Creativity and innovation by empowering the customer: The case of Mulino Bianco. Part I: Organisational innovation context

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Abstract. The terms of creativity, co-creation, creative industries, innovation, and co-innovation are more and more used nowadays. While co-creation offers the possibility and encourages a more active involvement from the customers to create value rich experiences, innovation is responsible for the little improvements made for a better life, to grow a business, to improve products, services or company’s productivity. Either customers, current and potential, or stakeholders’ involvement into innovation activities, through their creativity, represent an important way of value creation, of actions’ performance that increases the worth of goods, services, or business as a whole. More and more, different size businesses gather ideas for innovation from customers / stakeholders through their involvement into the early stages of the innovation process. Actually, it has been shown that their ideas sketch their needs and wishes, and have been described as “need information”. Customers and stakeholders, in general, also offer ideas that have been called “solution information”, which represents, not only need information, but also customer-based proposals that describe how ideas can be transformed into marketable products. The term of creative industries refers to those goods that can technically be reproduced, industrially produced, and commercially sold, this being one of the many definitions found in the literature. The classification of creative industries differs at the European Union level according to each country’s development level and opening towards these industries’ perception as an engine for economic growth. To better explore and identify the importance of innovation and creativity for new products’ development or improvement a case study about Mulino Bianco was done. This methodology approach represents a part of a qualitative research approach within a broader research undertaken within the framework of the National Research Program PN II. Mulino Bianco was first launched in Italy, being one of the value brands of Barilla Group, which we can say, according to the Italian researches regarding their definition and classification, it belongs to creative industries: industry of food and taste. The foreseen result of this paper is highlighting the fact that the key strategy for the Group and for Mulino Bianco, by default, is mainly its customers’ pro-active involvement in products’ development or creation.

1. Introduction
Innovation, along with co-innovation, creativity and co-creation are processes that are found again in the top of the agenda of a corporate agenda. These processes have never been a fad, but have always been fashionable, out of fashion, being rediscovered as a growth factor in every generation of leadership. Too often, however, the relevant statements about innovation are followed of mediocre
execution with anaemic results, and the groups of novation are quickly abolished in units of cost reduction [1].

The International Community has recently experienced a large variety of studies and measurements, depending on the particular definitions, regarding the concept of cultural, creative industries and creative economy. The use of the term creative industries, industry of which was identified as being part also the Barilla Group in Italy, varies from one country to another, being of relatively recent origin, developing in Australia, since 1994 with the launch of Creative Nation report. The term has seen a greater exposure in 1997, when the political decision makers of Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in Great Britain established Creative Industries Task Force [2,3] It is noteworthy that the name of creative industries that have been developed since then has extended the scope of cultural industries beyond arts and marked a change of approach of potential commercial activities which until recently were considered pure or predominantly non-economic, [4].

Thus, in 1998, DCMS defined creative industries as “those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, artistry, talent and which have the potential to generate prosperity and jobs creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”, [5].

With all that in Italy there is no official definition of cultural industries, which is here meant by this is that represents cultural goods and services which can be “technically reproduced” or “industrially produced and commercially sold” according Edgar Morin. Thus in Italy we talk about [6]: books; press; broadcasting; cinema; music recordings; new mass-media. On the other hand it should be emphasized that the concept of creative industries in Italy was spread to other neighbouring industries, highly creative, among which an important place is occupied by the gastronomy, beside fashion, advertising etc.[6],becoming more popular lately.

2. Mulino Bianco – a valuable brand of Barilla Group

*Mulino Bianco* was launched in Italy, being one of the Barilla Group's brands of great value. Since its appearance, it quickly became the preferred brand of Italian cakes, currently being found in over 78% of Italian homes. It is already known the fact that Italy consumes more cakes than the United States, and that Italians serve cakes for breakfast, [7].

*Barilla Group*, which was founded in Parma, Italy, in 1877 initially as a store of bread and pasta, is ranked as one of the most important top groups in the food industry in Italy. Barilla Group leads the global business with pasta and pasta sauces in Europe, in the bakery business in Italy, and in business with crisp bread in Scandinavia. The Group has 41 production units, of which 13 are in Italy and 28 outside Italy, exporting to more than 100 countries. Every year, around 2.5 million tons of food produced by Barilla, Mulino Bianco, Voiello, Pavesi, Academia Barilla, Wasa, Harrys (France and Russia), Golden Toast (Germany), Misko (Greece) Filiz (Turkey), Yemin and Vesta (Mexico) brands are included by people from all over the world as part of their evening meals [8].

3. Barilla Group’s process of products’ creation

The company’s attention given to quality and nutrition is complete and it is always united by the desire to surprise the ones who choose them and welcome them to their tables. The process, in which a new product that was born from an idea comes to life, is fascinating. This includes a series of interactions that can be unpredictable, between the development of prototypes on one hand and the permanent contact with the final consumers of the products in order to obtain the best quality of the final product.

Barilla Group launches approximately 50 new products, annually. This represents the ultimate stage of a long process that creates products in order to satisfy the necessities of those who buy them and bring them into their homes. The process behind the creation of a product is divided into several stages, also divided into four moments. At the end of each stage, the results are evaluated and it is decided whether or not the development should continue [9].
The process is based on the interaction of different professionals, from the inside of the company, such as from the outside. These people are brought together by the close relationship of those who make the project of the products (design) and those for who the project is made (stakeholder). Each project/design team collaborates with a selected group of people that participates actively on creating new products. They are not simple tasters, but they are pro-active persons that are involved even in the first stages of the developing process [9].

4. Mulino Bianco’s products
From the products production point of view, the evolution of the Mulino Bianco’s products is divided into 4 big periods, between the years 1971-1975, 1976-1989, 1990-1999 and 2000-2011. In each of these periods, starting with the desire of being the number one choice of consumers in pastry production, the brand was permanently interested in developing innovative products and technological perfecting in order to always offer quality products and in conformity with their own environment politics. Thus, after years of experimenting, in October 1975 appeared in stores the first Mulino Bianco’s biscuits packs, that were a great success [10].

The taste of the first Mulino Bianco biscuits is due to the experience of the talented English biscuit maker, George Maxwell, a real pastry maestro, who took care in secrecy of the experimental line, for several months, in an isle of the factory. He elaborated rigorously many natural recipes, without any additives or preservatives, inspired by the tradition from England [11].

In an era where industrial biscuits were button shaped, the idea of introducing symbolic iconography into designing a product meant an actual revolution and the innovation of using particular and irregular shapes with personalized drawings proved to be a winner, [11]. There were created hundreds of shapes, and then finally there were registered a number of 73 different shapes.

The years 1978 and 1979 have been very successful in which concerned the clients/the consumers, there was positive feedback: Mulino Bianco was liked and the enthusiasm has doubled when the American firm Grace had withdrawn and the Italian firm returned to the family, into the hands of Pietro Barilla. Shortly, Mulino Bianco becomes the leader of the profile market, in the Italian pastry products domain and the incomes in the pastry domain have risen as the years passed by [12].

As the time passed, consumers appreciated the firm image, the quality of the products and the equilibrated price; the best results were highlighted above all, in the most innovative lines, opening new consuming areas, confirming the approach of Mulino Bianco to 40% incomes from the recorded total income in the pasta domain. [12] In the same year, 1983, the market quota in the pastry domain reached 17.2%, the difference between it and the next competitor being of 8.4%.

The year 1986, when the incomes of Mulino Bianco have succeeded to equalize the incomes of Barilla pasta, the firm conquered the first position on the Italian market, reaching an elevation of 24%, it continued to create new products and lines of biscuits and sweets under the Mulino Bianco brand.

According to the data from the Mulino Bianco’s site, the products fabricated under this brand are divided into 5 big categories, each of them being divided into assortments and types of products.
5. Research and Development at Mulino Bianco

For Mulino Bianco, as part of Barilla’s Group, the products made are the main communication tools used to reach people from all over the Earth. Therefore, the main responsibility in Research and Development is to delight the ones for who are made Barilla’s products. Only by establishing a direct and personal relationship with them, knowing their various life styles, also fully understanding their needs, expressed or not, can take to realize/offer new solutions of product that people can adopt in their routine [14]. The main tools to reach this goal are represented by the functional competencies, but by a knowledge of the alimentary and nutritional technologies too.

As part of Barilla’s team, anyone is involved in the full cycle of life of making the product, of the first steps in production. Starting with generating the idea and personal creativity, throughout the ingredients, the nutritional science, technology, process definition and packaging, it works with experts of many different disciplines: from the process of baking, extruding the paste, drying, cooking, of the alimentary technologies of stabilization, of processing drinks, to chemistry-physics, microbiology, rheology, research of wheat and alimentary plants, science of ingredients, sensory analysis, evaluation and recommendation of the nutrients, to the techniques of market research, opinion surveys, statistics and projects, knowledge and people’s management. All of these are necessary to take the product from the laboratory to the market, and this experience is “spiced” with a powerful incentive for innovation, a generous dose of passion and willing of working together to reach success, [14].

The involvement in the development of a new product can be realized even for a specific objective of consumption, or in thinking about new healthy food for our future, living daily in a world full of new ingredients, technologies, processes and alimentary experiences. An entire network of international experts and leading academic groups ensure the connection of the company with the most recent scientific discoveries and news related to nutrition. For Barilla, this means to be able to offer more and best opportunities than any other company that works with a great feeling of ethics and to people and the name Barilla which represents, [14]. The department of Research and Development is constantly using the knowledge and researches of the 250’s researchers that hired and work in 6 of the offices from Italy, USA, Russia, France, Germany and Sweden.

Research and Development is a crucial stage in the process of transformation of an idea into a product, needing, most of the time, more time than the production phase. This can happen because it might take lot of time and effort to work with an idea and to find contributors. Therefore, the process of research and development is fundamental for what happens later, in the production phase. For example, the story that put the basis of the appearance of Palicao, Fregoli biscuits, it’s a beautiful and interesting one, based on the experimentation and innovation. From a while, Mulino Bianco had in mind the idea to extend its presence for breakfast too, in the yet unexplored areas.

In the sector of the products that are consumed with milk, for years not improved, there were some interesting perspectives [15]. After many important tests on the products from the market, as the techniques from Mulino said, there was born the idea which took to the final product: “why don’t we
try a biscuit that soaks in milk? So there started the experiments to produce baby’s biscuits. Every day there appeared new recipes and new tests were made: it was made the dough, it was baked and it was drinking. The process wasn’t easy at all, and the questions and doubts have been many: Why wasn’t it baking well? Why all the ingredients were soluble and yet they did not soften the biscuit? A thing was sure, though: the biscuits for babies wanted to be a child’s food that included the bottle too. Analysing and eliminating the effects of those products, the first prototypes are adjusted, but they’re only at the beginning. Only in this moment surprises started to appear.

Until that moment they tried to dissolve the product in milk at a low temperature. Then, one morning, inadvertently, it is thrown in hot milk. So what happens? Palicao starts to take density, by becoming chocolate in the cup. After one hour, the first surprise appears: in the cup there’s a sort of pudding. Astonishment and curiosity are great. Enthusiasm grows and the question is: Why wouldn’t they try to put it in the fridge mixer. And what if, after that, they put some sour cream too? The product, as a miracle, changes continuously under the experiments’ eyes: from frappe to ice cream, to mousse, to cake. And so on, form the surprise till the Sacher e alla bavarese. The biscuit that melts into the milk was, actually, the ideal basis for all the receipts that imagination can offer: this is how Palicao gets birth, the cocoa miracle [15].

6. Mulino Bianco’s Projects
Mulino Bianco’s future projects are primarily related to the care for the environment. Since 2009 the brand has chosen to satisfy 100% of its energy plants using renewable energy sources, in order to always keep the care and attention devoted to nature. Because of this decision was possible to estimate the reduction of CO2 equivalent emissions by approximately 55.000 tons per year. Mulino Bianco’s commitment to the environment has become concrete in several other top initiatives: -47% water used in bakeries (2004-2011 comparison), >90% recycled packages, and 100% eggs from free-range chicken [16].

One of the projects initiated in 2009 and which has achieved a sustainability management policy is “Mulino Bianco Tour”. The project is an exciting itinerary and rich in content, addressing to families, schools and revealing, through fun and entertainment, Mulino Bianco’s Good World and its many quality products, [16].

In 2014, to the full program of activities consolidated over the years, the laboratory “Recycling Adventure” was added, representing a workshop to raise awareness of the importance of respecting nature and simple gestures to protect it, the care for the “from farm to table” product [17].

Mulino Bianco future projects have as strategy the achieving of a good market segmentation and strategic positioning on the handicrafts market, healthy, wholesome and uncontaminated. Therefore the innovation strategy has always in view generating new products and packaging. Brand’s website contains sections of traditional communication which describe history, products, promotions and events which are regularly organized, all these actually demonstrating the Mulino Bianco intend towards product sustainability. Such a blog is „Il Blog del Pane“, which aims entertainment, big and small, about bread and discovers how such an ailment, rooted in Italian history and tradition, indispensable of Italian cuisine, can teach so many and is even considered a faithful „companion“. [18]. There is no project announced related to bread, but still considered current on the platform the project „Ricordi di Pane“, achieved collaborating with NABA (Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milano).

7. Conclusions
The dream of Mulino Bianco brand is to provide a “Good World” (Mondo Buono) with deep roots, combining passion and experience, which is found in ingredients that are grown and selected with respect for nature and people, can be discovered at the table, in emotions of affection and the ones of being together and can be recognized in the pride of those who have sent their own know-how with the enthusiasm that only a good story can convey.
According Mulino Bianco the “Mondo Buono” products are born from a main principle: “To give people what we will give to our children”, because to think of our children is as we think about the future, what we can do to build a world much better in all respects.

In order to achieve all these, the Mulino Bianco team give voice to all those who choose them, listening carefully to what they want, their suggestions and criticisms through an open. The road which the brand has chosen to have has no end, because never stops in building the future, and every achievement is for them a step closer to a better world.

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