso”. This space serves as dedicated archive where ancient rice-processing machinery are displaced to show the real history of the company, moreover this experience will be integrated with interactive and digital videos (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). This is an ambitious project that will be ready approximately next year, according to the Brand Manager in the interview. The goal of the brand is to register its gallery among the official “Musei d’Impresa”, which is an association that reunites more than 160 museums and archives of Italian companies to give value and to testify the remarkable Italian manufacturing capability (Museimpresa, 2026).

Becoming part of this association would formally recognise the brand’s history as a certified strategic asset capable of strengthening brand identity and consequently reinforcing consumer trust.

Furthermore, a tangible representation of its heritage can be shown in the evolution of the physical packaging (figure 5.1 and 5.2), which were first integrated in the 40s and 50s with communicative cues like customised corporate recipe books to build a connection with the consumers. Today these cookbooks have evolved into more digital archives available on the Riso Scotti website, known as “Cucina Creativa” (figure 5.3 and 5.4). This evolution shows how the company preserve the original intent to engage with its consumers while adapting its communications to their

contemporary lifestyles.

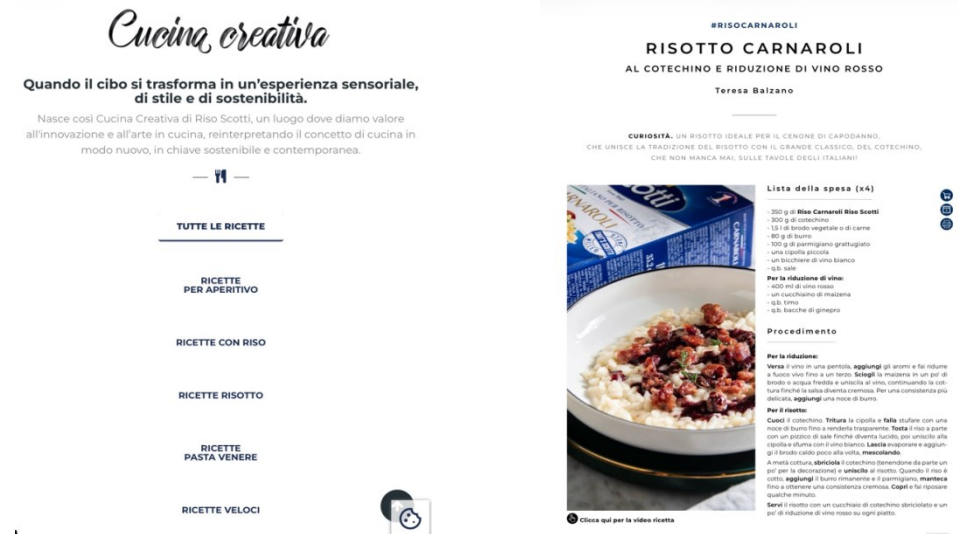


Figure 5.3 and 5.4: official page of “Cucina Creativa” and an example of recipe
Source: Riso Scotti official website, retrieved June 17th, 2026.

The long-term consistency of Riso Scotti’ identities and values has contributed to build almost a universal brand awareness across the Italian market. This demonstrates how continuity over time can become a strategic asset. The advertisement campaigns have always leveraged on brand’s core values like familiarity, trust and authenticity. Particularly representative in this sense, it is the commercial TV campaign from the 80s and early 2000s that featured Gerry Scotti (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). His presence further reinforced the image of an authentic product bound to its origin landscape, since he was born in Pavia as well. So, in each campaign there is always attention to the company’s territorial identity and to the core values that characterises it.

However, Riso Scotti was able to leverage on this heritage as an asset that sustained innovation and through it underwent a significant transformation in the product offerings, requiring also a shift in the communication channels. The ability of the brand to shift its strategy to better reflect the changing expectation of the contemporary consumers has enables the company to remain relevant to these days.

Lastly, the company's commitment to the supply chain sustainability is a strong connection to its heritage. The belonging to the Pavese territory is a fundamental and distinctive characteristic that the company has always highlighted and the traditional respect for this area has been translated into an annual sustainability report (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). In this way the company connects its historical land to modern ecological strategies, demonstrating once again that heritage acts as a substantial driver for new strategic decisions.

5.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

When communicating its heritage in international markets, Riso Scotti faces a significant challenge linked to the various cultural perceptions of its core product. The cultural consumption of rice in Italy is sophisticated and fragmented among many different qualities of it, like "Carnaroli" or "Arborio"; international consumers, particularly non-European or distant markets, on the other hand, perceive rice as a highly standardised commodity (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026) .

To successfully cross these barriers and to defend its premium positioning against low-cost private labels, the brand executes a strategic "glocal" marketing communication (Robertson, 1995). The foundational identity of the brand, which is based on the fine quality of the rice remains strictly uniform worldwide. However, the promotional tools and offering of the products are adapted to match the expectations of the diverse consumers.

A primary vehicle for this international storytelling is the standardisation of physical packaging. If in the domestic Italian market, the product recognition is already highly stable, in foreign markets the packaging becomes a direct narrative tool for brand's history. The inclusion of the

foundation years on the logo reinforces the company's longevity and communicates more than 165 years of expertise in rice products and the superior cooking performance of the Italian rice. Also, the typical blue colour for rice and the black one for the Venere rice are representative of Riso Scotti and allows the company to stand out on global shelves (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

However, what is adapted are more the products themselves, they are offered with various flavours to sustain local tastes. For example, in Italy is sold a package of already cooked plain rice, which serves as a base in the Italian cuisine. In culturally distant markets, the "risotto" culture is not so much present and plain rice would not be appealing, so to avoid this problem the pack of precooked rice is sold already flavoured (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). This demonstrates that the company adapts the form of the products while preserving the authenticity and quality that define its heritage

The physical communication of both the story and the product is integrated with a more recent digital storytelling through social media (Figure 4.5). Riso Scotti extensively uses global social platforms like Instagram and Facebook to engage directly with consumers with interactive food culture campaigns. This digital network is strategically adapted according to the habits of the targeted market and by leveraging on local influencers. For example, in Nordic regions like Finlandia, the most used social is Facebook, while in Italy is Instagram (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

In particular, the difficulty lies on explaining abroad the "italiannes" of the brand, so Riso Scotti tries to simplify the international narration of these concepts, by *"starting from simple common concepts shared abroad about Italy, the brand sets up a strategic communication"* (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). Explicative is the company's rubric called

“learning with Scotti”, that starting from basic concepts tries to teach some common Italian words and habits to reduce the distance among international markets (figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5: International Instagram page with “learning Italian with Scotti” campaign dedicated posts

Source: Official Riso Scotti International Instagram profile, retrieved June 17th, 2026

To conclude, bringing this extensive legacy across diverse markets with important cultural gaps is really challenging. But Riso Scotti demonstrates that communicating effectively its heritage abroad requires a balance between standardised historic narration and cultural adaptation. The brand however tries to always preserve its core narratives, which are based on its longevity and master expertise of high-quality rice. In this way the company successfully transform its long-lasting heritage into a distinctive source of competitive advantage abroad.

5.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

The interaction between Riso Scotti’s brand heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect presents a distinctive dynamic in the international agrifood sector. In the majority of artisanal sectors, the “Made in Italy” label serves as an immediate and globally recognised guarantee of prestige and

quality (Temperini et al., 2016). However, in the global rice sector, this interaction is much more complex. First, rice is not native to Italy, but it was imported from Asia during the Roman Empire. Second, rice is considered to be a commodity and not much consideration is given to the brand at the moment of purchase (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). Consequently, unlike the wine or pasta sectors, where Italian provenance is immediately associated to best quality (Godey et al, 2012), the global rice market is heavily saturated by domestic brands in local territories which possess deep historical roots similar to those of Italian master millers (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

The challenge that Riso Scotti faces seems double, it has to educate international consumers not only on the prestigious use of its product, but also on the history of Italian rice. Despite these constraints, the company actively elevates the “Made in Italy” image by intertwining its own 165-year history with the broader reputation of Italian culinary excellence.

As shown in other cases studies, abroad, the “Made in Italy” effect operates as a primary lever for overcoming initial market barriers. Once this label captures consumers’ attention and initial trust, then it is the brand’s own heritage that captures long term loyalty. Similarly, Riso Scotti’s heritage, six generations of family ownership and high-quality rice, with the Italian identity associated to it, becomes a powerful leverage in international markets. In particular, in the Food Service Horeca channel (restaurants), the traditional Italian Risotto is becoming a very recognised gastronomic specialty, and the company can leverage this culinary trend to transfer its expertise directly to international food professionals (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

Lastly, the interaction between Riso Scotti’s brand heritage and the “Made in Italy” effect provides the company with a powerful source of differentiation in international markets. As said, rice is perceived abroad

as a standardised agricultural commodity and consumers usually chose on the base of the pricing, because of that the company has to face fierce competition from cheap private labels (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

However, the Italian provenance of Riso Scotti confers to its product perceived quality, coming from a country of superior food culture, and this positive effect creates an initial layer of credibility that helps the consumers to accept the company's premium positioning. In addition, the company's own heritage further reinforces these associations and through its long history and expertise, Riso Scotti transforms the symbolic value of "Made in Italy" into a distinctive brand identity (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026).

Riso Scotti leverages both its heritage and its Italian origin to justify its premium positioning. The historical authenticity of the brand, mutually reinforced by the excellent reputation of Italian cuisine, transforms rice from a simple commodity to a premium product expression of the Italian gastronomy. In this way, the company reduces consumer's price sensitivity, while strengthening brand loyalty.

5.5 Conclusion

The insights provided by the Head of Press and the Brand Manager offer a comprehensive understanding of the management of brand heritage as a strategic lever for international positioning.

The company demonstrates that its 165 history serves as an active endogenous asset rather than as a constraint. In fact, by leveraging its history as a foundation of continuous renewal, Riso Scotti successfully transitioned from a small mill to a highly innovative company (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). The commitment to innovation is reflected in pioneering important modernisations like the vacuum packaging in the

90s and the strategic diversification of its portfolio, from the offering of plain rice to the current extensive food solutions provided (Riso Scotti official website, 2026).

The case also illustrates the necessity of adapting heritage communication when expanding in culturally diverse markets (Robertson, 1995). To overcome these obstacles, Riso Scotti introduces a “glocal” strategy (Svensson, 2001), while the brand protects the core of its history and origins, it tailors digital assets like narratives, localised digital platforms and targeted local influencer campaigns (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). The objective is to preserve the authenticity of its heritage while making it culturally relevant and easily understandable for foreign consumers as well, and this effort ensures that the brand’s prestige effectively reaches even cultural distant markets.

Finally, the case illustrates a distinctive relationship between its heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect. In the category of rice, international markets are saturated by competitors, and the company cannot rely only on automatic Italian prestige, also because as said, rice is not native in Italy (Interview Riso Scotti, 2026). Instead, Riso Scotti leverages the “Made in Italy” label more to promote the authentic Italia culinary culture surrounding its product, particularly through the traditional “Risotto” preparation (Riso Scotti International official Instagram, 2026). Then, the company’s 165 years legacy of master milling and artisan quality reinforces this national reputation, translating the positive perceptions of the Italian gastronomy to a distinctive brand identity.

Overall, the case of Riso Scotti demonstrates that brand heritage and Country-of-Origin effect act as mutually reinforcing forces. The growing culinary appreciation for the Italian risotto and its own prestigious heritage, allow Riso Scotti to justify its premium pricing and to protect

itself from the fierce competition of cheap private labels.

Chapter 6 - Pomellato

6.1 Company Overview

Pomellato represents one of the most iconic and revolutionary brands in the jewellery sector, redefining the cultural perception of fine jewellery manufacturing since its foundation. The company was founded in 1967 in Milan by Pino Rabolini, a visionary entrepreneur coming from a multigenerational Italian goldsmiths' family (Interview Pomellato, 2026). Operating in a peculiar historical period, where the figure of the woman was gaining awareness, with her rights and freedom, as well as the rise of pret-à-porter fashion, he realised the presence of a significant gap in the jewellery market. Precious jewellery was designed only for important occasions, like gala events or red carpets, and what actually lacked were jewels adapt to be worn every day (Interview Pomellato, 2026). From that moment the brand became “*an icon of an emblematic, yet always actual style, both in tune and ahead of its time*” (Pomellato official website, 2026).

From the beginning, Pomellato was characterised by a strong commitment to craftsmanship and innovation. To these days, all brand's jewels continue to be handcrafted by more than 100 Milanese goldsmiths, that specifically design them with the intent of valorising women and their independence (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

Pomellato's first iconic product was the reinterpretation of the chain necklace and bracelet (Figure 6.1) by “*elevating it into a form of art*” (Pomellato official website, 2026). From that, the portfolio expanded to all jewellery products, such as earrings, bracelets and rings. Among the most iconic creations, the “Fedone” (Figure 6.1), is one of the most representative rings of the brand. It was created in the 70s, and its design has always been maintained untouched to represent Pomellato's identity

(Interview Pomellato, 2026).



Figure 6.1: Iconic Chain Bracelet and “Fedone”

Source: Pomellato official website, retrieved June 19th, 2026

Pomellato’s portfolio is characterised by some collections, like “Nudo” which has then become the absolute signature collection of the brand thanks to its iconic coloured gemstones, together with “Iconica”, launched for the 50th anniversary of the brand and inspired by some of Pomellato’s most recognisable pieces (Interview Pomellato, 2026; Pomellato official website).

The distribution of its products occurs through highly selective channels. Through specific Pomellato’s branded boutiques or eventually through multi brand jewelleries (Pomellato official website, 2026). This distribution represents the high premium positioning of the brand and allows Pomellato to give its customers a more exclusive experience.

Thanks to its iconic portfolio and the deep meaning of empowering women, Pomellato experienced a great evolution becoming an international jewellery brand present almost globally. It is in fact available in Europe, North America, Middle Orient and Asia with a focus on China and Japan (Interview Pomellato, 2026; Pomellato official website).

In particular, a significant turning point in its evolution was the

acquisition of the brand in 2013 by Kering group, one of the world's leading luxury groups, allowing Pomellato to get the necessary visibility to officially penetrate in the global market (Kering official website, 2013). However, regardless of this acquisition, the brand has maintained strong creative autonomy and most importantly, it still remains faithful to its core values, like the belonging to Milan and the centrality of the woman figure. In particular, the woman centrality theme is highly represented also in the internal organisation, the CEO is a woman, as well as the 70% of the workforce (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

Pomellato is characterised by a peculiar combination of Milanese craftsmanship, innovative design and strong social values. It's ability to balance these themes while always remaining faithful to them, successfully allowed the brand to reach its unique positioning and building long term brand loyalty.

6.2 The Role of Brand heritage

For Pomellato *"history is the essence of what they do everyday"* (Interview Pomellato, 2026) because its heritage and core values are deeply embedded in its daily activities. Since these fundamental values are closely linked to its story, heritage becomes a strategic source that gives continuity to the brand's decision-making process (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

As explained in the Interview, Pomellato's heritage is based on three fundamental pillars, which are "Milanese-ness", craftsmanship and female empowerment. These elements have always characterised the brand since the foundation, and it is essential for the Maison to *"never forget and always bring the heritage forward, because that is what makes the difference from other luxury brands"* (Interview Pomellato,

2026). In this way, Pomellato's heritage becomes a strategic asset to be leverage both as a source of competitive advantage and positioning (Urde et al., 2007).

Then, the brand heritage manifest itself as a strict guide for contemporary innovations and product development. The jewels are the physical representation of Pomellato's heritage. Its first manifestation is surely in the care put in the production of each piece, entirely handmade by Milanese master goldsmiths for sixty years (Interview Pomellato, 2026; Pomellato official website, 2026). This historical expertise, with the theme of woman empowerment, is expressed through iconic design elements left unchanged since the 70s. The use of large voluminous gold chains and the incision of colourful gemstones have become the visual signatures of Pomellato making it a highly recognisable aesthetic for the consumers, which do not need a visible logo to recognise it.

The continuity between past and present is evident in the introduction of reinterpretations of iconic products. For example, the "Icona" collection recalls some iconic pieces, like the use of chains and "Fedone" (visible in Figure 6.1). In addition, the symbolic importance of "Fedone" is reinforced in every Pomellato's boutique, because it is represented by the handle of the entering door, as shown in figure 6.2 (Interview Pomellato, 2026).



Figure 6.2: “Fedone” Handle of a Pomellato boutique
Source: Pomellato official website, retrieved June 19th, 2026

At the same time, to keep its heritage relevant and contemporary to customers’ requests, Pomellato continuously reinterprets its traditional designs through new collections, like “Nudo”, that recalls the use of gold and gemstone (figure 6.3) or the “Bisanzio” one, whose signature piece is, again, the revisited “Fedone”(Figure 6.4).

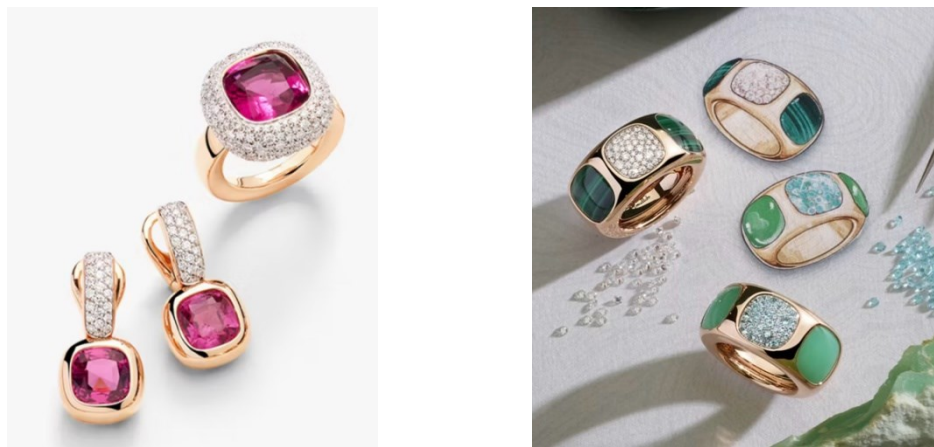


Figure 6.3 and 6.4: Earrings and rings of Pomellato’s “Nudo” collection and rings of “Bisanzio” collection

Source: Pomellato official website, retrieved June 19th, 2026

Pomellato does not have a physical museum to display its heritage artefacts, but it has a traveling exhibition that moves around the world, as a visual representation of its story and best pieces. Usually it is temporary, like a month of activity, but it is designed to tell the story of the brand and in 2026 it is scheduled to be in Paris. However, top clients may be invited to visit the company site to be shown about the care of craftsmanship behind each jewel (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

Lastly, in the communication of its heritage, Pomellato relies on a powerful storytelling leveraged on female empowerment, individuality and self-expression. Unlike many famous brands, the Maison consistently presents jewellery as a symbol of independence, it is women

itself that decide to buy themselves a jewel, they do not have to wait anymore to receive them as a gift from men. This narrative remains coherent across all communication channels reinforcing the importance of the brand's historical values with contemporary social values (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

What has emerged from the interview was that the coherence of Pomellato along the narration of Milanese craftsmanship, iconic product designs and its core values, allowed the brand to be recognised as unique and authentic, all while reinforcing its positioning in the market.

6.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

When entering in international spaces, Pomellato faces the competition of different foreign brands with much more longevity and an equally strong heritage behind their back. For example, Cartier has a really defined reputation whose symbols are the panther and the woman, however this brand, like the majority present on the market, are traditionally associated with a more gift-oriented narrative, with the main intent to attract attention of men and to promote the jewels as the perfect gift for a woman (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

Pomellato, with its unconventional woman-centric perspective challenges the traditional view of the jewels, introducing in the new markets in which it enters innovative practices and aesthetics. This untraditional philosophy is embedded in Pomellato's heritage since its foundation and to support and promote it, the brand leverages on an international communication strategy based on the standardisation of its core values, while adapting the expression and communication of them to the diverse cultures to which is directed (Svensson, 2001). However, the brand communication never aims to reach mass market, instead it is designed to support the phenomenon of female self-purchase with

financial autonomy, aligning its 1967 values with the global movements of women empowerment (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

The primary vehicle for this value driven international storytelling is a digital strategy managed centrally by the company itself but with the help of local partners, to take into account different commercial habits and cultural calendars of the diverse markets (Interview Pomellato, 2026). For example, while the website remains unchanged globally to display the product catalogue and telling the premium Milanese craftsmanship story behind each jewel, social platforms like Instagram are leveraged by the brand to show high attention to diverse cultural occasion, like the Chinese New Year (figure 6.5) (Pomellato Instagram profile, 2026). In this way the brand actively respects and integrates cultural milestones and festivities in its international calendar. In addition, by integrating also localised global ambassadors Pomellato bridges the cultural distance with foreign consumers.

The digital channels however have its main foundation in promoting globally the primary value of the brand, the importance of women. The brand advocates the freedom and empowerment of women through “Pomellato for Women”, a campaign launched initially in 2018 (Interview Pomellato, 2026) to make the brand value intersect with contemporary values. Explicative of this is the International Women’s Day campaign (Figure 6.6), every 8th March the brand dedicates its channels to sensitive topics like gender-based violence, domestic abuse and inequality (Interview Pomellato 2026, Pomellato Instagram profile, 2026)



Figure 6.5 and 6.6: Pomellato's post for Chinese New Year and for 8th March
Source: Pomellato Instagram official page, posted February 17th and 8th March 2026

By using global celebrities and activists, like Jane Fonda, Pomellato makes this communication international to underline the importance of these values for the brand. They are part of its heritage, but not only as part of its story but has deeply rooted belief that the brand actively feels the necessity to advocate for. The aim of Pomellato is to contribute to the creation of a global community built around independent women.

However, we must notice that translating this extensive legacy across many different cultural markets is really complex, particularly because recently the jewels market is not growing at a fast pace, so it is always the same customers being stimulated by different brands (Interview Pomellato, 2026). A part from local differences both in culture and habits the main challenge is communicating the premiumness of the pieces which can be actually admired only when worn (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

To differentiate from competitors, the brand globally leverages on three

universal pillar that compose its heritage, the authenticity of “handmade in Milan”, the physical consistency of its iconic design traits and the global resonance of female empowerment (Interview Pomellato, 2026). With this coherent communication globally, Pomellato transforms its heritage as a guarantee guarantees for its differentiation and premium positioning worldwide.

6.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

The interview with Pomellato showed that the strategic connection between Pomellato and the Country-of-Origin effect is based on a complementary action, where the brand’s heritage travels alongside the global image of “Made in Italy”. For Pomellato, the relationship with its nation's provenance is deeply collaborative, even if the brand rarely relies on generalised national stereotypes to establish its first presence in a new country. Instead, it promotes a more authentic and specific interpretation of the Italian identity rooted in its Milanese craftsmanship and goldsmiths' expertise.

The brand’s Milanese heritage arrives side-by-side with the global prestige associated with Italy, because one is already embedded in the other and vice versa (Interview Pomellato, 2026). In this sense, the “Made in Italy” effect provides a layer of credibility and perceived quality (Tarabashkina et al., 2024) immediately reinforced by Pomellato’s own heritage and artisanal know-how. This complementarity reinforces international credibility and ensures that the brand is recognised, and premium positioned among an elite group of well-established jewellery brands.

This mutually reinforcing interaction is driven through peculiar strategic actions that the brand undertakes to connect its product origins directly to

Italian lifestyles. For example, when activating boutique launches or during promotional events Pomellato incorporates recognisable Italian elements like artisanal gelato or the classic aperitivo hours (Interview Pomellato, 2026). In this way the brand creates an emotionally environment strongly connected to Italy to capture the guests. This sensory activation is extended also inside the boutiques where the sound tracks used are usually songs of influential Italian women from the 1970s (Interview Pomellato, 2026). These strategic choices ensure the connection of the brand, and in particular its Milanese 70s origin and the historical context where it was founded, to an elegant and authentic Italian lifestyle experience.

Pomellato deliberately avoids relying exclusively on national clichés because, rather than promoting a generic image of Italy, the brand emphasises those elements that define both the brand and the broader tradition of craftsmanship associated with the “made in Italy label”. The historical expertise of Milanese goldsmithing is the foundation of its value proposition and represents the point where its own heritage intersects the global reputation of Italian manufacturing.

From the Interview it emerged that Pomellato’s relationship with the Country-of-Origin label is based on a mutual reinforcement. If the Italian provenance helps consumers recognise the quality of the brand, its heritage transforms this first perception into a more credible premium positioning.

In particular, by combining the symbolic value of “Made in Italy” with its own historical legacy, Pomellato is able to maintain a highly distinctive and premium positioning across international markets that competitors find really difficult to replicate.

6.5 Conclusion

The interview with Pomellato allows to have an important insight into how a brand can strategically manage its heritage to navigate successfully in international markets.

What emerged is that the brand sixty-year history act as a fundamental driver in the decision-making process along the way both of product innovations and communication strategies (Urde et al, 2007). Pomellato anchored its identity to those characteristics that constitute its owns history, like the Milanese identity with its maximum expertise in handmade jewels and the female empowerment.

Though this coherent strategic approach, the brand has successfully built an enduring loyal relationship with its customers defining also its premium positioning as an iconic pret-à-porter daily wearable jewel in the global market.

This case study then highlights the importance of adopting a flexible “glocal” (Svensson, 2001) approach to communicate the heritage to international audiences. When brand awareness is low, to overcome cultural barriers Pomellato leverages on digital storytelling to advocate both for its unconventional product, purchased as a symbol of female self-expression while simultaneously supporting all the women rights.

Through initiatives like the International Woman Day (Interview Pomellato, 2026; Pomellato official Instagram profile, 2026), the brand demonstrates a true commitment to supporting women and becomes a strong activist for them. In doing so, at the same time it links its historic values to more contemporary themes making its heritage always relevant (Balmer, 2011). However, this connection to women is not merely symbolic but it demonstrates that the brand truly cares and advocates for them (Interview Pomellato, 2026), customers feel in this way seen and

supported creating a really deep sense of trust and familiarity with the brand itself.

In addition, Pomellato's core values' communication is balanced with big respect for local calendars and cultural events, like Chinese New Year and the use of Global Ambassadors (Pomellato official Instagram profile, 2026). This actually demonstrates how heritage works better when it is reinforced abroad by proactively being adapted to different cultural backgrounds (Douglas and Wind, 1987).

Lastly, this case study was really useful to highlight the mutual beneficial relationship between the external Country-of-Origin effect, and the internal heritage. As seen, Pomellato does not leverage on simple stereotypes related to "Made in Italy", instead it organises curated experiences that remind to the classic Italian lifestyle moments, like artisan gelato or aperitivo or the 70s songs of Italian icons (Interview Pomellato, 2026). Though the subtle presence of these elements, the brand builds a sensory experience that recalls Italy strengthening the authenticity of its origins while making the consumer feeling familiar to it.

Fundamental however, for backing this relationship is the core characteristic element of Pomellato, which is the trust in more than 100 Milanese goldsmith that carefully handmade each jewel (Interview Pomellato, 2026; Pomellato Official website, 2026). This "Milanesess" allows the brand to justify its premium positioning on the global market. Pomellato is a perfect example of strong integration of unique historical values and broader national identity, and by combining them successfully it demonstrates how heritage becomes a strong and global strategic asset to build a distinctive positioning and to foster an authentic consumer relationship difficult for competitors to replicate internationally.

Chapter 7 - Barilla

7.1 Company Overview

Barilla Group is one of the most representative companies in the international food landscape being a strong ambassador of Italian food culture, in fact it produces mainly pasta which is the flagship product of the excellent Italian cuisine.

The origins of Barilla date back to 1877 in Parma, in Emilia Romagna, a territory known to be tied to the Italian gastronomic culture. At the time, Pietro Barilla opened a small bread and fresh pasta shop (Barilla official website, 2026) but its success was so strong that this little artisanal shop laid the foundation for an extremely successful global company. Despite its international growth, the company continues to preserve its original values and identity, which are based on “*profound passion for food and an indissoluble tradition with family*” (Barilla official website, 2026).

In fact, one of its distinctive characteristics is that the company has remained entirely family owned to these days, for four generations and always using the surname “Barilla” as both an identity and commercial trademark. In the Interview this point was stressed out because it allowed the brand to preserve its traditional family and corporate values creating a coherent brand positioning and a unique relationship with consumers (Interview Barilla, 2026). Even if today the company is global, its roots remain strongly linked to the one of the original family businesses operating in a small shop in Parma.

As said, today the company is highly stabilised and an international group, its first actual production facility was built in 1910, but only in 1936 the commercial network was developed and expanded in Italy. However, we have to wait till 1999 for the opening of the first

international production facility, specifically in USA (Barilla official website, 2026).

Today the group is present almost all around the world and its revenue streams are distributed across highly diversified markets. The domestic Italian market accounts for the 40% of the corporate turnover, while the rest of Europe accounts for 30%, North America generates the 25% while the newly emerging Asia-Pacific areas represent a smaller 5% (Interview Barilla, 2026).

As for the distribution channels, the model relies on a business to business (B2B) model accurately developed according to the markets. Specifically, in highly consolidated markets like North America, Barilla directly governs the supply chain by locally producing the pasta in its own production facilities (Interview Barilla, 2026). This approach helps the company to locally satisfy the demand while preserving and controlling the quality standards (Interview Barilla, 2026).

As for the product portfolio, its most distinctive product is pasta packed in its traditional blue box, that has become one of the most recognised visual symbols. Iconic are “Spaghetti n. 5” as well as many diverse variations of pasta. Alongside pasta, Barilla introduced ready-made sauces solutions (Barilla official website, 2026). In the 1970s the company introduced alongside its core business a bakery section, the “Mulino Bianco” brand. This brand successfully established a second major Italian food representative, based on the traditional Italian breakfast and sweet snacks (Interview Barilla, 2026). Barilla has a universal and stable retail presence internationally, while Mulino Bianco adopts a more selective international targeting because it leverages more on Italian communities abroad as awareness channel.

However, Barilla, across all its products promotes the values of Italian

conviviality, family and shared moments while eating together. These elements have become recognisable elements of the company identity and continue to play a fundamental role in its international positioning strategy.

7.2 The Role of Brand heritage

For Barilla its heritage has a fundamental and active role in guiding its strategic decisions, “*it is the very essence*” for the brand itself (Interview Barilla, 2026) because it defines exactly what the brand is and what represents (Interview Barilla, 2026). In this last sense, in the interview it is also said that heritage is “*Fluid*” because even if company has to continuously adapt and change according to the consumers’ need, the heritage again identifies what the brand truly is and even draws a line on what it never will be (Interview Barilla, 2026). It means that, even if the context evolves, there are specific values that constitute the essence of the brand that cannot be changed.

An important part of Barilla’s heritage it’s the story that characterise the family behind the company itself. The company still carries the surname of its founding family and remains entirely family owned today too. Because of this, the history of the Barilla family and the one of the brand are deeply bounded to each other and inseparable, and as highlighted in the interview, the family values that belong to the business, are also communicated to the consumers (Interview Barilla, 2026). We can say that heritage does not serve only as a representation of the past but more as an active asset to leverage of (Urde et al., 2007).

Barilla surely communicates its heritage through a storytelling centred on the concepts of family and conviviality. This is expressed through its payoff, that was “*Dove c’è Barilla c’è casa*” and then recently changed

in the current “*Come in Famiglia*” (Interview Barilla, 2026). Even if the meaning of family has evolved over time, the core values of connection and sharing moments with people we love are still the main substance of the brand heritage.

The most recognised manifestation of Barilla’s heritage is represented by the iconic Blue Box (figure 7.1), which has become the main visual symbol of the brand. As explained in the interview, the packaging is the first communicative tool, particularly when the brand awareness is low and where the product is displaced among many others on the supermarket shelves. This layout has remained coherent from the past to these days, and it is left standardised in every market because it represents a visual identity of the brand and remaining faithful to it means remaining consistent to its heritage as well (Interview Barilla, 2026).



Figure 7.1: Barilla iconic blue box
Source: Barilla official website, retrieved June 22nd, 2026

The preservation and communication of Barilla’s heritage are supported by a series of initiatives located in Parma. The company does not have a traditional corporate museum, but several facilities are leveraged as such to show to the partners the care and quality behind each production process (Interview Barilla, 2026). Then the company to transmit its heritage it can leverage on the Gastronomic Centre, that is a specialised gastronomic school with cooking courses and an historical archive and library that contains more than 10,000 volumes about food culture. Lastly, the original shop (figure 7.2) in Parma was recently restored and

is open to be visited (Interview Barilla, 2026).



Figure 7.2: Barilla original shop

Source: Barilla official website, last retrieved June 22nd, 2026

Together these places function as physical representation of brand heritage and contribute to maintain a strong connection between the company's contemporary activities and its history (Montemaggi and Severino, 2007).

Lastly, what has surprisingly emerged from the interview is that sometimes heritage can become a constraint. Barilla's heritage, as said, is based on the Italian tradition to take time with your own family while eating, but in these fast-evolving times, this practice is disappearing. If the brand is not able to adapt to the new trends it may remain stuck in the past. So, "the biggest challenge today for Barilla is to embrace these new trends while remaining faithful to its original identity" (interview Barilla, 2026).

What has emerged is that Barilla's heritage is guarded and actively leveraged through a combination of family ownership, tangible and visual asset like the packaging and the physical places. The aim is to adapt and communicate the Italian conviviality which is at the base of the

brand heritage to reinforcing consumer trust and supporting long term competitive positioning.

7.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

When communicating its heritage abroad, Barilla tries to leverage on a combination of standardised values and locally adapted communication activities (Svensson, 2001). The core identity of the brands remains unchanged and continuously revolves around family and conviviality, however the way these values are communicated can vary widely across the diverse markets (Interview Barilla, 2026). For example, if the blue packaging is the same internationally, in some market which have more knowledge about Italian excellence, the logo is accompanied with “*First [brand] in Italy*”, while in other markets it is omitted because not relevant (Interview Barilla, 2026).

A path recently undertaken by the company to penetrate countries like South Korea or Japan, with very different food cultures, is the one of partnerships with local producers, which allows these to leverage the brand through the “Powered by Barilla” label (Interview Barilla, 2026). This is a way to embrace amore local solution and to initially penetrate consumer awareness by leveraging its heritage and identity of largest Italia pasta producer.

Also, the iconic Spaghetti n.5 remains mainly standardised but its recipe its slightly adapted to local ingredients to ensure that quality is reached regardless of the production location (Interview Barilla, 2026). This commitment reflects Barilla’s willingness to preserve authenticity of its heritage, that cannot be changed, while simultaneously adapt across international markets.

Another signal of the adaptation of the heritage communication is the

translation of the payoff “Come in Famiglia” in different languages. Also, those payoffs are slightly changed to better express the core values abroad, in English for example it becomes “Tastes like Family” (Interview Barilla, 2026). As said in the interview, what the brand has understood is that introducing these local variations helps, because it allows consumers to feel the product like their own, and when we are talking about food this perception is fundamental.

Then, peculiarly Barilla relies also on educational initiatives. As mentioned before, the Barilla Academy “*collaborates with chefs and experts of the culinary world to design new gastronomic experiences*” (Barilla official website, 2026). This is realised through research activities focused on pasta that helps to promote the Italian cuisine, also educating consumers on how to correctly cook pasta (Barilla official website, 2026). In culturally distant markets, these initiatives are really useful to communicate its heritage through educational experiences.

At the same time, the interview revealed for the company that it is fundamental to maintain a strong commitment to the authenticity of its product. In fact, for example the interviewer talked about the Baiocchi biscuits of Mulino Bianco brand, specifically in the Chinese market. Local consumers perceive the biscuits as too large according to their standard small-sized snacks. Barilla, to remain faithful to its essential core values and characteristics of the product preferred to avoid entering in this market (Interview Barilla, 2026).

This demonstrates that the company adapts the way its heritage is communicated but avoids altering those values or product characteristic that are considered as of its identity. Communication can evolve through different cultural contexts, but heritage continues to define the boundaries of what the brand is and what it will never become.

7.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

When analysing the relationship between Country-of-Origin effect and the brand heritage, from the interview emerged a strong interaction between these two aspects. There is in fact a mutual reinforcing relationship between the local “Made in Italy” effect and Barilla’s identity. In particular, operating in the food sector already represents an advantage itself, because of the generally positive perceptions of Italian food products across markets (Temperini et al., 2016). As also cited in the interview, Italian provenance is usually associated with quality and culinary expertise, and this gives Barilla a strong base when entering in foreign countries (Interview Barilla, 2026).

This being said, relying only on the “Made in Italy” label is not enough to build a distinctive long-term positioning in foreign markets. Italian origins facilitate the market entry and consumer recognition, but then it is Barilla’s own heritage and reputation that help the brand to differentiate from other Italian competitors operating globally (Interview Barilla, 2026).

The brand, in fact, has built its narrative around the conviviality of sharing Italian food together (Interview Barilla, 2026). Barilla is not solely focused on communicating the quality of its product and Italian expertise, because in its sector, just being Italian contributes to communicate these concepts. So, complementarily to the “Made in Italy” effect, as said already embedded in the product and its provenance, Barilla distinguishes itself by transmitting important values around food, such as the importance of family, friendship and taking time to share small moments while sharing meals all together (Interview Barilla, 2026). In the end, it is this brand narrative that allows consumers to

immediately associate with the company and to position the brand differently from competitors.

In this sense, heritage allows Barilla to personalise and strengthen the positive association already generated by the Country-of-Origin effect and the final result is a position reached by the combination of the “Made in Italy” label with the brand’s authenticity built through a multigenerational commitment to Italian food culture.

The interview demonstrated that Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage can be leveraged as complementary assets that mutually reinforce each other. The positive perception around Italian food supports the entry on the market but then it is the brand’s heritage that has to further support the “Made in Italy” label to reach a distinctive positioning and to ultimately foster a long-term relationship with consumers.

7.5 Conclusion

The interview with Barilla showed the importance for a brand to leverage its own heritage to support international growth by remaining loyal and coherent to its original identity. For the brand heritage is not a simple representation of the past, but it is a guide in the decision-making process (Urde et al., 2007) setting boundaries on “*what the company can be and will never be*” (Interview Barilla, 2026).

A distinctive characteristic of Barilla is the strong tie with its founding family; the company is named after this family and since 1877 remained family owned. Consequently, the values of the family business are deeply rooted in the history of the company and communicated to consumers through the care put in every product and then, through brand storytelling.

From this case it also emerged the importance of maintaining the core elements of brand heritage coherent across markets while adapting their communication (Svensson, 2001; Robertson, 1995). Barilla in fact adapts certain communication elements to local consumers' culture and habits but always leaves unchanged the values of conviviality, family and sharing. As cited, some initiatives adopted by the brand to make its heritage understandable across diverse markets are collaborations with chefs as well as the adaptation of visual communication symbols, like translating the payoff in diverse languages or adding "1st in Italy" to the logo in some countries.

As for the interaction between Country-of-Origin effect and heritage, the brand demonstrates how to transform those two elements in complementary strategic assets. Both together they allow Barilla to strengthen consumers' trust and reinforcing long term brand positioning. Leveraging on its strong ties to Italian food, the company facilitates its entry in the markets but only after introducing its core values of family and conviviality, it can successfully differentiate itself from competitors across international markets.

Barilla was an interesting case study that demonstrated how heritage can become a strategic asset useful to support international expansion by strengthening long term consumer trust and ultimately its premium positioning. Remaining coherent to its core identity's elements and following their lead in the decision-making process allowed the brand to preserve its authenticity despite operating in highly competitive and culturally diverse markets.

Chapter 8 - Kartell

8.1 Company Overview

Kartell is one of the most iconic and internationally recognised companies on the Italian design landscape. Since its foundation, the company has distinguished itself from others for its innovative industrial production and the peculiar aesthetic that made its products symbols of the international contemporary design.

The company was founded in 1949 by a young chemical engineer, Giulio Castelli. Since the beginning Kartell operated in Milan by researching on technology and design (Kartell Museum official website, 2026). Castelli's intuition was to use for the first time plastic materials for industrial production of domestic elements (Kartell official website, 2026), which allowed their daily use to become practical and really functional for household life (Kartell official website, 2026). Since then, the company continues its research in the industrial use of plastics making it a pioneer in this sense and contributing to the evolution of modern designs (Interview Kartell, 2026).

In 1988 the company gets acquired by Claudio Luti, Castelli's son in law who brings with him a new sensibility that will evolve in the collaboration with many internationally renowned designers like Philippe Starck, Ron Arad and many others (Kartell official website, 2026). These collaborations become one of the defining characteristics of the company and contributed to the creation of some of the most iconic Kartell's products that allowed it to strengthen its international identity globally.

One significant event for Kartell occurred in 1999 when it became the first company to use polycarbonate to produce transparent objects. With this new introduction the company reached a new level of originality and

unicity that to these days still distinguishes the brand (Kartell official website, 2026).

Today the company is an international icon in its sector and is always projected to the future. This innovation centricity is reflected in its portfolio, which includes furniture, home accessories and lighting solutions always characterised by this unique aesthetic and practical functionality (Kartell official website, 2026). Among some of the most iconic products there is the “Componibili” storage units (Figure 8.1) designed by Anna Castelli Ferrieri in 1967, which are still present today in the catalogue of the brand (Interview Kartell, 2026). And the “Louis Ghost” chair (Figure 8.2) designed by Philippe Starck, it is the most iconic polycarbonate chair, inspired by the lines of Louis XV armchairs.



Figure 8.1 and 8.2: “Mobile Componibile” by Anna Castelli Ferrieri and “Louis Ghost” by Philippe Starck

Source: Kartell official website, retrieved June 23rd, 2026

As for the distribution channel, Kartell operates globally through some selected retailer, but mainly through a network of mono-brand stores (Interview Kartell, 2026), which by maintaining a global coherent image and visual consistency, they act as a brand amplifier through special displays. The brand today has more than 150 stores, and 850 Kartell dedicated spaces in retailers (Kartell official website, 2026).

However, despite its international presence, Kartell still remains

connected its origin and in particular to its belonging to Milan and to the Italian design. Today the company is characterised by a distinctive positioning in the global design market that is the result of its ability to combine industrial innovation with excellent aesthetic.

8.2 The Role of Brand heritage

From the Interview emerged that for Kartell its heritage is an active resource that continuously supports the company's present and future decisions. In fact, its heritage is composed of a "*whole series of very innovative product that marked the stages of industrial production in furnishing products*" and because of this dense history, "*the foundations in which Kartell bases its root can be a lesson for the future*" (Interview with Kartell, 2026). Heritage once again is not only a memory to guard but it is connected with innovation, acting as a bridge between the company's past achievements and its future evolution (Urde et al., 2007).

The importance of the heritage is well demonstrated by the brand through the creation of the Kartell Museum in 1999; established for the company's 50th anniversary it collects historic products, technical drawings and corporate documents (Interview Kartell, 2026). However, the main purpose of the museum is not only the one to be an archive, but rather to be a tangible repository of the brand's heritage to maintain its memory alive and by being of inspiration for future designers. In this way Kartell is able to always maintain a strong connection with its roots while supporting contemporary design research.

The interview also highlighted how heritage is fundamental for brand awareness and how it strengthens authority on the market. As said:

"Awareness is something that happens precisely through the consciousness of the history. And history is something that obviously

gives substance to contemporary products, so the fact that Kartell has a history allows us to be in some way authoritative and therefore to load with value and content what is done today” (Interview Kartell, 2026).

The characteristic values of the brand, such as innovation, industrial production and collaboration with international designers, play a central role in defining Kartell since its foundation and continue to do so today (Interview Kartell, 2026). In fact, more contemporary products cannot be perceived as disconnected from the past because they actually are the evolution and adaptation of the company’s identity through its own history.

Explicative of this view it is the practice of the “re-editions”, when an iconic and historical product is revised and re-integrated in the catalogue of Kartell’s products (Interview Kartell, 2026). As stated in the interview this process is possible because of the preservation of historical drawings and material that are a source of inspiration for contemporary products. This can also be seen as a way to maintain Kartell’s heritage contemporary and relevant to present and future generations (Balmer, 2011).

To support this vision, really important is the example provided during the interview about Kartell’s lighting division. The company produced lamps until the 70s and re-entered this category only in 2002 with the FI/Y lamp designed by Ferruccio Laviani (Figure 8.3) (Interview Kartell, 2026). This perfectly shows how the brand leverages its heritage and past expertise to naturally develop contemporary innovations, all while maintaining continuity with its past.



Figure 8.3: FI/Y Lamp by Ferruccio Laviani
Source: Kartell official website, retrieved June 23rd, 2026

Other Kartell's heritage manifestations could be found in exhibitions precisely with the intent of showing both historical and more contemporary collections to make consumers and visitors discover the brand uniqueness (Interview Kartell, 2026). Then, on this line as mentioned in the interview, the 2012 Taschen monograph book retraced five decades of the company history, contributing to the preservation and communication of its design culture.

For Kartell, its heritage plays a crucial role because firstly it gives substance to its contemporary products, acting as a strategic guide to follow for future developments. In fact, the company maintains continuity with its historical values while constantly innovating. This contributes to always support its positioning as one of the leaders in the global design market.

8.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

Kartell has to face a wide range of international consumers when communicating its heritage abroad. But despite operating globally, as emerged from the interview, the brand adopts a highly standardised approach in communicating its values. Its core narratives remain substantially the same across all the diverse markets because the main

objective is to provide a coherent and unified vision of the brand worldwide (Interview Kartell, 2026). So, the values of innovation, industrial production and collaboration with recognised designers remain unchanged regardless of the market in which it is operating.

However, it also emerged that Kartell at the same time adapts the communication channels used to target different countries, according to local habits and media preferences. As said in the interview, platforms like Instagram are widely used in Europe, while for example in China, to ensure the effectiveness of the communication, the brand leverages on alternative platforms and local influencers (Interview Kartell, 2026). Important to notice is that the adaptation in this case concerns only the communication channels and never the content itself. The values remain always consistent, it changes the channels according to the specific characteristics of the market selected.

The commitment to the consistency of its unified vision globally is particularly visible through Kartell's mono-brand stores. The visual identity of the brand is globally coherent through seasonal windows displays, with graphics and layouts replicated across different markets (Interview Kartell, 2026). By creating a coherent international image of the brand, Kartell ensures that consumers face the same identity and designs regardless of their location.

From the interview emerged also that the company leverages on educational and experiential forms of communications (Napolitano et al, 2018). From museum visits, exhibitions, guided tour (Interview Kartell, 2026) to digital initiatives like its podcast, called "Kartell che racconta", where the brand presents some iconic products and their story (Kartell Instagram official page, 2026). Kartell always tries to adapt the way in which its heritage is explained on the basis of the audience it is facing.

The interviewee explained that the guided tours always try to go towards the interests of the visitors to understand what they would be more interested to learn about Kartell's story (Interview Kartell, 2026). This approach helps visitors to connect on a deeper level with the brand's heritage and its values and to leave the exhibitions satisfied with new knowledge.

However, Kartell also faces some challenges in communicating its history internationally. The main obstacle is not the one of the design appreciations of the product, which actually is immediate, rather is the communication of their historical significance and the innovation process behind them (Interview Kartell, 2026). For example, understanding why an apparently simple design was actually revolutionary in the 60s, requires a strong historical and cultural awareness that foreign consumers may lack. Because of this communicating the brand's heritage means not only presenting the product itself but explaining also the historical background and design culture behind them.

To conclude, Kartell demonstrates the necessity to balance between coherence and adaptation when communicating its heritage abroad. Communication channels and educational approach can vary across markets and audiences, but the core values and narratives conveyed by the brand must remained unchanged. This approach allows to preserve the authenticity of its heritage while making it relevant to consumers with a different cultural background (Balmer, 2011).

8.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

Between the Country-of-Origin effect and Kartell's brand heritage, it has emerged a strong interaction between these two dimensions. Even if, differently from many other Italian brands, Kartell does not rely on

artisanal manufacturing or craftsmanship narrative to communicate its Italian origins, the company connects its identity to the more elegant concepts of design expertise, beauty and aesthetic refinement (Temperini et al., 2016), which are regardless strongly associated with the global perception of Italy (Interview Kartell, 2026).

As explained during the interview, Kartell considers itself not as a simple representative of the “Made in Italy”, but rather an active contributor in supporting this label. In fact, it is the brand itself that carries and reinforces the image of Italy abroad through its design culture (Interview Kartell, 2026). On the basis of this we can say that the relationship between Country-of-Origin effect and the brand heritage is complementary because Italian provenance provides an initial base of positive associations (Tarabashkina et al., 2024) but then it is Kartell’ heritage that strengthens and enriches that image through its own history.

The interaction between these two assets is visible in the way the company communicates its origins. In the logo, in fact, it is always present “Made in Milan”, and this promotes the idea of beauty and design taste deeply embedded in Italian culture (Interview Kartell, 2026). In particular, by referring specifically to Milan, the company associates its heritage with one of the most internationally recognised capitals of design. This allows the brand to strengthen its connection between its history and the highly positive reputation of the Milanese design culture, creating a more distinctive and premium positioning than a more generic “Made in Italy” label.

The interview demonstrated that the Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage cooperate as complementary assets. The positive reputation associated with Italian design supports the perceptions of the brand abroad and then Kartell’s heritage gives substance to these associations

through a long history of innovation and design expertise. Together these elements contribute to reinforcing the company's distinctive positioning in the global design market.

8.5 Conclusion

This case study provides significant insights into the management of brand heritage as a strategic asset capable of supporting international positioning. The company does not consider its past as a story to preserve and tell, but rather as an inspirational guide to lead present and futures activities (Urde et al, 2007). In fact, through the preservation of catalogues, technical drawings and historical products, Kartell maintains a strong connection with its roots all while simultaneously inspiring innovation (Interview Kartell, 2026). The re-editions and the reintroduction of the lighting division are perfect examples to show how the brand leverages its past expertise to develop new products that remain coherent with its identity (Interview Kartell, 2026).

In particular on this topic, Kartell demonstrates the importance of maintaining a unique brand image perception across international markets. If communication channels may vary according to local habits and media preferences (Robertson, 1995), the core values communicated by the brand have to remain consistent in every market (Interview Kartell, 2026). Explicative of this, are the educational and experiential approaches, like the museum, guided tours and expositions, that the brand adopts to make its heritage understandable to many audiences with diverse backgrounds (Interview Kartell, 2026; Montemaggi and Severino, 2007). This highlights that effectively communicating abroad requires a careful balancing between consistency in transmitting the core values of innovation and industrial production and the adaptation of the channels through which these values are transmitted.

As for the interaction between Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage, even if Kartell does not rely on the narrative of craftsmanship to communicate its origin, the brand identity is still associated with design expertise and beauty. With the claim “Made in Milano” (Interview Kartell, 2026), the company strengthens its connection to one of the most iconic capitals of design. The result is that the positive associations generated by Italian design are reinforced by Kartell’s own history of expertise in this sector, while simultaneously the brand itself contributes to supporting the image of Italian design abroad.

Overall, Kartell demonstrates that heritage is a strategic resource capable of promoting innovation and giving substance to its current products. In addition, the company transformed heritage into an element to strengthen international positioning by always remaining coherent to its values and image internationally.

Chapter 9 - Olivetti

9.1 Company Overview

Olivetti is one of the most well-known companies in Italian industrial history and it has been widely recognised since its foundation for its contribution to technology and innovation, as well as its attention to design and industrial culture (Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026). In particular these values directly come from its founder that transformed his initially small company into a modern industrial group (Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026).

The company was founded in 1908 by Camillo Olivetti in Ivrea, and at first, it was born as “*the first national factory for typewriters*” (Figure 9.1) (Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026). Then the company rapidly distinguished itself through its strong focus on technological innovation and industrial development (Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026). Throughout its history the company progressively expanded from mechanical typewriters to calculators, electronic systems and computer technologies and eventually it became one of the most innovative companies in Europe (Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026).



Figure 9.1: M1-first Italian typewriter

Source: Archivio Storico Digitale Olivetti. Last retrieved June 24th, 2026

A decisive role in the evolution of the company was played by the son of the founder, Adriano Olivetti that guided the company from 1932 to 1960. He transformed Olivetti into an international benchmark for its technological excellence, but he also distinguished itself for its peculiar view of the industry. Adriano Olivetti developed a system of social welfare initiatives both inside and outside his company and launched many cultural projects to support also the Italian territory (Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2026). During its leadership he combined innovation, design, architecture and employee welfare, creating a business model still unique today (Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2026). Then in 1978 the first electronic typewriters were developed and in 1982 the first European professional PC, starting the successful and fast growth in the informatics sectors as well (Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026).

Another distinctive feature of the identity of Olivetti, which reflects the company's support to its territory, it is the strong connection with its city of origin, Ivrea. This relationship even received an international recognition when in 2018 it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as “industrial city of the XX century” because of its unique industrial and architectural heritage (UNESCO, 2018).

Today, Olivetti is part of TIM Group, specialised in IoT with main focus on digital innovations projects, smart city solutions and services both for businesses and public administrations (Olivetti Official website, 2026). However, at the same time the company preserves and promotes its dense historical legacy with the “Associazione Archivio Olivetti” which safeguards documents, products and every type of material related to its history (Interview Olivetti, 2026; Archivio Storico Olivetti official website, 2026).

The Italian market represents the company's primary area of activity with approximatively 70% of total turnover coming from this area. But with a 30% of the turnover coming from foreign markets, Olivetti maintains also a stable international presence through the distribution of technologies and digital solutions (Interview Olivetti, 2026). Today the company is recognised both for its ability to combine innovation design and culture, and for its digital expertise.

9.2 The Role of Brand heritage

History within Olivetti is a fundamental asset, as stated in the interview it is "*a compass and an asset potentially very strategic on a commercial level*" (Interview Olivetti, 2026). In fact, in 118 years of innovation and history, the company has reached the awareness of how much heritage is worth, in particular because of the dense history, of their founder actions and entrepreneurial approach that characterises the one of Olivetti (interview Olivetti, 2026). So, it means that heritage is a dynamic and strategic resource helpful to the company to maintain continuity with its origins (Urde et al., 2007).

Olivetti experienced an evolution in its approach with heritage, because at the beginning the company focused mainly on the preservation of its historical asset. However, starting from 2019 its heritage is not only preserved but also enhanced and strategically valorised through a strong collaboration among the Associazione Archivio Storico, TIM Group and the municipality of Ivrea (Interview Olivetti, 2026). This shift transformed heritage into an element capable of generating cultural and reputational value by being told to present and future generations (Balmer, 2011).

However, we must recognise the importance of Archivio Storico Olivetti

that safeguards all the historic material related to more than a century of history. But, as highlighted in the interview, its role is to keep alive, the so called “*technological red thread*”, meaning the continuous timeline thread that connects all the different phases of the brand’s evolution, from typewriters to electronics, informatics and more recent digital solutions (Interview Olivetti, 2026). In addition, the archive has been digitalised for researchers, and it contains more than 600,000 digital records. Among the most recent initiatives, the archive also developed an AI trained digital human of Camilo Olivetti (figure 9.2) which “answers” questions through authorised contents by the archive itself.



Figure 9.2: Camillo Olivetti Digital Human

Source: Screenshot of YouTube video, Olivetti official channel, last retrieved June 24th, 2026

It also emerged how heritage contributes to giving credibility to contemporary products and services. In fact, it was stated during the interview that awareness is generated through the knowledge about the company’s history since heritage allows the stakeholder to better understand the values and the vision behind contemporary activities (Interview Olivetti, 2026). This is why in many cases Olivetti organises private tours to the archive in Ivrea, because history helps to better appreciate the business and the perception of the company itself.

So, the role of heritage is not only the one of preserving the brand’s memory, but it is the one of acting as a strategic resource to strengthen

Olivetti's identity while driving innovation for contemporary activities. The brand has demonstrated how heritage can be leveraged as a valuable competitive asset for generating awareness and long-term trust.

9.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

When communicating its heritage abroad, Olivetti relies on a combination of both traditional and contemporary communication tools. During the interview it was explained that the company's heritage, which is based on welfare initiatives, products and design excellence are well known in markets like South America, Japan and Europe (Interview Olivetti, 2026). Clearly, already having a strong connection with these areas makes a little easier communicate its heritage, which is already partially known. Because of this certain level of awareness already surrounds Olivetti, the way its heritage is communicated is really often standardised, surely the core values remain always unchanged.

However, the interview also reveals that in the international communication the company does not always fully exploit its historical legacy, despite the considerable awareness still surrounding the brand abroad (Interview Olivetti, 2026). However, to overcome geographic limitations, Olivetti increasingly relies on digital communication activities able to reach international audiences.

Among the most relevant initiatives there is "OLIverse", a podcast published in English on Spotify (figure 9.3), specifically designed for international audiences. Every episode is based on the historical archive's documents and presents stories about products and significant moments for the company. Similar to this, there is the already cited digital human of Camillo Olivetti. Then the company has recently opened Threads, a social platform connected to Instagram, completely in English allowing a

wider audience to learn about historical contents related to Olivetti's heritage (Interview Olivetti, 2026). Clearly, the brand is also present on almost all social media, but with the majority of its profiles in Italian language. These digital technologies are being used to communicate and diffuse the brand heritage making it easier reach diverse and distant targets.

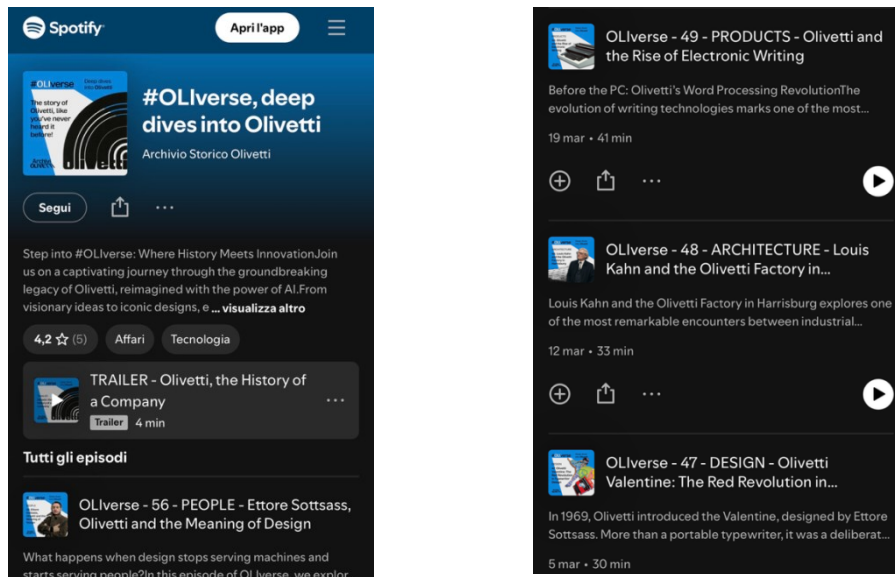


Figure 9.3: OLiverse podcast available on Spotify

Source: Archivio Storico Olivetti on Spotify, last retrieved Jun 24th, 2026

Alongside digital channels, Olivetti also promotes its heritage through worldwide exhibitions and cultural initiatives. For example, the travelling exhibition “Universo Olivetti” is organised with several international locations like Belgium, Switzerland, Tel Aviv, Mexico City and Costa Rica (Interview Olivetti, 2026). The objective of these initiatives is to communicate the broader culture and social values associated with the brand, alongside its new products.

The interview also highlighted that communicating heritage abroad, however, is not always straightforward. One of the main challenges encountered is the difficulty explaining the historical and cultural background and so what made certain innovations revolutionary if it

lacks the familiarity with the context in which they are developed (Interview Olivetti, 2026). For these reasons, if necessary, the brand adapts the presentation and communication of the heritage is according to the target but always maintaining unchanged the core values.

Altogether, from the interview emerged that Olivetti preserves a coherent heritage narrative centred on innovation, design and social responsibility while simultaneously adapting the communication with contemporary and digital tools to make its historical legacy widely accessible and still relevant today.

9.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

From the Interview it emerged that Olivetti does not communicate its strong Italian ties through craftsmanship narratives but rather through innovation, design culture and aesthetic refinement, which are anyways strongly connected to the international perception of “Made in Italy” effect (Interview Olivetti, 2026). So, the brand highlights a mutually reinforcing relationship between the country-of-origin effect and its heritage.

However, Olivetti consider itself not only as a beneficiary of the positive association of the “Made in Italy” label, but rather it contributes to its diffusion. It is often the brand that brings with itself “italianess”, not the other way around. So, it is the brand that comes first in the minds of international stakeholders, and it is its reputation that also strengthen the one of the Italian excellences abroad (Interview Olivetti, 2026). What is evident is that Country-of-origin effect and heritage do not operate independently but rather together.

A central element of this interaction is represented by what was defined during the interview as “Olivetti Style”. Through its history the company

has built a distinctive identity based on technological innovation but also on design excellence. “*Beauty communicates the brand values and because of that it has a fundamental value, not only a formal one*” (Archivio Storico Olivetti, 2026). The company in fact, in its past has collaborated with recognised designers to create iconic pieces of design, like the really famous “Valentine” typewriter designed by Ettore Sottsass jr (figure 9.4) or the MC4 Summa calculator designed by the architect Marcello Nizzoli (figure 9.5) (Archivio Storico Olivetti, 2026). In addition to iconic products also advertising posters and corporate buildings have been associated to Olivetti and the elegant care behind Italian lifestyles.



Figure 9.4 and 9.5: Poster for “Valentine” typewriter and MC4 calculator

Source: Archivio Storico Olivetti and Catalogo generale di Beni Culturali, both last retrieved June 24th, 2026

These refinements for design have become an intrinsic characteristic of the brand and contribute to differentiating Olivetti from other Italian companies operating internationally. In this sense, the company’s heritage enriches and personalises the general association connected to the “Made in Italy” label.

So, the interview demonstrated that Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage operate as complementary assets (Godey et al., 2012). There is a

positive image associated with Italy that provides an initial source of recognition, but then it is always the company's historical legacy that transforms this generic perception into a distinctive and recognisable international positioning.

9.5 Conclusion

For Olivetti, heritage is not considered merely a historical memory to preserve but it is an asset for strategic decision making (Urde et al., 2007). The interview highlighted how the brand progressively shifted from a more preservative returned approach of heritage to one more based on enhancement and valorisation. If communicated correctly, heritage can become a “compass” that helps maintain continuity between past and present (Interview Olivetti, 2026) and foster a distinctive long-term international positioning.

Olivetti also demonstrates the importance of valorising what was defined the “technological red thread” connecting the different phases of the company's evolution (Interview Olivetti, 2026). This concept allows to identify the element of continuity in the brand's history, which is innovation, starting from mechanical typewriters to electronics, information technology and contemporary digital solutions. Innovation so, has become a core value of Olivetti's identity and heritage, and because of this his last becomes a source of inspiration for future development and initiatives.

From an international perspective, the case communicated heritage through a combination of traditional and digital channels. While always maintaining standardised core values and narratives of its history, the brand increasingly relies on digital platforms like social media, without abandoning more traditional tools like exhibitions and the fundamental

Archivio Storico. Olivetti presents and communicates the heritage by making it accessible by an international audience. At the same time, there are also challenges to face, which have been identified in explaining the relevance of the company's past and background to culturally diverse markets that are not familiar with the context in which Olivetti developed (Ghemawat, 2001). This means that also some adaptations in the communication of the heritage are necessary to make it accessible and understandable to global audiences as well.

Lastly, the case introduced its complementary relationship between Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage. Even if the positive reputation associated to Italy may support the brand recognition abroad, it is actually Olivetti's heritage that brings with itself the Italian iconicity, not the other way around (Interview Olivetti, 2026). It is the company's history that gives substance and credibility to the association related to "Made in Italy". With its unique style, the "Olivetti style" the company contributes to reinforce the image of Italy and its aesthetic refinement of its design internationally.

To conclude, Olivetti demonstrates that heritage, when actively valorised, it is both a powerful commercial and communicative asset. The company shows how heritage and the company's historical legacy can be transformed into sources of awareness and credibility which support stakeholder trust and eventually contribute to a distinctive international positioning.

Chapter 10 - Campari

10.1 Company Overview

Campari Group is one of the most internationally recognised premium company in the spirits sector. Campari has become the undisputed leader in the aperitif category as being the symbol of the Italian aperitif culture and by combining product quality and visual identity (Campari Group official website, 2026). Throughout its history built on values like “*passion, integrity, human connections and pragmatism*” (Campari Corporate Presentation, 2026) it was able to build a distinctive positioning that goes beyond the product itself, but it became strongly associated with art, design and advertising (Campari Group website, 2026).

Campari was founded in 1860 by Gaspare Campari after he invented what would become the most iconic and revolutionary red beverage the Campari, whose original recipe has remained unchanged to this day (Campari official website, 2026). Then, a few years later, in 1867, the founder opened its first café, the so called “Caffè Campari” in the heart of Milan in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. This marked the begin of the enormous success that came after the iconic red beverage. In fact, in less than 20 years the product rapidly gained popularity that quickly became international. In 1904 the first production facility is open in Sesto San Giovanni, near Milan, where the company’s headquarter is still located today (Campari official website, 2026).

Under the leadership of Gaspare’s son Davide, the company reached a significant international expansion. In addition, Davide was the first to introduce the social moment of aperitif by opening the “Camparino in Galleria” café in Milan and inventing Campari Soda in 1932, which is

recognised as the first single-serve aperitif (Campari official website, 2026). However, particularly significant was the relationship that he established with the world of art. In these years the brand started collaborating with renowned artists, like Cappiello or Depero (figure 10.1 and 10.2) to enhance product promotion (Campari official website, 2026). This bond with art will later become one of the brand's most distinctive characteristics and strongest heritage assets.



Figure 10.1 and 10.2: Cappiello adv poster and Depero “Manifesto Futurista”

Source: Official Campari website, last retrieved June 25th, 2026

Through the twentieth century, Campari progressively evolved from a family-owned business into a global group. During the 1960s its distribution networks reached over 80 countries, and in the second half of the 1990s the company began an extensive trend of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) which led to the creation of the current multinational corporation Campari Group (in 1995) with its extensive portfolio that contains more than 50 brands from aperitifs, agave spirits, whiskies, rums, cognac and champagnes (Campari Group Corporate presentation, 2026). Today, Campari Group is present in more than 190 markets worldwide.

Alongside its commercial activities, Campari actively preserves and

promotes its legacy through Galleria Campari, inaugurated in 2010 which act as a repository of art (Campari official website, 2026). The company is recognised not only for the quality of its products but also for the ability to integrate heritage, art and innovation into a unique distinctive brand identity.

10.2 The Role of Brand heritage

For Campari its heritage is a strategic asset which guides the company's decision making process, moreover it allows the brand to make credible choices and maintaining a consistent personality, which means remaining faithful to its original spirit while evolving to current times (Interview Campari, 2026).

As emerged from the interview, in fact the company preserves its historical identity while simultaneously developing it as a “*full-fledged communication lever*” (Interview Campari, 2026). However, Campari is careful to not remain anchored to the past, but it continuously reinterprets its history to keep its product relevant to present and future generations (Balmer, 2011); it is a careful balance because this constant innovation should always stay coherent to its original essence.

As cited before, a distinctive characteristic of Campari's heritage is its historical relationship with the artistic world. In fact, Davide Campari collaborated with internationally recognised artists and illustrators, like Depero, Cappiello, Dudovich and many others, he was able to understand the real value behind visual communication and so, he transformed advertising into an artistic expression (Campari official website, 2026). Over time this relationship consolidated even more, and it evolved together with communication itself. Progressively advertisement campaigns moved from illustrated posters to photography,

then to cinema and eventually to contemporary visual campaigns, while maintaining the same distinctive artistic language (Campari Official website, 2026). Because of this, art cannot be simply considered as a communicative tool, but rather it became a deeply integrated component of Campari's identity and heritage.

Particularly significant is the longstanding collaboration with Fortunato Depero that has become one of the strongest manifestations of Campari's heritage. He contributed profoundly to the visual identity of the brand, and alongside numerous advertisement campaigns, in 1932 Depero designed the iconic Campari Soda bottle (Figure 10.3), which is still recognised today as one of the most distinctive symbols of the company (Depero official website, 2026). Together with the unmistakable Red Campari (Campari official website, 2026), this product has become an iconic asset capable of immediately recalling of the company's identity and heritage.

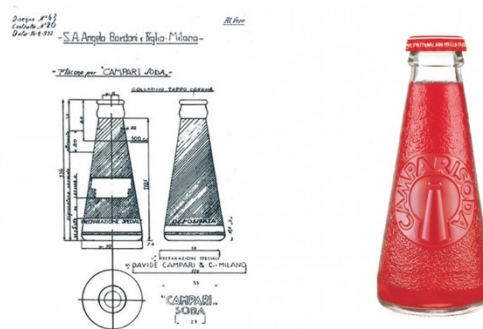


Figure 10.3: Campari Soda's design bottle by Fortunato Depero
Source: Archive of Depero official website, last retrieved June 25th, 2026

As for the preservation and valorisation of Campari's heritage, in 2010 the brand inaugurated at the historical headquarters the "Galleria Campari" for the 150th anniversary of the company (Campari official website, 2026). This is more than a traditional corporate museum, the gallery acts as a cultural repository that preserves original iconic artworks like Belle Époque manifestos, drawings and sketches realised

by many international and renowned artists. This gallery also displays the strong relationship that Campari has with the Cinema, like Tv commercials of famous film directors like Fellini or Sorrentino (Galleria Campari official website, 2026). With this permanent exhibition, the brand actively communicates its heritage but most importantly keeps it history alive and accessible to many audiences (Montemaggi e Severino, 2007).

From the interview it emerged that Campari is one of the best examples in demonstrating that brand heritage is not a simple memory to preserve. The company continuously transform its heritage into a strategic source of communication (Interview Campari, 2026) by integrating artistic collaborations and iconic design. Heritage in this way become a strong asset that reinforces Campari's identity and consequently both consumer awareness and a premium distinctive positioning.

10.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

From the interview it emerged that in communicating its heritage globally, Campari adopts a standardised communication strategy centred on its core values and main heritage narratives. However, according to contemporary trends and consumer expectations, the brand still adapts the communication channels and the way in which the heritage is told (Interview Campari, 2026). So, in the international communication, heritage is not adapted by changing its core meaning, but rather what is changed are the channels by selecting the most appropriate communication tools to make the brand history understandable and relevant to different international markets.

Campari's communication expands through a wide range of touch points through which the company tells its heritage. In fact, the brand

communicates its history through storytelling, packaging, events and through Galleria Campari, all of which contribute to reinforce its historical identity (Interview Campari, 2026). In particular, the packaging itself immediately recalls the brand's visual identity and its continuity across diverse markets, becoming consequently a symbolic heritage asset that maintains consistency in the brand image. In particular the Depero Campari Soda bottle (figure 10.3) and the Campari bitter bottle (figure 10.4), together with the logo and the red colour are immediately internationally recognised and associated with the brand.



Figure 10.4: Campari's bottle with red liquid and logo

Source: Campari official website, last retrieved June 25th, 2026

Next to these more traditional channels, the company also introduced digital communications tools to reach geographically and culturally diverse audiences. Explicative of this is the “Fil Rouge” podcast, developed by Galleria Campari. The podcast covers the most significant moments of the company's heritage through 14 episodes dedicated to iconic products, advertising campaigns and artistic collaborations (Campari Fil Rouge, 2026). Ideally, it was conceived to be listened along the Milan's red metropolitan line that connects Galleria Campari with Camparino in Galleria, but it can be accessed actually from anywhere and it is also available in English (Campari Fil Rouge, 2026). Similarly, Campari actively promotes its heritage through social media channels, cultural events and contemporary campaign and exhibitions (Interview

Campari, 2026).

As already said, Galleria Campari (figure 10.5 and 10.6) represents also as an important element of heritage communication because besides preserving the brand's artistic legacy, it also functions as a cultural platform by hosting contemporary and interactive exhibitions aimed at engaging and educating the public (Galleria Campari official website, 2026).



Figure 10.5 and 10.6: Galleria Campari

Source: Galleria Campari official website, last retrieved June 25th, 2026

However, the interview highlighted the necessity to adapt and simplify the communication of its heritage abroad. The main challenge faced is the one of “*salience*”, which means “*the consumer ability to link the product to its moment of consumption*” (Interview Campari, 2026). In fact, the aperitif culture is typically Italian and in other countries it does not even exist, so the brand cannot take this concept for granted and it has to continuously adapt its communication considering this cultural gap (Ghemawat, 2001); it also has to explain this shared social ritual and to bring abroad some of Italian lifestyle (Interview Campari, 2026). In addition, Campari's story is so dense and rich of details and elements, that usually they have to be simplified or reduced because they appear to be irrelevant for an audience that lacks the knowledge of the Italian history and the context in which the product was created (Interview

Campari, 2026). So, the adaptation of the brand's heritage consists of introducing the core values of Campari and the product, once awareness has been established than the communication strategy can introduce more detailed historical narratives.

Overall, Campari shows that brand heritage is a fundamental asset for communicating the brand's identity abroad. It is not necessary to change the core of the brand, rather adapting the communication channels and tools allows the consumers to better understand the history and eventually always keep the heritage alive and relevant.

10.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

As for the relationship between Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage, the interview revealed about a mutually reinforcing relationship between these two elements. In fact, the company recognises that the "Made in Italy" label, and all the positive association connected to it, acts a source of competitive advantage because it *"opens the doors to international markets and helps in communicating the premiumness, including premium pricing, and desirability of the product itself"* (Interview Campari, 2026). In this sense, the Country-of-Origin effect reduces the effort required for building brand awareness and positioning because consumers already associate the brand with Italian quality and authenticity (Tarabashkina et al., 2024; Temperini et al, 2016).

In particular, Campari does not actively communicate the "Made in Italy" as the central element of its positioning abroad because the company already has embedded in its identity the broader concept of "italianness" (Interview Campari, 2026). Having Italian origins and representing the Italian lifestyle with the aperitif culture represents an implicit component of the brand image and it is not necessary to

explicitly communicate it.

So, in this case as well, we can say that brand heritage is the main element that gives substance and credibility to the positive expectations initially generated by “Made in Italy”. Italianness facilitates the first approach with international consumers and creates a first base of awareness, then Campari’s legacy and heritage strengthen trust and justify the brand’s premium positioning over time, fostering in the end a more distinctive long-term relationship with consumers.

This case study demonstrated once again that Country-of-Origin effect and heritage operate as complementary assets. Campari does not rely only on the reputation of Italy but uses its own heritage to reinforce and personalise its positioning in the global market. Italianness facilitates the market entry, but brand heritage is the main source of trust and credibility with the consumers.

10.5 Conclusion

Campari is an interesting case study that demonstrates how brand heritage can transform its historical legacy into a strategic asset capable of supporting international positioning. The company continuously reinterprets its history while remaining faithful to its true origins. Heritage is enhanced and communicated, and by doing so it becomes a lever to guide the brand’s present and future decisions with coherence to its original personality (Interview Campari, 2026). With this approach Campari balances continuity and innovation, preserving its heritage while keeping it relevant to current times (Balmer, 2011).

Then, the interview highlighted the importance of communicating heritage through multiple channels. Artistic collaborations and iconic packaging, cultural initiatives and exhibitions, many of which presented

in Galleria Campari, alongside digital storytelling are part of the strong heritage communication of the brand (Interview Campari, 2026). All these methods help the company to reinforce its identity and its international image. However, the case introduced some challenges, like the foreign lack of knowledge about Italian culture, that makes it necessary to adapt language and communication tools according to different cultural contexts (Interview Campari, 2026), while leaving unchanged the core values of the heritage.

Lastly, the relationship between Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage showed positive signs of complementarity. The positive associations linked to the “Made in Italy” label facilitate the market entry by already communicating values like quality and authenticity. But then, it is Campari’s heritage that is able to transform these expectations into stronger trust and credibility. In addition, the brand does not need to explicitly promote its country of origin, because it naturally incorporates Italianness into its heritage and its Italian aperitif culture (Interview Campari, 2026).

Overall, Campari is a perfect example of leveraging heritage as a strategic asset capable of creating competitive advantage and supporting international communication, leading eventually to a premium positioning. In the communication of its history, the company is able to integrate art, culture and innovation creating a highly distinctive identity.

Chapter 11 - Cimbali

11.1 Company Overview

Cimbali Group is one of the leading companies in the international professional for its contribution to the espresso culture. The centenary company has built its reputation around values like technological innovation, continuous research and both product quality and design. In this way, it has become one of the most established professional coffee machine manufacturers in the world (Cimbali Group official website, 2026).

The company was founded in 1912 when a hydraulic coppersmith, Giuseppe Cimbali, opened a copper workshop in Milan, where he produced essential components for the newly invented coffee machines (MUMAC official website, 2026). Then, in the 1930s his shop specialised in the production of espresso coffee machines marking the birth of La Cimbali company. In the same decade, the company created what would become the first La Cimbali brand model, La Rapida coffee machine (figure 11.1) (MUMAC official website, 2026).



Figure 11.1: La Rapida coffee machine

Source: Cimbali Group official website, last retrieved June 26th, 2026

Over the following years, the company progressively developed its

expertise and production by always keeping pace with the evolution of technology and by applying innovative features and designs to its new product (Cimbali Group official website, 2026). The company contributed significantly to the technological evolution of the espresso sector becoming one of the pioneers both of the Italian and international industry.

In particular, Cimbali is recognised not only for the innovation of its products, but for their design as well, many of which were designed by famous architects or designers. One of the most explicative examples of these collaborations dates back to the 1960s where the Pitagora coffee machine, designed with the Castiglioni brothers architects, won the prize “Compasso d’oro” (Cimbali Group official website, 2026), which is the world’s most prestigious award for industrial design with the intent to celebrate “Made in Italy” (ADI, 2026). Even if the collaboration with prestigious designer continued, Pitagora is the only machine in Cimbali’s story to have won this prize (Cimbali Group official website, 2026).

An important step in the company’s history occurred in the mid-1990s, when the historical brand and competitor Faema was acquired by Cimbali, later forming the Cimbali Group which now includes also Casadio and Hemerson brands (MUMAC official website, 2026). The company evolved from a small business to the leading organisation worldwide for professional coffee and cappuccino machines, which today follow the latest technological trend and super-automatic systems.

Cimbali group to these days operates through a distribution network that involves more than 100 countries and 700 authorised distributors (Cimbali Group official website, 2026), with approximately 85% of the total turnover coming from international markets. The group reaches international markets through directly owned subsidiaries and authorised

retailers, ensuring also technical assistance and after-sales services while maintaining consistent quality standards globally (Cimbali Group official website, 2026).

Today, Cimbali position itself as a technological and design leader in its sector, developing innovative solutions for supporting baristas' needs, but always remaining faithful to its origins. Alongside its commercial activities in 2012 for its 100th anniversary, the company inaugurated MUMAC museum (MUMAC official website, 2026). "*MUMAC is the driving force behind the spread of coffee culture*" (MUMAC official website, 2026), and it displays unique exhibits and all the most iconic coffee machines offering visitors a historical journey through the evolution both of the sector of espresso coffee machines and the heritage of the company (MUMAC official website, 2026).

11.2 The Role of Brand heritage

According to the interview conducted, Cimbali considers its heritage not only as history but also as "*a legacy for the current life of the enterprise, guarded, promoted and disseminated*" (Interview Cimbali, 2026) in the everyday activities of the company. So, heritage is considered a fundamental element because it allows the company to communicate its long tradition of innovation and technological development while maintaining consistency with its core values (Interview Cimbali, 2026). Heritage is also considered a "*competitive advantage*" over international competitors because it is through it that Cimbali can distinguish itself from its contenders that often lack of a similar consolidated heritage (Interview Cimbali, 2026).

The most important representation of the brand's heritage is MUMAC – Museo della Macchina per Caffè and its historical archive, which

becomes the “*first access point for sharing the history*” (Interview Cimballi, 2026). MUMAC does not only preserve the heritage of Cimballi Group, but it was also conceived to tell the broader history and evolution of the espresso coffee machine sector, which is deeply interconnect with the company’s legacy since they are mutually influenced by each other (MUMAC official website, 2026). The museum reconstructs the technological evolution of the sector while simultaneously highlighting the important contribution of Cimballi through the expositions of more than two hundred machines, technical drawings and archival materials (figure 11.2 and 11.3) (MUMAC official website, 2026).



Figure 11.2 and 11.3: MUMAC and an exposure by room inside the museum

Source: MUMAC official website, last retrieved June 26th, 2026

Another fundamental manifestation of its heritage is represented by the strong and long-standing collaboration with the world of design. The company in fact, collaborated with internationally renowned architects and designers, including Gio Ponti (figure 11.4 and 11.5), Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Ettore Sottsass and many others. These collaborations contributed to elevate professional espresso machines into authentic industrial design pieces that from “*work tools*” become “*collector’s items*” (Collezione Enrico Maltoni, 2026). Many of these iconic models are today preserved and exhibited at the MUMAC (Collezione Enrico Maltoni, 2026; MUMAC official website, 2026) as a demonstration of the relationship between technological progress and

aesthetic refinement. In particular, through these collaborations Cimbali developed innovative products that contributed to the affirmation of Italian design culture.



Figure 11.4 and 11.5: Gio Ponti's La Pavona coffee machine
Source: MUMAC official website, last retrieved June 26th, 2026

Heritage contributes to strengthen the company's credibility in international markets because the long history of Cimbali represents an element of distinction that competitors cannot replicate, reinforcing consequently also stakeholders' trust and perception of expertise (Interview Cimbali, 2026). So, history and legacy provide substance and credibility to contemporary innovations by connecting past achievements with present developments.

Cimbali has demonstrated that by both safeguarding and valorising its brand heritage, it can become a strategic resource for reinforcing credibility and ultimately the company's international positioning.

11.3 Brand Heritage Communications in foreign markets

In communicating its heritage across markets, Cimbali adopts a standardised approach centred on preserving the core values across international markets. As emerged from the interview the historical narratives have to remain unchanged regardless of the country in which it is diffused, while the way in which it is communicated and the tools can be tailored according to the habits of the specific culture (Interview

Cimbali, 2026).

As already mentioned, MUMAC represents not only a fundamental physical representative of Cimbali's heritage, but also the main instrument through which the latter is communicated (Interview Cimbali, 2026). Alongside promoting the company's and sector's evolution, the museum also diffuses the broader culture of espresso, explaining that Cimbali's heritage is part of a wider Italian industrial and cultural tradition (Interview Cimbali, 2026). The museum contributes in communicating the identity of the company and the evolution of an entire sector through tangible symbols that are universally understandable regardless of the cultural background (Montemaggi and Severino, 2007).

Alongside the preservation of historical products, MUMAC actively promotes coffee culture leveraging temporary exhibitions and educational activities like collaborations with universities and designers (MUMAC official website, 2026). In particular the distinctive design element of Cimbali's heritage, is communicated both through permanent and temporary installations at MUMAC that displays the most iconic machines in collaboration with internationally renowned designers, allowing visitors to understand the bond between design and industry (Collezione Enrico Maltoni, 2026; MUMAC official website).

Furthermore, some design pieces from the museum are loaned to temporary international exhibitions of the coffee sector, for example "La Pavona" designed by Ponti was displayed at the Musée des Art Décoratifs at Paris, and previously in Holland, South Korea and Brazil (MUMAC official website, 2026). In this way Cimbali demonstrates its fundamental role in shaping its industry but especially the brand promotes its heritage and the Italian espresso culture, which however is already internationally renowned. Through these initiatives, Cimbali also

communicates its international positioning as a high-quality expert and promoter of espresso culture.

Alongside these traditional communication channels, clearly Cimbali also leverages on internationally available websites and social media (Interview Cimbali, 2026). For example, on Instagram the brand posts about both its newest products and “throwbacks” to some historic key moments (figure 11.6). It is also a platform leveraged to reach geographically distant audiences and engage them directly in sharing their experiences with the coffee machines (figure 11.7) (Cimbali official Instagram profile, 2026).

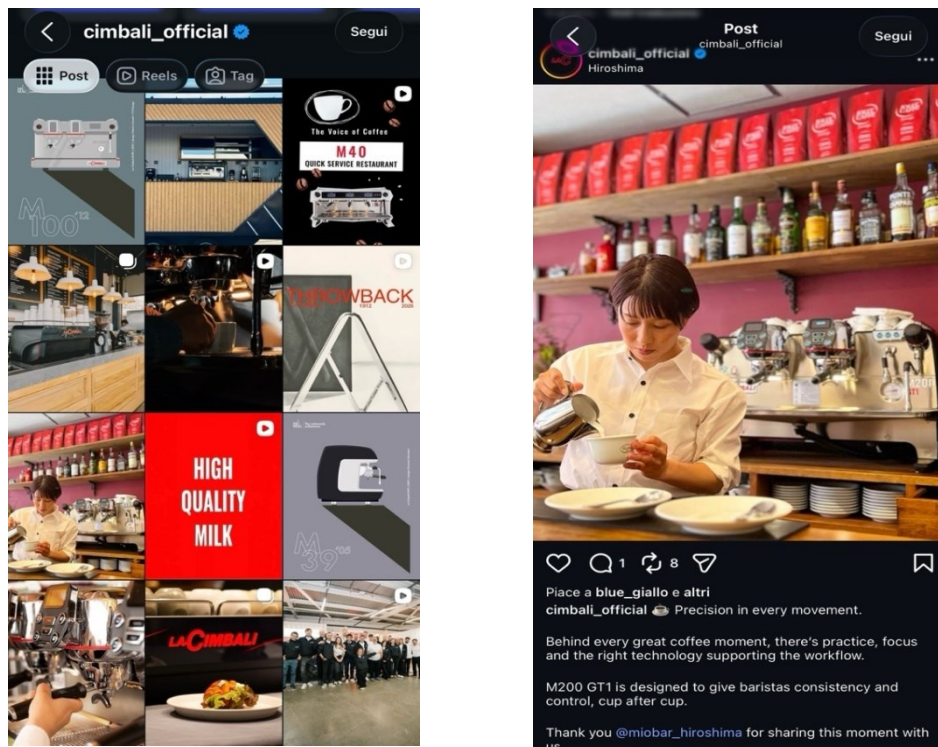


Figure 11.6 and 11.7: Instagram radical profile and post with a Hiroshima client
Source: Cimbali official Instagram profile, last retrieved June 26th, 2026

However, communicating heritage internationally often bring its own challenges. From the interview emerged that the main challenge faced by Cimbali is the one of entering as a first player in a new market (Interview Cimbali, 2026). It is true that today espresso culture is almost present

globally, many times thanks to Cimbali itself; in fact, for example in Portugal the espresso is directly called “cimbalino”, since it is made only through Cimbali’s machines (Interview Cimbali, 2026). It is also true that there are some countries where the espresso coffee culture lacks, as well as all the background connected to it. In these markets, it becomes more difficult to communicate the brand heritage and the Italian context connected to it, when they company must first introduce the coffee culture itself. For these reasons, even if the core values always remain consistent, heritage is explained with different channels according to the culture and awareness of the diverse markets (Robertson, 1995).

Cimbali is a perfect example of demonstrating that heritage communication goes beyond the simple brand history. It is necessary to integrate museums and archives alongside exhibitions and initiatives, design and digital tools to promote its heritage in an accessible way across international markets.

11.4 Interaction with Country-of-Origin effect

From the interview it emerged that Cimbali’s heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect are strongly complementary. The company recognises that the historical Italian roots of the brand facilitates entry in foreign markets because of the positive associations connected to the “Made in Italy” label and in particular to the globally recognised Italian espresso culture (Interview Cimbali, 2026). So, Italian origins act as a competitive advantage in the first approach with international customers because they already perceive the brand to be credible and of quality (Tarabaskina et al., 2024).

However, the interview also highlighted that Cimbali does not simply benefit from the positive Italian reputation of the “Made in Italy”, but

rather thanks to its historical legacy it actively contributed to build the international reputation of the Italian espresso coffee machines (Interview Cimbali, 2026). Because of this, we can say that the relationship between Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage is reciprocal: the positive image of Italy supports brand recognition abroad, Cimbali's own history simultaneously contributes to promote the Italian espresso excellence.

An important aspect emerged in this case study is the manifestation of this mutual relationship through the communication of both the Italian and Cimbali's heritage. In particular, through the products themselves and the museum activities, such as the exhibitions at MUMAC and the lending of iconic pieces to others cultural entities, the company does not simply export professional coffee machines but also promotes the broader culture of Italian espresso (MUMAC official website, 2026). The brand's heritage becomes part of a wider cultural tradition that represents one of the many aspects of the "Made in Italy" identity.

This interview demonstrated that the Country-of-Origin effect and brand's heritage operate as mutually reinforcing strategic assets. Thanks to the facilitated entry due to the positive associations connected to the "Made in Italy" effect, Cimbali's heritage and long history of innovation, design and technological expertise gives substance and credibility to the initial perceptions. Ultimately, these two assets shape the company's distinctive international positioning as leader in the coffee machines industry.

11.5 Conclusion

Cimbali represents an interesting case study in demonstrating how brand heritage can become a source of competitive advantage through its active

valorisation and communication (Urde et al., 2007). The interviewee explained that the company does not consider its past as a mere memory, but as an asset that should be strategically leveraged for decision making processes (Interview Cimbali, 2026). By always maintaining its core values consistent through a century of activity, the brand transformed its heritage into a source of positioning and trust for the consumers, strengthening credibility and quality around its products.

The case also demonstrated the importance of preserving and communicating the heritage through a combination of traditional and digital tools (MUMAC official website, 2026; Interview Cimbali, 2026). However, the company does promote the broader culture of Italian espresso alongside its history, in its museum it displays the deeply interconnected evolution of both its heritage and the industrial coffee sector (MUMAC official website, 2026). At the same time, the case explains the need to adapt the communication tools and storytelling according to the different cultural contexts, while leaving untouched its core values (Interview Cimbali, 2026).

As for the interaction between Country-of-Origin effect and Cimbali's heritage, the case demonstrated a strong complementary between the two assets. The company does not simply benefit from the international reputation of "Made in Italy", but it actively contributes to strengthening and promoting globally the espresso culture through its products and historical legacy (Interview Cimbali, 2026).

Cimbali is the demonstration that heritage is not simply brand memory. Heritage is a source of awareness, trust and positioning, and by valorising the Italian culture of espresso with the brand heritage, the company successfully transforms its history into long-term competitive advantage and differentiation.

Chapter 12 – Cross Case Analysis

12.1 Data Structure

To enhance the credibility of the qualitative analysis and to show the process behind the findings, the results were organised into a data structure according to the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012). The data structure provides the visual representation of the analytical process through which the evidence collected from the interviews of the nine case studies was then transformed into theoretical concepts. Starting from interviewees' key literal quotes, the process followed the individuation of first-order concepts closely connected to the participant's own explanations. Then, these concepts were grouped into more abstract and theoretical second-order themes. Lastly, the second-order themes subsequently converged into three aggregate dimensions representing the main findings of the study. Each one of them will be explain in detail in this chapter.

Figure 12.1 illustrates the final and complete data structure, showing also, how the empirical evidence was organised to address the research questions. The first aggregate dimension explains how brand heritage emerges as a transferable firm-specific advantage across international markets. The second one illustrates how companies maintain global brand consistency internationally, while adapting selected marketing activities to different local cultures. The third aggregate dimension introduce the interaction of brand heritage and Country-of-Origin effect and how both of them together can support international positioning in foreign markets.

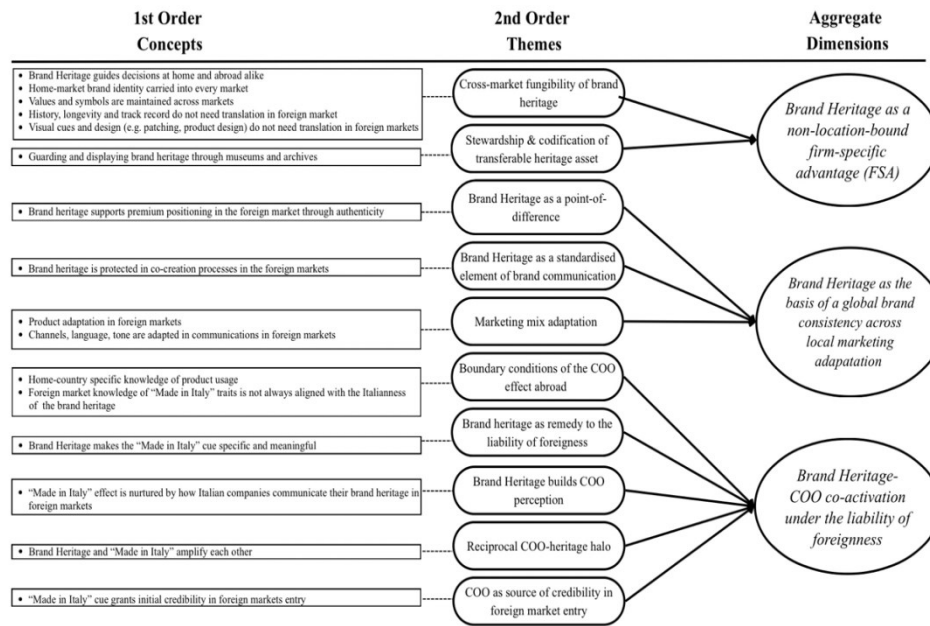


Figure 12.1 Data Structure

Source: Personal elaboration of the author

12.2 Brand Heritage as a non-location-bound firm-specific advantage (FSA)

Across the nine case studies, brand heritage emerged consistently as a firm-specific advantage whose value is not bound to a specific location, but rather it can be extended across many different foreign markets. Even across different industries, all interviewees referred to heritage as a source of continuity that guides their strategic decisions, reinforce the brand's identity and preserve its distinctiveness from competitors regardless of the cultural and geographical context in which the brand operates. These findings suggest that brand heritage is a transferable strategic resource that can be leveraged across international markets maintaining relevance over time.

In particular, this aggregate dimension is based on two main pillars which are the second order themes: "Cross market fungibility of brand heritage" and "Stewardship and codification of transferable heritage assets", which demonstrate how brand perceive heritage as a resource

with value across different markets and how companies actively preserve their heritage to display and transmit it over time.

In detail, the first second-order theme: “Cross-market fungibility of brand heritage” refers to the ability of brand heritage to retain its useful strategic role across different international markets. Interviewees described heritage as an asset that can be used across markets as a mean to position themselves and as a guide, without the need to adapt it specifically to each local area. This pattern is really clear when we look at the five first-order concepts that compose this theme.

A first recurring pattern concern the strategic role of brand heritage inside the organisation, through the first-order theme “Brand Heritage guides decisions at home and abroad alike”, the brands interviewed explain that heritage is not simply a story to guard, but it is actively embedded in their daily activities, even becoming a guide in their decision-making process. The real highlight is that heritage continues to support the brand’s development regardless of the markets in which operates, whether domestic or foreign. For example, one interviewee stated that “*History is part of our DNA in the sense that guides us for strategic decisions*” (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). These findings indicate that heritage is embedded in the strategic decision-making process of the brand and maintain its relevance both domestically and internationally.

Then a second pattern emerges from the first-order concepts “Home-market brand identity carried into every market” and “Values and symbols are maintained across markets”. These concepts indicate that brands when going international, always carry with themselves their core brand identity and in doing so they always try to remain coherent and faithful to their values and symbols, which in fact are not locally adapted.

In fact, one interviewee stated: *“Our story is embedded in Italiannes, we are Italian, it is our heritage and we bring it with us”* (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). As for the importance of the values and symbols embedded in their history, another interviewee explained that *“History is the essence of what we do every day, because it truly repeats itself continuously in all our activities”* (Interview Pomellato, 2026). Together these statements show that heritage is the essence of each brand and when internationally expanding, brand’s identity should not be changed or adapted, instead companies preserve a coherent set of values and symbols that remain recognisable across geographically distant markets.

Lastly, the last two first-order concepts, “History, longevity and track record do not need translation in the foreign market” and “Visual cues and design (e.g. packaging, product design) do not need translation in the foreign market” show that some components of brand heritage remain consistent and relevant globally, without the need to be locally adapted.

The nine cases repeatedly insisted on the fact that some elements like history, iconic products and visual identity of brands are what makes them immediately recognisable internationally, regardless of the cultural background, and changing them across market would mean change also the brand identity. Really explicative of this are these statements from two interviewee: *“The values that are conveyed [internationally] and the stories are always the same anyway, they are equal for everyone, precisely for this idea of giving a unique [brand] vision”* (Interview Kartell, 2026) and *“Spaghetti number five, which is another important icon of the company, is the same in all markets”* (Interview Barilla, 2026).

As for the second second-order theme, “Stewardships and codification of transferable heritage assets”, it highlights that the transferability of brand

heritage requires brands to actively preserve, display and communicate their historical asset over time. In particular this pattern emerged from the first-order concept composing this second theme: “Guarding and displaying brand heritage through museums and archives”.

Almost all interviewees described initiatives to preserve and transmit their brand heritage internationally across generations. For example, museums, historical archives, exhibitions and dedicated heritage spaces like headquarters, were presented as physical repositories of the brand’s history, allowing the company to present the brand timeline pattern through the display of iconic products, documents and archival materials. These initiatives are perceived more as organisational assets to ensure the continuity and accessibility of brand heritage across time, rather than simple celebratory instruments. In fact, as one of the interviewees explained: *“Our museum is the first point of access for sharing the history of our brand and the sector”* (Cimbali Interview, 2026).

To conclude, taken together all these findings suggest that brand heritage represent a specific-firm advantage whose value extends beyond the domestic market. However, to maintain this advantage companies need to leverage heritage as an asset for guiding their decision-making process, while remaining faithful to their identity. In addition, it is necessary to actively preserve and codify brand heritage to ensure continuity of history, values and symbols that define a brand internationally.

12.3 Brand Heritage as the basis of global brand consistency across local marketing adaptation

From the analysis of the interviews, the findings show that interviewees consistently described heritage as the stable foundation of their brand,

emphasising that maintaining consistency across different markets is fundamental. So, even if companies recognise the need to adapt certain aspects of their communication strategy locally, these adaptations never involve brand heritage, its identity and core values. Therefore, this aggregate dimension explains how companies balance global brand consistency with local adaptations to never compromising the essence of their heritage.

In particular, this aggregate dimension is composed of three second order themes: “Brand Heritage as a point of difference”; “Brand heritage as a standardised element of brand communications” and “Marketing mix adaptation”

The first second-order theme, “Brand Heritage as a point of difference”, explains how brand heritage is perceived as one of the main sources of differentiation in foreign markets. In fact, across the nine interviews heritage is often associated with authenticity and it is what allows to occupy a distinctive positioning in international markets that competitors cannot easily replicate. In particular this phenomenon is reflected in its first-order concept “brand heritage supports premium positioning in the foreign market through authenticity”.

It is through the heritage that brands associate a premium positioning to their history which increases the perceived value of the brand itself and eventually reinforces its authenticity and credibility. One respondent explained that heritage *“gives us a competitive advantage in communicating premiumness, including price premiumness, and desirability”* (Interview Campari, 2026), while another said that heritage *“helps us a lot in being credible and recognisable among consumers”* (Interview Pomellato, 2026).

While authenticity enables brands to differentiate in foreign markets,

companies deliberately preserve their heritage by maintaining consistent its core elements in its international communication. This aspect is represented by the second-order theme “Brand Heritage as a standardised element of brand communication”. As particularly highlighted by the first-order concepts composing this theme, “Brand heritage is protected in co-creation processes in foreign markets”, companies tend to preserve the core elements of heritage even when communication activities are developed with local partners or adapted to different contexts. For example, collaborations with local designers or partners never imply changing the historical identity and values that define the brand but rather reinterpreting it to make it resonate better with the specific culture. As one interviewee explained: “*We collaborate with local designers... for example, we worked with this local Chinese artist for the New Year, and she gave her own interpretation of the history and of the brand, creating a connection between Chinese culture and Italian culture, but without changing the codes*” (Interview Acqua di Parma, 2026). These findings allow us to understand that heritage is not an adaptable element, eventually what can be adapted is the way in which it is communicated, but never the history and the codes associated to it.

To further reinforce what just said above, the third second order theme “Marketing mix adaptation” refers to the necessity of adapting the heritage communication channels to better respond to the diverse market habits. In fact, as previously stated the adaptation does not concern to the core elements of heritage but rather to specific elements of the marketing mix, like products, communication channels, language and tone of voice. Explicative of this are the two first-order composing this theme: “Product adaptation in foreign markets” and “Channels, language and tone are adapted in communications in foreign markets”.

Across the interviews, respondents explained that products are adapted

only when necessary to respond to local consumption habits and preferences, in fact several brands highlighted that these adaptations facilitate the market entry without compromising the authenticity of the brand. One interviewee said: *“The strategy is to enter with a more local product, make the brand known to people thanks to a more local use of the product, and then convert them”* (Interview Barilla, 2026). A similar approach emerges with regard to the communication activities, digital channels, language and storytelling frequently get adapted according to the characteristic of each market. Many respondents explained that in particular they simplify the narration of heritage storytelling abroad to make it easier the understanding and then they tailor specifically digital channels. As two interviews stated: *“digital communications are the ones that most detach from a master communication to embrace more local situations”* (Interview Barilla, 2026) and *“if we are dealing with markets very far from ours and with little familiarity, messages can be skimmed or simplified”* (Interview Campari, 2026).

These findings all together indicate that international adaptation is a delicate balance between maintaining unchanged and coherent the core heritage elements internationally, while however tailoring the marketing activities to the local cultures.

12.4 Brand Heritage – Country-of-Origin effect co-activation under the liability of foreignness

From this analysis, it also emerged that brand heritage and Country-of-Origin effect (COO) do not operate independently in foreign markets, but rather they continuously interact in shaping consumers’ perceptions of the brand. In almost all interviews, the respondent emphasised the importance of “Made in Italy” in shaping perceptions of quality, authenticity and trust. But they also underline that its effectiveness

depends on how it is combined with the brands' heritage. So, rather than acting as separate advantages, COO effect and brand heritage reinforce each other in strengthening the brand positioning. In particular this interaction is articulated through five second order themes which explain how these two elements mutually reinforce each other.

The first second-order theme "Boundary conditions of the COO effect abroad" explains that the value of COO effect is not constant across international markets, but its positive effect depends on consumers' familiarity with Italian culture and products. This finding is based on two first-order concepts: "Home-country specific knowledge of product usage" and "Foreign market knowledge of the Made in Italy traits is not always aligned with the Italianness of brand heritage".

Across the interviews, the respondents frequently explained that foreign consumers lack the cultural knowledge necessary to understand the cultural Italian context and certain products here traditionally consumed. This challenge is evident for some products whose value is strongly connected to Italian consumption habits, for example "*the [Amaro] digestif is rooted precisely at a cultural level. Abroad it does not exist*" (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026). Similarly, the correct interpretation of the "Made in Italy" faces some challenges because consumers' knowledge of Italianness does not always coincide with the peculiar Italian identity represented by a specific brand. In fact, one interview stated that: "*Being Italian for the sake of being Italian is not enough. We must bring our way of being Italian to consumers*" (Interview Barilla, 2026). As a result, some elements of brand heritage cannot simply be transferred abroad without additional explanation when the international audience lack the correct Italian context. These findings suggests that the effectiveness of the COO depends on foreign consumers having a certain familiarity with both the Italian cultural contexts and the

specific heritage associate with each individual brand.

However, the interviews also revealed how brands overcome the previously discussed limitations of the COO through their own brand heritage. This is supported by the second second-order theme “Brand heritage as remedy to the liability of foreignness”, which highlights that brand heritage enables to make the “Made in Italy” cue more meaningful in foreign markets by providing the historical context and values that allow consumers to understand what makes each brand uniquely Italian. This pattern is reflected in the first-order concept “Brand Heritage makes the Made in Italy cue specific and meaningful”.

In fact, the respondents described brand heritage as the element that transforms general reputations associated with Made in Italy into a distinctive brand identity. As one interviewee stated: *“For the Made in Italy, the fact that everything is produced in Italy is important, yes, and this has always been always said. But it is important precisely because of the fact that Kartell carries that Italian taste and aesthetic which means good taste”* (Interview Kartell, 2026). So, it is heritage that enriches the first general perceptions of the COO effect by linking them to the brand’s own history and values. The final result is that heritage mitigates the liability of foreignness by helping foreign consumers to develop a deeper appreciation of both Italianness and the individual brand.

In addition, the third second-order theme demonstrates that companies do not simply benefit from the positive associations linked to COO but actively contribute in shaping and reinforcing them through communicating their own brand heritage. The first-order concept reflects this concept very well “Made in Italy effect is nurtured by how Italian companies communicate their brand heritage in foreign markets”.

The respondents explained that communicating their history, as well as

traditions, craftsmanship and cultural roots, contributes to strengthen alongside their own identity, also the overall perception of Made in Italy abroad. So, in this way companies leverage the positive Italian reputation while actively participating in building and maintaining it through their communication activities. One interviewee stated that: *“Being recognised as a Made in Italy brand undoubtedly contributes to carrying the image of Italy in the world and acts as a commercial driver too”* (Interview Cimbali, 2026), while another clearly said that *“It is us who carry the image of Italy”* (Interview Kartell, 2026). These findings suggests that the communications of brand heritage actively nurture the perception of Made in Italy, generating benefits that extend beyond the individual brand and contribute to the reinforcement of the reputation of Italian excellence in international markets.

Moreover, the interviews suggested that the relationship between COO and brand heritage is not only bidirectional, but also mutually reinforcing. The fourth second-order theme “Reciprocal COO-heritage halo” explains the concept of these two elements, that when communicated together abroad generate reciprocal benefits. This relationship is captured by the first-order concept “Brand heritage and Made in Italy amplify each other”.

In fact, the respondents consistently explained that COO effect provide an initial association with quality and authenticity while brand heritage provides a specific cultural and historic context to strengthen these perceptions. At the same time, brand heritage communication contributes to reinforce the overall made in Italy reputation, creating in this sense a virtuous cycle in which both elements enhance each other. Really explicative of these whole concepts is a quote from an interviewee: *“We combine heritage with the concept of Made in Italy, that's when it becomes that superpower where you combine two important elements in*

a concept that amplifies it” (Interview Barilla, 2026). So, neither brand heritage or the COO effect reaches their full potential alone. It is their joint combination that generates a reciprocal halo effect that strengthen both of them simultaneously.

The reciprocal relationship between the COO effect and brand heritage ultimately translates into a strategic advantage for international expansion, in particular in the first early stages of entering in a foreign market.

The fifth and final second-order theme, “COO as a source of credibility in foreign market entry” explains that the COO effect provides brands with an initial level of credibility when approaching new international markets. Clearly, this pattern is shown in the first-order concept “Made in Italy cue grants initial credibility in foreign market entry”.

The interviewees stated that the Made in Italy cue facilitates the first interaction with culturally distant markets by generating positive expectations about quality and craftsmanship in the consumers’ mind. It represents an important advantage during market entry because encourage consumers to become familiar with the brand and consequently reduces the uncertainty typically associated to foreign products. However, respondents also emphasised that this initial credibility alone is not sufficient to achieve long-term success, which depends on the brands’ ability to leverage their own heritage. In fact one interview explained that: *“Being Italian opened the doors for us, but our history comes right after”* (Interview Amaro Montenegro, 2026).

Taken together, all these findings suggests that the Country-of-Origin effect and brand heritage should not be considered independent sources, but rather two closely interconnected assets that reinforce each other in the internationalisation process. Made in Italy gives an initial layer of

credibility, but then brand heritage gives a more specific and authentic context ultimately strengthening brands' international positioning in foreign markets.

Chapter 13 – Discussion

The previous chapter presented the findings that emerged from the cross-case analysis, identifying three aggregate dimensions that explain how brand heritage supports international positioning and how it interacts with the Country-of-Origin effect (COO) in foreign markets. While the Cross-Case Analysis chapter focused on presenting the data structure and the empirical evidence collected from the nine case studies, the purpose of this chapter is to interpret those findings and to present them in relation to the existing literature. In particular, the aim of the discussion is to examine how the empirical results confirm, add or refine the current theoretical knowledge on brand heritage and the COO effect.

Starting from the three aggregate dimensions identified through the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012), each one of them will be discussed by comparing it with the theoretical framework of relevance, to highlight eventual elements of convergence with previous studies as well as elements that could contribute to the academic research. The idea is to interpret the findings through existing theories to provide a better understanding of the strategic role of brand heritage in international markets and how it contributes to international positioning, in particular by interacting with the Country-of-Origin effect. The final goal is to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question of this thesis and to highlight the main theoretical contribution of this study.

The first part of the discussion focuses on the role of “brand heritage as a non-location-bound firm specific advantage”. To better interpret this aggregate dimension, its discussion will be related to the literature on firm-specific advantages (FSAs) and their transferability across international markets.

The concept of “Firm-specific advantage” belongs to Rugman and Verbeke (1992; 2001), and in particular, according to their 2001 paper, FSAs are defined to be “*intangible or production-related assets that could be transferred relatively easily across boarder within the firm without too much attention to adaptation or codification*”. Typically, they consider part of FSAs technological, manufacturing or marketing-know how, as well as organisational capabilities (Rugman and Verbeke, 2001).

However, previously in their 1992 work, Rugman and Verbeke further distinguished between non-location bound and location-bound FSAs. The former can be exploited across international markets without substantial adaptation, and therefore with low marginal costs. On the other hand, location-bound FSAs can benefit a company only in a specific geographical context, because of this they cannot be easily transferred without significant adaptation in other markets.

The empirical findings of this research suggest that brand heritage belongs to the first category. In fact, across the nine case studies, companies consistently described heritage as a strategic resource that maintains its value regardless of the market in which it operates. In addition, heritage guides strategic decisions preserving the brand’s true core identity and providing the continuity of its values throughout all the internationalisation process. These findings confirm the idea that brand heritage can represent non-location bound firm-specific advantages (Rugman and Verbeke, 1992;2001) capable of supporting international positioning.

At the same time, the findings further developed the conceptualisation of brand heritage proposed by Urde et al. (2007). According to the authors, brand heritage is “*a dimension of brand identity found in its track*

records, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in an organisational belief that its history is important". The present study is consistent with the definition of brand heritage provided by these authors; the cases highlighted the strong organisational belief of importance of the brands' history and that the elements composing the heritage remain stable over time, even during international expansions. More importantly, the findings suggest that it is precisely this stability that allows heritage to preserve its strategic value across foreign markets. Heritage becomes the representation of brand's identity and maintaining it consistent across markets makes the brand itself highly recognisable, ultimately allowing it to carve out a specific international positioning.

Another relevant finding of this research connects with the process through which brand heritage becomes transferable across international markets. In particular, this can be connected to the concept of codified knowledge which belongs to Kogut and Zander (1992). The authors defined codifiability as "*the ability of the firm to structure knowledge into a set of identifiable rules and relationship that can be easily communicated*", and because of that they also argue that codification reduces the costs associate with knowledge transfers (Kogut and Zander, 1992).

The empirical findings of this thesis are coherent with this perspective because almost all the nine case studies described their museums, historical archives, exhibitions and dedicated heritage spaces, exactly as organisational mechanism through which their heritage is organised, then preserved and communicated. So, in this sense these initiatives can be interpret as forms of heritage codification, since they transform a brand's historical knowledge into resources easily shared across markets. Because of this, we can conclude that the transferability of brand heritage does not depend only on the existence of a long and rich story, but also

on the brand's ability to codify and organise the heritage to make it accessible and more easily communicated across international markets.

While the first aggregate dimension focused on explaining why brand heritage can be considered a transferable firm-specific advantage, the second one "Brand heritage as the basis of global brand consistency across local marketing adaptation", focuses on how this advantage is managed across international markets. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature of global branding, to examine how companies balance global brand consistency with local market adaptation while preserving the authenticity of their brand heritage.

According to this, one of the most influential debates in international marketing concerns the extent to which a company should standardise or adapt their branding and marketing activities internationally. Levitt (1983) argued that technological development and market globalisation have reduced the differences among consumers, leading to increasingly homogeneous markets and consequently companies should pursue a standardised strategy by offering the same products and marketing activities worldwide to reach economies of scale with lower costs (Levitt, 1983).

However, two other authors challenged this perspective, Douglas and Wind (1987) argued that actually markets should not be considered completely homogeneous. It is true that globalisation has increased similarities across consumers, but the scholars insist on the fact that important differences in cultures, alongside consumer habits and preferences, still existing foreign markets. Because of this, *"a firm's international operations are thus likely to be characterised by a mix of strategies, including not only global products and brands, but also some regional products and brands and some national products and brands"*

(Douglas and Wind, 1987). So, companies should not choose between standardisation or adaptation but rather identify which elements can remain consistent internationally and which instead require local adaptation.

In particular, the findings of this thesis agree with this latter perspective. According to the case study interviewed, companies consistently described that their brand heritage and its core values should remain equal across all markets, while recognising the need to adapt some specific marketing activities to local consumers, like storytelling or communications channels. The empirical results suggest that brand should combine both strategies by maintaining a consistent brand identity while adapting the execution of its communication in different markets.

The balance between standardisation and adaptation can be found in the concept of global brand consistency (Keller, 1993). In particular, building a strong brand requires a “*customer-based brand equity*” which occurs when “*the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong and unique brand associations in memory*” (Keller, 1993). These associations constitute consumer-based brand equity and create additional value for the brand due to what consumers know and associate within their minds. Consequently, having a coherent brand identity across different international markets is essential to preserve these associations and strengthen the brand positioning over time. In addition, Keller (2003) further emphasised the strategic importance of branding as one of the most valuable assets that organisations have to “*reduce risks and set expectations*” in international markets (Keller, 2003). Because of this, he explained that reinforcing brand equity requires consistency in the supporting “marketing programme”, while allowing specific marketing tactics to change, the key source of brand

equity remains unchanged (Keller, 2003).

The findings confirm this perspective, because all selected companies described brand heritage as the element that should remain unchanged regardless of the country in which the brand operates. Brand heritage and its connected elements, like history and values, are considered the foundations of international positioning and in this sense the findings of the research suggest that brand heritage is the key sources of brand equity deliberately preserved across markets to maintain a recognisable brand identity internationally.

This interpretation is also consistent with the concept of international brand architecture proposed by Douglas, Craig and Nijssen (2001). The authors argue that building a coherent brand architecture allows companies to manage their brand across international markets and to coordinate their international marketing strategies (Douglas, Craig and Nijssen, 2001). In particular, across the nine case studies, companies explained that they maintained the core elements of brand heritage unchanged but adapted communication channels, language, storytelling and when necessary, even some product characteristics according to local market preferences.

So, brand heritage provides the stable foundation that guarantees global brands consistency, while the adaptation of marketing mix activities allows brand to remain relevant across diverse cultural markets.

In addition, what emerged from the research is that brand heritage can be considered a strategic source of differentiation, which is important for international positioning. According to Keller's concept of Points of Difference (2013), they are "*associations unique to the brand that are also strongly held and favourably evaluated by consumers*", these associations provide a strong competitive advantage because competitors

cannot easily imitate them. Brand heritage represents one of these distinctive associations and as the brand interviewed stated, their brand history, traditions and values are the elements that differentiate the brand internationally and make it recognisable across foreign markets.

To further support this interpretation, we can connect to Beverland's work (2005). He argued that authenticity is a fundamental component of successful brands because it contributes to building a unique brand identity (Beverland, 2005). In addition, he states that authenticity is not created simply through marketing communication but rather through "*a sincere story that involves the avowal of commitment to traditions, passion for craft and production excellence*" (Beverland, 2005). The findings of the thesis are coherent to this perspective, in fact brands described their heritage as the distinctive element of brand authenticity that supports international positioning. Consequently, preserving and communicating brand heritage strengthens consumers' perceptions of authenticity, ultimately supporting a positive positioning in foreign markets.

So, the second aggregate dimension explained how brand heritage provides the basis for reaching a consistent international positioning. The third aggregate dimension "Brand heritage–COO co-activation under the liability of foreignness" shifts the focus to another key aspect of internationalisation. Specifically, it examines how brand heritage interacts with the Country-of-Origin (COO) effect in foreign markets and how this relationship supports brands in overcoming initial barriers associated with reaching culturally distant markets.

This aggregate dimension needs to be conceptualised and interpreted through the literature of the Country-of-Origin effect, which explains how consumers use information about a product's country of origin to

evaluate foreign brands (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). According to the author Han (1989), “*when consumers are not familiar with a country’s products, country image serves as a halo from which consumers infer product attributes, and it may indirectly affect their brand attitude*” (Han, 1989). The author explains that since consumers are often unable to evaluate the true quality of foreign products before purchasing them due to a lack of direct experience with it, they rely on country image to form initial belief that subsequently influence their attitudes (Han, 1989). So, the COO effect acts as an initial evaluation mechanism that allows consumers to reduce uncertainty during the first approach with unfamiliar foreign brands.

Similarly, Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) argue that Country-of-Origin represents a cognitive cue that consumers use to infer product attributes, like quality, when other information about the brand is limited. Because of this, the COO effect can facilitate consumers’ initial evaluation of foreign brand on the basis of their origin while providing an immediate signal of quality.

This theoretical perspective helps to explain the findings of this research. In fact, across the nine case studies, respondents described the “Made in Italy” cue as an important advantage when approaching foreign markets, in particular during the early stages of internationalisation. The interviewees stated that consumers frequently associated the Italian origin of the brand with positive expectations regarding quality, craftsmanship and authenticity, even before becoming familiar with the brand itself. Therefore, the COO effect can be said to represent an initial source of credibility that facilitates foreign market entry.

This aggregate dimension needs also to be interpreted through to the concept of liability of foreignness, introduced by Zaheer (1995). The

author defines the liability of foreignness as the additional costs that firms operating in foreign markets have to face when compared to local competitors, which may even lead to a lower probability of surviving in the long run (Zaheer, 1995). These costs are due to “*the foreign firm’s lower familiarity with the market*” or even “*the foreign firm’s inability to appeal to nationalistic buyers*” (Zaheer, 1995). Under these conditions consumers often perceive these foreign firms as unfamiliar and distant to them, because of this the positive associations linked to the Country-of-Origin become particularly important since they help reduce some of the uncertainty connected to the first interaction between consumers and a foreign brand. The findings are coherent with this perspective, showing that the Made in Italy cue partially mitigates the liability of foreignness by providing brands with an initial source of credibility even before their heritage is communicated.

This previous discussion suggests that the COO effect provides brand with an initial advantage when entering in foreign markets. The empirical findings support this perspective but also indicate that this initial positive perception alone is not sufficient to support the international positioning of the interviewed companies. The effectiveness of the COO effect largely depends on the way it is supported and enriched by brand heritage.

To explain the findings, it is necessary to introduce the contribution of Anholt’s work relatively to Competitive Identity (2007). The author argues that a country reputation is not shaped only by the government communication, but rather it emerges from actions and outputs of national stakeholders, including “*tourism, people, culture, investment, policy and brands*” (Anholt, 2007). In particular he explains that people’s perceptions about a country are formed by “*the things that are done in the country*”, “*the things that are made in the country*”

alongside the “*way other people talk about the country*” and “*how the country talks about itself*” (Anholt, 2007). From this perspective, companies and their products become contributors to the construction of a nation’s competitive identity. The author himself notes that an essential component of a country promotion relates to promoting “*its companies and their products*” (Anholt, 2007).

So, building on Anholt’s argument, this thesis suggests that communicating brands heritage does more than simply strengthening their own international positioning. In fact, if the heritage is deeply rooted in the history, traditions and culture of a country, its communication inevitably also conveys the symbolic meaning associated with the country itself. Consequently, brand heritage communication may contribute to reinforcing the country’s reputation abroad, while simultaneously benefitting from the positive associations already attached to its Country-of-Origin. This relationship that appears to be reciprocal is found also in the empirical findings of this research. Across the interviews, almost every respondent stated that, while their brand benefited from the positive associations linked to the Made in Italy effect, communicating their own heritage contributed to strengthening the image of Italian excellence in international markets.

Taken together, these findings suggest a more dynamic relationship between brand heritage and Country-of-Origin effect than what generally described in the existing literature. Rather than operating as two independent sources of competitive advantage, the two forces actually reinforce one another. Initially, the Made in Italy cue facilitates the brands’ first market entry by generating positive expectation regarding quality, authenticity and craftsmanship in the consumers’ minds. Then, brand heritage gives these general associations a more specific and distinctive meaning by communicating the brand’s own history and

values. However, at the same time, the international communication of brand heritage contributes to reinforcing the image of Made in Italy itself, creating a reciprocal relationship in which both these two resources continuously strengthen one another.

This reciprocal mechanism becomes particularly relevant when brands operate in culturally distant markets. In fact, as Ghemawat (2001) argues cultural distance deeply influences how consumers interpret products and brand across countries. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that when the meaning associated with Made in Italy cue is less immediately understood, brand heritage provides the historical and cultural context necessary to help consumers to interpret the Italianness more effectively. Consequently, brand heritage not only interacts positively with COO effect, but also reduces some of the interpretative barriers created by cultural distance and ultimately it supports a more distinctive international positioning.

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how brand heritage supports positioning in international markets and how it interacts with the Country-of-Origin (COO) effect in this process. More specifically, the goal of the research is to understand whether brand heritage represents a strategic resource that companies can leverage internationally and how its interaction with the COO effect contributes to strengthening brands' positioning abroad. To address the research question, a qualitative multiple case-study was conducted on nine Italian heritage brands operating in different industries and then, it was adopted the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2012) to identify the main patterns emerging from empirical data.

The findings provide a clear answer to the research question and confirm that brand heritage emerged as a strategic resource capable of supporting international positioning through different but interconnected mechanisms.

First of all, the study showed that the core elements of brand heritage, which are history, values and identity, can be preserved across international markets while maintaining their strategic relevance. This allows companies to build a coherent international image and to develop a specific positioning in the diverse markets, however, without preventing the necessity to adapt specific marketing activities to local market conditions. In this sense, the findings suggest that consistency and adaptation do not exclude each other, but rather a complementary and balanced approach enables companies to remain recognisable and relevant to different foreign markets.

Then, the research also demonstrated the dynamic relationship between brand heritage and Country-of-Origin effect. They do not act as separate resources but rather the findings suggest that they continuously reinforce one another throughout the internationalisation process. Specifically, the Made in Italy cue provides an initial source of credibility when consumers first approach a foreign brand, then brand heritage enriches these general associations by communicating the brand's own history, traditions and values. In addition, communicating brand heritage contributes to strengthening the image associated with Made in Italy, creating a reciprocal relationship where the two resources mutually reinforce each other.

Overall, this research suggests that the international value of brand heritage does not lie simply in preserving a brand's history, but in its strategic management and communication across different cultural contexts. If consistently maintained and effectively communicated, brand heritage becomes a distinctive strategic resource that supports international positioning while strengthening the positive associations linked to the brand's Country-of-Origin.

Beyond answering the research question, these findings offer both theoretical contributions to the existing branding literature and practical implications for companies managing their brand heritage internationally. First, brand heritage is not a simple part of the brand identity, but it plays an active role into shaping positioning during the internationalisation processes of firms. By considering heritage as a firm-specific and transferable resource that preserves its value across markets, this research extends the discussion on how intangible brand resources contribute to building and maintaining international positioning.

Additionally, this research provides a more integrated understanding of

the relationship between brand heritage and the Country-of-Origin effect. The existing literature has already studied both subjects, but generally as separated constructs. The findings of this thesis, instead suggests that these two forces are deeply intertwined and have a reciprocal relationship and therefore, studying them separately would overlook the relationship through which each element reinforces the strategic value of the other during the internationalisation process.

However, beyond its theoretical contribution, this research also intends to offer several managerial insights. What emerged from the research is that companies should consider brand heritage as a long-term strategic resource and not a simple element of brand communication. In fact, preserving a coherent heritage across international markets allows brands to maintain a recognisable identity enabling consumers to develop a clear and consistent understanding of the brand itself, regardless of the country in which it operates.

At the same time, the results indicated that while the Made in Italy cue is a facilitator for the initial entry into foreign markets, managers should not rely exclusively on the positive associations linked to this label. Instead, these associations need to be reinforced through the communication of the brand's own heritage, which provides the correct cultural context for having a better understanding of what makes each brand truly and uniquely Italian. Because of this, effectively managing brand heritage is not only a way to strengthen international positioning, but also an opportunity to contribute to the broader reputation of Italian excellence abroad.

Despite the contributions of this research, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused exclusively on nine Italian heritage brands. Although the selected companies belong to different

industries, the findings reflect the characteristics of a specific national context, the Italian one. Because of this, future research could extend the analysis to heritage brands originating from other countries, to explore whether similar dynamics emerge when different Country-of-Origin associations are involved. Such comparisons could contribute to understanding whether the reciprocal relationship between COO effect identified by this research can be observed also beyond the Italian context.

A second limitation concerns the qualitative nature of the research and the reliance on managerial perspectives. The findings are based on interviews with companies' representatives and so reflect how organisations strategically interpret and communicate their brand heritage. It could be interesting for future studies to complement this perspective by investigating the consumers' point of view, maybe through experimental research as well. This would allow the research to have more complete understanding on the interaction between the COO effect and heritage, and furthermore to understand if this mechanism works in the consumers' minds in the same way it is described by the brands.

Finally, although the multiple-case study included nine companies, the sample remains relatively limited. The case studies interviewed allowed the identification of consistent patterns across different industries, however a larger sample may reveal additional ways in which brand heritage can be leveraged to support international positioning. So, future research could expand the number of cases studied to further validate the findings of this thesis.

Overall, this research highlights that the real value of brand heritage does not simply lie in preserving a company's past, but rather in its ability to

create relevant connections between the brand itself, its Country-of-Origin and consumers across international markets. In particular, today as competition in global markets continues to increase, differentiation becomes more challenging, however strategically managing and communicating brand heritage may represent a valuable resource for building a distinctive international positioning. We can conclude that it is not history alone that helps to create competitive advantage, but the ability of companies to preserve, interpret and communicate that history in ways that remain meaningful across different cultural contexts and generations.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Protocol of Interview

Section A: The Internal Dimension: Heritage Management

Q.1. How is history considered within your company? Do you consider your past as a legacy to be guarded, or as an active resource that guides strategic decisions? In what way?

Q.2. What tools does the company use to communicate its history to the consumer? Do you use specific channels like digital storytelling, corporate museums, or evocative packaging? Do you have iconic products that serve as a symbol of your history?

Section B: The International Dimension: Expansion and Adaptation

Q.3. Moving to foreign markets, what percentage of turnover do they approximately represent? Does the foreign consumer perceive your heritage as a guarantee of authenticity and quality, reducing that natural distrust toward a foreign brand?

Q.4. When you enter a new market, or one where brand awareness is lower, how much does your history help you establish a bond with the consumer? Is the longevity of the company perceived as a factor of reassurance and guarantee for the foreign customer?

Q.5. In communicating your story abroad, do you maintain a standardised narrative, therefore equal to the domestic one, or do you adapt some cultural elements to make them more appropriate for the local audience?

Section C: Interaction between Heritage and Country of Origin effect

Q.6. The 'Made in Italy' is a very powerful asset in foreign markets. In your case, how does it interact with your heritage? Is it the brand that carries with it the image of Italy, or do you believe it is being Italian that opened the doors for you initially? Do the two elements reinforce each other?

Q.7. Is there any other relevant aspect regarding your international strategy and your history that we haven't touched

