



CASE STUDY

The new territorial orientation of a transnational company: Italian pasta

SILVIA DESSI*

FEDERICA CABONI[^]

ERNESTINA GIUDICI[♦]

Abstract

Taking the new consumer requirements for products linked to regional identity and cultural heritage into consideration, today's transnational companies have modified their strategies. By using a regional or geographic indication, it is possible to exploit existing associations that consumers have with a region or particular place and provide products that have a specific image. The purpose of this case study is to illustrate this new orientation of transnational companies' towards a rediscovery and evaluation of *terroir*. To pursue this goal we chose to use the case study methodology, based on the analysis of the Italian food company Barilla. The study underlines the decision of this transnational company to offer a line of products closely linked to their geographical origin. Furthermore, it analyses how this territorial links are able to communicate and transmit cultural and traditional roots.

Keywords: transnational companies, food products, territorialisation.

Introduction

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in food provenance and origin (Bowen & Zapata, 2009; Parrot, Wilson, & Murdoch 2002; Pratt, 2007). As Erickson and Roberts (1997) point out, over the last few decades the traditional identity of local places has suffered the invasion of transnational companies, retailing their products through and to a worldwide market. In the same period, many problems has been raised and have garnered stronger evidence: the environment and human health (Bowen & Zapata, 2009; Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002) and the renewed pursuit of sense-of-place (Mayes, 2008). The main implication involved consumers who are no longer satisfied with standardized and rootless products and require food which offers a connection with territory, history and traditions (Conter, Zanardi, Ghidini, Pennisi, Vergara, Campanini, & Ianieri, 2008; Dekhili & d'Hauterville, 2009; van Ittersum, Candel, & Meulenber, 2003). This means an increasing awareness to regain a connection with local culture, traditions, and places pro-

* Silvia Dessi is PhD candidate in Business Administration at the University of Cagliari, Via S. Ignazio, 74 - 09123 Cagliari. E-mail: silviadessi@unica.it.

[^] Federica Caboni is PhD candidate in Business Administration at the University of Cagliari, Via S. Ignazio, 74 - 09123 Cagliari E-mail: f.caboni@unica.it.

[♦] Ernestina Giudici is Professor at Department of Business Economics, Member of the Board of Directors, University of Cagliari, Via S. Ignazio, 74 - 09123 Cagliari, Italy. E-mail: giudici@unica.it.

gressively lost (Giudici & Dessi, 2011; Honoré, 2005). In answer to this new requirement of products linked to regional identity and sensory quality (Conter et al., 2008; van Ittersum et al., 2003), firms have changed their strategies by developing new product lines which reflect an accurate and strong image of the origin and roots in a specific geographical area (Iversen & Hem, 2008). Hence some firms have adopted the place of origin of the product as a marketing tool (Skuras & Vakrou, 2002).

Until now scholars have almost exclusively focused on the analysis of small-and medium-sized enterprises producing typical and traditional products (Caporale, Policastro, Carlucci, & Monteleone, 2006; Di Monaco, Di Marzo, & Cavella, 2005; Iaccarino, Di Monaco, Mincione, Cavella, & Masi, 2006; Skuras & Vakrou, 2002). Less attention has been paid to the transnational companies that have strategies with a territorial orientation.

Firms' focus on global strategies resulted in these companies abandoning local products attributing more importance to the global ones (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). The real challenge and change that we are witnessing is a clear and increasing counter-trend (Feagan, 2007): the transnational companies are rediscovering the local and re-evaluating the territorial dimension as places of big and multifaceted heritage (Sirkeci, 2013).

What are the main factors that determine the new face of these transnational companies? To which extent does the local dimension influence their chosen strategies?

In light of these questions, the purpose of our study will be to highlight this rediscovery of places and to question the existence of an increased interest of transnational companies in regional products. In recent times some companies have started to adopt a territorial strategy and to build behaviours (e.g. a brand image) that reflects territorial identity and cultural values (Erickson & Roberts, 1997; Ger, 1999).

Theoretical background: From global standardization to glocalisation

During the second half of the 20th Century, a series of continuous changes deeply modified the way in which people and organizations work, consume, acquire information and define their identity (Kale & Zlatevska 2009).

The advent of a “borderless world”, with the implication of the creation of a global market, promising greater global returns through the adoption of standardized marketing efforts, became extremely attractive for transnational companies. However, a genuine process of homogenization has never occurred; moreover, the expression of a global marketing appeared more complex than was supposed (Sirkeci, 2013; Wilken & Siclair, 2011). As scholars have underlined (e.g. Champy, 1997; Wind, 1986), people who live in countries located in different continents of the world have maintained their own culture and behaviour patterns, and even when they share values that transcend national borders, they – consciously or unconsciously – modify their

behaviours by adapting local values and customs. This can be considered as the premise of the birth of glocalisation (Robertson, 1992), both as a word and a concept. More precisely, the concept of glocalisation arose just because transnational companies understood that the single advertising campaign for all markets was not very effective in all cultures (Ilbery, Morris, Maye, & Kneafsey, 2005).

Robertson (1992), rejecting the false dialectical opposition of the global-local and universality-particularism models as inadequate, proposed the term glocalisation as a way of considering both global and local. The word glocalisation derives from the Japanese term *dochakuka*, meaning “global localization” or, in micro-marketing terms, the tailoring of global products and services to suit particular cultural tastes (Robertson, 1992). Glocalisation highlights the co-presence of interconnected processes of homogenization and heterogenisation (Robertson, 1994; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007).

The way this concept is usually applied by transnational companies consists of the insertion of a product onto the market by appealing to local preferences and customs. So, for instance, McDonald’s offers vegetable McNuggets and mutton-based Big Macs in India, espresso and cold pasta in Italy, beer in Germany, McSpaghetti in the Philippines, and so forth (Vignali, 2001); and Ikea makes furniture smaller in Japan and Hong Kong, because people live in smaller spaces. In other cases, transnational companies adapt their advertising messages: for example, Nescafe uses local citizens in its ads in India, but places the actor in transnational settings.

Place and food brand: towards re-territorialisation

The industrialization of agriculture, the growth in food processing and distribution industries, the liberalization of trade, and the changes in consumption, both in diet and eating patterns, have reshaped the agro-food market (Parrott et al., 2002; Pratt, 2007). Mass market and standardization, often labelled as “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 1993), have distanced the consumption of food from its production (Ilbery et al., 2005), blurring the link between place and food (Parrot et al., 2002; Pratt, 2007).

The gap between place of production and consumption, clearly appeared in the internationalization phase of development of brands, such as Nestlé, Danone, Barilla, and Ferrero that organize their activity to satisfy a wider range of consumers (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004) with less attention paid to emphasize the food provenance.

In recent years the interest in food provenance and place of origin has grown (Bowen & Zapata, 2009; Parrot et al., 2002; Pieniak, Verbeke, Vanhonacker, Guerrero & Hersleth, 2009; Pratt, 2007). From the end of the 20th century to present, consumers have become more attentive in acquiring information and sharing opinions with other consumers. There has been an

increase in the demand for local foods that are, often, perceived as of a higher quality (Chambers, Lobb, Butler, Harvey & Traill, 2007), sustainable and eco-friendly (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000; Risku-Norja Hietala, Virtanen, Ketomäki, & Helenius, 2008), and belonging to a cultural heritage and tradition linked to regional identity and sensory quality (Conter et al., 2008; van Ittersum, 2003). Kunzmann suggests that “in times of globalization local identity has become a key concern” and that “[...] the cultural content remains the last bastion of local identity” (Kunzmann, 2004: 387). The strong link between food products and their geographic origin is due to the relationship between the natural conditions under which food products are grown, bred, or caught and their distinct physical qualities that sometimes stimulate emotional or imaginary perceptions (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007). As the French concept of *terroir* (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007; Barham, 2003; Demossier, 2011; Maréchal, 2009; Pratt, 2007) reminds us, an intimate connection between soil, air, water, climate, seasons, and foodstuffs exists. All these elements contribute to creating a special kind of food, with unique features “connoting traditions, locality, distinctiveness, or quality more in general” (Maréchal, 2009: 922), and are able to evoke an emotional attachment to food products as belonging to a certain cultural heritage and tradition, possibly in the form of a refined gastronomic tradition (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007). The concept of *terroir* is not just geographical, but also cultural emphasizing evaluation and preservation of rural and traditional knowledge and cultural roots (Dekhili & d’Hauteville, 2009; Maréchal, 2009; Pratt, 2007). With *terroir* in mind, it may be easier to understand the connection between food and place, as Barham (2003), Bowen and Zapata (2009) have pointed out. Many countries have adopted “labels of origin” that are place-based names which connect agricultural products to their geographical origin. Hence connecting products to their cultural and historical identity, quality, reputation or further characteristics due to the fact of having been grown or manufactured in a specific territory.

The combination of the product characteristics and the communication of the place of origin determines a synergistic effect that contributes to the creation of a distinct product identity (van Ittersum et al., 2007). Some firms have recently developed new lines of products reflecting characteristics which are strictly related to a particular place associated with the product, or line of products (Chlivickas & Smaliukienė, 2009; van Ittersum et al., 2007).

It is not simple to define the concept of territorial identity because in general identity is an elusive concept (Erickson & Roberts, 1997). Mayes stated that place identity and sense of place are considered as deriving from the intrinsic features and history of a given place and a shared relationship to these elements (Mayes, 2008). According to Dekhili and d’Hauteville (2009) many regions in Europe gained a specific identity linked to specific and characteristic local products. The ability to communicate identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) and cultural heritage, can be a firm’s strength to exploit characteristics

of specific territories and develop cognitive emotional associations (van Ittersum et al., 2003) while creating dialogue with consumers to remain in their mind. Consumers often have a strong relationship with the place of origin and cultural heritage (Bessière, 1998). Therefore transnational companies should be able to emphasize specific emotional values which can evoke main characteristics of the region of origin (Sheth, Mittal & Newman, 1999). Transnational food companies in particular, can seize the opportunity to take advantage of food products that are rooted and produced in certain territories. Adopting such a strategy, as highlighted by several scholars (Caporale et al., 2006; Letablier & Nicolas, 1994), transnational companies re-territorialize their offer (Dekhili & d'Hauteville, 2009) with a focus on local quality perceptions of consumers. Thus, food companies can exploit the historic and symbolic links between regions and foods (Delamont, 1995).

Methodology and data collection

To achieve the purpose of this study (investigating the hypothesized new transnational companies' orientation towards a rediscovery and evaluation of the link between food and territory) we adopted the case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989). In particular, we used a single case with the aim to account it as a pilot case. The perspective is to proceed with the analysis of other cases (multiple case study). The case here taken into consideration is referred to Barilla company. Barilla is an Italian food company leader in the pasta business worldwide – pasta sauces business in continental Europe, bakery products business in Italy and the crisp-bread business in Scandinavia.

We conducted a documental analysis both internal (specific archival data and similar information) and external (any document, analysis and comment concerning Barilla and pasta in general). With reference to the internal documentation, the majority of information come from the company web sites (www.barilla.it/; www.barillagroup.com/; and www.academiabarilla.it). The Ethics and business Report (2004) gave us a clear idea of Barilla's mission and vision, devoted to highlight human beings and their values (such as culture, tradition, and products quality). Moreover, we analysed some existing interviews of Guido Barilla (Lastampait, 2010-11-28; Rai, 2013-04-21) which emphasize the relevance of food culture and food quality and, underlining the strict commitment with Slow Food¹ activities, highlights the Barilla's attention towards to tradition and specific local food cultures.

The Barilla company - as a family-business - expresses its history in many different ways: this clearly emerge by analysing its web-sites, some advertising, some books concerning both its founder Pietro Barilla (Alberoni, 2013) and the company history (Invernizzi, 1996).

With reference to the other sources considered, we analyzed several news-

¹ Slow Food is the largest movement devoted to restore meaning, authenticity, security and identity to place and food.

paper articles (e.g. *Il Sole 24 ore*) and some non-governmental organizations' web sites like IPO (International Pasta Organization), AIDEPI (Associazione delle Industrie del Dolce e della Pasta Italiane), Oldways, and Un.A.F.P.A. (Union of Organization of Manufactures of Pasta products of the E.U.).

About Barilla

Barilla was founded in 1877 in Parma by Pietro Barilla, and has always been a family business, a magical blend between what it produces and the people who choose its products; a history based on tradition, hard work and passion, that touches people's hearts.

Barilla operates all over the world, often availing itself as a local brand better able to interact with the local market's specific need and which also benefits from an awareness and close relationship with the consumer. For over 130 years the Company has been managed by one family and it is now being run by the fourth generation of siblings. Having always been oriented towards proper diet through its exceptionally flavoured and nutritionally balanced products intended for daily use, Barilla became popular worldwide due to its attention to the quality of its products, to the needs of families all over the world and to their relationship with consumers.

Findings

Barilla's distinctiveness stems from the company's strong roots linked to its territory of origin, the city of Parma (Invernizzi, 1996). Despite this close link with local traditions and culture, Barilla shifted its orientation more and more towards a global-drive, temporarily overshadowing this bond as company grew overtime.

Recently, in response to the change in consumers' expectations, Barilla has rediscovered the importance of the link with its territory of origin. In 2004, the Italian company launched the *Accademia Barilla*, an international project dedicated to the protection, development and promotion of Italian regional gastronomic culture as a unique part of the world heritage. As indicated on its website, Barilla chose this name just "to convey the idea that gastronomy is not mechanical but cultural (www.academiabarilla.it). The diversity in a country's cuisine does not exist solely in a list of recipes, but is represented in the identities of a country and its people, including both extraordinary cuisine and, at times, somewhat strange customs to an outsider (www.academia.barilla.it). A place's cuisine exists in the memories of its people. People pass along the knowledge and wisdom on preparation of food, transforming on occasion 'poor' or marginal ingredients into masterpieces of taste and good health" over generation through centuries (www.academiabarilla.it).

Regionali Barilla line

Academia Barilla helped the company to create a new line called Regionali Barilla underscoring Italian Regions' gastronomic heritage. The firm's management, over time, acquired a broader knowledge of the peculiarities of Italian regions. Particularly, the numerous varieties of pasta with Regional characteristics. Such as Regnette Napoletane, Trofie Liguri and Caserecce Siciliane.

The Regionali Barilla can be considered as an answer to the new consumer demand for products linking to a territory and local identity. Regionali Barilla are closely linked to regional and cultural heritage. Through this line of pasta, the firm pays attention to the creation of variety of pasta that may allow consumers to feel relationship with both the territory and its traditions. As Barilla points out both on its website and the packaging, with the creation of this line, they wanted to capture the consumers' attention in reference to flavours, recipes, ingredients, typically from specific Italian regions in order to develop a culinary journey through Italy in search of traditional flavours and dishes.

The Regionali line consists of various kinds of pasta, typical to different Italian regions. Every Italian region has a culinary tradition, with specific ingredients representative of these territories (www.barilla.it). To reinforce this bond, Barilla offers recipes based on the characteristic ingredients of the region of provenance of the different types of pasta to their customers, while also explaining history and traditions.

In the creation of this kind of pasta, Barilla pays attention to emphasising the relationship between pasta and local traditions hoping, thus, the consumer would create an empathic relationship with the place of origin of the product. The company also offers information on its website, so consumers can learn ancient recipes and create and taste typical regional Italian dishes. To better understand this new venture by Barilla, it is useful to analyse the information provided by Barilla with reference to some variety of Regionali Barilla Pasta : Orecchiette Pugliesi, Ziti Napoletani and Gnocchetti Sardi (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Three kinds of Regionali Barilla line



The Orecchiette Pugliesi (a) represent, one of the typical dishes of Puglia (a region of southern Italy). Barilla explains to its customers how in Puglia this

kind of pasta is called "strascinate"², because, traditionally, the housewives drag them one by one on a work surface with their thumb or using a special knife with a rounded tip and without a handle called "delivers". The bond with cultural heritage is very strong and the choice to adopt this kind of pasta to explain the traditional story of this region is not random. Barilla decided to implement in this line of pasta not only a new kind of product but their principal goal was to celebrate the homeland of typical pasta.

Barilla offers one of the traditional recipes of the gastronomic culture from Puglia region: Orecchiette with turnip tops, is presented as a dish of ancient origin, which brings the scents of Puglia to the table (www.barilla.it).

Concerning the Ziti Napoletani (b), Barilla explains that this type of pasta was born from the ancient culinary tradition of Naples (a city in the South of Italy). The choice of this name is not accidental, but Barilla with this name wants to underline that their name is closely connected with the tradition of marriage: "Zita" in the Neapolitan dialect means "bride", and this pasta was the traditional pasta served at weddings. Moreover, Barilla explains that, despite the Ziti being a form of pasta for rare occasions, thanks to their irresistible taste, today, they have earned an important place on the tables all over Italy. The Ziti were born as a long pasta, but the Neapolitan tradition is for them to be broken, therefore, it is said that on Sunday mornings, in the streets of Naples in the background you can hear the sound of the Ziti being broken. Thus the company underlines the cultural heritage and practices associated with the Regional background so offering further opportunity to connect. Due to the large size, and their consistency, the Ziti offers the taste sensations of particular intensity. It is suggested that the best way to enjoy them is in accordance with the Neapolitan tradition: broken into quarters and served with typical ingredients such as the buffalo mozzarella cheese produced in the Campania region (www.barilla.it). Hence another Regional connection is offered.

With reference to the Gnocchetti Sardi (c), Barilla explains that this kind of pasta, called "Malloreddus" in Sardinian language (which literally means "Little Bulls"), is considered the typical dish from Sardinia island. Barilla reminds consumers that the real specialty of this little kind of pasta is the size, designed to give a unique texture, and the scored surface. This distinctive surface was once obtained by crushing pieces of dough with your thumb on the bottom of a wicker basket called "ciuliri", today it is done using a grooved chopping board. To create an experience that would remind the customer of the flavours and traditions of Sardinia, Barilla suggests to savour the Gnocchetti Sardi in a traditional recipe with tomato, sausages, fennel, saffron and the typical Sardinian pecorino cheese. These typical ingredients are underlined to offer a colourful plate intense with flavours, resembling to the Sardinian

² "Strascinate" is a word of the Puglia's dialect which means "trailed"

landscape (www.barilla.it); another clear reference to the territorial origins and evidence for territorial orientation.

Conclusion

Not many scholars have paid attention to the territorial orientation among some transnational companies, this case study illustrates this trend focusing on new attentiveness towards values and feelings linked to a particular place of origin. In the face of increasing demand for local adaptation, companies need to develop strategies to address these needs and wants. Territorial links are seen as a way to achieve this.

In the case of Barilla, and specifically the Regionali Barilla line, a strategic decision appreciating the local dimension –consciously or not – adopting the concept of “terroir” in its broad sense.

This case study has some limits. Firstly, it analyses only one company. Secondly, consumers’ response to this new line of products launched by Barilla is not taken into account. However, it is a first step of a broader research project aimed at investigating this new orientation in relation to consumer perceptions and requirements in food products. We will continue our research analysing other companies in different European countries, verifying what motivations drive consumers to buy these particular kinds of products. Understanding the reasons behind the territorial strategies of companies and their links to consumer perceptions and behaviour is a worthy query for future research.

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