Archival Projects. Tools and Methods for Promoting the Corporate Culture Starting from Historical Brand

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Abstract. In the contemporary informational/digital landscape, the attention dedicated to data analysis has necessarily place the accent on the impact they have on design process. We no longer speak only of formal design, but of its communication, or even more about the way in which this good will reach the final consumer. In this scenario, the need to manage the methodological/design process by virtuously involving both the material and immaterial aspects, connecting, evaluating and re-evaluating existing knowledge, research and business in the best possible way, is clearly evident.

The proposal intends to present and discuss the research "MaToSto - Communicating and promoting entrepreneurship starting from the historical brands of the territory" which has seen a precise methodological structure aimed at promoting and qualifying the heritage of the historic Turin brands, to define criteria, tools, and project outcomes aimed at their enhancement also from an entrepreneurial point of view.

From the set of 25.000 company trademarks, registered from 1927 to 1970 at the Turin Chamber of Commerce, the researchers started a project using the organizational, creative and visual tools typical of big data analysis, including: a quantitative research on defined product categories, the implementation of a processing method, data filtering and selection for visualization purposes, a taxonomic analysis on figurativity to hypothesize a classification based on tags useful for archival research, and – nevertheless – useful to drive impactful heritage marketing actions.

Keywords: Historical brands · Digital humanities · Big data · Storytelling · Cultural heritage

1 Introduction

With the growing pervasiveness of information and communication technologies, we now live immersed in a new environment, which some define as infosphere [1], consisting of a continuous offset between the real and virtual dimension, between the online and the offline. A situation in which coexist the physical world of objects, documents, devices and the digital one that allows and guarantees the accessibility and the extended use of these "cultural objects".

The exploitation of new information technologies applied to cultural heritage is concretized on the one hand in an increase in the ease of use of resources, and in a consequent ease of learning, but even before it responds to the logic of social inclusion, allowing increased accessibility (mainly in quantitative terms) and the use of archives and museums, as well as all those places dedicated to cultural conservation.

History, a privileged discipline in the environment of archives, and the history of design as regards the subject of this contribution, has - therefore - a special opportunity in the redefinition of a general intellectual framework. Special occasion in being, itself, the subject of new interpretations, in returning to assume a central role as a relational, social, communicative and shared good.

With a view to revitalizing cultural heritage, transcending mere conservation, digital archives thus become essential tools for the narration of the culture of design and, through the potential of digital networking, also for its dissemination.

The large number of archives available online today, including those dedicated to design and its protagonists (company and/or designer archives), highlights a panorama of profoundly different methodological approaches which must correspond to different objectives and results calibrated on the target audience, and on the wishes of users.

In other words, by acting within the complex contemporary stratification of digital reality, the issue of enhancing sources as objects to design new research paths and new relationships becomes central.

The archive, traditionally repository of historical tales, is in fact made up of the relationships between its parts - more than individual objects - potentially capable, by intertwining, of stimulating the construction of original stories [2, 3]. It is also important to remember how the recent debate on the role of research requires the latter to be able to speak to an ever wider audience in order to regain a central position in the cultural and scientific debate. An objective that can be reached through a profound methodological change that includes the use of big data, the enhancement of the opportunities offered by digital humanities or topic-modeling software, able - among other things - to automatically read huge quantities of documents. From this point of view, the new trends in historiography speak of the need for new narratives capable of being read and understood by an audience of non-experts [4]. And again, the attention to visualization, to IT tools, and the fusion between large and small - between "micro" and "macro" - which combines the best that can be drawn from archival work with large overviews on issues of common interest.

The affirmation of historians David Armitage and Jo Guldi that "*in the world of digital university there are now tools that can consolidate and synthesize written texts (or information) in distinct views, imitating economists in creating and returning simple and immediate images of topics covered*" [5] should push scholars and researchers to innovate the way of analyzing the chronological change of the events treated, using various forms of visualization of time lines, thanks to the different tools for calculating the terminological occurrences and quantitative analysis.

Therefore, the work of micro-history in the archives and the macro-historical frames - result of the intertwining of a wider range of sources - can offer a new horizon in the study of the flow of events. Because "*responding to the call for a public future also means*

writing and talking about the past and the future in public, so that the ideas proposed can be easily shared" [5].

2 The project

2.1 MaToSto.it - Marchi Torinesi nella Storia

MaToSto® is the acronym of Marchi Torinesi nella Storia – Turin Trademarks in History – and is the database that the Camera Commercio Torino – Turin Chamber of Commerce – has created to make available to the public the minutes of the applications for registration of national and international trademarks that are part of the institution historical archive. Starting from this, the research entitled "*Enterprises Historical Brands and Communication Design*", illustrated and detailed below, finds its place in the need, shared between the disciplines of design and history, to pursuit a research in the field of design and visual communication in relation to the Piedmont area. The partnership with two local entities such as the Turin Chamber of Commerce and the archival-librarian center for documentation and research, the Institute for the Memory and Culture of Work (ISMEL) – founded in 2008 in Turin – was decisive.

The first (Turin Chamber of Commerce) provided access to its archive, also available online, with the digitalization of the immense historical heritage linked to the trademarks filed between 1926 and 1991, as well as following the researchers in the data retrieval phase and their consultation; the second (ISMEL), as a research institute, talked with the researchers in focusing on socio-cultural contexts, linked to the history of the company in the Piedmont area, to isolate the case studies resulting from in-depth studies that converged on the chamber site http://matosto.it/. "*Enterprises Historical Brands and Communication Design*" therefore constituted a first opportunity, as a case study with all the aforementioned characteristics, to scientifically and practically put to the test a multidisciplinary collaboration that has seen as an expected result the enhancement of a strongly cultural and productive heritage anchored in the territory, whose recognizability is to be maintained thanks to the introjection of cultural values rather than mandatory regulatory interventions [6]. The aim is to promote the historical culture of a brand, through grouping by product type, isolating some brands that could potentially be the object of interest by a new business and therefore also the object of redesign in their communication, starting from the logo or logotype. The research is also aimed at facilitating the Chamber of Commerce in the actions/policies to promote the Piedmontese business culture and to provide some tools (taxonomy, classification) useful in the future to guide the planning phase for those wishing to take over a historic brand.

2.2 The Developed and Adopted Methodology

"*The new design challenge is to use data for the same humanistic results we have in mind when we shape products through the user interface or their physical form*" says M. Rolston, titling his work *The next era of designers will use data as a means of communication* [7]. In fact, if analysis offers a promise aimed at understanding reality on a global level, design is able to offer the right framework to understand human behavior

at a granular level of detail, with the hope of creating better experiences. Experiences more efficient and engaging at the product, service and process level [8].

In the contemporary informational/digital landscape, the attention dedicated to data analysis has necessarily place the accent on the impact they have on design process. We no longer speak only of formal design, but of its communication, or even more about the way in which this good will reach the final consumer, defining an increasingly targeted, dynamic and complex product system [9]. By doing so, it is possible to manage the methodological/design process by virtuously involving both material and immaterial aspects, knowing what is present in the area, connecting and re-evaluating existing knowledge, research and business in the best possible way [10].

Therefore, starting from the data as a fundamental tool for the project, the research has seen a precise methodological structure aimed to promote and qualify the historical culture of the brand.

Sports, construction, clothing, food, drinks are just some of the product macro-categories present within the rich documentation of historical brands archived at the Turin Chamber of Commerce. A documentation that today boasts about 25.000 registrations between the 1920s and 1970s, of which about 15.000 verbal marks (primarily words) and 10.000 figurative marks (icons). For the research in question, however, it was decided to focus only on the figurative brands of two specific sectors that are particularly relevant and strategic for the reference context and some related sub-categories: agro-food with eggnog, candies, flours and jams, and clothing, with hats, raincoats, suspenders, belts and shoes. Once the areas of interest were defined, the methodological process was fundamentally divided into three sequential but closely related phases: research and quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, exploratory analysis and definition of project outputs.

2.3 Research and Quantitative Analysis

The first phase of the methodological path, also defined as the research and prelimi-nary/quantitative analysis phase, saw a real continuous exploration of the information material, constantly bringing out new questions and points of view on the dataset and at the same time on the focus of the research, and on final goals. This phase was mainly concentrated in two moments that will be illustrated in detail: the identification of filters and tags useful for categorization and the consequent organization and classification of the dataset. The first moment saw the definition, in fact, of the filters useful for skimming the data.

Starting from the sectors of interest, we tried to understand what terminology was used to describe the product under analysis; terminology that, given the span of time, has inevitably followed the evolution of the language, enriching the archive of synonyms, names and nomenclatures. In the case of candies, for example, terms such as: *caramell*, pastigl*, pasticca* and *pasticche*, or hats are added to *berrett** and *copricap**.

Upon the first screening, it was noted that some registrations remained active even if they did not belong to the chosen category. See the example of the belts product: a recurring term in the product categories of clothing such as construction and automotive. For this reason it was necessary to proceed with a second manual skimming which saw the cleaning of the archive from the records relating to categories not subject to analysis

and from the records that reported typologies and descriptions that were too generic or clearly referring to other products. Finally, the third and final sorting saw, thanks to the information received from the Turin Chamber of Commerce, the identification of orphaned trademarks or those no longer bound by rights of use. Finally, about the categorization and finalization of the dataset, as many documents have been created as the number of categories was, and inside they have been ordered chronologically, divided by year and correlated with the reference iconography: that is logos (190 for sweets, 28 for jam, 24 for flour, 4 for eggnog, 179 for shoes, 44 for raincoats, 30 for hats, 8 for suspenders and belts).

The investigation then continued with an exploratory analysis and the aim to identify particular correlations between different categories or any temporal recurrences. To meet this need, a taxonomy was structured and drafted starting from the iconographic elements: historical period, typology (figurative, figurative and word, figurative with repeated elements), basic elements, color, style (functional or decorative), decorative imprint (late Romanesque, Art Nouveau, modern, patriotic, heraldic, etc.), typography (Gothic, Serif or Sans Serif, original, etc.), language and categories (e.g. celestial bodies, animals, plants, landscapes, objects).

The compilation of this categorization has allowed the transition from the exploration and quantum/qualitative analysis of the data to the actual design action.

2.4 Qualitative Analysis

The data-driven approach that guided the first part of the research also instructed its part of qualitative analysis, which began with a phase of research and systematization of content through timelines and thematic insights based on evidence [11] (Fig. 1).
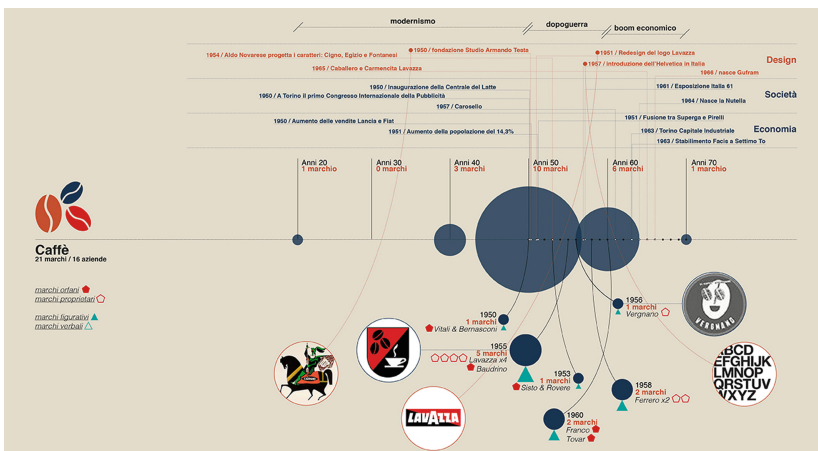

Fig. 1. Systematization of information and contents, as well as visual rendering through timeline and other visual models.

All the information collected has flowed into the creation of cultural content prepared for the digital archive site of the Turin Chamber of Commerce MaToSto.it and to suppose further research hypotheses (output).

This second phase of the process, first of all, involved a wide-ranging investigation into the socio-economic, cultural and political context relating to registered trademarks and categories of interest for research. From a historical point of view, great events, particular innovations, patents, more or less passing fashions have been researched and systematized, to name a few.

The data, divided by category, year and decade, also allowed a first consideration of the graphic-iconographic typologies recurring in the registered trademarks. Among the discriminating factors, we took into account how many companies were operating in a particular sector in a historical period and the results of that commercial and technological sector over the years. In this phase, the comparison with ISMEL was useful, the consultation of local historical magazines such as: Municipal monthly magazine and Economic Chronicles (chamber magazine), the digital database of the brands of the Central State Archives, for the purpose of a cross-comparison between patents, trademarks and products [12].

Equally important was the identification of "families" of products, companies, communication campaigns relevant to the restitution of the history of the city and the region in relation to the production and design sectors. In this case, the qualitative analysis made it possible to relate the collected data to the socio-economic and cultural context (events, fairs, innovations) relating to the registered trademarks, taking into account in particular those that were proving to be more interesting by recurrence in the investigated chronology and for their notoriety in the area.

2.5 Exploratory Analysis and Definition of Project Outputs

From the process illustrated above, some insights, or archival storytelling, were drawn up, functional to heritage marketing actions, with the aim of reconstructing company stories by crossing the data on the product sector to the supply chains to which they belong, according to a narrative that continually refers to the research tags: the brands identified, the reference brands and their renewal over time, the relationships with the socio-economic context (Fig. 2).

Two thematic in-depth studies are dedicated, respectively, to the history of raincoat manufacturers and confectionery companies specialized in the production and packaging of sweets. For raincoats were investigated the relations with the Piedmontese textile industry linked to rubber processing and its product sub-categories. For candies, the focus was on the relationship with the packaging industry: metal boxes, labels, wrapping paper with its decorations. The respective product/process/communication innovations are highlighted in the reconstructions.

Another study, transversal to all categories, examines the aspects related to the history of communication and brands, highlighting for some companies the presence of a coordinated image along the chronology investigated.

The research work carried out so far, as well as the relationships activated, have provided a structured basis on which to continue the study and dissemination of the archival

Fig. 2. Archive storytelling: an example of thematic analysis for the MaToSto.it website (theme: Raincoats in Turin).

system linked to the history of brands, in the circularity between design, aesthetic, socio-economic and of the territorial business culture.

In order to improve and enhance the consultation of the digital archive and contribute to the dissemination of its wealth of images, it was assumed to apply a search filter to the database based on the keywords used in the taxonomic analysis used (illustrated above). The hypothesis is to implement archival research based on the characteristics of the figuration of the marks (geometry, decoration, style…) to ask questions based on visual keys translated into textual keys, as a possible alternative to sophisticated visual selection algorithms (image system). Linked to this is also the study of a model of analysis of a figurative trademark, useful for the Chamber of Commerce for the registration of new trademarks, especially taking into account the changed technological conditions and the mediums that the transition from analogue to digital has introduced.

Among the possible future design outputs, a series of texts (each with the characteristics of a "catalog raisonné"), dedicated to the individual production sectors where to collect and describe a selection of historical brands (so-called "orphans") available for entrepreneurs interested in undertaking enhancement and investment actions commercial.

3 Conclusions

With a view to revitalizing cultural heritage that transcends mere conservation, digital archives thus become essential tools for the narration of the design culture and, through the potential of digital networking, also for its dissemination.

The history of design has indeed a multidisciplinary nature, "it is made up of many stories", allows intertwining and promotes complex investigations, as well as lends itself to technologically multifaceted returns: from communications on a social basis, to online training activities such as videos and workshops aimed at an extended audience. In the

digital treatment of archival sources, therefore, the three actions of cultural selection, technological strengthening and above all the ability to create networking which is equivalent to the creation of new meanings play a fundamental role.

Emerges the idea of a digital heritage and an archive as a relational asset capable of creating narratives and instructing possible design actions with connotations of "knowledge design", advanced by the designer and historian Jeffrey Schnapp, director of the Harvard metaLAB, which combine the digital dimension to the most advanced and innovative profile of design.

A digital archive, such as MaToSto, by its definition can dialogue with other archives: of historical associations, foundations, designers and corporate image studios and company archives, but also industrial and local history museums. The editorial proposals favor the "relational aspects" between the various actors for the purpose of promoting the historical and economic culture of the brands, especially if they still belong to the original companies, possibly in possession of the historical documentation relating to the corporate image.

The process initiated with this research therefore aims to enable attitudes of resilience, proactivity and exploration of the territorial heritage, where the design component is based not only on a purely intuitive but also pragmatic logic.

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