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The Migration of Symbols. Religion and Italian Advertising, 1969-2013

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The Migration of Symbols

Religion and Italian Advertising, 1969-2013

by Carlo Nardella

The use of religious symbols in commercial advertisements has become an important area of research in the past few years. Several studies have explored the complex issues at the basis of this phenomenon, such as the accessibility and management of a system of symbolic goods that has acquired particular meaning and value in society, the secularization of religion, and the supposed influence of consumer culture on other cultural spheres.

While increasing attention has been paid to the nature of portrayals of religious symbols in advertising, little research has determined the frequency of these portrayals. Moreover, only few studies have analyzed systematically whether and to what extent the number of advertisements containing religious symbols has varied over the years.

The purpose of this article is to report the results of a content analysis conducted on a sample of advertisements appearing in popular Italian magazines between 1969 and 2013. Analyzing the Italian context is of particular interest because Catholicism still represents a key element of the Italian social structures. The research questions examined in the present study are as follows: to what extent have religious symbols occurred in Italian advertising over the last forty years? To what extent and in which ways has advertising used different types of religious symbols? What are the values evident in advertisements containing religion?

The Portrayal of Religion in Advertising: A Review of the Literature

Most of the quantitative studies that focus on the use of religion in advertising has been conducted in the United States.[1]

In 1996, Maguire and Weatherby [1998] analyzed the content of a random sample of commercials collected from eight U.S. television networks. The conclusion was that 16 out of 797 commercials sampled, or 2%, had religious or spiritualistic content. Almost ten years later, Weatherby and Pugh [2008] updated this study by examining the content of a sample of American television commercials collected with the same methodology that Maguire and Weatherby adopted. The most important finding of this study was that out of 1,499 commercials examined, 51 (3.4%) incorporated some form of religious symbolism – an interesting finding according to Weatherby and Pugh because it represented a 170% increase over the original 1998 study.

Another study on the presence of religion in American advertising was conducted by Moore [2005]. Of the 4,533 advertisements sampled from a selection of U.S. general interest and news magazines, 51 contained some form of religious images in them (1.13%). This figure was slightly lower than the figure that Maguire and Weatherby calculated; it must be noted, however, that the selection criteria that Moore established to collect his sample did not consider the textual component of the ads.

Empirical data on religion and advertising were also collected by Pardun [2000] in a study conducted on a sample of 826 magazine ads and 649 television commercials. The combined sample of 1,475 ads yielded 5.6% that contained religious references. In addition, the analysis revealed that religion was more common in television commercials (11,4%) than in magazine advertisements (3%).

Apart from the United States, the presence of religious symbols in mainstream media advertising has been quantified only in a few other cultural contexts. By analyzing a sample of 134 advertisements collected from a selection of Indian magazines, published both in English and Tamil languages, Fairfield and Johnson [2004] found that 11 ads (8%) contained religious themes, most of which were linked to Hinduism. The findings of the study by Buschmann [2006] revealed that the ads referring to religion collected from a widely read German magazine (i.e., *Der Spiegel*) increased from 55 in 1995 to 196 in 1999. Although Buschmann did not report the size of the sample, it is worth noting that the total number of ads containing religion gathered over a five-year period was very high (517).

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[1] Table 1 gives characteristics of the samples discussed in this paragraph.

TAB. 1. *Quantitative Content Analyses of Advertisements Containing Religious Symbols*

Author(s)	Context studied	Sample size	Period of sample	Source of sample
Maguire and Weatherby [1998]	U.S.	797 television commercials	January February 1996	5 one-hour slots per day, from 7:00 A.M. to midnight, for 8 days on 8 U.S. television networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, CNN, ESPN, FAM, MTV)
Pardun [2000]	U.S.	649 television commercials and 826 magazine ads	February 2000	One week of prime time on NBC and the February issues of 13 top-revenue magazines
Fairfield and Johnson [2004]	India	134 magazine ads	1997-1998	50 randomly selected magazine issues collected from rural and urban outlets in southern India
Moore [2005]	U.S.	4,533 magazine ads	2003	Every 2003 edition of Newsweek, Time and U.S. News and World Report
Buschmann [2006]	Germany	Unreported	1995-1999	Every issue of Der Spiegel from January 1995 to December 1999
Weatherby and Pugh [2008]	U.S.	1,499 television commercials	July 2005	5 one-hour slots per day, from 7:00 A.M. to midnight, for 8 days on 8 U.S. television networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, CNN, ESPN, FAM, MTV).

Many studies have provided qualitative evidence for the presence of religion in advertising. Most of these studies are focused on European countries. Potel [1981] showed that from 1966 to 1980 French advertising exploited Catholic imagery by representing rural priests, gourmet religious men, bell towers, patron saints and the story of Adam and Eve. About thirty years later, Cottin and Walbaum [1997] and Freyssinet-Dominjon [2000] identified the presence of other types of religious symbols in French advertisements, such as the concept of temptation, images of angels and devils, and the cross. Lugrin and Molla's [2008] more recent findings showed that such Christian imagery has not disappeared from French contemporary advertisements. In addition, they emphasized the increasing visibility of ads containing Buddhist motifs as well as references to spirituality.

In conclusion of his investigation of the use of religion in Italian advertising, Nardella [2012] reported that Christian symbolism was widely used as a creative strategy over the last two decades. By analyzing the Belgian beer market, where the Trappists have a reputation for quality in their products, Jonveaux [2011] found that monastic imagery was used in advertisements for beer companies that had no link with any abbey or religious community. Waade [2010] showed how paradise was used as a metaphor in Danish tourism ads. Ruah-Midbar and Zaidman [2013] analyzed how and for what purpose mainstream Israeli advertisements appropriated New Age elements, by identifying specific patterns of use.[2]

Although it seems to be a recent phenomenon, historians pointed out that religion has been exploited to promote secular commodities since the dawn of advertising. At the beginning of the 1900s, American advertisers used vague forms of sacred symbolism to invite attitudes of veneration or awe toward the product [Marchand 1985, 264-284]. During the first decades of the twentieth century, both Italian and French advertisers made wide reference to Catholicism [Borello 1999]. These ads included references to Biblical stories like that of the great flood, priests and monks, as well as religious figures such as saints, Jesus, and even God, represented as an elderly bearded man with a bright triangle around his head.

Today advertisers certainly represent religious themes much more creatively than in the past. However, an excess of creativity can sometimes produce conflicts. This happens when religious institutions perceive the semantic invasions of advertising as an attack against their symbolic power.[3]

Method of the Present Study

Sample

To develop the data necessary to examine the research questions previously outlined, a sample of print advertisements was drawn from a wide range of popular Italian weekly magazines from the period 1969-2013. A three-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, twelve different years, four years apart, were selected beginning in 1969 and ending with 2013 (i.e., 1969, 1973, 1977, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013). Next, two more years were added for control purposes (i.e., 1957 and 1961). Finally, two particular months were selected (i.e., Oc-

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[2] On spirituality in advertising, see also Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee [2009].
[3] For more on this, see Cheyronnaud [1999], Guizzardi [2007], Mallia [2010], Miller [1998], and Saint-Martin [2009].

tober and December). October was randomly chosen from the months which do not feature prominently in the religious calendar of Christianity.[4] However, December was chosen because it contains Christmas, which is a Christian feast closely linked to consumerism. October and December were selected to avoid bias in the sample based on the time of year the advertisements were published. It could be expected, for example, that advertisements in magazines issued in the religiously important month would include a higher number or only certain types of religious references.

Within each year, two October issues and two December issues of each magazine selected for the research were considered. Specifically, the sampling alternated the first and third issues and the second and fourth issues. Once the first and third October issue of the first year (i.e., 1957) had been selected, the second and fourth December issue of that year were considered. The sampling then proceeded by selecting the second and fourth October issue of 1961, the first and third December issue of 1961, the first and third October issue of 1969, the second and fourth December issue of 1969, the second and fourth October issues of 1973, the first and third December issues of 1973, and so on. The operation was repeated for the next years.

All Italian weekly magazines listed in the A.D.S.-Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa survey during the sampled years were considered for inclusion.[5] The selection procedure began with a subdivision of the magazines into homogeneous groups based on genre. Specialist publications like magazines aimed at teenagers and sport magazines were excluded because their target audiences are narrow. Also excluded from consideration were supplements distributed with newspapers and religious magazines because they usually contain a high number of ads for religious items and religiously associated services – such as Bibles, sacred music albums, and pilgrimage holidays – that may increase opportunities for distortion of research results.[6] Among the remaining groups, those with the highest overall circulation were considered for the research: family interest, women's interest, and news magazines. From each of these groups the two largest selling magazines were selected for each sampled year. Details of the titles included in the study are shown in Table 2.

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[4] Excluded from consideration were the months during which the most significant Christian feasts, Easter and Christmas, are celebrated. November and January were also excluded because of their proximity to the Christmas holidays.

[5] Weekly magazines were selected as, on average, they reach a higher number of readers than monthly magazines.

[6] The main reason for this choice was to avoid mixing up phenomena that are different in nature. The present study draws indeed a clear distinction between advertisements expression of religious beliefs and advertisements that use religious content to promote the sales of goods and services that have no relation with religion.

Although this sample of mass circulation magazines changes slightly in its mix of titles from year to year, it is characterized by the constant inclusion of six magazines for each of the fourteen publication years considered, thus giving a total of 24 issues per year (4 issues per 6 titles) and 336 issues overall.

All the advertisements that were physically part of the included magazines were identified and counted. Product placement in editorial content, money-saving coupons, advertorials and fliers were excluded from the count. This operation has allowed to identify a total of 26,975 ads, out of which only those ads that portrayed religion were retained for the analysis.

TAB. 2. *Magazines Selected for the Study*

Publication Year	Magazine Type[a]		
	Family Interest	Women's Interest	News Magazines
1957	GE - OG	GI - GR	EP-EU
1961	GE - OG	GI - GR	EP-EU
1969	GE - OG	GI - GR	EP-EU
1973	GE - OG	GI - GR	EP-EU
1977	GE - OG	GI - GR	ES - PA
1981	GE - OG	GI - GR	ES - PA
1985	GE - OG	GI - GR	ES - PA
1989	GE - OG	GI - GR	ES - PA
1993	GE - OG	GI - GR	ES - PA
1997	GE - OG	DM - GR	ES - PA
2001	GE - OG	DM - GR	ES - PA
2005	GE - OG	DM - GR	ES - PA
2009	GE - OG	DM - GR	ES - PA
2013	GE - OG	DM - GR	ES - PA

[a] GE Gente, OG Oggi, GI Gioia, GR Grazia, DM Donna Moderna, EP Epoca, EU L'Europeo, ES L'Espresso, PA Panorama

Coding

The advertisements were included or excluded from the sample on the basis of the presence or absence of a religious reference in their visual and/or textual component. For this purpose, a coding scheme consisting of five categories of "reference to the ideal-type religion" reflecting collectively-shared interpretations was developed. This set of categories is consistent with the literature that discusses the presence of religion in advertisements. The best known of these works is Maguire and Weatherby's [1998] "The Secularization of Religion and Television Commercials," which devel-

oped a working definition of religious symbolism. A more recent work that used a coding sheet that varied slightly from the criteria established by Maguire and Weatherby is presented by Moore [2005].

The coding categories adopted in the present study are defined as follows:

1) *The Afterlife*: the advertisement shows or mentions a place that the reader can identify as heaven or hell and/or figures closely linked to these places (i.e., angels, devils, saints). This also includes specific elements that indicate these places and figures in a clear and commonly recognizable way (e.g., white clouds, cave filled with flames, wings of an angel, horns/ tail/ pitchfork, halo, and the words "heaven," "hell," "angel," "demon," "devil," and "saint").

2) *The Christian God*: the advertisement refers to the Christian God, understood as both God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). This includes, for example, depictions of God and Jesus drawn from sacred art, images of the cross and the crucifix, visual and verbal references to Biblical stories, quotations from the Ten Commandments and Jesus' teachings, the words "Trinity," "miracle(s)," "miraculous."

3) *Ministers and Places of Worship*: the advertisement shows a place that is clearly connected to religious practice such as worship (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue) or has historical significance for a particular religious group (e.g., Vatican City, Jerusalem). Also included in this category are figures who can be clearly identified by dress, action, or other appearance as a representative of a particular religious movement (e.g., Catholic priest, Benedictine monk).

4) *Temptation*: the advertisement shows or mentions the religious concept of temptation by means of visual or textual references to the story of Adam and Eve (e.g., a man and a woman with apple or snake, the words "original sin," "forbidden fruit," "Eden"). The ad may also refer to sinful actions, the breaking of divine laws, the sacrament of confession, or one of the seven deadly sins (e.g., lust, gluttony).

5) *Non-Christian Religions*: the advertisement makes reference to Asian religious traditions or non-institutionalized religion. References to Asian religions include depictions of deities (e.g., Buddha, Vishnu), images of religious men (e.g., Buddhist monk, Hindu religious teacher), codified symbols and expressions (e.g., the classic symbol of Taijitu, the words "Zen," "Yin-Yang"). References to non-institutionalized religion include images of people practicing meditation or yoga, and expressions or signs associated with the New Age movement.

All 26,975 advertisements were coded on a yes-or-no basis for each of the above categories. When more than one religious symbol was shown in an advertisement, categorization was based on the most prominently displayed symbol (i.e., the largest). Church campaigns and advertisements for sacred texts, devotional pictures, and religious artifacts like rosary beads and votive candles were not coded (see note 6).

The coding was conducted by a single researcher. No formal testing of reliability could therefore be performed. However, after the coding was completed, the researcher and a group of twenty Italian graduate students came together in a series of meetings to discuss and agree on the decisions made in the coding process. The students were not aware of the research questions under investigation. Disagreements were resolved by discussion, thus generating assessments that reflected the view of the group and the researcher. These group discussions were conducted with the purpose of reducing the bias of a single coder and, consequently, to increase the credibility of the study's results. All of these efforts yielded a final sample of 381 ads.

The sample of ads containing religion was subsequently subjected to a content analysis along two other dimensions: the class of product being promoted and the cultural values employed in advertisements.[7] The coding sheet was developed by adapting to the advertisements sampled the content analysis system used by Pollay [1983; 1985]. Five categories of product – "durable goods," "food and beverage," "personal care," "services," and "personal apparel" – were coded. The coding for the nature of the product advertised was straightforward. To develop a set of categories for measuring values, a pilot test on a subsample of one hundred ads was performed using each category of the scheme of Pollay [1983].

This process identified categories that occurred rarely or not at all in the subsample, which therefore could be excluded with little loss of information. It also identified the desirability of combining less frequent categories with other thematically similar categories and, at the same time, partitioning some of the very frequently used categories into subcategories. The final set included ten categories reflecting ten cultural values (i.e., "practical," "dear," "rare," "wisdom," "enjoyment," "freedom," "vanity," "status," "family," and "health"). The categories "practical," "dear," and "rare" refer to the product attributes; "wisdom," "enjoyment," "freedom," "vanity," "status," "family," and "health" refer instead to the benefits that consumers can obtain from the purchase or consumption of the advertised item.

To establish the extent to which these categories occurred among the advertisements containing religion, a Likert scale ranging from one (not at all present) to four (very much present) was adopted. All the categories, together with their definitions and coding instructions, can be found in Appendix 1.

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[7] These are the values that are displayed in any "reason why" offered as a rationale for preference. As Pollay and Gallagher [1990, 364] pointed out, "values are manifest even when low-involvement products are sold with diffuse imagery rather than an argued 'reason why.' Products can be valued because of inherent properties or product attributes, or because they are instrumental to some benefit the consumer will realize." For example, an article of clothing can be advertised for its being inexpensive, or modern, or comfortable. But it can also be advertised as instrumental to social acceptance, economic success, or sexuality.

Results

The Frequency of Religious Symbolism in Advertisements

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of advertisements coded for each type of magazine in each month. Of the 381 ads containing religious references, 168 (44.1%) appeared in October and 213 (55.9%) appeared in December. It is worth noting that the percentages found in each of the three magazine types are very similar to those found in the overall sample.

TAB. 3. *Frequency and Percentage of Ads Depicting Religion in Each Magazine Type*

Magazine Type	Month		
	October	December	Total
Family Interest	43	49	92
	46.7%	53.3%	100.0%
Women's Interest	60	86	146
	41.1%	58.9%	100.0%
News Magazines	65	78	143
	45.5%	54.5%	100.0%
Total	168	213	381
	44.1%	55.9%	100.0%

It was not a surprise that advertisements containing religious references were more common in the month of Christmas. Most striking was the fact that religion was present in a relatively high number of ads appeared during a month that does not feature prominently in the Christian religious calendar. One possible explanation is that the use of religion to promote commercial goods and services is not exclusively linked to Christmas consumerism. Further inspection of the results presented in Table 3 confirmed this interpretation: no statistically significant differences were detected between the ads appearing in October and the ads appearing in December.

The extent to which religious symbolism was depicted in the advertisements of each year is shown in Figure 1. It is apparent from the scatter diagram that the use of religion for advertising purposes increased from 1957 onwards, by shifting from 0.5% to 2.9%.[8] The regression line, calculated by the minimum square method, is

[8] Frequency and percentage of advertisements that portray religion in each year can be seen in Table A in Appendix 2.

increasing, has a slope significantly different from zero (F-Test = 47.97; p < 0.01) and is a good fit to the data points (R^2 = 0.80). The end of the Sixties probably represented an interruption, however brief, of this trend.[9]

These findings provide an answer to the question of how frequently religion occurred in advertisements over the last forty years. Moreover, they suggests that a long-term positive trend exists.
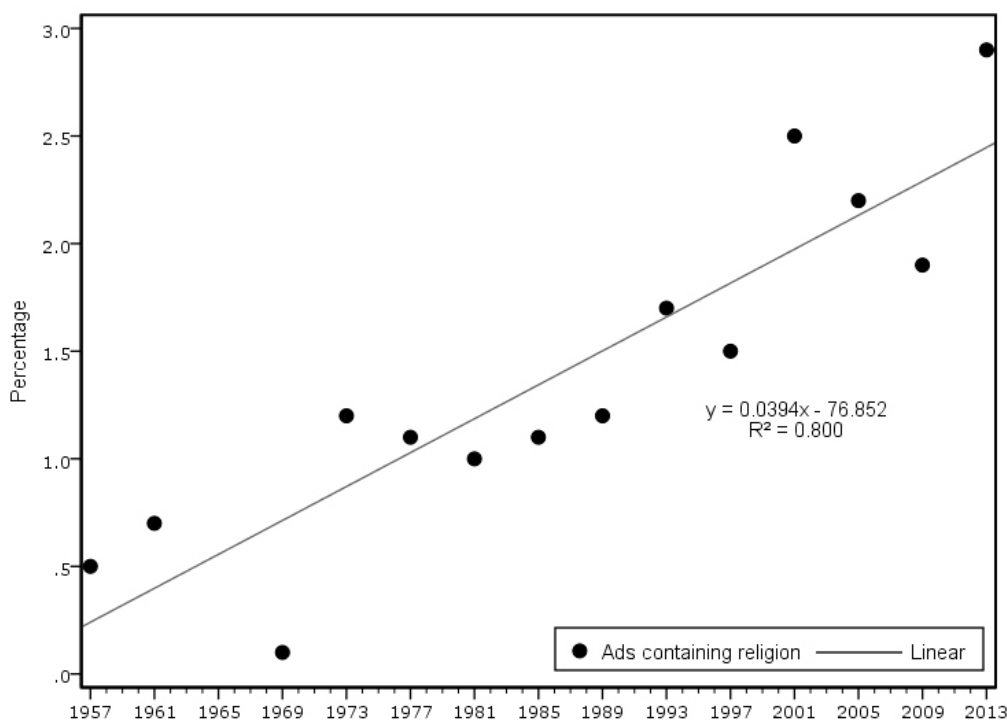

FIG. 1. Percentage of Ads Containing Religion by Year

Data Aggregation

To calculate percentages for each coding category separately, publication years were combined into groups to increase the number of data points in each group. This yielded four groups covering four different decades (i.e., *1970s*: 1969-1973-1977; *1980s*: 1981-1985-1989; *1990s*: 1993-1997-2001; *2000s*: 2005-2009-2013).

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[9] A starting point can be identified approximately in the fifties. It must be considered, however, that some form of religious symbolism was already present in the advertising posters diffused in Italy during the first half of the twentieth century [Borello 1999]. From this point of view, Figure 1 hides the fact that the end of World War II and the economic expansion that followed had a significant impact on the Italian advertising industry, which was completely reorganized. This lead to the abandonment of the Italian tradition of advertising art and its handicraft production methods.

Types of Religious Symbols in Advertisements

Table 4 presents the frequency and percentage of the types of religious symbols in the advertisements. Of the 365 advertisements sampled from 1969 to 2013, 92 (25.2%) referred to the afterlife, 83 (22.7%) displayed the Christian God, 71 (19.5%) contained non-Christian symbols, 62 (17%) showed ministers and places of worship, and 57 (15.6%) recalled the religious concept of temptation.

These categories followed different paths over time (chi-square analyses were performed to identify differences in the frequency distributions among categories). The afterlife was used quite constantly to sell goods and services over the last four decades, with percentages fluctuating between 24% and 29% ($\chi^2 = 0.85$, df = 3, n.s.). The references to the Christian God increased slightly during the last decade after a long period without significant changes ($\chi^2 = 7.68$, df = 3, n.s). The depictions of ministers and places of worship clearly decreased by shifting from 41.1% in 1970s to 10.2% in 2000s ($\chi^2 = 29.25$, df = 3, p < 0.01).

TAB. 4. *Frequency and Percentage of Ads Emphasizing Different Religious Symbols by Decade*

Type of Symbol	Decade				
	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Total
The Afterlife	14	23	27	28	92
	25.0%	29.1%	24.1%	23.7%	25.2%
The Christian God	11	13	22	37	83
	19.6%	16.5%	19.6%	31.4%	22.7%
Ministers and Places of Worship	23	14	13	12	62
	41,1%	17,7%	11,6%	10,2%	17,0%
Temptation	4	24	14	15	57
	7.1%	30.4%	12.5%	12.7%	15.6%
Non-Christian Religions	4	5	36	26	71
	7,1%	6,3%	32,1%	22,0%	19,5%
Total	56	79	112	118	365
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The percentage of ads that exploited the concept of temptation rose in the 1980s and dropped in the 1990s ($\chi^2 = 17.70$, df = 3, p < 0.01), while the advertisements containing non-Christian symbols increased markedly during the last two decades,

by shifting from 6.3% in the 1980s to 22% in the 2000s (χ^2 = 26.11, df = 3, p < 0.01).

Table 5 presents the frequency and percentage of the types of religious symbols for each magazine type. The advertisements containing the afterlife occurred in the three types of magazines in rather homogeneous proportions (χ^2 = 1.75, df = 2, n.s.). This suggests that the afterlife was not only very common during the entire time period considered, but also that it was used to appeal to different types of audiences. The advertisements containing references to non-Christian religions were more frequent in women's interest magazines (χ^2 = 12.34, df = 2, p < 0.01), where also the advertisements with references to temptation were very common (χ^2 = 7.03, df = 2, p < 0.05). One possible interpretation of these results is that non-Christian symbols and the concept of temptation were used specifically to address the female audience.

TAB. 5. *Frequency and Percentage of Ads Emphasizing Different Religious Symbols by Magazine Type*

Type of Symbol	Magazine Type			
	Family Interest	Women's Interest	News Magazines	Total
The Afterlife	27	32	33	92
	30.3%	22.7%	24.4%	25.2%
The Christian God	29	22	32	83
	32.6%	15.6%	23.7%	22.7%
Ministers and Places of Worship	15	17	30	62
	16,9%	12,1%	22,2%	17,0%
Temptation	6	33	18	57
	6.7%	23.4%	13.3%	15.6%
Non-Christian Religions	12	37	22	71
	13,5%	26,2%	16,3%	19,5%
Total	89	141	135	365
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6, which presents the frequency and percentage of the types of symbols for each class of product, can be read in this perspective. It shows that references to both temptation (χ^2 = 11.58, df = 4, p < 0.05) and non-Christian symbols (χ^2 = 13.08, df = 4, p < 0.01) were used more frequently in advertisements for personal care

products. Many of them indeed have women as their primary target (e.g., perfumes, creams, hair and skin care products).

Some example can clarify the nature of this relationship: the advertisement for Apple Anti Age cosmetics shows a young woman holding a bitten apple on her hands and the slogan: "Today the forbidden fruit is available." In the advertisement for Perlier cocoa-based beauty products the headline reads "Gluttonous sins for a perfect body" while the body copy adds an invitation to "Fall into temptation." The word "Samsara" – which refers to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in Buddhism – is used as the name for a perfume in the advertisement for Guerlain. The advertisement for Dior face cream shows a young woman forming the shape of a triangle with her hands and the headline reads "No Age."

TAB. 6. *Frequency and Percentage of Ads Emphasizing Different Religious Symbols by Class of Product*

Type of Symbol	Class of Product					
	Durable Goods	Food and Beverage	Personal Care	Services	Personal Apparel	Total
The Afterlife	22 32.8%	30 34.9%	9 14.3%	12 27.3%	19 18.1%	92 25.2%
The Christian God	12 17.9%	13 15.1%	9 14.3%	13 29.5%	36 34.3%	83 22.7%
Ministers and Places of Worship	5 7.5%	26 30.2%	8 12.7%	10 22.7%	13 12.4%	62 17.0%
Temptation	11 16.4%	8 9.3%	17 27.0%	3 6.8%	18 17.1%	57 15.6%
Non-Christian Religions	17 25.4%	9 10.5%	20 31.7%	6 13.6%	19 18.1%	71 19.5%
Total	67 100.0%	86 100.0%	63 100.0%	44 100.0%	105 100.0%	365 100.0%

Table 6 shows other interesting results. References to the Christian God were more common in advertisements for personal apparels and accessories rather than in the ads for any other type of product ($\chi^2 = 15.42$, df = 4, p < 0.01). Some examples: the advertisement for Cartier jewelry associates the word "Trinity," the central doctrine of Christian theology, with the image of a diamond ring with three intertwined bands. Cross pendants appear in many advertisements for Dolce and Gabbana clothing.

Ministers and places of worship were depicted more frequently in advertisements for drinks and food ($\chi^2 = 18.44$, df = 4, p < 0.01). This type of religious reference was used especially to promote bitters, liqueurs, food with therapeutic qualities and other goods that in the past were produced in monasteries and convents. The best example that can be cited is the ad for Alpestre liqueur: it emphasizes that all of the secrets concerning medicinal herbs and plants used to produce this tonic drink were initially developed by Catholic monks, who are represented both in the visual and textual component of the ad.

Values Manifest in Advertisements

Table 7 presents the percentage of the different values (definitions shown in Appendix 1) emphasized in the advertisements containing religion over all years studied. The three most common values were "rare" (present in 22.5% of ads), "vanity" (20.8%) and "status" (20.8%). One might note the low importance of "family" (8.5%). Another notable result is the relative emphasis of being "practical" (14%). "Wisdom," "dear," "health," "enjoyment," and "freedom" were endorsed in similar proportions.

TAB. 7. *Percentage of Values Employed in Advertisements Containing Religion from 1969 to 2013*

Variable	Percentage of Ads that Scored 3-4
Rare	22.5
Vanity	20.8
Status	20.8
Wisdom	17.0
Dear	16.7
Health	16.7
Enjoyment	15.3
Freedom	14.5
Practical	14,0
Family	8.5

1 = not at all present; 2 = just a little present; 3 = pretty much present; 4 = very much present

A principal component analysis (PCA) was applied to this set of variables to explore the relationships between the values analyzed and to reduce them into a limited number of dimensions. Table 8 shows the extracted components with eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser criterion). A more parsimonious and interpretable

solution was achieved by extracting only the first three components (56.2% of total variance).[10]

TAB. 8. *Components with Eigenvalues Greater than One*

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.217	22.169	22.169	1.984	19.836	19.836
2	1.794	17.942	40.111	1.927	19.273	39.108
3	1.608	16.080	56.191	1.708	17.082	56.191
4	1.200	11.997	68.188	1.540	15.401	68.188

Table 9 reports the loadings of the ten variables onto the first three principal components after an orthogonal rotation.

The first component was saturated by two variables with high positive loadings: the high economic value of the product sold (*dear* .903) and the attainment of a higher social status through consumer activity (*status* .882). This component seems to underline two complementary aspects: on the one hand, the more expensive the advertised products are, the higher is the consumer's desire to purchase them. On the other hand, there is the prestige deriving from the possession and public display of those same products.

The second component presented positive saturations on some variables and negative on others. Two variables had high negative loadings: the admiration for one's own physical appearance and abilities, accompanied by a desire for pleasure (*vanity* -.781) and the sense of autonomy and independence that can be obtained by consuming the product advertised (*freedom* -.713). The variables with high positive loadings were the following: the function and suitability of the product (*practical* .536), the enjoyment of consumer goods during leisure time (*enjoyment* .468), and the sharing of products and services with the rest of the family (*family* .529). The variables with negative loadings have in common traits of self-assertion and self-awareness. Those with positive loadings seem to have in common their opposition to individualism, in place of which they propose collective sharing and collaboration.

The third component was saturated by two variables with high negative loadings: the high product quality resulting from the application of an ancient knowledge

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[10] This decision was made on the basis of two considerations. First, the number of components retained with the Kaiser criterion represented more than a third of the original variables. Second, Table 8 shows that the quota of variance reproduced by the fourth component (11.99%) was lower compared to the first three (22.17%, 17.94% and 16.08% respectively).

or certified by experts (*wisdom* -.816) and the idea that the product will make the consumer healthier or improve his/her physical condition (*health* -.810).

Some short observations. It is clear that the first component is linked with the promotion of expensive goods that function as distinctive signs. This stresses that the analyzed advertisements emphasize a dimension strongly characterized by consumerism and ostentation, which was labeled "social distinction." The second component, besides being distinctly bipolar, is a mixture of two separate psycho-attitudinal dimensions: the attempt to maximize the satisfaction of one's self-interested goals and desires and the act of sharing pleasures with others. The label assigned to this component is "narcissism-sharing." Finally, the third component is focused on health improvement and production quality standards. The label used for this dimension was "reliability."

This factor analysis identified a typology that allowed for understanding of what were the main value systems to which the ads containing religion made reference. Craving for admiration, self-satisfaction, collective sharing, reliability: what emerges is a mix of heterogeneous elements that can be interpreted as evidence of the fact that religious symbolism has become a source of creative inspiration that advertisers use, without much reservation, in order to accomplish their most diverse commercial tasks.

TAB. 9. *Vectors of the Loadings of the Ten Variables on the Three Principal Components Extracted*

	Component		
	1	2	3
Dear	.903	.024	.164
Status	.882	-.041	.225
Rare	-.226	.124	.148
Vanity	-.186	-.781	.270
Freedom	-.222	-.713	.308
Practical	-.330	.536	.206
Family	-.277	.529	.203
Enjoyment	-.218	.468	.189
Wisdom	-.082	.049	-.816
Health	-.115	-.043	-.810

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Discussion

The findings indicate that advertising in Italy generally increased its use of religion to sell products and services: the number of ads in the total sample displaying religious symbols has risen between 1969-2013. Moreover, there is evidence that this use of religion in advertising was not significantly affected by the period of the year in which the advertisements were published. Advertisements with religious references occurred in similar proportions during the month that contains Christmas and a month less religiously relevant (i.e., October). This result might be interpreted as a sign of the fact that advertisers tend to consider religious symbols like any other consumer appeal, through which they try to attract the reader's attention to the advertised item.

A few significant changes over time were found in the types of religious symbols employed: the continuous decrease of references to ministers and place of worships and the remarkable increase of non-Christian symbols. The extent to which the afterlife, the Christian God and the concept of temptation were shown in the advertisements remained fairly constant throughout the years.

Based on these findings, it appears that in Italy the most common religious references used in magazine advertisements in the period 1969-2013 come from Christianity. In addition, Italian advertisements contain references to Asian religious traditions and non-institutionalized religion. This interpretation is substantially in line with the interpretation that Lugrin and Molla [2008] advanced by analyzing a sample of magazine advertisements collected in France, Switzerland and other French-speaking contexts, thus indicating some similarity between Italy and other European countries.

Significant differences in the portrayal of religion were found in terms of magazine type and class of product advertised. Advertisements containing the concept of temptation and non-Christian symbols were much more common in women's interest magazines. References to the Christian God and depictions of ministers and places of worship were used more frequently to promote, respectively, personal apparels and food and drinks. These results suggest that, except for the afterlife, all other categories of religious symbols were employed according to established and well-defined patterns.

These differences between symbol types are remarkable, considering that recent studies have underlined the existence of specific relationships between certain forms of religious symbolism and product types [cf. Jonveaux 2011; Ruah-Midbar and Zaidman 2013; Waade 2010]. In addition, advertisers seem to be increasingly eliminating their reservations about the display of religious symbols for commercial purposes, us-

ing these symbols to give value to various kinds of products and meet the most diverse advertising needs. Evidence of this was found in the analysis of the cultural values manifest in advertisements, which revealed that in Italian advertising, religion is associated with heterogeneous, sometimes contrasting, value systems ranging from social distinction, to reliability, narcissism, and values implying sharing and joint purpose.

Two short final observations. The present findings show that in Italy there is an escalating use of religion to sell goods and services. One possibility is that, in the long run, this advertising use will grow weaker and weaker because of the fact that religious symbols tend to become excessively vague, thus losing their ability to catch people's attention – a process that advertising contributes to boost through its usage. It is also possible, however, that advertising will be able to make these symbols migrate from the religious meaning system to its own meaning system, by objectifying them as advertising appeals that no longer have relations with the world of religion. In this way, religious symbols would lose their location, albeit generic, in the religious field to become an internal citation within the advertising field.[11]

Appendix 1. Selected Coding Definitions and Instructions

Product Class

1) *Durable goods*: products for household maintenance and/or operation whose consumption period is typically greater than a year. Examples: automobiles, appliances, furniture, paint and wallpaper, rugs, cameras, dishes, silverware, linens, towels, car parts, tools, computers, records, books, toys, office supplies.

2) *Food and beverage*: products for ingestion by household members, except for items in (5). Examples: packaged food products, beverages (nonalcoholic and alcoholic), candy, coffee, cooking oils, condiments.

3) *Personal care*: products for grooming and/or health maintenance of family members. Examples: cosmetics, patent medicines, hair and skin care, deodorants, feminine hygiene products, toothpaste, hand and bath soaps, toilet paper, weight gain/loss products, ingested or not.

4) *Services*: services and intangibles. Examples: travels, hotel rooms, credit and credit cards, insurance, entertainment.

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[11] This hypothesis was developed by Nardella [2012, 237-239]. A good case in point can be seen in the religious concept of temptation, which is usually invoked in advertisements as something good and desirable, namely something which no longer involves neither absolution nor punishment by a religious authority, but only happiness and satisfaction.

5) *Personal apparel*: item worn, except for therapeutic effect, or their components. Examples: clothing, jewelry, watches, shoes, pens, accessories, fabrics.

Note: Advertisements for catalogs should be rated according to principal merchandise included in the catalog.

Values

1) *Practical*: useful, efficient, long lasting, powerful, handy, time saving, economical, inexpensive, comfortable (clothes), tasty (food).

2) *Dear*: expensive, rich, valuable, highly regarded, costly, extravagant, exorbitant, luxurious, priceless.

3) *Rare*: rare, unique, unusual, scarce, infrequent, exclusive, tasteful, elegant, subtle, esoteric, hand crafted.

4) *Wisdom*: knowledge, expertise, experience, judgment, education, awareness, intelligence, comprehension, sagacity.

5) *Enjoyment*: rest, contentment, be at-ease, vacations, holidays, to have fun, be happy, celebrate, to enjoy parties, feasts and festivities.

6) *Freedom*: spontaneous, carefree, abandoned, indulgent, at liberty, inhibited, passionate.

7) *Vanity*: being beautiful, being fashionable, graceful, glamorous, feeling sexy, holding hands, kissing, embracing between lovers.

8) *Status*: social status, prestige, power, exhibitionism, pride of ownership, wealth (including the sudden wealth of prices), trend setting, to seek compliments.

9) *Family*: nurturance within the family, having a home, being at home, family privacy, companionship of siblings, kinship, getting married.

10) *Health*: free from disease, illness or infection, fitness, vitality, strength, to be active, athletic, robust.

Note: this coding requires the judging of the total ad: the illustration, the slogan, the body copy (if present) and the interplay between these elements. Each element may play a role in explicating the meaning of another element. Code the themes from one to four (1 = not at all present; 2 = just a little present; 3 = pretty much present; 4 = very much present).

Appendix 2

TAB. A. *Frequency and Percentage of Advertisements Containing Religion by Year*

Year	Total Sample	Number of Ads Containing Religion (Present Sample)	Percentage of Total Sample
1957	1096	6	0.5
1961	1454	10	0.7
1969	1325	2	0.1
1973	2413	28	1.2
1977	2367	26	1.1
1981	2738	28	1.0
1985	2174	25	1.1
1989	2226	26	1.2
1993	1890	32	1.7
1997	2150	33	1.5
2001	1889	47	2.5
2005	2543	56	2.2
2009	1682	32	1.9
2013	1028	30	2.9
Total	26,975	381	1.4

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The Migration of Symbols

Religion and Italian Advertising, 1969-2013

Abstract: The frequency and use of religious symbols in Italian advertising is examined by analyzing the content of a large sample of advertisements drawn from popular magazines between 1969 and 2013. The findings show a long-term rise in the proportion of ads containing religion. The most common religious symbols portrayed in Italian advertising come from Christianity. There is also evidence that recent advertising has increasingly made reference to Eastern traditions, like Hinduism and Buddhism, and non-institutionalized religion. An analysis of the values manifest in the advertisements indicate that religion has become a source of creative inspiration that advertisers use without much reservation to accomplish their most diverse commercial tasks.

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