

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT AND CINEMA

The Marketisation of Italian Film

Gloria Dagnino

ROUTLEDGE

Focus

Branded Entertainment and Cinema

The history of Italian cinema is mostly regarded as a history of Italian auteurs. This book takes a different standpoint, looking at Italian cinema from the perspective of an unusual but influential actor: advertisers.

From the iconic Vespa scooter and the many other *Made in Italy* products placed in domestic and international features, to the television programme *Carosello*'s early format of branded entertainment, up through the more recent brand-integration cases in award-winning feature films like *The Great Beauty*, the Italian film and advertising industries have frequently and significantly intersected in ways that remain largely unexplored by academic research. This book contributes to filling this gap by focusing on the economic and cultural influence that advertising and advertisers' interests have been exerting on Italian film production between the post-war period and the 2010s. Increasingly market-oriented film policies, ongoing pressure from Hollywood competition, and the abnormal economic as well as political power held by Italian ad-funded broadcasters are among the key points addressed by the book. In addition to a macro-level political-economic analysis, the book draws on exclusive interviews with film producers and promotional intermediaries to provide a meso-level analysis of the practices and professional cultures of those working at the intersection of Italian film and advertising industries.

Providing an in-depth yet clear and accessible overview of the political and economic dynamics driving the Italian media landscape towards unprecedented forms of marketisation, this book is a valuable resource for academics and students in the fields of film and media studies, marketing, advertising, and Italian studies.

Gloria Dagnino, PhD, works at the Institute of Media and Journalism of the Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI), where she teaches film economics within the Master program in Film Studies of the Swiss Cinema Network. She is also the Equal Opportunities officer at USI. Her research interests include political economy of media, branded content, media diversity and Italian cinema.

Routledge Critical Advertising Studies

Routledge Critical Advertising Studies tracks the profound changes that have taken place in the field of advertising. Presenting thought-provoking scholarship from both prominent scholars and emerging researchers, these groundbreaking, short-form publications cover cutting-edge research concerns and contemporary issues within the field. Titles in the series explore emerging trends, present detailed case studies, and offer new assessments of topics such as branded content, economic surveillance, product placement, gender in marketing, and promotional screen media. Responding quickly to the latest developments in the field, the series is intellectually compelling, refreshingly open, provocative, and action-oriented.

Series Editor: Jonathan Hardy

Alternative Reality Games

Stephanie Janes

Branded Entertainment and Cinema

The Marketisation of Italian Film

Gloria Dagnino

For more information about this series, please visit: <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Critical-Advertising-Studies/book-series/RCAS>

Branded Entertainment and Cinema

The Marketisation of Italian Film

Gloria Dagnino

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2020 Gloria Dagnino

The right of Gloria Dagnino to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dagnino, Gloria, author.

Title: Branded entertainment and cinema: the marketisation of Italian film/
Gloria Dagnino.

Description: London; New York: Routledge, 2020. | Series: Routledge critical advertising studies | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019033642 (print) | LCCN 2019033643 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780815348528 (hardback) | ISBN 9781351166843 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion picture industry--Italy--History. | Motion picture industry--Economic aspects--Italy. | Motion picture industry--Social aspects--Italy. | Motion pictures--Economic aspects--Italy. | Motion pictures--Social aspects--Italy. | Advertising--Italy--History. | Product placement in mass media--Italy--History.

Classification: LCC PN1993.5.I88 D326 2020 (print) | LCC PN1993.5.I88 (ebook) | DDC 791.430945--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019033642>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019033643>

ISBN: 978-0-8153-4852-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-16684-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
1 Gold, plastic, and lead: Italy between the 1950s and the 1970s	9
1.1 <i>Made in Italy: The manufacture of Italianness</i>	9
1.2 <i>Italy and the American-style economic boom</i>	13
1.3 <i>Italian television in the monopoly era</i>	18
1.4 <i>Italy and the golden age of cinema</i>	24
Notes	32
2 The normalisation of anomaly: Italy between the 1980s and the 2000s	34
2.1 <i>Media, advertising, and politics: the years of convergence</i>	34
2.2 <i>Politics as marketing, marketing politics</i>	37
2.3 <i>It's not (only) RAI: the Italian television duopoly</i>	44
2.4 <i>Italian cinema between advertising, television, and the state</i>	52
Notes	60
3 The imperfect marketisation: Italian advertising and cinema in the 2000s	62
3.1 <i>(Branded) content is king</i>	62
3.2 <i>Millennium bugs: Brands and films in times of disruptions</i>	63

vi *Contents*

3.3 *Levelling the field? A new policy framework for brands and films* 65

3.4 *The Italian market for brands and films* 71

3.5 *Who serves whom? The creative impact of brands in films* 77

Notes 84

4 Conclusions **86**

A friendly separation 88

The American way 89

Advertising: What's in a name? 90

Notes 92

References 93

Index 103

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Italian cinema and advertising industry practitioners that have lent me generous portions of their time to discuss the topics presented in this book; their passion and professionalism, despite the many difficulties, is admirable. I thank the editorial team at Routledge, especially Jennifer Vennall, for her patience and support. I am grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation for funding my year as visiting research fellow at the University of East London: it has been an invaluable experience, without which this book could not have been written. To my brilliant colleagues at the Institute of Media and Journalism of the Università della Svizzera italiana: thank you for believing in me and for encouraging me to do the same. For her friendship and advice, I am thankful to Fernanda Gallo, my number one source of inspiration on how to be a woman in academia. A heartfelt thank you goes to Giuseppe Richeri, Raffaele De Berti, and Jonathan Hardy for their guidance and enduring support. I thank my family—mamma, papà, Alberto, and Dada—and my chosen family—Giulia and Vanessa—for really wanting to see the end result of this research. To Elena, for being my wonderwall since the early stages of my doctoral research, when I did not know where it would have taken me: *grazie!*



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction

The year 2016 opened in Italy with an unprecedented cinematic sensation: the box office release of what was about to become the top-grossing Italian film of all time. This record-breaking picture was *Quo Vado?*, a comedy about a middle-aged slacker, played by popular TV comedian Checco Zalone, who goes to any length to hold on to his cushy government job. *Quo Vado?* (“Where am I going?”), an Italian spin on the Latin phrase (and arguably first cinematic blockbuster) *Quo Vadis* (“Where are you going?”), grossed over 65 million euros in the domestic market by the end of the year, thus becoming the second top-grossing film ever in Italian theatres, after James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) (Cinetel 2016). On January 3, only two days after its theatrical release, the then Minister of Culture Dario Franceschini complimented *Quo Vado?* via Twitter by saying that the film’s extraordinary success was beneficial to the Italian film sector as a whole. The film also spurred heated debate among critics, columnists, and intellectuals who commented, either positively (Minuz 2015b; Canova 2016) or negatively (Fofi 2016), about the film’s socio-cultural resonance in contemporary Italy, as well as about the aggressive distribution and pricing policies that boosted the film’s box office performance (Fiorelli 2016; Turrini 2016).

However remarkable, the success of *Quo Vado?* is just the most striking manifestation of a trend that has been characterising Italian cinema since the late 1970s, with increasing intensity over the last 20 years: a marked dependence on television. From a creative perspective, such dependence consists of the use of characters, situations, and storylines drawn from popular TV programmes. In fact, if we look at the top-ten-grossing Italian films of all time, we can see that all of them feature performers and characters whose popularity originated on television.¹ Since the turn of the 2000s, this trend has further intensified, as the number of Italian films starring comedians and performers “made in television” has more than tripled between 2000 and 2012 (Cucco and Scaglioni 2013). From an economic perspective, Italian cinema’s dependence on television emerges in the industrial structure that enables the

2 *Introduction*

very production of Italian films and their access to an audience. Italy's major broadcasters—RAI, the public service broadcaster, and Mediaset, the main commercial competitor—both operate in the film sector as vertically integrated companies. At the level of film production, RAI and Mediaset operate, respectively, through the subsidiaries RAI Cinema, and Medusa and Taodue; in film distribution through 01 Distribution and Medusa; and, until few years ago, Mediaset also controlled Italy's leading film exhibition chain, The Space, which was acquired in 2014 by multinational company Vue International.

The financial contribution of RAI and Mediaset to Italian film production, mainly done through pre-sales of copyright and co-production agreements, accounts for an estimated 40–45 per cent of Italian films' production budgets (MiBACT 2016; Barra and Scaglioni 2017). Broadcasters' investment in film production is far from exceptional within the international film sector: the EU, for instance, requires broadcasters based in member states to devote at least 10 per cent of their programming budget to European works created by producers who are independent of broadcasters (see Article 17 of Directive 2010/13/EU). In Italy, though, certain peculiarities exist that make filmmakers' dependence on television money particularly critical. These peculiarities have to do with the Italian media system as a whole and can be summarised as three main, long-standing features: (1) a highly concentrated television market, (2) advertising spending abnormally skewed towards television, and (3) a subaltern relationship between politics and media. While apparently unrelated to cinema, these three aspects interplay so as to significantly affect how Italian films are conceived, financed, produced, and, ultimately, their content and aesthetics.

This book looks at the intersections and reciprocal influence existing between four major players in the Italian cultural sector: advertising, television, cinema, and the state. Such influence exerts itself as a flow of economic as well as symbolic capital that has advertising, I argue, as its catalyst. Thus, the book deconstructs and examines the role advertising has been playing in shaping a significant part of Italian screen media and culture. While scholars have extensively investigated the role of advertising in the formation of Italian culture, they have mainly done so in relation to print and broadcasting media. This book takes a step further and looks at advertising as a form of economic and cultural agency over Italian film production. Advertisers influence contemporary film production by leveraging in specific ways the corporate relations, economic power, symbolic capital, and regulatory framework that underpin their position in the Italian media system, and that derive, either directly or indirectly, from the three aforementioned peculiarities. Let us briefly present each of these (in many ways interconnected) peculiarities, and how they have been enabling advertisers to hold such a powerful and yet largely unexplored leverage over Italian film production.

- (1) The Italian Communications Regulatory Authority reports that in 2016 the Italian free-to-air (FTA) television market scored 3.588 points on the Herfindahl-Hirschman index that measures market concentration (AGCOM 2017). This means that the Italian television market is “highly concentrated” (Padovani 2015: 133). Scarce competition has always been a feature of the Italian television market. Earlier, this was the result of the 25-year-long monopoly of RAI, the public service broadcaster. Since the mid-1980s, the television monopoly was replaced by a duopoly, an “imperfect” one² (Ortoleva 2008: 98), between RAI and the commercial competitor Fininvest (rebranded Mediaset in 1993), which endures today. Since the 1980s, RAI and Fininvest/Mediaset have dominated both the television and the film market in Italy, which means that they can retain significant control over which films can be made, with what kinds of budgets, and what visibility those films can enjoy, both in theatres and in subsequent distribution windows. RAI and Mediaset have such a powerful position within the Italian film industry that for national producers it is virtually “unthinkable” (Corsi 2001: 141) to make a film without the financial participation of one of the two. Since film producers depend heavily on the backing of broadcasters, “the Italian film market appears to be mediated, as the main clients of those who make movies is another business (the broadcaster), rather than the filmgoers” (Montanari 2007: 54). This means that decisions concerning the financing and production of motion pictures are in significant measure guided by logics that pertain to the television medium, rather than cinema. To put it briefly, when broadcasters invest in film production, they are to a large extent interested with how the film will work on the small screen, whether it will fit the network’s editorial line, and whether and how it will meet the needs of their stakeholders. This brings us to the second peculiarity of the Italian media market: the abnormally skewed distribution of advertising resources towards television.
- (2) Advertisers are universally a major stakeholder for the broadcasting industry, but in Italy their economic influence is particularly strong. Despite the rise of digital media, Italian television still receives nearly half of the overall annual advertising expenditure: 48 per cent in 2016. As a point of comparison, in the same year, the television share of advertising expenditure was 25 per cent in Great Britain and Germany, 28 per cent in France, and 39 per cent in Spain, which also corresponds to the average share across the 28 EU countries (EAO 2017: 18). The lion’s share of these investments, up to 67 per cent (R&S Mediobanca 2019), goes to Mediaset, the commercial end of the broadcasting duopoly, and also, as previously noted, a major player in the Italian film

4 Introduction

production and distribution market. This inevitably raises questions as to what types of cinematic productions are likely to be supported by an advertiser-funded company, with such a powerful position in both the broadcasting and the film market. Such a question is particularly apt in today's convergent media sector, where the pursuit of corporate synergies is a strategy commonly implemented by media companies worldwide (Hardy 2010, 852011). Notably, it seems crucial to examine whether and how the privileged relationship between advertisers and broadcasters, coupled with the latter's key role in the national film industry, affects Italian motion pictures from the twofold perspective of artistic and economic production. In Italy, the collaboration between advertising and television industries has been described as a "symbiotic mechanism", whereby "as years go by, one takes the features of the other" (Pitteri 2006: 172). From a creative perspective, such symbiosis can be traced back to a particular moment and event in television history: the year 1957, when the advertising programme *Carosello* (Carousel), began to air. *Carosello* was a 15-minute-long advertising programme broadcast daily on prime time by the then only channel available on Italian television. It consisted of four to five short comedy sketches that were paid for by advertisers. The format and contents of *Carosello* were meticulously regulated by the public service broadcaster. There were two paramount rules: the first dictated that in each sketch the entertainment bit (so-called *pezzo*) had to prevail over the proper advertising bit (so-called *codino*), and the second rule imposed that each sketch could only be aired twice. Such rules, coupled with the extensive pre-emptive censorship of any word, character, or situation even remotely at odds with a stringent Catholic morality, spurred the creation of ever more quirky solutions to bring together advertising and entertainment. Over the 20 years of its broadcasting (1957–1977), *Carosello* was actually much more akin to an entertainment programme than it was to advertising. Many *Carosello* episodes were produced in the Cinecittà Studios by the same artistic and technical talents that were creating Italy's most celebrated cinematic works, and they required TV-like budgets that were unaffordable to most Italian businesses. Moreover, *Carosello* came to be perceived by the Italian audience as a genuine entertainment show, which, over time, became part of every TV-owning family's daily routine.³ Such perception was encouraged by advertisers themselves, who bought spaces in RAI's listing magazine, *Radiocorriere*, to advertise their paid-for upcoming instalment of *Carosello*, just like it was done for regular television dramas (Dorfles 1998). In this sense, *Carosello* can be considered as an early, and particularly successful, example of what is now known as

branded entertainment. One fact about *Carosello* that all media scholars and commentators agree on is that it had a profound impact on the language, topoi, and style not only of subsequent commercial communications, but of television and of all Italian screen media. Some have gone as far as to argue that, through *Carosello*, advertising has become the one driving force behind the shaping of Italy's cultural industry and collective imagination (see Pitteri 2006).

While the creative influence of advertising on the Italian mediascape started as soon as the public service channel started to broadcast it, its ability to steer economic resources towards television boomed in the 1980s, with the launch and rapid consolidation of nationwide commercial networks. Indeed, with the consolidation on the market of Berlusconi's three channels, advertisers' investments grew unprecedentedly. In 1980, television accounted for 25.7 per cent of the overall Italian advertising expenditure; four years later, when Silvio Berlusconi acquired his third channel, that figure exceeded 47 per cent, which is television's advertising share still today (Brigida et al. 2004: 26). The steep growth of Fininvest channels through the 1980s was due to Berlusconi's innovative and aggressive strategy: in terms of business management (e.g. by marketing to small enterprises) and in terms of content programming (e.g. by recruiting celebrities until then strongly associated with the public service broadcaster). Berlusconi's media venture, though, could not have thrived had he not benefited from a favourable political climate, which, for many years, did not stop, and then ultimately legitimised an entrepreneurial boom built in violation of a number of juridical decisions. This brings us to the third peculiarity that we need to address in relation to the Italian media system, namely the subaltern relationship the media system has with political power.

- (3) In April 1986, American leading entertainment trade magazine *Variety* published an article enthusiastically titled "Italy and Silvio Berlusconi invented commercial television on the European continent" (quoted in Mattelart 1991: 102). The impressive take-off of Berlusconi's commercial enterprise was in fact unprecedented in the European mediascape, which was still largely shaped by the tradition of public service broadcasting. Berlusconi's undisputable entrepreneurial ability, though, did also benefit from political connections with then Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, leader of the Italian Socialist Party which ran the country from 1983 to 1987. The Craxi executive issued a number of temporary acts, collectively dubbed "Berlusconi decree", that allowed Berlusconi's channels to stay on the air, however in violation of a number of previous juridical decisions. Between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, Berlusconi was able to build his media empire thanks to propitious

6 Introduction

political interventions, followed by a prolonged regulatory vacuum, and finally by a broadcasting law that legalised *ex post facto* his position in the market. In 1994, when Berlusconi himself entered politics, the conflict of interest between his private media enterprises and his public role exploded for the first time, only to reappear at each of his subsequent prime minister electoral victories (four over 15 years).

While Berlusconi's case represents the epitome of the intertwined relationship between media and politics in Italy, such phenomenon did not start with him, nor with commercial television. Since its inception, RAI, the public service broadcaster, operated under exclusive licence by the Italian government, which appointed executives and dictated the editorial line. This, as we shall see, had profound consequences in terms of agenda setting, freedom of expression, and political and cultural censorship, especially because Italy's government was led uninterruptedly by one party, the Christian Democrats, for 35 years. In 1975, a broadcasting reform law, aimed at making the public service broadcaster more independent and pluralistic, removed RAI from direct control of the government and put it under that of the Parliament. The result of this change was the creation of the system of *lottizzazione*, i.e. the "formalized carve-up of RAI by political parties" (Hibberd 2008: 76). According to the logic of *lottizzazione*, "pluralism was finally reached once each of the three main parties was able to exercise hegemony over its own broadcasting channel" (Padovani 2005: 7).

Thus, either by means of direct monopoly control, and later of the system of *lottizzazione*, or on the grounds of corporate ownership, Italian political forces have been exerting control over both the public service broadcaster and the leading commercial competitor. Besides obvious, detrimental effects in terms of media freedom and pluralism, this also bears consequences for the film industry, given the centrality of RAI and Mediaset in financing, producing, and distributing Italian films. Moreover, the influence of political forces, and notably that of the governing parties, on Italian cinema manifests itself, at a broader level, in the implementation of increasingly market-oriented film policies, the legalisation of product placement, and the introduction of tax incentives for consumer companies that invest in national film production.

This book explores and critically examines the increasingly central role that advertising and advertisers' interests have been playing in the Italian film industry. To examine this, we need to look at a broader picture, which includes not only the economic and regulatory development of Italian cinema, but also the evolution of consumer culture and of another major medium of popular entertainment in Italy, television. This book does not aim to provide an exhaustive treatment of all the individual themes presented so far, as to do so would require an entire library. Instead, it aims to highlight an underlying

trend that has gone through the evolution of Italian cinema and audiovisual media from the post-war period up to the present day. This trend concerns the increasingly pervasive and established role that advertising has played, as an economic, aesthetic, and cultural force, in Italian film production.

The book is structured as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 provide a chronological account of the main developments undergone by the three different, but interconnected sectors of Italian society—Italian television and Italian cinema with regard to their relation to advertising. Chapter 1 focuses on the time span that goes from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, whereas Chapter 2 covers the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Overall, this half-century saw massive and increasingly accelerated changes at all levels of the Italian social, economic, and cultural life. Italian advertisers and filmmakers played essential roles in such changes, sometimes to prompt them and sometimes to incorporate and mirror them in their creative works. Following the implementation of dedicated policies since the early 2000s, exchanges and collaborations between Italian advertisers and filmmakers have become increasingly frequent, but no less problematic. Chapter 3 looks at the practices that best exemplify such collaborations: product placement, tax credit for non-audiovisual companies, and branded entertainment. Such practices also illustrate very well the criticalities that the collaborations between consumer and film companies involve on both sides. The section firstly provides an overview of Italy's contemporary market for product placement, tax credit, and branded entertainment involving films: the regulatory framework and the main market players, as well as the predominant modes of their collaborations, with particular attention to the crucial role played by promotional intermediaries. To do so, the chapter relies on first-hand data and knowledge that high-profile practitioners in the Italian film and advertising sectors have generously agreed to share with the author of the book. Their identities have been concealed to protect the confidential and sometimes sensitive nature of the information they shared. Finally, a conclusive section concisely discusses three main patterns of continuity that will emerge throughout the book and highlights some important implications for future studies in critical film and advertising industries.

Notes

- 1 Top ten grossing Italian films of all times and respective performers from television: (1) *Quo vado?* (2016; Checco Zalone), (2) *Sole a catinelle* (2013; Checco Zalone), (3) *La vita è bella* (1997; Roberto Benigni), (4) *Che bella giornata* (2011; Checco Zalone), (5) *Benvenuti al Sud* (2010; Claudio Bisio, Alessandro Siani), (6) *Chiedimi se sono felice* (2000; Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo), (7) *Natale sul Nilo* (2002; Fichi d'India, Biagio Izzo), (8) *Il ciclone* (1996; Leonardo Pieraccioni, Massimo Ceccherini), (9) *Benvenuti al Nord* (2012; Claudio Bisio,

8 *Introduction*

Alessandro Siani), (10) *Pinocchio* (2002; Roberto Benigni). Source: Cinetel and Movieplayer.

- 2 Ortoleva defines the 1980s television duopoly “imperfect” for two main reasons, both of which will be addressed in further detail over the course of the book. Firstly, because RAI and Mediaset, while being by far the biggest, were not the only nationwide players in the broadcasting market. Secondly, because the prolonged lack of clear and fair rules prevented the establishment of a level playing field in the Italian broadcasting market for at least a decade.
- 3 The phrase “After *Carosello*, off to bed!” (*Dopo Carosello, tutti a nanna!*) became a popular refrain that Italian parents told their children (Dorfles 1998: 91).