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"The Good Italian": Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A Study Based on Thematic Analysis and Digital Analytics

Alice Noris and **Lorenzo Cantoni**

Alice Noris, PhD, USI (2022) – Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland), holds a PhD in Communication Sciences from the Institute of Digital Technologies for Communication, Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society. She is currently working as Researcher at SUPSI, the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland. Her research interests are digital transformation within the field of fashion, digital analytics and the overlapping areas

Abstract

The continuous intertwining of cinema and digital technologies has allowed fashion films to spread as a new genre, through which fashion companies present their products, entertain, inspire their audience, share their heritage and tradition, and communicate their brand identity. This study presents the case of *The Good Italian,* a 3-episode story of the Prince of Soragna and his journey through Italian (life)style, published by the Italian Caruso menswear company. Through a thematic analysis of each video, information in the company's archive, the digital analytics provided by the Caruso YouTube channel, and an interview with the former CEO, who was deeply involved in the conceptualization and

between digital and intercultural communication.
alice.noris@usi.ch

Lorenzo Cantoni, Ph.D. (1997), USI – Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland), is the director of the Institute of Digital Technologies for Communication and holder of a UNESCO Chair in ICT to develop and promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites.
lorenzo.cantoni@usi.ch

realization of the films, this paper aims to answer two research questions: (i) How was the topic of being a "Good Italian" translated into the three fashion films? (ii) How were the films distributed, and which audiences did they reach? Thanks to the unique opportunity to access the company's digital analytics and archived documents, together with the interviews, this paper provides a view on the case that goes beyond what can be assessed by an outsider, a perspective that is relevant for both researchers on digital fashion communication and fashion films, as well as for practitioners.

KEYWORDS: fashion marketing, fashion film, culture, social media, stereotypes

Introduction

Cinema production processes and the lifecycles of video products have been deeply impacted by the digital transformation (Pardo 2015). On the one hand, what were once "special effects" have been integrated into a mixed reality, in which the reproduction of physical objects, their digital editing, and the insertion/animation of digital objects increasingly interact, sometimes making it difficult for the viewer to distinguish real elements from computer-generated ones. Even the characters themselves, with their skin, clothes and other accessories, can be reproduced as completely digital objects, giving rise to digital costume design. This new context has made video production accessible to an ever larger number of people, who, through their smartphones or devices, can make videos of better quality, making the production and sharing of videos a distinctive activity of contemporary life (Noris and Cantoni 2022). On the other hand, concerning the dissemination of films, cinematic movies have had to adapt to the digital world by combining their original model based on theaters with new access modalities, influenced by the emergence of television and then digital platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Video and Disney+. Such a continuous intertwining of cinema and technology has allowed fashion films to spread as an independent genre (Noris and Cantoni 2022; Uhlirova 2013).

Within the industry, the term "fashion film" is used to refer to creative audiovisual projects produced for fashion houses (Soloaga and Guerrero 2016). Buffo (2019) defines fashion films as online videos created by fashion brands based on branded content translated into moving images; they are usually inspired by cinematography, although they have developed their own way of communicating through net aesthetics and contribute to creating a stronger brand identity. Three main types of narrative choices are usually adopted by fashion brands to develop their fashion films or fashion sagas: (i) telling a story; (ii) creating or reinforcing brand personality; and (iii) evoking atmosphere (Buffo 2017).

Fashion films are considered by fashion companies to be a valuable marketing and communication tool that is useful not only for presenting a certain product or content but also for entertaining their audiences. Through such movies, fashion brands have enriched their activities and have started to share their heritage and tradition with their audiences through a new form of storytelling, avoiding continuously showcasing their brand logos (Buffo 2017; Buffo 2019; Soloaga and Guerrero 2016).

Fashion films, therefore, are not to be considered simply a new way of advertising and launching a particular product or collection but rather as a branded content strategy and a form of online short film that fashion companies choose to use as an element of their branding strategies (Mijovic 2013; Ramos Serrano and Pineda 2009; Soloaga and Guerrero 2016).

From a more sociological perspective, fashion films contribute to the "imaginary", which has dominated the fashion system since the mid-twentieth century. "Imaginary" is a notion that can be considered from many perspectives; for instance, an "imaginary" can consist of the stock of images, values, practices and rules that dominate Western fashion and that its participants take into consideration when they establish a relationship with fashion (Mora, Rocamora, and Volonté 2016). Based on this assumption, when presenting a new fashion film, companies must be aware that audiences perceive movies on the basis of their understanding of fashion in different imaginaries and that different imaginaries may be held by different communities (Mora, Rocamora, and Volonté 2016).

The present article aims to analyze the case of a fashion film saga produced by the menswear company Caruso, founded in 1958 by Neapolitan tailor Raffaele Caruso and acquired in 2009 by Umberto Angeloni, which since 2021 has been part of the conglomerate Fonsun (Bolelli 2021). This saga is titled *The Good Italian* and is a 3-episode story of the Prince of Soragna and his journey through Italian (life)style.

The case will be used to determine whether and how this movie genre can be used by a fashion company to convey a certain "imaginary", its brand identity and the idea of "made in"; this idea is to be understood not only as a production made in a certain country but also as a form of communication that proposes a certain storytelling style (Rech, Noris, and Sabatini 2023), values and elements representative of a certain culture that balance the need for localization, thereby adapting content to a certain audience (Noris, SanMiguel, and Cantoni 2020; Noris and Cantoni 2021) with a brand identity. Moreover, digital analytics will help bridge the research gap in most related studies, which approach fashion films only from an outsider viewpoint, as acts of expression, but are seldom able to assess their actual audiences.

Literature Review

The film industry since the twentieth century has played a key role in the promotion and representation of the fashion world. This has led

several film scholars to devote particular attention to the confluence of fashion and film, studying and analyzing the role of cinema in the production, promotion, and representation of fashion, as well as its role in stimulating consumption and sales. Moreover, the relationship between film, media, and fashion studies has offered valuable research potential, which is attracting increasing interest among researchers (Castaldo Lunden 2018).

Fashion and films present common and intertwining characteristics: both industries are considered among the most commercial, and both use technologies in combination with performances, bodies, and cameras. Moreover, film costumes not only have taken inspiration from haute couture and fashion but also have inspired trends and fashions within this sector (Paulicelli 2019; Leese 1991).

The birth of the fashion film genre can be traced back to the very emergence of cinema. According to Soloaga and Guerrero (2016), Uhlirova (2013) identified a film directed by Georges Méliès for *Mystère corsets* as one of the first fashion films ever, and Evans (2001) cites Poiret as the first couturier to use a film of a mannequin parade to promote his fashions in the early 1910s, even though it must be noted that both films were conceived as commercials. Newsreel screenings made between the 1910s and 1930s, which presented the latest Parisian collections to American customers, could also be cited as forerunners of fashion films (Evans 2001; Soloaga and Guerrero 2016).

Short films became increasingly popular over time: some simply presented the collections of a designer, while the main objective of others was to launch trends or present the production process or new fabrics such as nylon or rayon (Soloaga and Guerrero 2016).

Between the 1930s and 1950s, the Golden Era of Hollywood had a strong impact on fashion newsreels thanks to actresses and stars such as Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Kathrine Hepburn, and Jean Harlow. In regard to the interplay among fashion and films, women's casual clothing, which included pieces such as trousers, started to be adopted by the masses in the 1930s thanks to these Hollywood icons, who appeared for the first time wearing riding and sailor trousers both in films and in their private lives (Cunningham 2016; Noris and Cantoni 2022; Soloaga and Guerrero 2016).

Among those who contributed to the development of fashion films, it is worth mentioning the photographer Erwim Blumenfeld, who is considered a pioneer of experimental fashion films during the 1950s and 1960s; William Klein and Guy Bourdin, who contributed short films to complement their photographic work between the 1960s and 1980s; and some famous fashion photographers, such as Richard Avedon, Serge Lutens and Helmut Newton, who proposed fashion films for commercial brands during the 1970s and 1980s (Soloaga and Guerrero 2016). Moreover, among the precursors of fashion films as we know them today, according to Paulicelli (2019), Fellini's production *Alta*

Società (High Society) deserves mention. In this commercial, Fellini advertises a particular Barilla pasta type – rigatoni – through an elegant lady sitting in a French *haute cuisine* restaurant. After listening to the waiter listing the menu, the woman simply asks for a plate of rigatoni. Through this representation, Fellini shares in a sarcastic way what *Italianness* means for him from a culinary and language perspective. The request for rigatoni is a clear statement: Italian food in its simplicity is, for the lady, sexier and more appealing than French food (Paulicelli 2019).

Despite the frequent use of fashion films as a form of commercial, the genre has only recently become well-known and widespread thanks to the advancements of digital technologies, which have simplified the production and increased the dissemination of such movies (Khan 2012; Uhlirova 2013). The new genre of fashion films can be traced to the first decade of the 21st century as resulting from the digital revolution, which allowed fashion and high-luxury brands to create a different form of expression, art, and branding and a strong connection with their stakeholders through forms of storytelling that promote their products and entertain their audiences while emphasizing values, heritage and quality (Jang and Yang 2010; Soloaga and Guerrero 2016).

Brands have discovered the advantages of fashion films and their power of seduction, as they give their users a more engaged experience than classic TV advertising campaigns. Fashion films have inherited the principles of traditional fashion media but have added innovations in communication. In particular, according to Soloaga and Guerrero (2016), (i) fashion films are largely produced by luxury fashion companies to provide a new form of experience through entertainment via experiential marketing; (ii) they establish a more intimate relationship with consumers through the interactive possibilities of digital formats; (iii) storytelling and serialization are among the most common tools used to build brand engagement; (iv) beauty, balance, surprise and harmony are used as tools to affect the user through aesthetic pleasure; and (v) fashion films tend to dematerialize products on the one hand and on the other hand can make them real elements with their own life and personality.

Among the most recent fashion films, which are offspring of the digital transformation of fashion communication, one notes the 2016 Gucci fashion film conceived by Alessandro Michele, Gucci's former creative director, to launch the new Guilty perfume. The film makes strong references to the atmosphere and style of the movie *Death in Venice* (1971). Additionally, a 2017 Kenzo fashion film, conceived by its former creative directors Carol Lim and Humberto Leon to launch their autumn–winter collection, *Cabiria, Charity, Chastity,* directed by Natascha Lyonne, makes clear reference to a film of the past: Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957). It tells the story of Chastity, who reconciles her Vaudevillian past and is able to find the essence of life in a nonsensical world (Noris and Cantoni 2022).

In regard to collaborations, in 2017, the fast fashion brand H&M launched, with the luxury brand Erdem, the film *Secret Life of Flowers*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, the story of which was a love triangle set in a mysterious country mansion where it was "always spring". A series within the fashion film category is *Women's Tales*, an online series presented by Miu Miu in 2011, whose aim was both fashion branding, presenting fashion items through a feminine artistic eye, and disseminating a feminist message (Noris and Cantoni 2022).

Although one may think that fashion films have been widely studied and researched, it should be considered that the topic and the scenarios related to them can be analyzed by considering different perspectives. Indeed, academic studies allow fashion films to be analyzed not only by taking into consideration their various facets and the different methodological approaches researchers can offer for fashion, film, and media but also by examining issues that are intertwined with fields such as identity, status, ethnicities, cultures, and business practices (Castaldo Lunden 2018).

Before presenting the research questions and the methodology used in detail, the three fashion films belonging to *The Good Italian* saga are introduced and outlined.

The Three Episodes

The first episode of the film was launched on June 18, 2015, and is entitled *The Good Italian I 'The farmhouse of wonders'*[1] (6′ 07″). For the first episode Caruso has also shared *The Good Italian – Behind the scenes*[2] (3′) to introduce the audience to how the movie was shot. In the film, two English tourists on a bicycle come across a small, dilapidated farmhouse in the countryside of Soragna, which reveals, behind the creaking door, the interior of a princely residence: the dining room of Prince Meli Lupi di Soragna, which contains some of the most important Baroque frescoes in northern Italy. The prince, played by actor Giancarlo Giannini, is very warm and friendly and welcomes the two tourists to his table, laden with "culatello" from the cellars of a well-known Italian producer (the Spigaroli brothers' Antica Corte Pallavicina) and local wines from the cellar of a local restaurant in Soragna, La Stella D'Oro (IMDb 2015; The Good Italian n.d.). As the male guest is not dressed properly for a prince's reception, the prince asks his faithful butler Fefè to take care of the new guest, inviting him to the prince's dressing room so that he can put on an impeccably tailored blue suit. The final touch is the transformation of the guest, initially dressed in a cycling jacket and pants, into a perfect 'good Italian' (IMDb 2015; The Good Italian n.d.) (Figure 1).

In the second episode, *The Good Italian II 'The Prince goes to Milan'*[3], (6′ 40″) launched on January 11, 2016, the Prince travels to Milan to meet a mysterious lady who turns out to be his niece. Traveling in a prestigious Lancia Aurelia Spider B24, a symbol of Italian

Figure 1
The famous Italian actor Giancarlo Giannini on the set of *The Good Italian I 'The farmhouse of wonders'* (photo by S. Masini, courtesy of U. Angeloni).

design and industry worldwide, he chooses the secret enclave that most closely resembles the atmosphere of the princely Rocca di Soragna: the Four Seasons Hotel. After a quick visit to the hotel's Michelin-starred kitchen, the Prince realizes that the basil in the kitchen is not up to the standard of the recipe the chef was supposed to prepare: trenette al pesto. Through a fictional film choice, the Prince goes to get the pesto himself in his garden in Soragna. After harvesting the basil, the prince goes to his suite and gets ready for dinner, finding the perfect dress to welcome his niece. The secret recipe and the atmosphere will convert the young cosmopolitan woman, spoiled by the most cliched frivolous luxuries, to the refined and simple pleasure offered by the Italian life-style (IMDb 2016; The Good Italian n.d.) (Figure 2).

The third episode *The Good Italian III 'The Magic of Naples'*[4] (8′ 58′′), for which the costume designer Lindy Hamming made the clothes, was launched on January 13, 2017. Here, Giancarlo Giannini in his role as the Prince of Soragna is absorbed in the usual ritual of shaving with the family barber, played by the real Prince of Soragna, Diofebo Meli Lupi. A close friend of his, the Italian tenor Vittorio Grigólo, arrives in a hurry to Naples to meet the Prince, who is of Neapolitan origin, and asks him for advice on the best rendering of the famous Neapolitan song *O Paese d'o Sole*. The tenor's difficulty is not technical but in

Figure 2
Filming of *The Good Italian II 'The Prince goes to Milan'* (photo by S. Masini, courtesy of U. Angeloni).

finding the expressiveness and interpretative passion that characterizes this musical form derived from Italian melodrama. The Prince knows that the secret lies in the authenticity of the emotion expressed by the song, and only by immersing himself in the essence of Naples, a dramatic and at the same time enchanting place, will the tenor's voice be able to express its power. Accompanied by the faithful Fefè, who in this film is immersed in an amorous enchantment and on a silent search for ecstatic emotion, the Prince accompanies Grigólo on an immersion into the essence of being Neapolitan – the Gulf, the old squares, the noisy alley-ways, the pizza fritta on the street corner, the lemons, the terrace of Posillipo with a view of Vesuvius, and so on (IMDb 2017; The Good Italian n.d.) (Figure 3).

According to Umberto Angeloni, former CEO of Caruso – who happily accepted to be interviewed by us at the University premises in Lugano (Switzerland) in November 2nd, 2021 – the company chose to create the saga The Good Italian when it realized the importance of fashion films to communicate with its audience and the potential effectiveness of digital channels.

Angeloni explains that Caruso's choice in the three episodes of the saga was to play with a balance between fictional and real elements: the places, characters, facts, objects, relationships, etc., are so exceptional and

Figure 3
A pause while filming *The Good Italian III 'The Magic of Naples'* (photo by S. Masini, courtesy of U. Angeloni).

improbable that they require a willing suspension of disbelief, yet they are almost all true; however, they are shown in a (super)natural reality that is equally awe-inspiring and therefore also makes them less fictional.

Moreover, according to the interview and to the information provided, the reading key of both film directors, Emanuele Di Bacco for the first two episodes and Adriano De Santis, director of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia of Rome, for the third movie, is fiction-real: the chef of The Good Italian II is real, Vincenzo Mollica, as are the tenor of The Good Italian III, Vittorio Grigòlo, and the Prince of Soragna, who truly exists and who plays the Prince's barber in the third episode. The actual Prince of Soragna also has real Neapolitan origins: his mother was a noblewoman of the Quaranta family.

In directing the three episodes, Caruso chose to pay homage to literature and cinema. The title The Good Italian was in fact inspired by *The Dangerous Summer* by Hemingway ([1959] 2002). Regarding cinema references, in The Good Italian I and II, the table setting scenes are inspired by *Grand Budapest Hotel,* directed by Wes Anderson in 2014. In the second film, the car trip from Soragna to Milan was inspired by *Il Sorpasso* with Vittorio Gassman, directed by Dino Risi in 1962, which used the same car, a Lancia Aurelia Spider B24 (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Scenes from *Il Sorpass*o with Vittorio Gassman and *The Good Italian II* with Giancarlo Giannini.

Another cinematic reference can be found in the preparation of the pesto, which involves a mixture of the magic laboratory in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,* directed by Peter Greenaway in 1989, and the perfect kitchen of *The Chef (Le Chef),* directed by Daniel Cohen in 2012, starring Jean Reno and Michaël Youn. In The Good Italian II, other cinematic references are related to the works of Fellini: theatrical suspense is created with the atmosphere of the store and the dialog with the mannequin, inspired by $8^1/2$ (1963), and the venture into the mysterious cave is inspired by Roma (1972).

Finally, The Good Italian III takes inspiration from *L'oro di Napoli*, a 1954 episodic film directed by Vittorio De Sica. The fashion movie takes its cue from the episode titled *Pizze a Credito,* in which Sofia Loren sells fried pizza that can be paid for after eight days.

The cinematographic choices focused on the concept of "Made in Italy" and on the Italian essence, explaining through the three episodes what it means to be a "good Italian". Caruso chose to convey this message by collaborating with two Italian cinema directors, Emanuele Di Bacco and Adriano De Santis, and with mostly Italian actors who in one way or another were connected to the three episodes of the saga. Giancarlo Giannini, who plays the Prince of Soragna, has a direct connection with the real Prince, Diofebo Meli Lupi. The faithful Fefè is played by Emanuaele Angeloni, son of the former CEO Umberto Angeloni. Finally, in the second episode, the chef of the Four Seasons, Vincenzo Mollica, as well as the tenor Vittorio Grigòlo in the third film, did not play a simple role since they were impersonating themselves. Moreover, the brand consciously decided to keep all the dialogues in Italian.

The films' choices were not only well received by the public but also by the critics. The movies received awards at many fashion film festivals such as the Berlin Fashion Film Festival, Fashion Film Festival Chicago, La Jolla Fashion Film Festival, London Fashion Film Festival, Miami International Film Festival, and Sarajevo Fashion Film Festival for best actor, best casting, best cinematography, best director, best film, best music, and best story.

Research Design & Methodology

This paper aims to answer two main research questions.

RQ1. How was the topic of being a "good Italian" translated into the three fashion films?

To answer this question, a thematic analysis of the three films was conducted using a template analysis, which is a very flexible technique with few specified procedures, allowing researchers to tailor it to match the research requirements.

According to King (2004), thematic analysis allows the production of a list of codes ("templates") that represent the themes identified in the text. No value is given to the reliability of coding; elements such as the introspectiveness of the researcher, the attempt to approach the topic by taking different perspectives into consideration and the richness of the description produced are crucial aspects (King 2004). The essence of this method is that the researcher produces a list of codes (a 'template') representing themes identified in the textual data. Some of these themes are defined a priori, but they are modified and adapted according to the way the researchers read and interpreted the texts (King 2004).

The codes determined a priori were identified thanks to Studia Imagologica (Beller 2007), which determines how national stereotypes emerge, what they are and to what extent they are determined by either historical or ideological circumstances or by cultural, literary, or discursive conventions. From travel literature, one of the main sources of the image of Italy in ethnographic, artistic, and political representations, five possible aspects of Italian-ness were identified. (i) Magnificent ruins and ancient statuary and (ii) religion were included. (iii) Italians' love for fine arts was another aspect: thanks to great painters and architects such as Bramante and Palladio and masters and virtuosos of music such as Monteverdi, Vivaldi, and Verdi, the very language of the Italians is seen to participate in their musicality, and they have often been represented as talented songwriters. (iv) The image of Italy is also an image of its landscapes. Some visual tropes have come to determine the stereotypes of modern tourism: Florence as seen from Piazzale Michelangelo, the leaning tower of Pisa, the panorama of the city and gulf of Naples with Vesuvius in the background, the ruins of the Greek theater of Taormina in the foreground of the coast and Etna in the distance, etc. (v) The image of the Italian is another aspect: at the base of this stereotype is a summary list of qualities, which imply that "the Italian is good, the Italian has genius, the Italian is lazy, anarchic, a classical character, a wise man, a laborer, a saint, a hero" (Bollati 1972, 951). The essential idea was formulated by Vincenzo Gioberti (1844, 105), who defined the Italian people as "a desire, not a fact; an assumption, not a reality".

To carry out this thematic analysis of the three fashion films, the first step was to transform the three videos into texts describing in detail the

contents of each film: the places and environment, characters, objects, sounds and music, symbols, logos, etc. The themes were based on the way meanings and their implications were constructed and on the historical, cultural, and sociological context of the films.

RQ2. How were the films distributed, and which audiences did they reach?

To answer this question, we carried out an in-depth analysis of the information archived by Caruso regarding the launch of the three films, correlating it with the information published on various digital channels and with the interview.

Moreover, access to the digital analytics of the YouTube channel was granted by the company, allowing us to obtain a "behind the scenes" understanding of the actual usage of the three fashion films. These data enabled us to obtain a better understanding of the audience for these films.

Finally, a semistructured interview (SSI) with the former Caruso CEO, Umberto Angeloni, provided both additional information to answer the above questions and the possibility of double-checking hypotheses and obtaining a better understanding of the role of such films as seen by the company: the interviewee was, in fact, the initiator and the "soul" of the studied case.

SSI was particularly suitable since some of the open-ended questions required follow-up questions to investigate the thinking of the interviewee, to delve into uncharted territory with unknown but potentially important aspects, and to provide Umberto Angeloni the maximum freedom to identify useful topics and address them (Adams 2015).

The SSI in this case aimed to complement the analysis of the textual, visual, and analytical components, since it allowed the use of a mix of closed and open-ended questions, accompanied by follow-up questions about the why or how of certain aspects, without strictly adhering to verbal questions as in a standardized survey, thus allowing the possibility of delving into completely unforeseen themes (Adams 2015). The interview was carried out in person, and follow-up questions were posed afterward via email or phone call when information was missing.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: How was the topic of being a "good Italian" translated into the three fashion films?

To answer this question, a template analysis was carried out. Starting from the five preidentified codes mentioned above (magnificent ruins and ancient statuary; religion; Italians' love for fine arts; Italian landscapes; and the image of the Italian character, which represents, according to Beller (2007), the Italian national character), we developed a template of codes retrieved both from the three fashion films and from

the interview with Umberto Angeloni, an interview through which we aimed to understand how the interviewee constructed meaning.

To perform the thematic analysis, the three videos were transformed into text and described in detail by the authors (including descriptions of the dialog, environment, objects, scenes, colors, etc.), and the interview was transcribed. The following codes were identified:

(i) Italians' love for beauty: representations of fine arts such as music, in particular classical music, painting, architecture, and sculpture, but also cars, clothing and food. The three episodes are rich in references to the beauty of the arts; examples in the first film include the dining room of Prince Meli Lupi di Soragna, which contains some of the most important Baroque frescoes in northern Italy, as well as delicious foods and wines such as culatello di Soragna from the Spigaroli brothers' Antica Corte Pallavicina and wines from the cellar of a local restaurant in Soragna, *La Stella D'Oro*. In the second movie, we find an iconic car, the Lancia Aurelia Spider B24, a symbol of Italian design and industry, as well as passion for food, its preparation, and the choice of every ingredient through the representation of trenette al pesto, a dish that is apparently simple but hides a great tradition. In the third movie, food is featured once again, with the tradition of fried pizza and the architecture of the city of Naples. All three episodes are also accompanied by classical Italian music, for example, *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata* by Giuseppe Verdi (1843) and *O Paese d'o Sole* by Vincenzo D'Annibale and Libero D'Onorio (1925).

(ii) The representation of Italian landscapes. Examples include the countryside of Soragna, the city of Naples and the Parthenopean landscape.

(iii) The sight of magnificent ruins, buildings, and ancient statuary: the external appearance of never-new period buildings, sometimes in ruins or seemingly neglected. An example is Soragna's mansion in the first episode, which from the outside looks crumbling but inside is majestic.

(iv) The representation of the Italian character. Examples include the hand-kissing of the nephew, the treatment of the butler, the fact that the Prince remembers by heart the names of the Four Seasons employees, and the idea of the Italian savoir vivre.

(v) The idea of perfection. This concept is represented by two quotes from the Prince in the second episode: "Ah … a proposito deve essere tutto perfetto … ", "Ah … by the way everything must be perfect … ", stated at minute 1.01, referring to his stay at The Four Seasons Hotel; and "Fefè è

perfetto … questo … ", "Fefè, it's perfect … this … ", stated at minute 4.13, referring to the choice of the suite for the dinner.

(vi)   The indeterminacy of time. This concept is represented in the third episode through the quote "Quando si cerca la perfezione il tempo non esiste", "When seeking perfection, time does not exist", stated by the Prince at minute 2.0 and repeated by Vittorio Grigòlo at minute 4.50.

This ensemble of positive stereotypes can be summarized through the term "gooditalianism", for which Caruso also created a fictional dictionary entry:

gooditalianism\ɡʊdī-tal-yə-ˌni-zəm\noun [neologism, derived from Caruso's movie series "The Good Italian"] can be defined as: (i) demeanoror behavior of a good Italian - *If you want to travel gaily, and I do, travel with good Italians* (Hemingway, "The Dangerous Summer", 1959); (ii) quality or characteristic of Italian people who display a higher level of culture, spirit and taste – *ultimately – is the art of being happy: the most difficult of all* (Stendhal); (iii) Italian lifestyle in its most authentic and refined expression – *is a manual written in twenty seven centuries* (anonymous): (iv) innate ability to detect and discern the absolute best in objects, occasions and cultures, and to re-elaborate and re-present them at a higher level; (v) the promotion of Italian excellences, heritage and ideals; (vi) mindset of people who share the same appreciation of Italy and Italians - *I dwell in*; (vii) specialized interest in or emulation of superior Italian qualities or achievements - *a man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority* (Samuel Johnson 572, Boswell 1791); (viii) holistic view of proper Italian personality, style and culture.

The moral of the episodes is that the authentic Italian lifestyle can be found in places with great history, local traditions, treasures, art, and craftsmanship. It can be experienced through a full immersion in Italian landscapes that feature magnificent ruins, buildings, and ancient statues, including both well-known places such as the city of Naples and the Parthenopean landscape and hidden places such as the countryside of Soragna. The authentic Italian lifestyle can be experienced in the representation of fine arts such as music, painting, architecture, and sculpture, as well as cars, clothing, and food; finally, it can be found in positive stereotypes that represent Italians: friendliness, lightheartedness, the continuous search for perfection and the idea that time does not exist.

For Caruso, being a "good Italian" and representing the idea of "Made in Italy" means not overdoing the spectacular or excessive pomp

and circumstance. Small details make the difference, since beauty can be found in simplicity: in the first episode, the prince's farmhouse, from the outside, makes us think of a ruin with little to offer inside, but inside, it shows all its splendor despite its simplicity; in the second episode, the car chosen for the trip from Soragna to the Four Seasons, in its simple lines and design, may not seem as valuable or luxurious as other more famous brands, and the same can be said about the search for perfection in trenette al pesto, a quite easy dish someone might think is unworthy of the kitchens of a hotel like the Four Seasons; and in the third episode, the Prince chooses to accompany the tenor Vittorio Grigòlo among the common people to take inspiration and aspire to the best.

All this is reflected in the essence of the brand Caruso: its garments aspire to perfection, and they are considered timeless, but they are not for everyone; in fact, only the careful and trained eye of a true connoisseur can grasp their true essence, as well as the true essence of a "good Italian". The choice to present this topic in these three episodes allowed Caruso to make its communication choices consistent with its brand identity by using some of the positive stereotypes from literature and the classics to describe Italy and Italians as an instrument.

RQ2. How were the films distributed, and which audiences did they reach?

For Caruso, digital platforms were fundamental to launching the 3 fashion films. In particular, social media was employed, such as Facebook, Vimeo, and YouTube, accompanied by the digital channels of newspapers and fashion and film outlets such as the Fashion Channel, Fotogramas, La Repubblica, The Corner and, for the second movie, the Four Seasons Hotel channel, since the film was set there. Umberto Angeloni reported that Instagram was not utilized as a distribution channel, since at the time of the launch of the three films, it did not allow the uploading of such long videos. In Table 1, a summary of the publication outlets is provided.

Table 1. Film views according to the main digital platforms on which they were shared (data provided by Caruso and retrieved at the end of September 2021).

Platform / views	The Good Italian I (15.06.2015)	The Good Italian II (11.1.2016)	The Good Italian III (13.01.2017)
Facebook	32'000	25'000	4'380'000
Fashion Channel	–	101'272	51'634
Fotogramas	4'906	–	–
Four Seasons	–	190'356	–
Repubblica	3'886	1'874	–
TheCorner	2'794	–	–
Vimeo	8'382	8'665	6'986
Youtube	405'638	1'005'916	962'505

Although most of the reach of the three films was due to the digital channels on which they were promoted, premieres of each of the three episodes were also launched: that for The Good Italian I in the Caruso store in Milan, that for The Good Italian II at the Four Seasons, with a lunch in the kitchens where the pesto scene took place, and that for The Good Italian III in a room of the Four Seasons.

Caruso, to reach a larger audience, also utilized comarketing activities in collaboration with some of the brands in the three films, such as the Four Seasons, Spigaroli and Proraso. In addition, for the launch of the first film, a promotion was made on Ask Andy's Style Discussion forum (www.askandyaboutclothes.com), as part of which a prize was offered for the best comment on the film.

The three fashion films had a far reach and were highly appreciated on social media channels, especially on Facebook, where they were shared by various pages and personalities. Some of the most significant reshares include the following: The Good Italian I was shared by the Dress My City page, with over 8,000 views, and by other pages such as Italia Pretiosa, Gentleman Style of Life and Plaza Uomo. The Good Italian II was also shared by Dress My City, with 20,000 views; by the Four Seasons Hotel, which also engaged in a collaboration and targeted promotion with Caruso to benefit from the movie; by ICFF Canada; and by Plaza Uomo. The second episode had its world preview at Pitti Uomo. Among the accounts that shared the Good Italian III on Facebook were several pages and people celebrating the city of Naples and the Campania region, including PassioNapoli, with over 22,000 views; Artisti & Comici Made in Napoli, with over 60,000; Napoliammore and Regno delle Due Sicilie, with over 4,000 views each; and Salvatore Cacace's page, with over 4 million views and over 4,500 comments.

From the information provided by Caruso to date, more than three hundred articles have been published about the three movies. Among the major on- and offline magazines and newspapers that have discussed the three films are Esquire, FMAG, Frankfurter Allgemeine, GQ, Il Corriere della Sera, Il Giornale, Il Sole 24 Ore, La Repubblica, L'Officiel, Panorama, and Vogue.

Using an external consulting company, Caruso estimated the editorial value of each episode. For The Good Italian I, the editorial value was almost €384,000 (€132,919 from printed media and €251,000 from digital media). For the second episode, the editorial value was estimated as €454,594.

For The Good Italian III, the editorial value was estimated at almost €290,000, of which €144,993 was from printed media and €145,000 from digital media. Umberto Angeloni reported that according to the former director of the Milan store, after the second episode, many customers came to the shop asking for the pieces of clothing from the film. According to the YouTube analytics collected on 22.11.2021, the three

films were viewed on YouTube 497,780, 1,008,903, and 966,058 times, respectively; on average, the first film was viewed for approximately 3'07'', the second for 2'23'', and the third for 3'08''.

On average, 51% of the first film was viewed, 36% of the second, and 35% of the third. Such average lengths of viewing are particularly notable and indicate major interest on the side of the viewers. According to Strike Social (2018), the average view rate of video ads in the fashion industry is 43%; hence, percentages above 50% or 30% for films whose durations are long – in this case, 6'08'', 6'40'' and 8'58'', respectively – are considered very high.

The fact that the percentage decreases for the second and the third episodes is likely due to – as we will see below – the fact that these episodes were also promoted through advertising campaigns within YouTube. It may be that some of the people reached by such campaigns watched the films for only a short time, reducing the average viewing time. The twelve countries with the highest numbers of views, adding the views for all three films, were Italy (18.08%), the USA (12.43%), Great Britain (7.01%), Germany (4.89%),

Brazil (1.82%), Canada (1.67%), India (1.58%), Russia (1.35%), Spain (1.21%), Argentina (1.09%), France (1.05%), and Australia (1.02%). This is fully in line with the main actual and intended markets of the company; it should be noted, however, that YouTube is not as legally accessible as other social media in mainland China. In terms of age and number of views, the 25–34 age group had the highest average number of views with 29.70%, followed by the 35–44 age group with 20.27% and the 45--54 age group with 17.22%. The 55–64 and 65+ age groups averaged 15.35% and 10.23% of views, respectively. Finally, the total percentage of views by people up to 24 years of age was 7.24% (Graph 1).

This distribution provides a good indication of the age cohorts relevant for the company. As far as viewer gender is concerned, the analytics show that approximately 91% of the views were from males, in line with the nature of a menswear brand. Regarding the average duration of views, the data for men and women are similar: men watched an average of 34% of the three films, while women watched 31%. The YouTube analytics show how Caruso's cinematic choice to use the concepts of "Made in Italy" and being a "good Italian" as the fil rouge of the three episodes led the brand to reach different audiences both in terms of age groups and in terms of countries, crossing possible cultural barriers.

Graph 2 presents the top ten traffic sources of the episodes. The category "suggested video" is of considerable relevance for all three episodes. Few YouTube advertising activities have been performed for The Good Italian I (accounting for 2.6% of the views), while for The Good Italian II and The Good Italian III, the views due to YouTube advertising are 31.38% and 26.68%, respectively. All other views are to be
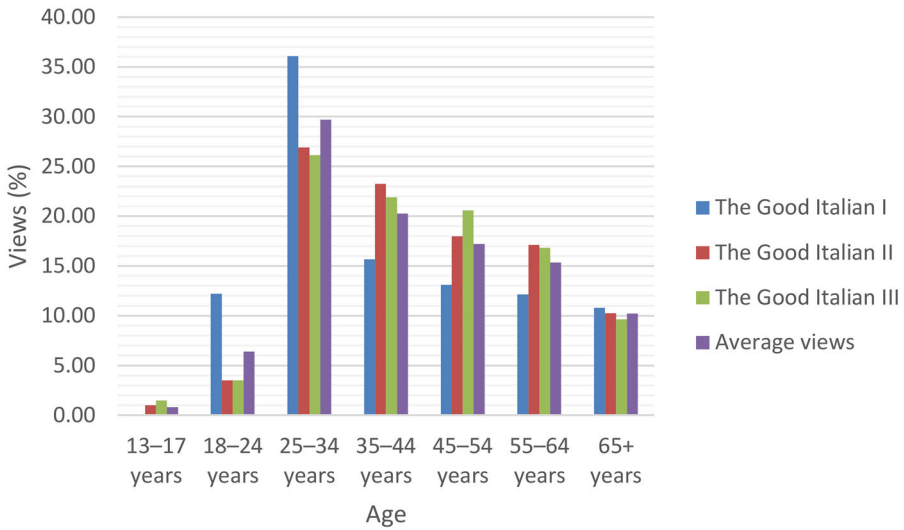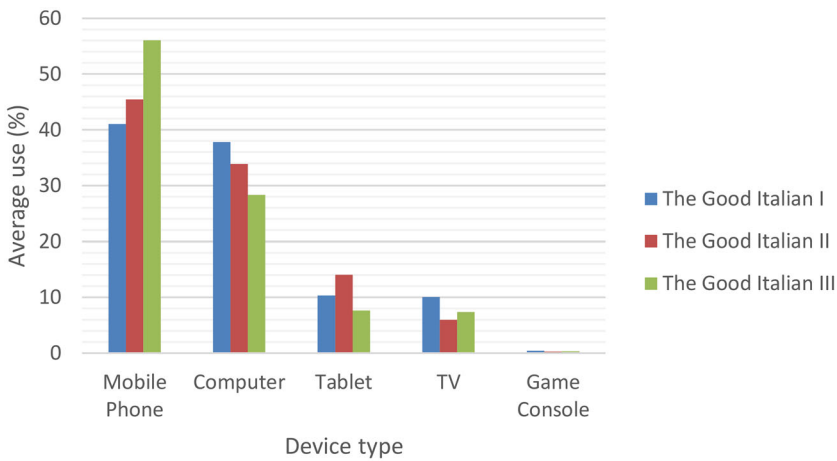
Graph 1
Average number of views of The Good Italian according to age range.
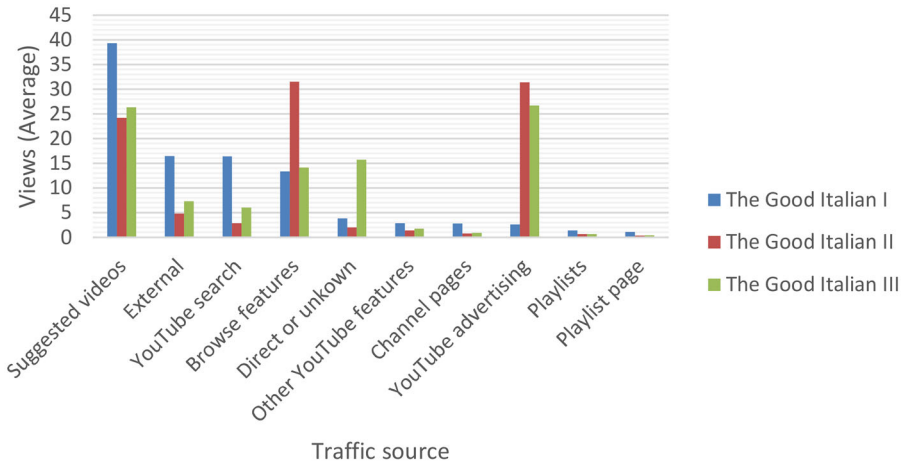
Graph 2
Traffic sources.

considered organic. Due to the lack of similar information from other fashion films and companies – the openness of this company in sharing such data is thus far unique – no comparison can be made of paid vs. organic views. However, in regard to overall views, it can be said that The Good Italian series had very good results in terms of reach.

The last graph (Graph 3) shows which devices were most often used to watch the three fashion films. In general, it can be noted that the

Graph 3
Device types.

most commonly used type of device is a mobile phone, followed by a computer, tablet, TV and game console. From the graph, the use of mobile phones increased significantly between the first and third films, while the use of computers to watch the three movies decreased. Tablet usage increased with the second film, launched in 2016, but it significantly decreased for the third movie.

Conclusions, limitations and further studies

Thanks to the close collaboration with Caruso and the access to archives, digital analytics, and the personal experience of former CEO Umberto Angeloni and his team, this paper provides a unique set of data and insights on fashion movies. On the one hand, the paper contributes to the development of academic research with respect to the use of movies as a genre to communicate with a brand's audience and for the definition of an "imaginary", and on the other hand, it provides practitioners with insights and data concerning how this communication and marketing tool can be successfully used to represent a brand.

Although the importance of the cultural localization of content in both geographic and temporal terms is an aspect to which fashion brands are not indifferent (Noris, SanMiguel, and Cantoni 2020; Noris and Cantoni 2021), the present study shows how it is possible to balance the localization strategy of a fashion brand with a brand identity-conscious communication that is able to represent the brand's culture of origin at a global level. The choice of proposing in the three episodes the concept of "good Italianism" and the idea of "Made in Italy" using stereotypes about Italy derived from literature has allowed Caruso to make its communication choices consistent with its brand identity and

to use traits and characteristics typical of a certain people and culture, in this case Italy, to communicate on a global level with different audiences. In this direction, Caruso has chosen to apply a "reverse localization strategy", which refers to a process in which companies or specific stakeholders, instead of adapting the communication content of websites and social media based on the country they are approaching, share and utilize content that represents the country of origin and some of the national stereotypes associated with it.

This strategic choice, and the economic investment for each film of approximately 150,000 euros, brought interesting results in terms of the reached audience, as can be seen from the analytics. In fact, not only was the company able to reach its markets of reference in terms of age, country and gender, but it was also able to attract heterogeneous audiences who were intrigued by the film choices and the content and, in some cases, redirected through paid advertisements. Moreover, the three films, years after their publication, continue to show a certain resilience and seem to still be of interest to the public.

Caruso has chosen a unique communication strategy by aiming, for all its target audiences, to create a specific "imaginary" (Mora, Rocamora, and Volonté 2016) connected to the concept of Italianness, "good Italianism" and cultural stereotypes through the use of images, sounds, texts and other carefully selected elements.

In conclusion, this case shows that thanks to the intertwining of fashion films and digitalization, brands can create a strong image of their identities in the minds of their stakeholders. Caruso's case study confirms the assertion of Soloaga and Guerrero (2016) that regarding luxury brands, fashion films can be used to strengthen the brand image through the communication of their heritage, creating an aspiration and desire to belong; it also demonstrates that fashion films can aspire to become communicative models capable of crossing spatial and temporal barriers, thanks to diffusion on digital channels. Fashion movies can also break down cultural barriers with their messages that convey values belonging to their brand and culture; in this case, Caruso presented the Italian culture, playing on positive stereotypes without falling into banal or offensive representations. Moreover, this study, which presents both qualitative and quantitative analysis, provides a 360-degree perspective of the state of the art of fashion films in the digital era, although the fact that the analysis takes into account only Caruso could be considered a limitation.

Having argued the importance of a balance between localization and brand-conscious communication, we argue it would be important to further investigate the topic in other contexts and settings. Future research could also expand the sample and study how other companies belonging to the fashion world use fashion films and digital channels to communicate with their audience, ideally approaching the topic with a comparative strategy.

Notes

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrHh-8VfjYg.
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1DFw-_Z4v0.
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XujO3CZn1L0.
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MKb65ZGd2E.

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ORCID

Alice Noris http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1135-3795
Lorenzo Cantoni http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5644-6501

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