

# MARKETING AND CULTURE

*Two Characters in Search of an Author*

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The subject of culture seems to have become the common denominator of a deep and continuous debate on the distinctive identity of Italy, on the need to valorize a competitive position that has not yet been completely defined and a *country brand reputation* strategy that lacks incisiveness and continuity.

In the firm conviction that Culture, in its widest conceptualization, can favour those systematic connections that are vital for competitiveness on the international scene, we can now see a widespread interest in this subject, confirmed by the principle, ever more common, that culture contributes to economic and social growth, acting as a catalyst for local development, generating revenue from the valorization of resources, reinforcing the social capital and, above all, promoting human development (Napolitano, 2015). Its value is not only an economic value, but above all a collective value, capable of reinforcing the competitive positioning of an entire Country System, re-qualifying the more strategic segments for development and innovation (Florida, 2005) and acting as a facilitator for the entrance of businesses and business systems onto the international markets (Montella, 2008; Sacco, 2010; Caliandro, Sacco, 2011; Cerquetti, Montella, 2012).

But how can we conjugate Marketing with Culture, intended in this specific meaning? Can there be a reciprocal exchange of values between two disciplinary ambits that from the beginning of time have always been almost at the antipodes?

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Marketing and Culture, though seemingly far apart, separated by ancient traditions and conceptual preclusions, today exist in a very interesting area of contamination, capable of generating areas of research of great interest and debate.

Marketing, a word from Anglo-Saxon derivation, refers, as is well known, to actions that have a specific reference to the market. Culture, with its linguistic roots in the ancient world and a powerful Latin usage, is traditionally abstract and far from any operation of “commercialization”.

The potential that the dialectic between these two systems of meaning produce has created a series of profound debates finalized at intercepting the coinciding areas of research, despite the “fundamentalist” positions taken up by the more rigorous supporters of the respective positions.

In recent years, marketing has suffered from a “discriminatory campaign” which began contextually with a new “feeling” and a new awareness of the role of mankind on the Earth. Environmental damage, the wastage of non-renewable resources, poverty, inequality, multinationals vs. local business, have all put the spotlight on consumer policies that are more defensible and less “invasive”, in favour of policies that are more careful with the Planet’s resources and more equal in the distribution of consumer goods.

Marketing, therefore, has been accused of feeding an unsustainable consumerism. Relegated to everything that is an image without meaning, shape without substance, accused by intellectuals and ideologists of being responsible for manipulating the minds of consumers towards wicked shopping habits, for following the logic of profit against the environment and the community. In this way Marketing becomes, under the blinding spotlight of the Culture party, the manifesto of the “compulsive shopping doctrine”, exploited by business to feed its market logic.

But is this the right interpretation? Certainly, this is not the view of those who have studied the discipline of Marketing well beyond these stereotypes and superficialities.

And for those who believe, like many, that the true function of Marketing is to create value. Value and identity.

In this sense, above all through the message transmitted to us by the Italian Marketing Association, we can strongly reaffirm our diverse vision. A mission that supports a dignifying process, a return to the origins, compatible with the environment and the contemporary world.

And it is from this perspective that a dialogue between Marketing and Culture fits so well. In a reciprocal exchange of value.

Marketing needs to amplify its ambit of research to new perspectives. And Culture is surely one of these and can present us with interesting and vast opportunities. Sharing value means contributing to the awakening of

territories and businesses to their potentiality of growth, development and progress for the whole Country. But it also means sustaining, through strategic levers, the narrative of a collective identity through which economic operators and common citizens can both benefit in their sense of identity and belonging.

And Culture? Why should it share its “value” with Marketing?

For many years Culture has been the subject of research and study for a chosen few who have raised conceptual barricades and maintained their “asphyxiated” positions, thus preventing any dialogue between these two seemingly permeable worlds. Marketing can contribute to the identification and reinforcement of our Cultural patrimony in order to improve the awareness of the Country and its businesses, to enhance, to our eyes but also to those who are watching us, our history and our most intimate essence, contrasting the stereotypes and the false beliefs, working towards sharing and communicating the value that we produce.

So, the value of Culture is rising, as is the attention of academics and policy makers in defining and highlighting the relations between the production of culture, creativity and innovation (Caliandro, Sacco, 2011). The relations that link these three ambits have in fact contributed to destroying the ideological and disciplinary barriers, by setting off a complex process of contamination that uses cultural resources, together with skills, ideas, innovation and productive processes, and that is based on the immaterial patrimony of culture and knowledge, enrooted in the local contexts.

Culture, Creativity and Innovation are, therefore, the supporting columns that if managed in a systemic prospective can give birth to a positioning strategy for a country like Italy that has many specificities, many manufacturing and productive excellencies and a cultural patrimony of priceless worth in its richness and variety.

Culture, Creativity and Innovation constitute a single unit in which the creative dimension uses the cultural one, since a great part of the added value produced is in fact the result of stimuli that have their origin in the cultural sphere (Thorsby, 2008), through the innovative processes that share the value that is produced.

Can we, therefore, imagine these three columns as a single competitive lever for the local and international development of territories and businesses, especially as regards the use of communication levers?

The virtuous link between culture, creativity and innovation certainly explains the incomparable reputational capital that has been built over the years by Italian industry, based on artisan skills, the characteristic acumen of the places and the people, creativity and talent. However, it is evident that still much can be done to enhance the distinctive features of a Country,

like Italy, by using a unitary prospective and remembering, for example, that even in the middle of an economic crisis, the balance for exports remains positive thanks to the peculiarity of the ‘Made in Italy’.

We must therefore start from an inclusive concept of Culture that is capable of extending its range further than the works of “genius”, that takes on new strengths, becoming to all effects a resource with a strategic character for the development of the social and economic identity of countries and businesses.

We need to define the conceptual and methodological borders of the concept of Culture in order to transform it into a variable that is autonomous and measurable in the strategies for *country brand management*, territorial marketing and strategic marketing planning for businesses.

Recent works (Napolitano, Marino, 2016; Napolitano *et al.*, 2015, Mainolfi *et al.*, 2016) have shown how it is the *cultural heritage* that seems to configure itself as a polyhedral and dynamic construct capable of filling the methodological gap so disturbing for researchers and the academics of Marketing. The object of theoretical and empirical contributions, with different finalities and perspectives, as noted by Pearce (1998, p. 1), *cultural heritage* “lacks a strong disciplinary presence and a corresponding agreed framework of reference and research”.

*Cultural heritage* thus synthesizes Culture from different perspectives of analysis, and permits the opening of various lines of research, with specific methodological approaches.

Thanks to the international recognition obtained from UNESCO, the concept of cultural patrimony has been enriched by the intangible component that was initially missing in 1954, when it was introduced for the first time by the Convention for the protection of cultural patrimony in the case of armed conflict stipulated by the Aja. In fact, in Article 2, paragraph 1 of the *UNESCO convention for the protection of the intangible cultural patrimony* stipulated in Paris on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2003, cultural heritage is defined as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and Cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their Cultural heritage” and includes “oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship”.

Cultural heritage becomes a distinctive factor of the imagine and reputation of the Country and business systems and is welcomed there. As stated by Anholt (2007), a strong identity and a positive reputation form

the basis for advantage not only for businesses but also for cities, regions and Countries for global competition, as well as constituting distinctive factors capable of activating a virtuous cycle of development.

Among the many open opportunities, we can certainly add further study on the role of *cultural heritage* in the formation of the Country Image. That is to say, how *cultural heritage* is declined in the institutional communication of those Countries in possession of an important historical-cultural patrimony and, therefore, the identification of the constitutive dimensions of the *cultural heritage image* (Mainolfi *et al.*, 2015). In particular for Countries like Italy, the image of the cultural patrimony and in particular of its intangible and identifying components, becomes a lever for competitive advantage, above all on the international markets. From this perspective, any research capable of supplying indications on the cultural variables that can better influence the buying perceptions and intentions of foreign consumers could contribute to enhancing the *Made in* effect on the international markets (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2012) through the identification of innovative and original communication strategies, thus making Culture to all effects the fifth variable of the international Marketing mix for the *Made in Italy* businesses (Napolitano *et al.*, 2015).

Currently, the managerial literature has not paid enough attention to the use of variables in connection with Culture especially as regards the assessment models for the influence of the Country image on consumer behavior, and in particular regarding the foreign customer, often neglecting to see things from the business point of view.

Even though the literature gives various definitions of *country image* that interpret cultural patrimony as a constitutive dimension of the construct, the *cultural heritage image* (CHEI) has rarely been the object of study (Hakala *et al.*, 2011, Rojas-Mendez, 2013).

However, the use of the components of the image of *cultural heritage* can offer an efficient support for a more incisive national image for policy makers and national businesses, and greater integration between image strategies both for tourism and national production, thus opening the way to new and interesting perspectives also in relation to the enhancement of manufacturing sector.

Obviously, many different perspectives open up with the merger of Culture and Marketing, besides other ambits already profitably explored that regard more specifically Cultural Marketing or Tourism Marketing.

Let's try to widen our vision, shuffle the cards, integrate the perspectives, preferably with a creative approach, also in our own ambit – that of scientific research.

And let's not forget, as stated by one of our greatest men of literature, Luigi Pirandello, in one of his masterpieces, *Six Characters in Search of*

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*an Author*, there is always another way of looking at things, and we firmly believe that value and innovation can only be created from diversity.

*“Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do”* (Pirandello, 1921. Translation by Edward Storer, 1922).

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