



LINK idee per la tv



The Fever for Series: TV revamps Soap Opera Magazines

How wonderful are these times for people fond of Media. The scenario keeps changing. A change in contradiction with years and years of standstill that had almost convinced us that the rules of entertainment would never change.

So here we are with TV production, specifically TV series, becoming the jewel of the crown.

TV production for many years approached the broadcasting system on tiptoe, feeling bad for not being same quality of cinema. Now things are moving the other way round.

Today in fact, the priority of broadcasters is to secure a pipeline of serial content for their schedule. And in this case there's no difference if the service provided is traditional or non-linear.



So where does this new appeal for serial content, specifically TV series, come from? Let's try answering considering different perspectives.

The appointment to view.

The idea of extending emotions on many episodes is old. Starting from the 'feuilletons', the novels published in episodes on dailies and magazines, the soap opera magazines up to TV soap operas and novelas.

Many of us spent years with a TV appointment (many times kept secret!), with Beautiful, Capitol or Ciranda de Pedra.

When a broadcaster succeeds in creating such a tight bond with its audience it's a double success. First success is the ratings generated and second is the flywheel that can be activated. In fact that appointment to view is a promotional magic moment to readdress viewers to other parts of the programming schedule, possibly generating a virtuous circle. When promotion is interesting it transforms into information and service (at the same time when promotion is irrelevant it transforms in boring advertising!).

For a very long period, TV series have been considered a 'minor' genre, not too chic. Masterpieces can only be unique, so a series, by definition, cannot be that good...

In the past also, the viewers gathered by TV series were the less qualified from an intellectual and cultural perspective (but still very important from advertisers' standpoint).

But this was all facade: ratings have always been very high. The difference has always been that the less chic audience would admit watching these contents while the so-called 'intellectuals' would publicly deny and then watch in private.

The change. Now, thanks to TV Series, 'Coming-Out' is possible.

You can publicly declare your passion for these serial appointments to view, without fearing being perceived as someone with lower class taste.

Great scriptwriting, enormous budgets, first class cast, airing on top channels and operators, in prime time. All of this changed the perception



of this content: from B-content compared to movies to ‘augmented cinema’.

The Business Plan. The great appeal of serial content isn’t limited to audience only, There are some specs of this content that make it very valuable also for production companies, distribution companies and broadcasters.

First, any kind of serial productions allows resources **optimization**. The Studios, used since ever to huge investments for producing single blockbusters, find very appealing to exploit the same resources and amortize the costs on 12 or 24 hours instead of 2. Moreover, if the series succeeds, producing the following seasons amplifies again this efficiency mechanism.

With the format now considered A-Quality also agreements with talents are easier. Popularity is nowadays created and maintained on TV rather than on the movies. Artists like the idea that, through serial content, they are going to be present on a channel for many times, thanks to different episodes, repeats and new seasons. A good way to become familiar and stay in touch with the fans communities.

In this virtuous cycle, Production companies and talents recognize how much they need each other. So the once disdained format can today rely on support of any kind of talent. Even the fee of those Stars is better amortized on hours and hours of content.

TV Series, thanks to their ability to give personality to a Network’s schedule, because of their airing in many valuable time slots (including repeats and all the promotional and marketing support), are more and more used as **Branding** elements.

We’ve recently seen how powerfully TV Series have been used as tools to describe a new commercial offer, underlining reliability and strength of newcomers on the market. Check for instance Netflix’ landing strategy on new markets. They produce transversal contents like ‘House of Cards’ or ‘Narcos’ to be used worldwide, as well as local content (i.e. Suburra in



Italy or Marseille in France), so to become also locally relevant, thus creating stuff which is, at same time a programming, PR and Marketing tool.

Sky Italia too confirmed it's authority as a real entertainment studio (and not just a content aggregator), through its successful productions. Talent shows like X-Factor and Masterchef and above all series like Gomorrah and Young Pope stated the new deal. And demonstrated as well that also in Italy you can produce high quality content able to be distributed abroad in the most competitive markets.

No surprise that big players of the entertainment arena secure the **pipeline** for new projects by acquiring independent production companies that have been noticed for creativity and innovation. Its some years now that NBCUniversal acquired Carnival Films (the guys of Downton Abbey). Later we've seen other important acquisitions like Eyeworks International by Warner Bors, All3Media by Liberty Global and Discovery, as well as Endemol acquired by 21st Century Fox, Miramax by beIn Media, the Israeli Abot Hameiri by Freemantle and recently Starz by Lionsgate.

The big Studios secure in this way fresh ideas and organizations able to work with lower costs, thus allowing content experimentation. In the great Studios organizations in fact you start feeling a lot of bureaucracy, some lack of risk appetite for fear of failure, high cost of personnel and 'institutional' suppliers.

Moreover, the US Studios acquire in this way production units in tune with international needs and tastes. This opens them up to local productions for markets that US companies would never have considered otherwise.

The Target: TV series nowadays are appealing to the 'upper class viewers' as well as young targets. Through the genre of the production it becomes easy to aim very well the commercials on the desired eyeballs. This is the reason why advertisers and media buyers became so fond of Series. And if advertisers are happy also broadcasters are.

New borders of **product placement** activate different budgets. A car, a watch, a laptop in the hands of the main character of the series ensures minutes and minutes of a very qualified presence of those brands. Simply



irresistible for advertisers.

The other side of the coin. When you deal with big advantages there's always big risk attached. You need to make very wise choices: if the chosen series is wrong for your network you find yourself loaded with hours and hours of compromised schedule and limited possibilities of repeats. Often, when the content distributor is a big player, he may impose a 'Life of Series' contract. This means that the broadcaster has an obligation to buy the series for all the years it gets produced. Which is a very good thing if the content works well for the network: the price is set and frozen and avoids fighting with competitors every year. But if the series doesn't work for you this is a disaster. Maybe they keep producing it in the US because it works over there and you have to buy it in your market every year knowing it will be a failure... So you see your budget and your schedule locked and blocked for years. No good.

Selecting the right content for your network is essential. You need talent, knowledge and luck.

Bulimia. All good then with TV series as new kings of broadcaster's content? Not really, because now there is really too much availability of this content.

In recent years, the desire of such a content brought the result of more than doubling the number of TV series produced in less than 10 years. In 2015 more than 400 TV series have been produced!

There aren't enough viewers to watch them, networks to air them and above all there isn't enough marketing and advertising to give them some kind of awareness.

Let's assume that 5% of these 400 series 'must see' ones, this means 20 series of, let's assume 12 episodes. Which viewer has the time to watch 240 hours of content, even considering all the non-linear possibilities? And what about the remaining 95%? Who is going to watch that?

Quantity brings content fragmentation on the networks and fragmentation is the worst enemy to 'event programming'. Nowadays the event, more than quality, fosters the success of TV content.

As a matter of fact research confirms that TV series fans are starting to lie. They pretend having watched series they couldn't follow, just to seem



cool. Inside them however, there's frustration for not being able to be fully up to date. What a paradox!

So many series, of very high quality, too similar.

In the excitement of producing and in the desire of avoiding mistakes the industry often keeps following routes believed 'safe'.

It's the phenomenon of 'clone series'. Let's think to how many medical series we've seen, like Nurse Jackie, that tried (without success) to become the new 'Dr. House'. As well as the remakes in the US of series already produced in Israel or in the UK because the story is interesting but US public needs to deal with more 'familiar' faces and codes. So we end up finding, at the same time the same stories which only differ for the nation of production (i.e. Strike Back, Homeland, Being Human, ...). This generates additional watering and confusion.

A special mention is due to the **algorithm**.

Many productions are in fact inspired by our behaviors while watching TV. More and more sophisticated algorithms gather and melt our preferences, shake them with those of people similar to us in other markets and finally generate a briefing for the authors of next generation content.

This system bears within the risk of killing creativity as you keep thinking within the existing, looking for what has already been appreciated by viewers. Which doesn't mean that viewers wouldn't appreciate something truly different. As a matter of fact the system pushes towards homologation and repetition of clones with a minimal amount of change.

Notwithstanding the above today's scenario is a paradise for viewers as, with such a huge offer, it is very unlikely they don't find what suits them. But the perspective changes from the point of view of Production Companies, broadcasters and advertisers: they risk in fact not to reach the eyeball number that was foreseen in the respective business plans.

What Next?

Historically the market reacts to extreme industrialization with high quality craftsmanship. Aside new big budgets, strong cast, super strong



productions we should expect 'other stories' dedicated to appeal niche targets. The idea is to keep appeal for advertisers also with lower numbers selling them the homogeneity of the viewers.

Whatever kind of the above, they all need strong communication. In a wide sea of offer the viewers need help to navigate and find the right thing for them.

Quality, creativity, digital assets of the promotional communication must become more and more part of the production process (and its costs). Otherwise there's the risk of producing masterpieces unknown to the majority of viewers.