

REVIEWS / COMPTES-RENDUS

Catherine Johnson,
Branding Television,
Routledge Chapman & Hall,
London 2011, pp. 224

In *Branding Television* Catherine Johnson studies the development of branding in US and UK television industries, exploring the reasons who these different industries address.

In the first part of the book, the author offers a critical analysis of the industrial and legislative changes in the US television market. From 1980s, the deregulation of the Republican government under Ronald Regan deteriorates the oligopoly of the three main broadcasters: NBC, CBS and ABC. Johnson focuses on the birth of new channels like MTV, FOX and HBO analyzing scheduling, advertising and promotion. Every network defines a specific identity, which communicates in terms of brand not only to previously identified niche targeting, but also to advertisers and employees. The presence of new competitors forces also the big three to embrace the brand strategies through innovative campaigns. This experience demonstrates that niche cable channels can easily built a differentiated brand identity, while national networks have to focus on the quality of the program mix. HBO is the only channel that develops both strategies, in order to obtain larger numbers of subscribers and income from syndication and merchandising. Over the 1990s, new technologies and the business of media conglomerates radically alter the US landscape, changing the viewing experience and turn the uses of television set itself, for instance it's possible to use television as a monitor for a computer or to access on line. In the digital era, content creators can distribute their products on web, evading networks¹. The major conglom-

erates develop new services, which entails that organizing content is more similar to database philosophy than to traditional television flows. The author argues that in the digital era, brands do not function as form of recognition, but as form of loyal relationship. Networks embody ideas and values, which spread also through corporate social responsibility campaigns. In this landscape Hulu is an interesting reality, it is a joint venture platform between Fox, NBS and Disney, but it does not publicize the relationship between the networks. Johnson's analysis underlines that Hulu does not promote a particular product or a company but an experience, its brand focuses on selling a service.

The second part of the book centers on British television industry, which is marked by public service broadcasting policy. Compared to the European landscape, commercial channel was introduced early in the UK, but ITV and state BBC share the same public service broadcasting logic. Unlike the USA market, satellite offers such as Sky and BSB transformed the television industries in United Kingdom. The first alternative terrestrial mass channel is Channel 5, which is aimed at a younger audience. Channel 5 builds its brand identity on youth power and on an alternative programme, identifying a gap in the previous national television landscape. In the late 1990s, digital terrestrial television develops in Europe and every British broadcaster sets up new channels based on existing channel brands. The public BBC conquers new networks (joined under the umbrella brand identity of UKTV) and a different platform, like BBC Online, but it prefers to launch different brand identities, so the new channels are called UKTV People (then Blighty), UKTV History (then YeSTERDAY), UKTV Gardens, UKTV Food (then Good Food) and do not carry the

BBC initials in the name of the channel. Also Channel 4, which had a specific public service orientation, expands to innovative service like 4oD (on demand channel) or 4Mobile (mobile service), but in distinctly separate sites. In this way, Johnson argues that traditional boundaries between public and commercial service broadcasting are declined. In this perspective, brand and marketing are useful strategies to communicate also the value of public service to the national audience.

Finally, the author considers the different elements that build the brand identity – such as name, trademark, communication and visual appearance – and chooses to focus her attention on interstitials between the programmes. This aspect of brand communication received relatively poor attention from previous researches. A further area of analysis is connected to the ancillary texts around television – like trailers, posters, promotion on magazines. In fact, these paratexts contribute to assign a precise meaning to a program, a channel, a broadcaster. Johnson retrieves and studies the development of interstitials on main British channels: BBC One, ITV1 and Channel 4. These ancillary elements are first based on clearness, and are used to give coherence to an inhomogeneous scheduling of the public service. Instead in the US landscape, NBC, ABC, CBS and Fox initially utilize interstitials in a more commercial way, to retain the audience. In the digital era, both UK and US broadcasting use interstitials to steer the spectator toward a multiplatform offer of programmes and services. However, in this age, emerges the importance of brand for the high concept programs, which extends the text through the transmedia storytelling.

Johnson argues that programme branding have specific properties: longevity, transferability, multiplicity. Moreover, it adapts well to types of programs like serialized drama and reality. Most of all, program branding shows the loss of centrality of television channels, as site to access for content; networks have become just one site for distribute programmes also available online .

Branding Television analyzes different strategies from channel branding to quality schedule branding, from relationship branding to service branding and to programme branding in the UK and the US landscape. While other recent researches like Temporal² and Banet-Weier³ more thoroughly analyze a single brand identity, a value of this present book is the plenitude of case studies: from different broadcasts of two different nations and addressing both commercial and public services. Instead traditional marketing theory distinguishes product brand form service brand associated to corporation, Johnson analysis shows a more complex situation. Moreover, to compare corporate, channel/service and a program's brand as interrelated elements allows to consider television as a cultural form and to understand its evolution from a different perspective.

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- 1 T.M. Todreas, *Value Creation and Branding in Television's Digital Age*, Greenwood Pub Group In 1999.
- 2 P. Temporal, *The Branding of MTV. Will Internet Kill the Video Star?*, John Wiley & Son, 2008
- 3 S. Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship*, Duke University Press Book 2007.