

Standard Celebrities. Evolution of Communication Strategy in the Ready-to-wear Fashion Industry

Giulia Caffaro

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Abstract

In the middle of the 1950s Italy was experiencing its “economic miracle”, and the significant diffusion of industrialisation helped the birth of what we could call “standard fashion”. The production revolution was gradually entering into the consumer culture. It was therefore necessary to build an image able to pilot the purchasing attitudes of the Italian population. The case of the Gruppo Finanziario Tessile (GFT) shows, through some well-known examples of advertising of the 1960s, how the cult of celebrities influenced the ready-made clothing market, structured in an efficient standard sizing system. Since products were mass market oriented, sales spokespersons’ campaigns had to speak to the mass culture and stimulate ever-new purchasing needs in the population. From the cult of celebrity, they moved to the culture of celebrities.

Keywords: Standard celebrities; Pop communication; GFT; Ready-to-wear fashion

Giulia Caffaro: Università di Bologna (Italia)

Corresponding Author: giulia.caffaro2@unibo.it

She graduated in Industrial Design from the Politecnico di Torino and obtained a master’s degree in Visual Arts from the University of Bologna with a multidisciplinary dissertation on the relationship between man and bicycle. The project won the “Dario Ciapetti” prize promoted by the National Association of Virtuous Municipalities. In 2016 she obtained a II level Master in Europrogettazione 2020®.

Introduction

In the 1950s a deep revolution characterised the design, production and marketing of clothing, which began to be used as customised accessories for the emerging social classes. The revolution began from an easy consumer product, knitwear, and from the beginning of the 1950s “there was a tremendous volume of exports, and Americans spent millions of dollars every year on Italian knit”.¹ The fashion industry started to gradually think about the convenience of the product, its quantity and instant availability rather than on its stylistic qualities, guiding light of the following decade. At first, ready-made clothes were innovative but standard.²

The gradual democratisation of fashion and the consequent growing interest of consumers in its items increasingly contributed to creating the concept of “popularity” both in the general public and industrial field. Clothes were used for showing off and therefore had to have distinctive and recognisable features.

The exhibition of products and its transformation into a *show* was the aim of all fashion designers working for Italian ready-to-wear clothing companies.

During this historical period, GFT presented itself by promising the highest wearability of its garments: in shops, just like at the tailor, everyone could find a suit fitting his size and conformation. GFT deserves the credit for creating interest among Americans for Italian ready-made fashion: in June 1958 an article in *Women's Wear Daily* said: “GFT will show for the first time a complete range of women's apparel. It is thought that this spring-summer collection will permit GFT to enter the American market”.³

The new standard clothing, resulting from an industrial system that had been revolutionised by ready-to-wear manufacturers, gradually made its way into Italian homes thanks to a massive media communication campaign that highlighted the appealing qualities of these products: quality, instant availability and low prices.

To boost the demand for ready-to-wear clothing, GFT needed messages, and later on faces and bodies, able to attract consumers with the latest – and democratic and distinctive – fashion products. Later on, the messaging became more emotional and less descriptive and demonstrated the strategic changes implemented by the company at that time, when new media offered innovative promotional solutions. It also demonstrated the choice of adapting its communication strategy to a growing market by, nevertheless, maintaining the characteristics of a mass industry.

It is important to point out that due to the sizing revolution and greater accessibility of clothing, the “Italian fashion system showed that it had a real and practical sense of life..., an increasingly simple and essential style”⁴ able to turn products into pieces of a mass production that were worth experiencing. “This did not mean the lowest levels of manufacture, but specific mass-produced middle and upper ranges of seasonally stylish ready-to-wear”.⁵

In order to follow this flow, designing an advertising campaign had to be very different from creating an *affiche*: in the first case the image of the product was repeated and enriched with narrative details depending on what media channel was used, while in the second case it acquired the iconic and static function of the brand.⁶

The pairing of famous faces with standard bodies and the constant aspiration to represent reality demonstrated a deep need for a narrative able to express the story of the brand and its expressive powers through advertising campaigns and billboards.

¹ White, 2000, p. 55.

² Cf. Paris, 2006, p. 358.

³ White, 2000, p. 58.

⁴ Paris, 2006, p. 374.

⁵ White, 2000, p. 61.

⁶ Cf. Testa, 1963.

By advertising, from billboards⁷ to TV spots, GFT tried to develop an iconography for ready-to-wear customers so that they could understand and appreciate testimonials, and reproduce the same *VIP* expressive features through simple garments.

The visual and verbal languages used in the 1950s differ considerably from those used in Catherine Spaak's campaigns in the 1970s, although they kept the same focus on the brand and its values as they evolved with the industry. For example, in the first Facis's billboards in 1954, the satirical and cartoonish images associated with mnemonic claims like "ready! ready!! ready!! Yes! Ready, like a Facis suit"⁸ were useful when describing the quality of an innovative product for the clothing market of that time. In contrast, the advertising campaigns of the 1970s focused on higher and universally valid values, such as on the spokesperson and stylistic features rather than on the suit.

The modern man's clothing

The new rhythms of the 1950s, made of business, news, commitments, practicality needs and chaotic shifts, lit up the new industrial system which, according to surveys and statistics, provided efficient clothing options for the new standard consumers.

The usefulness and productive quality of these garments were further accentuated by the imposition of a fixed price and by the wide availability of multiple sizes.⁹

In 1954 Facis, GFT's menswear brand, secured a long-term partnership with Armando Testa to encourage "novelty" consumerism.¹⁰ The result of this collaboration was the production of the most important communication campaigns of the following decades.

While poster illustrations were hand-drawn using flat fluorescent colours, the well-known Turin communications firm was investigating the languages of industrial communication and creating a new product culture, in this case for clothing. The first advertising poster for Facis was born, the famous man running with the tailor-made suit under his arm, accompanied by the claim: "Run to wear it, it's a Facis suit"¹¹ (fig.1).

Armando Testa commented his first work for GFT saying that "93% of the Italian population went to the tailor.... Therefore the feature to be highlighted in the poster was the idea of speed offered by ready-to-wear clothing, in addition to the need of a billboard...able to remain engraved in the consumer's mind".¹²

In fact, Facis's aim in the 1950s was to lead the general public towards ready-fashion and therefore meet the emerging needs of a large part of the population. From the beginning, the brand stood for "Facis – Ready-to-wear menswear"¹³ and no other attributes nor characteristics were necessary. Therefore celebrity, meant as the highest level of notoriety, had to reach a generic but heterogeneous consumer market in terms of structure, status and age. Celebrity was to enter the standard market and to attract the attention of the average Italian man.

Irony and fantasy were chosen as the main ingredients to arouse the public's approval and its engagement. Narratives, as seen on posters, were fascinating, amused the public, turning products into something familiar. The first advertising directives established by GFT focused on the speed and versatility of purchasing a ready-to-wear garment able to give the right level of self-confidence to any respectable man.

⁷ The original Testa's term is "cartellone operativo", *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸ The original claim is "pronto!pronto!!pronto!! Si! Pronto, come l'abito Facis", Studio Testa, *Annuncio pubblicitario*, size 9.7 x 32.5 cm, monochrome print, Editoriale Milano Nuova, 1954, in Archivio Storico del Progetto Grafico/Collezione Armando Testa, CAT-PURio21.

⁹ Cf. White, 2000, pp. 63-64.

¹⁰ Cf. Paris, 2006, p. 358.

¹¹ Cf. ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, mazzo 2744, fold. 1.

¹² Abruzzese, Golzio Aimone, 1989, p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1: Armando Testa, Facis advertising poster “Di corsa al indossarlo, è un abito Facis”, A/I 1955/1956, Torino, in ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, mazzo 2744, fasc. 1.

From a socio-cultural point of view, the protagonists of Facis’s advertisements were not yet celebrities, but men who embodied both vices and virtues of a clumsy yet ambitious Italy, engaged in the race to economic recovery. The billboards and commercials of the 1950s, created by Studio Testa,¹⁴ presented a series of caricatures of modern men with direct and mnemonic messages. When the clothing industry turned to mass production its communication strategy had to adapt and find practical solutions.

What did people expect from modern *affiches*? They had to be effective and compatible with all media channels and therefore had to be designed for repeatable campaigns.¹⁵

The Facis brand is a graphic abstraction of the clothing industrial transformation that went from tailoring to industrial manufacturing, and therefore contains the story of how craftsmanship turned into a mass industry. “The apparel production in this country [Italy], is the result of about a thousand industrial or semi-industrial companies and several thousand undefinable firms”,¹⁶ so, even behind a suit communication there was need for a well-reasoned multi-stage project, exactly as in the design, production, and distribution of ready-to-wear clothes.

The Facis brand and its posters told the story of a standard man who runs from the point of sale to his home carrying his ready-to-wear suit, as a simulacrum ready to be animated. This image contains the novelty of a mass-produced product and the irresistible charm of innovation.

“Repetition” and “variation” are the specific qualities involved in the seriality of these advertising campaigns. In the narrations, some traditionally conflicting values are woven together: order and disorder, speed and robustness, efficiency and leisure.¹⁷ The concept of seriality was introduced into the context of modern life with its more rapid pace and new needs requiring greater garment versatility.

The poster of the 1950s maintained an essential and rigorous style, albeit with bright colours. The image evolved from a man-mannequin to a “worldly man” placed in a sociological context representing the

¹⁴ Cf. Archivio Storico del Progetto Grafico/Collezione Armando Testa, CAT-PURio21.

¹⁵ Cf. Testa, 1963.

¹⁶ White, 2000, p. 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

“emancipating” function of clothes.¹⁸

The media channels ranged from press campaigns to the use of *affiches*, from radio announcements to posters, and “luminous” window showcases. The brand was reproduced on cigarettes packs, matchboxes, Totocalcio and Totip cards in order to penetrate the mass market.

At the end of the decade, in response to the ever-changing modern market’s demands, standardised clothing was combined with several models and faces in order to demonstrate how ready-to-wear fashion was increasingly suitable for every situation and character.

After the campaign “Facis has sizes for all”, developed by the agency Masius, the use of bill posting was interrupted. In 1961 GFT worked on a new television campaign strategy, the Carosello, that quickly replaced the traditional advertising media.

1959-1967: the standard celebrity cult

At the beginning of the 1960s the Italian consumer began to select the items offered by the market according to the social and professional prestige they granted. The concept of Style became a mass phenomenon as consumers developed more qualitative needs rather than quantitative ones. Consumers’ stylistic needs were seen as a condition of wellness, meant as one of those factors that improved the quality of life.¹⁹ All these needs were followed by the emerging necessity to increase “the image side of the industrial standardised production”²⁰ which meant building a common production strategy among the Italian fashion manufacturing companies.

The initiative to “program” fashion habits involved several clothing companies from all over the country, like Abital, Ballarini, Caesar, GFT, Lubiam, Manifattura Lane Marzotto, Max Mara, Pirelli, Rosier, Sealup, Tescosa and Valstar, which in October 1959 established the Clothing Industrial Fashion Committee, a “research body focused on research and forecasts of colours and fabrics”.²¹ The Committee, which probably started to work in 1961,²² worked to promote the coordination of the fashion market phases but also to set up an appropriate promotional strategy.

These signals “meant that the fashion industry was going to gain an enormous relevance in modern times, thanks to the creation of a ‘democratic elegance’”.²³ With the development of the market economy and the increase of the Italian living standards, the influence of *Haute Couture* on ready fashion became stronger.

In the early 1960s even low-priced items were influenced by the “fashion factor”, therefore the only chance to rationalise the production system was to accurately forecast the upcoming seasons’ fashion trends.²⁴

As in high fashion, the aesthetic canons of ready-to-wear fashion defined concepts such as elegance, manhood and femininity. The clothing industry moved quickly from communicating through words to “writing with images”, i.e., by representing realities in which the average consumer could easily identify itself.

Thus, in the years when Facis was the largest Italian men clothing company, the promotional campaigns, as well as GFT’s identity, reached the lower social classes, like the new middle and working classes, by using popular celebrities who were easily recognisable.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁹ For more on the concept of “well-being” Cf. Baroncini, 2013.

²⁰ Paris, 2006, p. 360.

²¹ Paris, 2005, p. 31 (note 66).

²² According to Fiorentini Capitani the Committee activated services only in 1961. Cf. Fiorentini Capitani, 1991, p. 18 (note 57).

²³ Paris, 2005, p. 33.

²⁴ Paris, 2006, p. 362-362.

With the beginning of the 1960s the mass consumerism of clothing, due to the urgent need of goods able to enhance one's quality of life and perception of wealth, was transformed into an increasingly dynamic consumerism of "styles"²⁵ and values. Clothes could make consumers maintain the same social status or achieve a higher one.

In those years the photographic culture suppressed all kind of illustration by turning towards realism. The setting, the product and the testimonial's characterisations became essential for every new Facis communication campaign. The main problem was to match text and image,²⁶ thus promoting the settlement of a new cult of celebrities. Actors were chosen according to their body structure, social role, and personal bearing, guaranteeing the diversification sought by many different consumers. Celebrities had to represent different social classes, professions and roles but most importantly they had to convey a message: the Facis suit could satisfy every size and every stylistic need, and therefore fit the physical body as well as the social status.

In the 1960s the advertising strategy aimed at anticipating the ordinary motivation behind purchasing by inducing consumers to develop a strong feeling of belonging. In fact, in the Facis Carousel ads from 1961 to 1966, GFT began to use testimonials, such as famous personalities from the arts, journalism and sport, with different "measurements" and different lifestyles, but all equally satisfied with their standardised clothes. These television shorts reproduced common situations, all suitable for the modern man, although very different from a tailor's customer in his personal needs and lifestyle.

GFT felt the need to associate standard sizing with added brand value, and therefore marked the passage from merely considering the industry's product to considering its powerful social and cultural impact. Standard, ready-to-wear, high quality, durable and affordable suits were gradually associated with well-known faces that made them their self-expression.

Until then, celebrities did not appear on ready fashion billboards, which used a neorealist language with graphic images. From the mid-1960s the testimonials of seasonal campaigns became famous faces able to create evocative images and insert their standard body, dressed in standard clothing, in a prestigious but real and verifiable context.

From autumn 1961 onwards, television campaigns had Giulio Bosetti as a testimonial. The common message for all the TV carousel ads was "A confident gesture, a natural elegance". The most famous episode was *Il party* in the series *Una naturale eleganza*²⁷ in which the Italian actor, playwright and theatrical director played the main character. The narrative sequence showed Bosetti as a successful man who elegantly wears Facis clothes as the beautiful Alida Chelli falls in love with him. The voice-over narrator spoke to the protagonist as to himself and ended with a message disclosing the secret of a man's charm: "Facis is the brand of male elegance. This brand means high-quality fabrics, high-line models, accurate manufacturing".²⁸

The elegant woman wears Cori. The confident man wears Facis

It is important to emphasise that the clothing revolution in 1961 occurred when the Italian Industrial Association of Clothing published the new women's sizing system. For this reason and from that moment on GFT's womenswear brand became an exemplary case of harmony between fashion and communication.

In those years the Cori product line was meant for a wide range of women and showed great flexibility, although the female market remained less relevant than the male one.

GFT celebrated the new "ready fashion" with a national press campaign portraying the popular faces found on the newly born television: women and "90-60-90" divas like Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, Virna

²⁵ Paris, 2006, p. 358.

²⁶ Cf. Abruzzese, Golzio Aimone, 1989.

²⁷ Emmer, 1961.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Voiceover translation.

Lisi, and Eleonora Rossi Drago, who were meant to represent the masses' expressive values, and reach all those women who were still "uncontaminated" by stylistic influences.²⁹ The appearance of well-known celebrities in the popular imagination became GFT's core business philosophy: the communication of distinctive models, embodied by ordinary women, who elevated their social status through their attitude, charm, elegance, and confidence. Every local newspaper tried to keep the consumer's attention on the living images of the new "standard body".

In 1961, the *Carlino Sera* of Bologna started investigating the local women's most common measurements, easily comparable to the ones belonging to famous actresses. The average Italian woman was 162 cm tall, with 94 cm chest and 100 cm hips. Gina Lollobrigida was as tall as the average women but had a 140 cm chest and 95 cm hips.³⁰

It is quite curious that while GFT was promoting the new women's size system, it started a semiotic operation that would later prevail throughout all the company's communication campaigns.

The standard sizing system, the alphanumerical result of complex calculations and accurate statistics, was simply translated into the image of a "normalised" body. The faces of these bodies were famous women instead of simple models with the most common and widespread measurements. These celebrities were icons of elegance, and were, therefore, promoting a specific taste in clothing that would have changed the market's dynamics forever. Consumers began to associate the quality of fabrics with the concept of "elegance", which shifted the motivation for purchasing almost more than the price.

Because of this concept, industries would favour a vertical imposition of taste parameters, suggesting the diffusion of certain variables within the market. The promotional strategies implemented by GFT aimed at underlining the connection between a garment and a presumed personality. What does it mean to be elegant? Whose wardrobe will inspire by own choices?

Many clothing companies together with the National Apparel Manufacturing Association³¹ became part of this strategic landscape, including Cori which began to focus on the concept of "elegance" for ready fashion.

In 1962 the National Apparel Manufacturing Association, headed by GFT, founded the Cori-Amica referendum contest "The most elegant woman in Italy"³² whose aim was to define the standard of Italian elegance on an annual basis and therefore what should lead the market. This repeatable task could be considered as one of the activities to be carried out within a communication project.

Sophia Loren won the first contest. She was the model Italian women could aspire to. So in 1962 the actress became the spokeswoman of Cori-Biki, the womenswear brand by Elvira Leonardi Bouyeure, GFT's first joint venture with a fashion designer.³³

The use of celebrities as spokesmodels and the collaboration with well-known fashion designers constituted a first attempt at mixing mass production and high fashion. The highest brand value was achieved when both of these components were included within a product.

Biki's hands and creativity alone could guarantee the quality of a fashion collection, but if the most elegant woman in Italy had worn it, the marketing operation would acquire a greater value. GFT was thus able to reach a wider target, people that did not attend the Milanese fashion gatherings.

The story of the Cori-Biki venture shows the industry's insatiable desire to standardise clothing's expressive value, and therefore schematise and optimise the mass production of garments.

²⁹ Cf. Paris, 2006, p. 382.

³⁰ *Carlino Sera*, 11 September 1961.

³¹ Cf. Paris, 2005.

³² "The Most Elegant Woman in Italy" contest was inaugurated in 1961 in collaboration with *Il Giorno* and continued from 1962 to 1966 together with *Amica*.

³³ Cf. White, 2000, p. 69.

An archival photo³⁴ shows the two women, one creator of social imagery and the other creator of fashion design, supporting a small butterfly trophy: the Cori-Amica competition prize as well as the company's logo. Sofia Loren's strong presence represented the famous brand claim: "Elegance on a butterfly's wings" (fig.2).



Fig. 2: The designer Biki and Sophia Loren, winner of the Cori-Amica "Prima donna elegante d'Italia" prize, photography, 1962, in ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, mazzo 2882, fasc. 1.

It is important to stress the fact that after the war, Italian women like Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida and Claudia Cardinale were the perfect incarnation of the femininity of that period, and therefore women's icons for their earthly and traditional facets. They represented the national recovery, its anthropological and territorial identity, especially in the eyes of international researchers.

As Stephen Gundle stated: "The Italian stars of that era appeared as natural and spontaneous, not as the manufactured products of the studios. They came over as passionate, a little wild and quite traditional".³⁵

The Cori advertising campaigns, developed by the Seller agency, used press campaigns, radio announcements, billboards, direct and combined advertising, public relations and national events as well as television shows.

The protagonist of the first of these television shows in autumn 1964 was Eleonora Rossi Drago.³⁶ The series of Carousel ads made for these seasons focused on "the Lady of the Italian cinema", able to increase its prestige and make a lasting impression on the viewers, as well as to increase the fame of the clothing

³⁴ ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, bundle 2882, fold.1.

³⁵ Cf. Gundle, 2007, p. XVI.

³⁶ Majano, 1967.

brand. A GFT press release to dealers proudly stated: "...For this year, Cori will be the only company in the female clothing industry present in the Carousel".³⁷

Although Cori was the most innovative company at that time, the brand's communication and the seasonal production lines were in agreement with the other major Italian clothing producers, in order to avoid the risk of an excessive stylistic diversification. This was the reason why the periodical *Amica* signed an agreement with GFT, Hettemarks, Marzotto, Max Mara and Ruggeri for the promotion of the "Amica wardrobe" section, where seasonal advertising of the major manufacturing companies could unify and set the current styles.³⁸

The partnership between GFT and Eleonora Rossi Drago continued until 1967 when the actress won the Cori-Amica "The most elegant woman in Italy" contest-referendum.

Events like these were places where fashion celebrities and their most faithful audience could meet, ready to cross the country and attend the award ceremony. All the chosen icons were famous women who embodied GFT's aesthetic ideals and allowed consumers to acquire awareness and confidence when dressing and, therefore, to distinguish themselves.

Briefly, the contest elected a standard celebrity to become the spokesperson for the following season. That is, dominant models were selected by the ready fashion industry that would identify the celebrity able to lead the market and build the whole stylistic line accordingly to her body. For all intents and purposes, it was a marketing operation that highlighted the common Italian industries' need³⁹ to define a standard communication and market management strategy.

The same operation of choosing values and spokespersons was also carried out for the menswear brand Facis: while the elegant women were Sophia Loren, Virna Lisi, Eleonora Rossi Drago, the self-confident men at their side were Giulio Bosetti, Alberto Lupo and Gabriele Ferzetti.

GFT began to define the standard consumer as a man seeking confidence in the wide range of Facis products. The message reversed the order of the addends, and the result changed completely. They still talked about the models' standard production and low prices, but first and foremost they talked about what those clothes were able to give to consumers in aesthetic and social terms. The concept of "confidence" came before the economic "convenience".

For example, in 1965 self-confidence was embodied by Gabriele Ferzetti, an indistinct modern man, without a known name nor job. In the *Ferrovìa* episode of the series *Un uomo sicuro*, the protagonist wore a suit that made him proud and efficient, a concept underlined by the voice-over narrator at the Carousel ad's end: "We don't know who the man is, we only know he's a self-confident man. His gestures, his actions, his clothes are confident. His confidence is Facis".⁴⁰

From 1967 the "confident man" was Alberto Lupo, who starred in many television scripts including the episode in which he was an architect, always confident in every professional and personal decision he needed to make.⁴¹ A strong-minded man that knew that a Facis suit was always true to his inner substance (fig.3).

Depotment and confidence turned into male elegance and in those years "always being in order and elegant had become 'a duty and a social commitment' for many different consumers".⁴² So the industrial clothing system, once again shaken by the new consumers' needs, had to reinforce men and women's standards of elegance for the ready-fashion because it differed from high fashion, although still inspired by it.

³⁷ GFT issue to retailers, 1966.

³⁸ Paris, 2006, p. 354, note 138.

³⁹ Cf. Paris, 2006, p. 361-364.

⁴⁰ Moretti, 1965.

⁴¹ Molinari, 1967.

⁴² Paris, 2006, p. 360.



Fig. 3: Vito Molinari, Architetto, Serie: Un uomo sicuro, 1967, con Alberto Lupo, in Archivio Nazionale Cinema d'Impresa, Fondo GFT, Original films preserved into the Archivio di Stato di Torino; cf. ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, mazzo 3011 (digital storage project pending).

It is noteworthy to consider that, unlike the previous decade, the 1960s were characterised by a different kind of consumerism, meant as “distinction, social competition through consumption, establishment of status expenses”⁴³ that caused some complications for the ready-to-wear fashion industry. Low prices, good quality fabrics and fast production were suddenly not enough to ensure the same sales volumes as in previous years. Until then pop stars had been used to convey the values of pop products, while at the end of the 1960s, the use of famous *spokespeople* was necessary for sales campaigns. GFT focused on the expressive features of the characters rather than on their television talents; it bet on the social values of the product rather than on the economic and utilitarian ones. Therefore it moved from the Century of Fashion to the Open Fashion System,⁴⁴ made of trends able to build the consumer’s identity.

1968: the new communication strategy

In order to anticipate market trends, it had to deal with matters that concerned not only the production department but the entire company. The rapid change in the marketplace meant that “fashion was now a universal matter” and that the promotional strategies were destined to face many difficulties. At that time the “influencer” role was taking shape: celebrities had become the ones who had the power to influence buying decisions.⁴⁵ In 1968 some companies chose to connect their image to some great designers’ fame, as the famous knitwear company Callaghan signing with Walter Albini,⁴⁶ while others chose to focus on celebrities during the selling phase so to act on the finished product.

GFT chose both strategies, even though in 1968 Cori was definitely experiencing “the year of the – communication – strategy”.⁴⁷ The company chose the campaign “This woman wears Cori” to focus on specific consumers seeking elegance, quality, and class. That women’s world was recreated in the photographic and television environments where celebrities acted, wearing only Cori garments.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁴⁴ Lipovetsky, 1991.

⁴⁵ Paris, 2006, p. 374–377.

⁴⁶ Cf. Merlo, 2003, p. 93.

⁴⁷ Cori billboard “Questa donna veste Cori”, 1968.

The 1968 Spring communication campaign combined a prestigious product with a prestigious person and broadcast a Carousel ad starring Germaine Lefebvre, best known as Capucine. The French actress and model embodied all the attributes of a classy woman with the added European charm.

One must consider that in the 1960s and 1970s the celebrities involved, as well as stylists or fashion designers, were image makers: the brand produced images for selling them afterward. At that point, GFT decided to innovate the communication strategy in order to leverage the testimonials' reputation and create strong brand images.

Moving towards a new decade meant transforming the ideal women and transforming beauty – purely Italian – into an European model full of power and expressive freedom. “During the 1970s, Italian feminism staked claims to liberation, to female freedom of expression and to a different perception of the body”.⁴⁸

GFT tried to reply to this market change by adopting a new communication strategy based on the values associated with the brand. The body wearing Cori was animated by new characteristics conferred by the testimonial's personality. First, Capucine was selected for the new television series *Parigi è sempre Parigi*, directed by Luciano Emmer. In the episode, “La vita dei gioiellieri”⁴⁹ the famous actress visited the most famous jeweller in Paris, Cartier, a museum of dreams for any woman. “Every queen, every cinema celebrity has entered in this museum of dreams at least once in their lives”, says the protagonist. The transfer of fame was two-fold: on the one hand a famous jewellery brand, on the other a cinema celebrity, both vouching for a line of clothing. The voice continued: “This is Capucine, one of the most elegant women today. Do we want to discover the secret of this pure and refined elegance?”.⁵⁰

Many national press ads entitled “This woman wears Cori” followed her portrait, almost to emphasise the causal connection between the model's fame and the clothing she had chosen (fig.4).

The image of Capucine wearing Cori garments was published in many magazines like *Grazia*, *Amica*, *Anabella*, *Novella 2000*, *Vogue Italia*, *Donna*, *Oggi* and the message “Cori, elegance on the wings of a butterfly” travelled alongside.

In the 1970s a new revolution in the clothing industry arose, probably driven by the gradual increase of fashion identity. What was the fashion market like in those years?

During the years of economic and political crisis, full of controversy and expressive needs, the consumer became both aware and savvy. Consequently, GFT emphasised individual choices while the brand's collections focused on the freedom that one had in expressing oneself through garments.

Thanks to the media success generated by the combination of celebrities like Capucine and ready-to-wear-fashion, in 1971 the same operation was replicated through the use of another pop icon.

This time, GFT chose Catherine Spaak for various Carousel ads. In the episode, “Fontane”⁵¹ the famous actress was walking through the streets of Paris, alone, while the narration was focusing on the reasons why she should always wear Cori. Paris was shown as it was back then, with different recognisable city monuments in the background and some elements linked to the years 2000.

The importance of the female subject was underlined “by the identification process that seems to arise in the consumers when seeing the model – actress – and the world around her”.⁵²

Therefore Catherine Spaak, the well-known cinema celebrity, allowed viewers to imagine themselves – thanks to her talent and the dresses she wore – as that modern woman surrounded by the beauties of Paris. The location seemed to be perfect for emphasising Cori's products, emotionally loaded with the empathy Catherine Spaak had created. The actress moved in a city representing the centre of fashion but, because

⁴⁸ Gundle, 2007, p. 193.

⁴⁹ Emmer, 1969.

⁵⁰ Voiceover transcript.

⁵¹ Emmer, 1971.

⁵² Cf. LCM Graman, 1971, p. 9.



Fig. 4: Capucine, Cori advertising support “Questa donna veste Cori” - P/E 1969, in ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, mazzo 2807, fasc. 3.

of a temporal *debrayage*, captured fragments of it in the future, as well as of a modern woman able to anticipate clothing trends. The Cori dress was therefore both elegant and innovative, and by wearing it any woman would also acquire Catherine Spaak's personality. With this example, it was clear that the communication of values had overcome product communication, which nowadays is presumed or simply left to catalogues and magazines, and that GFT had achieved the "imitation effect".⁵³

The company was therefore able to trigger purchasing wishes through the use of famous models, and therefore cope with the market's need for change by continuously updating the collection. As for Capucine, in 1971 many newspaper and periodicals' ads were branded "Even Catherine Spaak wears Cori".

The entire campaign of that year told the story of an elegant woman, a celebrity having the characteristics of a wealthy life yet easily linked to many other women's lives. Everything around Catherine caught the observer's attention, welcoming it into an easily accessible world, thus making her want to wear that dress and become famous (fig.5).

GFT chose Catherine Spaak as a Cori spokesmodel because her celebrity worked when connecting the spectacular and domestic imaginary, and therefore made women appreciate ready-clothes or democratise high fashion with its founding paradigms. Thus, the civilising and revealing function of Cori's female advertising emerged on a fashion industry that reflected the ongoing social revolution. The young actress perfectly represented the ideals of that period's feminine beauty and elegance. A young, sporty, casual woman, who made her youth her strength in the fight against the oppressive system of values imposed by the previous fashion trends. Women of the 1970s fought for the legitimacy of an expressive fashion system.

The prevalence of lifestyles on social classes was accentuated with the new cult of youth.⁵⁴ Women who followed the trends were young, innovative women who wanted to abandon convention in order to express themselves through clothing.⁵⁵

The new collection of GFT was inspired by the golden age of Monroe but revisited in a very modern way.⁵⁶ In 1973 Catherine Spaak arrived in Turin to attend a prêt-à-porter preview show. "With long blond hair on her shoulders and an amused look, Mrs. Dorelli does not give up the pure and simple college girl's look"⁵⁷ and her work with Cori dresses suggested that GFT wanted her to represent a business philosophy rather than a product line. At that time Catherine Spaak was 28 years old and was a celebrity, not just a fashion model.

Clothing had become an expressive and interactive language, a use and commodity item, a symbolic form of protection or exposure, an instrument of validation, social distinction or cultural expression,⁵⁸ therefore the dress was necessarily attached to the personality of she who chose it and experienced it. Ready-to-wear fashion identified the young person as the "unconscious and unwitting" prophet who could wonderfully dress because he or she rejected the established society. Because of this, in those years GFT carried out an anthropometric survey to define young people's bodies, because "this class of consumers is the one that will cut ties with tailor-made clothes".⁵⁹

This communication episode about one of the largest companies in the Italian clothing industry highlighted the growing importance of women and new generations in driving the market's attitude.

⁵³ Segre Reinach, 2011, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Segre Reinach, 2011, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Paris, 2006, p. 377, note 191.

⁵⁶ Cf. Rossetti, 1973.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Cf. Caratozzolo, 2017.

⁵⁹ Paris, 2006, p. 386.



Fig. 5: Catherine Spaak, Cori advertising support A/I 1971, in ASTo, Corte, Archivio Gruppo Finanziario Tessile, mazzo 2807, fasc. 7.

Conclusions

The selection of the above-mentioned cases is a way of reading GFT's advertising identity, by delving into the messages that were chosen for a large number of campaigns from the 1950s to the 1970s.

As for the business perspective, it is important to remember that the Group's research of the product image, and of the *corporate* image afterward, has always been that of emphasising the specificity of clothing, meant as goods that are always closer to consumer behaviours.

Such a need was very clear at the beginning of mass production in the early 1950s, when clothing was not yet part of the Italian habit. It was therefore necessary to stimulate the birth of a standard market⁶⁰ and to cultivate it.

The examples above reveal how decisive the contribution of celebrities was in accelerating the collective shift in mindset and how it pushed consumers to a new form of consumption. The Facis and Cori collections became commonplace in the 1960s only after a great effort in terms of advertising imagery aimed at catching the consumers' attention by using a language that could translate the concurrent industrial innovation into common values.

By the end of the 1960s ready-to-wear communication came to the fore and revealed its social and expressive functions. Through some examples we understand how different it was from the "service advertising" of the 1950s, approaching more and more exciting and allusive content. The new communication system, characterised by the use of celebrities as guarantors of products, contributed to describing multidisciplinary scenarios sometimes almost overlooking the product advertised.

The evolution of the Facis brand expressed "sales strategies but also cultural content, individual experiences and collective moments. It illustrates that not only do 'market dynamics' – size, price, demand and offer – do matter, but also individual creativity and imagination".⁶¹

Throughout the 1970s the ready-to-wear fashion had to avoid the desire to exploit an established industrial system and direct the massive demand for products worn by influential people.⁶² The evolutionary process analysed culminated at the end of the decade when different social hemispheres come into play also involving GFT's communication strategy. The standardised clothing system blended with other cultural fields, such as design, architecture and contemporary art, transforming the industry into an image producer and its products into fashion "items",⁶³ like brand value cases.

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⁶⁰ Cf. Abruzzese, Golzio Aimone, 1989.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶² Paris, 2006, p. 374.

⁶³ Cf. *Items: Is Fashion Modern?*, by MoMA, New York, 27 September 2017–28 January 2018.

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