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## **Luxury fashion flagship hotels and cultural opportunism: the cases of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino**

### **Abstract**

This article gives an insight into the phenomenon of brand extension into the hospitality business by Italian luxury fashion labels and conceptualises it in terms of *luxury fashion flagship hotels*. Examining the cases of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino this article investigates the different ways in which they refer to Italy and its culture.

It is argued that within Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino there are strategies of cultural opportunism at play that are aimed at deploying their Italianicity as a means to strengthen their association with their parent brands and increase their prestige, but also to augment their offerings, maximising the brand extension potential of those labels.

Through a semiotic analysis, it is contended that Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalise not only on parent brands Missoni and Moschino but also on the positive connotations associated with Italy and its lifestyle, so that they can convey meanings that concern a broader socio-cultural context and that revolve around issues of national identity. The hotels portray

versions of Italianicity based on different traits but both contribute to the creation of a myth of Italy that involves the commodification of the Italian national identity and promotes its symbolic consumption.

## **Key words:**

Luxury fashion flagship hotels

Italianicity

Cultural opportunism

National identity

Italian luxury fashion labels

Brand extension

Semiotics

## **Introduction**

The luxury fashion industry is closely intertwined with the phenomenon of brand extension. Italian labels have been particularly active in this regard, consistently extending into sectors that are sometimes rather distant from the core where they operate. This article gives an insight into the phenomenon of brand extension into the hospitality business by Italian luxury fashion labels by unpacking the relationship it holds with Italianicity. Examining the cases of two iconic Italian luxury fashion labels, Missoni and Moschino, and the hotels associated with their names, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, this article investigates the different ways in which they refer to Italy and its culture.

This article argues that within Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino there are strategies of cultural opportunism at play that are aimed at deploying their Italianicity as a means to increase

their prestige and strengthen their association with their parent brands Missoni and Moschino. Moreover, it is contended that the hotels also employ strategies that see the deployment of characteristic traits associated with Italy and its culture as a way to augment their offerings, maximising the brand extension potential of those labels.

Through a semiotic analysis, it is contended that Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalise not only on the empirical manifestations and brand values of parent brands Missoni and Moschino but also on the positive connotations associated with Italy and its lifestyle, so that they can convey meanings that concern a broader socio-cultural context and which revolve around issues of national identity. Within Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino a series of characteristic traits that refer to Italy are identified, and it is contended that they are employed to create specific, but different myths of Italianicity within the hotels, myths that are nonetheless in line with the ones portrayed by parent brands Missoni and Moschino. Whereas Hotel Missoni Edinburgh focuses on ideas of sociality, informality and friendliness, on the other hand Maison Moschino focuses instead on notions of creativity and playfulness.

The different versions of Italianicity portrayed by Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino reinforce the idea that national identity is not a fixed entity but a mutable and composite entity that offers brands a variety of characteristics to exploit for their ends. In these cases, the images of Italy that are portrayed are idealised versions that transcend what the country *is*, to focus instead on what it *could* be or what it *was*, creating narratives where past and present, as well as fiction and reality, are intertwined and confused. For this reason, in the present work the Italian national identity is examined in terms of 'Italianicity'. The term Italianicity was coined by Barthes (1977: 48) to identify 'the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian, from spaghetti to painting' and is used here instead of 'Italianness' because it was created to remain open to new additions that, case by case, are linked to Italy and its lifestyle, not crystallising into a definitive list of elements that are Italian *tout court*.

However, while Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino rely on traits of Italianicity they

also contribute to shape ideas of Italianicity. It is argued here that those different versions of Italianicity portrayed by Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino contribute to the creation of a myth of Italy that involves the commodification of the Italian identity and promotes its symbolic consumption. Italy is considered in this sense as a narrative text from a semiotic perspective, acknowledging that it is constituted through a variety of discourses and entities, like Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino.

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh was opened in 2009 as a function of a worldwide license agreement signed in 2005 between parent brand Missoni and licensee Rezidor Group, a hospitality management company based in Brussels. In 2011 a second Missoni Hotel was opened in Kuwait City (Kuwait). Missoni is an iconic Italian brand created by Ottavio Missoni and his wife Rosita in 1949; the fashion label took off in the 1960s (Casadio 1997a) and is renowned for extremely lightweight knitwear and brightly coloured patterns such as zig-zags and stripes. Hotel Missoni Edinburgh was re-branded by the Rezidor Group in 2014 as G&V Royal Mile Hotel after the license agreement with the Missoni fashion label was terminated, but only minor changes were made within the hotel.

Maison Moschino was opened in Milan in 2010 as a function of a license agreement between parent brand Moschino and licensee Hotelphilosophy S.p.A., an Italian hospitality management company that specializes in luxury and design hotels. Maison Moschino was launched as a one-off project and is currently closed due to a legal dispute. The Moschino fashion label was created in 1983 by Italian designer Franco Moschino (Casadio 1997b) and was initially constituted only by a women's collection but, as the label became an instant success, new lines followed.

Originally, both Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino included restaurants alongside bars and room service provisions. However, in 2012 the Clandestino Milano restaurant within Maison Moschino was closed down. Clandestino Milano was led by executive chef Antonio Bufi under the aegis of Michelin-starred Italian chef Moreno Cedroni, who licensed the brand Clandestino to Hotelphilosophy (Zennaro 2011: 36). Cucina Restaurant on the other hand is still

open, despite the re-branding of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh as G&V Royal Mile Hotel, and is still led by Italian chef Mattia Camorani, initially under the aegis of Micheline-starred chef Giorgio Locatelli.

## Literature review

### Luxury fashion flagship hotels

Recently, international luxury fashion labels have associated their names with ventures into hôtellerie more and more consistently. For example, in 2003 Azzedine Alaïa designed the '3 Rooms' hotels in Paris and Milan and in 2005 Vera Wang designed a bridal suite at Hotel Halekulani in Honolulu (USA). Diane Von Furstenberg designed a suite in 2010 for Claridge's in London, whilst in 2012 Karl Lagerfeld made over the Hotel Metropole in Monaco. Even though other international luxury fashion designers and brands have ventured into the hospitality business they have not done so as consistently as their Italian counterparts, and their ventures do not constitute cases of brand extension. The present work considers brand extension as the use of an established brand name to extend into new areas or products (Aaker and Keller 1990).

In addition to the cases examined here, there are other hotel brands associated with Italian luxury fashion labels, Versace opened Palazzo Versace hotels in Australia and Dubai, Bulgari Hotels and Resorts feature developments in Milan, Bali and London, while Armani Hotels are present in Dubai and Milan. In this sense Italian luxury fashion labels have created spaces where people can live the brand in 3D and experience a lifestyle that reflects its philosophy (Dallabona 2015).

In this article this type of venture into the hospitality industry is defined as a *luxury fashion flagship hotel*, as it argued that these hotels present significant similarities with the flagship stores opened by the luxury labels in question. *Luxury fashion flagship hotels*, like luxury fashion flagship stores, can

reinforce 'the prestige of the brand through its up-market location' whilst at the same time acting 'as a promotional device to showcase the brand in a coherent and closely managed setting' and encouraging 'brand awareness and interest' (Moore 2000: 272-3). *Luxury fashion flagship hotels*, like luxury fashion flagship stores, are located in limited strategic areas where often their competitors are also present, and moreover these hotels also offer opportunities of media coverage that can increase brand presence. However, unlike flagship stores, hotels can offer all of these opportunities to luxury fashion labels without 'the significant capital investment required to open a new store and the high operating costs associated with their day-to-day running' (Moore and Doherty 2001: 278) where *luxury fashion flagship hotels* are the result of license agreements, as in the case of Missoni Hotel Edinburgh and Maison Moschino. In this case fashion brands can profit in terms of royalties (but also in terms of hotel supplies, as in the case of the Missoni Hotels) at virtually no cost. Licensing agreements are employed as a preferred strategy by luxury fashion brands to extend in areas 'that require different resources (such as cosmetics, eyewear, furniture and home collections, and perfumes)' (Varacca Capello and Ravasi 2009: 7), similarly in this respect to *hôtellerie*.

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, as *luxury fashion flagship hotels*, hold a very close relationship with their respective parent brands Missoni and Moschino, and refer to their empirical manifestations and brand values. These hotels are the results of meticulous planning aimed precisely at guaranteeing that they strongly cohere with the traits that characterize their respective fashion labels, capitalising on such associations which constitute their very *raison d'être*.

### **The brand values of**

**Missoni and Moschino** Brands are considered here, from a semiotic point of view, as entities whose most distinctive attribute is the one of being capable of conveying meanings (Marrone 2007). In this respect brands

like Missoni and Moschino are *semiotic engines* that can create 'complex discourse universes with a

strong narrative imprint' (Semprini 1996: 11). Moreover, brands are social entities immersed in the social and cultural context of their time and in this respect they can convey meanings whose nature is socio-cultural (Semprini 1996: 12), for example with regards to issues of national identity and Italianicity as examined here.

In this perspective, brands are discursive instances that create narratives and that reveal themselves through their empirical manifestations, i.e. through the variety of media and platforms they employ on the sensory dimension. Brands are abstract entities that can assume different forms (Marrone 2007: 11) and in this sense Maison Moschino and Hotel Missoni Edinburgh represent empirical manifestations of their parent brands Moschino and Missoni.

In the present work, the term brand value is used, in a semiotic perspective, to identify what brands stand for with regards to their intelligible dimension, i.e. the one regarding the signified or content (Floch 1985). Brand values are articulated through the different empirical manifestations of brands, but they originate on a deeper level. This deeper level is represented by the level of semio-narrative structures, i.e. the most abstract part of the Generative Trajectory as theorised by Greimas (Greimas and Courtes 1986); brand values undergo a process of actorialisation, spatialisation and temporalisation at the discursive level, acquiring a figurative shape that is then expressed in the textual level of the empirical manifestations of brands.

The Missoni fashion label is characterized in terms of empirical manifestations by brightly coloured patterns, such as zig-zags and stripes, which are characterized by contrast in terms of shapes and colours. The fact that the fashion brand Missoni is so strictly associated with 'a specific type of fabric and a specific chromatic palette' was considered by Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008: 133) to have a negative impact on the possibility to extend the brand outside of the realms of clothing and accessories. However, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh actually made the most of the patterns and palettes that characterize the Missoni fashion label in order to provide differentiation and prestige to the hotel.

With regards to marketing and communication, the Missoni fashion label has employed since its



origin narratives that focus on its family business nature, where three generations of Missonis work side-to-side. The Missonis have featured regularly in the media to promote their brand and have starred in several promotional campaigns. The same marketing strategy that emphasises the association between the Missonis and the fashion label has been employed also when the brand has ventured into brand extension or has collaborated with other companies. The marketing and communication strategy employed with regards to Hotel Missoni Edinburgh follows this direction. When launching the hotel the role of Rosita Missoni in creating its look was greatly emphasized and the personal involvement of the Missonis was a powerful instrument to guarantee media coverage to Hotel Missoni Edinburgh (Ward 2009: 20).

In this respect, in terms of empirical manifestations, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is in line with the strategies employed by the fashion label Missoni. The effect of coherence is further enhanced by the fact that also on the intelligible dimension, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and the fashion label Missoni share the same values, i.e. sociality, informality and friendliness. In this respect Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is a tangible and symbolic extension of the fashion label Missoni whilst also referring to traits that are more broadly associated with Italy.

The close association between Missoni and informality is particularly emphasised in the spring/summer 2011 campaign by Juergen Teller. The campaign features three generations of Missonis in their family home and achieves an effect of informality through visual techniques. The photos look like they could have been taken by non-professionals, as they proudly showcase certain flaws and imperfections, like for example the flash of the camera reflected in shiny surfaces, creating a constructed effect of informality that represents the values that the Missonis and their company stands for. The dimension of friendliness and sociality is on the other hand supported by the Missonis persona (Nayer 2011) and by a series of promotional campaigns which feature the Missonis alongside their friends, like for example the ones for the spring/summer 2011 and 2012.

The Moschino fashion label is characterized in terms of empirical manifestations by a mix of minimalist and over-the-top pieces and the same contrasting aesthetics are present also when it

comes to brand extension products like perfumes. Maison Moschino employs the same traits, as it features a mix of spaces that are minimalist, like the 'Luxurious Attic' room with its all-white clean design, alongside spaces that are more over-the-top, like the 'Gold room' where every surface is covered in a bold gold-on-gold pattern.

In terms of empirical manifestations, fashion brand Moschino is also characterized by references to the motif of the heart, predominantly in red, which is featured on a variety of products and is incorporated in the marketing and communication strategy of the label. In this respect, the strategies employed by Maison Moschino are in line with the ones that characterize the Moschino fashion label, creating an effect of coherence. This coherence is further enhanced by the fact that also on the intelligible dimension, Maison Moschino and the fashion label Moschino share the same values.

The Moschino brand is characterized by the values of creativity and playfulness. These values are articulated through empirical manifestations such as the label's inventive advertising campaigns and shop windows (Klein 2005: 96-103), like for example the one which showed two wardrobes 'dressed' in oversized Moschino clothes. The value of creativity is also articulated by the fashion label Moschino through a deconstructive practice that aims to expose how fashion making and, more broadly, the fashion industry works. This practice of deconstruction is featured also in Maison Moschino through the gastronomic offerings devised by chef Cedroni.

**Cultural  
opportu  
nism,  
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and  
Italianici  
ty** It is argued here that Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino employ strategies of cultural opportunism that see them appropriating and taking advantage of elements associated with Italy, the country where the Moschino and Missoni come from to achieve a series of benefits. In this respect, culture and business appear to be strictly intertwined as 'cultural meanings are regularly

appropriated for commercial ends' and conversely 'the apparently rational calculus of the market is inescapably embedded in a range of cultural processes' (Jackson 2002: 5). As will be discussed in more detail later on, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino present references to Italy to augment their prestige by capitalizing on elements in which the country has built a strong reputation of excellence, i.e. fashion, design but also food. Moreover, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalize in particular on the Italian gastronomic heritage as a way to enable the extension of the parent brands Missoni and Moschino in the culinary field.

If Missoni Hotel Edinburgh and Maison Moschino rely on traits of Italianicity for business purposes, however, they also contribute to the construction of ideas of Italianicity. They are not mere parasitic entities that simply capitalise on Italian identity, but also contribute to shape it. This is possible because national identity is not only constructed through discourses of nationalism but also the ones of 'nationness' (Borneman 1992: 352), which are created by a variety of entities. Those are more discreet mechanisms that can nonetheless actively contribute to shape nations' identities.

As argued by Edensor (2002) national identity can be created and reproduced through different mundane elements like fashion and advertising and is grounded 'in the everyday'. Billig (1995: 6) also claims that national identity is reproduced through the apparent innocence of everyday discourses, as 'daily, the nation is indicated, or "flagged" in the lives of its citizenry'. In this perspective, national identity is a 'fluid' (Cartocci 2009: 184) or 'liquid' entity (Bauman 2000) that, far from being fixed and established once and for all, remains 'perpetually open to context, to elaboration and to imaginative reconstruction' (Cubitt 1998: 3).

National identity is not static, but is 'never complete, always in process' (Hall 1990: 222). Brands also contribute to this process, constructing myths of national identity that then circulate worldwide, creating and re-shaping, in an on-going process, powerful images whose influence goes beyond the realm of commodities and into culture. In this sense the brand extensions into *hôtellerie* of Italian luxury fashion label Moschino and Missoni examined here are pivotal in shaping notions of Italianicity and can influence 'popular notions' of national identities (Davey 1999: 121).

In this respect, it is not relevant whether those notions of Italian national identity are produced in Italy, as in the case of Maison Moschino, or outside of the country, as in the case of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh. As argued by Edensor (2002: 144) 'the production of national identity' can also occur 'outside of the nation'; 'images of Italy from the outside feed back into the internal public debate on what it means to be Italian' (Croci and Lucarelli 2010: 253) therefore contributing to re-shaping national identity.

National identity is a 'discursive concept, built by different kinds of texts' (Bruculeri 2007: 1) and created by different sources and media in a comparative perspective based on difference as a salient identity-making tool (Ricoeur 1996). In semiotic terms, nations are texts (Ferraresi 2000: 245), entities created through narratives (Bhabha 1990) where at times reality and mystification merge (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Discourses of nationhood in branding, like the ones employed by Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, are intrinsically selective. They do not aim to convey an accurate portrait of nations but only to emphasise certain traits that are functional in reinforcing the prestige of brands. This means that they contribute to re-shape conceptualisations of national identity by focusing only on positive characteristics and by rejecting less desirable associations.

## **Methodology**

The present study adopts a semiotic approach to examine the cases of Maison Moschino and Missoni Hotel Edinburgh. Semiotic theories are very versatile (Mick at al. 2004: 53) and allow for the in-depth analysis of different elements, being capable of being applied to a variety of phenomena, from written texts to architecture and gastronomy, as their main concern is meaning and how that is constructed by different means (Magli 2004), making them suitable for analysing

the complexity of the cases of brand extension into the hospitality industry considered here. More specifically, a socio-semiotic methodology is employed here, which focuses on socio-cultural phenomena and their signifying processes considering both their textual dimension and the context within which they take place (Semprini 2005: 15-29).

The present study employs a multiple case studies methodology, allowing for the distinguishing characteristics of the single cases of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino 'to act as springboard for theoretical reflection about contrasting findings' (Bryman 2008: 55). Because the case studies examined in this work aim to shed light on Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino with the ultimate aim of exploring not merely the characteristics of the places *per se* but also the concept of Italianicity, they belong to the 'instrumental' case study category. In opposition to intrinsic ones, 'this use of case study is to understand something else' and involves 'a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we might get insight into the question by studying a particular case' (Stake 1995: 3).

The number of case studies examined in this research was ultimately the function of a self-selection process. Many potential cases concerning brand extension of Italian luxury fashion brands in the hospitality business were identified. Considering issues of logistics, funding and collaboration of the various entities involved in the hotels the cases of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino were ultimately selected. Companies which operate in the luxury sector are very cautious in allowing access to their staff and spaces because of the belief that researchers might pose a threat to the brand either by describing the brand in less than enthusiastic terms (Tungate 2005) or by disclosing sensitive information.

Several elements were examined in the present research, they include observation of the places in discussion, and the discourses concerning them. The present study relies on the observation of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, both of which were visited on three occasions between 2010 and 2012. Hotel Missoni Edinburgh was also visited in 2015, after being re-branded as G&V Royal Mile Hotel. The process of observation used is in line with the one employed by Thornton

(1995) and relies on 'what the researcher sees' (Gray 2003: 83). All of the data gathered through fieldwork and observation were analysed according to a semiotic methodology. Additional data was gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with a purposive sampling constituted by people who were relevant to the research question (Bryman 2008: 334), i.e. relevant professionals and key figures that were involved in the creation and development of the two hotels in question. The interviews are here 'used for the factual information they provide' and 'used as “quotes” to illustrate particular points when writing up the findings' (Denscombe 2010: 275), and are not the object of a semiotic analysis themselves. Transcripts of the interviews were sent to the interviewees in order to confirm their accuracy and all participants were offered the opportunity to edit out any information that might be commercially sensitive.

The cultural background of the author, as an Italian national but also as a semiotician, has informed the present analysis. This is a function of the fact that researchers are not only producers of culture and knowledge, but also the products of culture and knowledge. Any researcher is, to a certain extent, part of the field s/he is researching (Gray 2003: 17). Semiotic analysis has sometimes been criticized for proposing interpretations that are personal (Bryman 2008: 394) but this is a limitation that semiotic research shares with other disciplines.

Knowledge is necessarily situated (Gadamer 1989) and, in a certain sense, partial (Haraway 1997). All approaches are 'limited by a particular time, space and social horizon and also motivated, more or less consciously, by desire, interest and power' but 'partiality is not only inevitable - a necessary human condition of knowledge production - it is also, potentially, a resource or asset, provided it is made explicit and debated and reflected on' (Johnson et al. 2004: 17). However, the researcher's entanglement in a culture can also offer a privileged insight into particular phenomena and be a precious resource for the research process itself, as in the case of the present study. The fact that the author is a native Italian speaker had a positive influence in terms of accessing materials, negotiating access to the hotels and conducting interviews, as many of the key figures involved in the hotels that constitute the object of the present research were also Italian.

The results of a semiotic analysis do not imply any claims of being definitive nor of being the only possible ones (Tresidder 2011: 69) as the discipline acknowledges that any text can be interpreted in different ways by different people as a function of their background and knowledge (Eco 1990). This research does not focus specifically on this issue of different interpretations, i.e. the reader response but semiotic analysis can take those issues into account, as the work of Pozzato (1999) demonstrate.

## **Findings**

### **Staying in fashion**

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino hold, in terms of spatiality, a very close relationship with their parent brands Missoni and Moschino. The semiotic term spatiality recognizes that the significance of spaces goes beyond the meaning associated with a physical area but also involves narratives and discourses created by different media concerning the spaces in question and the variety of practices that take place there (Marrone 2007: 311).

Considering the narratives concerning the creation of the hotels and their media coverage, it is evident how the close relationship between Hotel Missoni Edinburgh, Maison Moschino and their parent brands Missoni and Moschino was emphasized in order to strengthen the association with the latter. However, both in the case of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, references to their parent brand constitute not only means to strengthen the association between the hotels and fashion labels, and to increase their prestige by capitalising on the labels' reputation, but also opportunities to capitalise more broadly on the prestige and reputation of Italian fashion.

The hotel features a variety of furniture and interior accessories by Missoni Casa (the home line of the Missoni fashion brand) and also features the typical patterns and palettes that characterize the

fashion label, creating an effect of great coherence between the empirical manifestations of the parent brand Missoni and the ones of the hotel.

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh features several references to the Missoni patterns, i.e. Missoni fabrics hung on the wall as decorative pieces, Missoni Home furniture, dinnerware and cutlery. The patterns featuring in the hotel are so closely intertwined with Missoni and the processes of identification between them so established that the former can substitute the latter by metonymy (Barthes 1977: 50), working as signs for the fashion label. In semiotic terms, those Missoni patterns represent isotopies (Magli 2004: 122-125) at the figurative level, i.e. recurring elements in the text constituted by the hotel that are responsible for its coherence.

Those elements are still present after the re-branding of the hotel as G&V Royal Mile Hotel, although the doormen's uniform is no longer constituted by kilts with a zig-zag Missoni pattern but a traditional tartan one. At Hotel Missoni Edinburgh the traditional Scottish kilt was 'Missonified' (Dallabona 2011) but also 'Italianized' given that Missoni's associations with Italy, through the use of a typical Missoni pattern, entailing a form of double commodification of locales. In this respect the hotel features elements that refer and anchor Hotel Missoni Edinburgh to the dimension of locale both in relation to Italy and Scotland, providing a means for product differentiation and uniqueness (Strannegard and Strannegard 2012). Within the spaces of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh there are several references to Italy, the hotel features Italian designer pieces but the hotel also showcases elements that refer to Scotland, like pieces of furniture by iconic Scottish designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Schiowitz 2010).

However, if at Hotel Missoni Edinburgh the emphasis was primarily on Italianicity and only secondly on Scotland, since its re-branding as the G&V Royal Mile Hotel the balance of this double commodification of the Italian and Scottish locale has shifted by privileging the latter. In gastronomic terms no such shift has occurred since the re-branding of the hotel, as the G&V Royal Mile Hotel still features Cucina restaurant, which still provides the same valorization of Italian food and lifestyle as before. However, Cucina no longer contribute to create a coherent environment



centred around the Missoni fashion brand and, more broadly, Italianicity, like it was for Hotel Missoni Edinburgh.

The spaces of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh share the same characteristic figures of contrast that the distinctive Missoni patterns and hues feature in eidetic and chromatic terms (Casadio 1997a). In relation to the eidetic dimension, that concerns issues of shape and form at the plastic level (Greimas 1989), the spaces of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh are characterized by the same marked opposition between straight and curved lines that characterize the Missoni fashion brand. Similarly, on the chromatic dimension, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh features the same figure of contrast that characterizes the Missoni fashion label, which is renowned for its clashing multi-coloured pieces, exemplified in their iconic stripes and zig-zags. Moreover, as in the case of the fashion label Missoni, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is also characterized by a strong opposition between the categories black/white versus other colours.

Also, within the spaces of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh there is another type of 'Missonification', constituted by elements that are unrelated to Missoni but undergo a process of resemanticization (Marrone 2001) by featuring in the context of the hotel. In this respect, elements that *per se* would not be associated with Missoni if they were not presented in a context characterized by such a theme are transformed into signs of the brand. Within the spaces of the hotel there is a tendency to employ objects that are unrelated to the brand Missoni and arrange them in a certain way so that they resemble the typical Missoni patterns and hues and therefore can be recognized as signs for the brand. For example the photos of the moon hung in the bar are arranged to mimic the typical multi-coloured palette that the Missoni brand is so closely associated with.

However, if the Model Reader (Eco 1979) of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is represented by an individual that can recognize the Missoni label with its multi-coloured clashing patterns, and possesses the knowledge to unpack and appreciate the different layers of meaning of the hotel, on the other hand the Model Reader of the G&V Royal Mile Hotel is a different entity. Within the G&V Royal Mile Hotel the dimension of contrast that is so strictly intertwined with the Missoni

fashion label is present, but is not valorized any more through the association with the Missoni brand, so that its Model Reader no longer recognizes it as a sign of the fashion label Missoni and might consider it problematic. As observed by Mr & Mrs Smith (2014), guests might feel conscious about clashing with the 'rainbow-coloured' interior of the hotel and might want to pack 'some understated threads in neutral hues' to avoid any clashing.

Maison Moschino was created in close collaboration with the fashion label Moschino, whose designer and art director curated the interior design, guaranteeing the coherence between Maison Moschino and the Moschino brand. The same creativity and playfulness that characterizes Moschino with regards to their products, communication and flagship stores is present in the hotel, for example through the use of lamps shaped like handbags in the lobby. The most consistently employed type of reference to the fashion label Moschino within the spatiality of Maison Moschino is constituted by references to the motif of the heart.

The motif of the heart, especially in red, has been featured consistently since the creation of the brand Moschino in a variety of lines and products, and has become so strictly intertwined with the brand that it can be considered as a sign of it. The theme of the heart is one of the most evident empirical manifestations of the Moschino brand, constituting an isotopy at the figurative levels. Similarly, the motif of the heart occupies a prominent role in Maison Moschino's communication and is featured in the spaces of Maison Moschino in a variety of ways. The door handle of the entrance is shaped as a heart, like the one in Moschino's flagship stores in Milan, and so are the keyholes of the guests' rooms.

Maison Moschino also replicates some salient characteristics of the Moschino's flagship stores, as within the hotel we find the same marked contrast between different shades of white and colours in order to maximize the effect of Moschino's colourful products (Pegler 2007: 28-32). At Maison Moschino many rooms adhere to this model, featuring a few colourful statement pieces, like a rose petal chandelier or bedspread that stand out in comparison to the white background.

In this respect, both Motel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino present a series of traits that

are in line with their parent brand Missoni and Moschino on the semiotic plane of expression through the references to the company's empirical manifestations.

Both the logo and the very name of Maison Moschino, as in the case of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh, present strong references to its parent brand by employing the same fonts and proportions and by incorporating the fashion label's name as part of the hotel's name. However, the name Maison Moschino also hides a wordplay that refers to the particular industry where the company operates. Maison Moschino refers to the nature of the fashion house of Moschino, as the term *maison* is used to describe luxury fashion labels. By using the name of their parent brand, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalize on their relationship with Italian fashion and on the connotations of luxury and prestige associated with it.

Italy is nowadays considered as one of the homelands of fashion (Vaccari 2005: 48), 'the majority of the world's most valuable luxury fashion brands are from Italy and numerous other Italian fashion brands continue to gain fashion authority globally' (Okonkwo 2007: 40). However, it was just after the Second World War that Italian fashion actually gained popularity among consumers and respect in the fashion industry, although the country had a long-established reputation with regards to embroideries and textiles, tailoring and accessory production (White 2000).

Moreover, Maison Moschino presents even more references to Italian fashion. The hotel is in fact located in Milan, which is not only the city where the label Moschino was founded but also the fashion capital of Italy. Milan is the nerve centre of the Italian fashion industry (Muscau 2008: 143) and its reputation as a fashion city is intrinsically linked to a number of labels like Armani, Prada and Moschino. In this respect the Moschino brand (including its brand extensions) both capitalizes and contributes to create this reputation. Staff at Maison Moschino wear uniform designed by Moschino and the hotel offers a package, called *Shopping Therapy*, involving a discount in all the Moschino boutiques. The hotel is at the centre of the Fashion City development (i.e. *Città della Moda*) of Milan is also part of that 'microfashion' phenomenon 'which often pleasantly surprises the tourists and indirectly strengthens the perception of Milan as one of the world's capitals of style,

giving the impression that the superbrands are, to a certain extent, only the tip of the iceberg, the corporate expression of a general widespread Italian creativity' (Muscau 2008: 151).

Moreover, at Maison Moschino references to fashion are playfully present throughout the hotel, for example in the hall there are floor lamps that resemble mannequins and table lamps shaped as bags and shoes. Further, Clandestino Milano restaurant within Maison Moschino features ice buckets shaped as bags and chairs are playfully 'dressed' with blouses and skirts.

### **Design: Excellence Italian Style**

However, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalise, in addition to fashion, also on Italian design to enhance their reputation and prestige.

As mentioned earlier, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh has been designed by Italian designer Matteo Thun, one of the co-founders of the renowned Memphis Group, and also refer to Italian design by showcasing a series of iconic pieces by renowned Italian companies like Cassina, Artemide and Zanotta (Perfetti 2009). Similarly, Maison Moschino features pieces that belong to iconic Italian brands that contributed to the history of Italian design like Kartell and Poltrona Frau. These hotels, by featuring creations by those entities, leverage on the authority and prestige associated with them.

In recent years, these two driving sectors of the Italian economy (fashion and design) have become more and more intertwined. Like Missoni, many Italian luxury fashion labels have created their own furnishing and interior lines, in accordance with the principles of diversification embedded in the total living philosophy, characterized by the tendency to transform luxury fashion brands into lifestyle brands capable of providing products and services to satisfy virtually all the needs of their customers (Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2008). Other brands have preferred to collaborate with established furniture firms on one-off projects, like Moschino did with Kartell to reinterpret the *Mademoiselle* chair (originally designed by Philippe Stark in 2004), which is showcased in Maison

Moschino.

Similarly to the case of Italian fashion, it was only after World War II that Italian design gained global recognition. In the 1960s Italian design broke the dominance of Scandinavian design as 'Italian designers proved better able to adapt their designs and materials to the altered technological and product-cultural conditions of the second half of the twentieth century' than their Scandinavian counterparts (Burdek 2005: 163). This was the result of a convergence of elements like 'the modernisation of the country, the development of the production of technical goods, the transformation in an industrial sense of furniture production' (Settembrini 2001: 105).

However, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino also refers to another area of excellence that characterize the 'Made in Italy' phenomenon, besides fashion and design, i.e. food.

### **Fashionably Eating Italian Style**

With regards to food, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino employ strategies of cultural opportunism that see them appropriating characteristics that are associated with Italy and its culture to maximize the brand extension potential of parent brands Missoni and Moschino in gastronomic terms. In this respect, the use of Italian gastronomic culture is aimed at supplementing the brands Missoni and Moschino, allowing them to 'stretch' into new areas whilst at the same time creating services that are coherent with the brand values of the labels.

Both Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino rely on Italian cuisine to increase their offerings, and in doing so they have enlisted the support of prestigious figures that are strictly intertwined with that realm, Micheline-starred chefs Giorgio Locatelli and Moreno Cedroni. Cedroni is considered one of the most innovative chefs of the country whilst Locatelli, known to the public thanks to several TV shows and cookery books, focus on traditional Italian cuisine. However, both chefs provide prestige and authority to their restaurants and their respective hotels, acting as

guarantors of quality and of a certain myth of authentic Italianicity.

Both hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino rely on ideas of Italian excellence in the culinary field, which is strictly intertwined with ideas of quality and very high standards (Massa and Testa 2012: 115) but although they showcase similar elements to convey their Italianicity (the use of Italian language, the reference to local dishes and recipes, the use of Italian ingredients and produce and also references to the Italian gustatory isotopy) they articulate them differently.

### **a. Italian language**

Both Cucina and Clandestino Milano restaurants use Italian language as a way to connote Italianicity and as a tool to showcase distinction and cultural capital, but in different ways.

In Edinburgh at Cucina restaurant the Italian language is used at different levels, from the very name of the restaurant (*cucina* is the Italian word for kitchen) to the categories of food and the description of dishes in the menu. Italian language here is fetishised and used as a marker to showcase Italianicity and suggest authenticity, whilst at the same time also strengthening the association between the hotel and its parent brand through references to its country of origin.

At Cucina, in certain cases some elements are lost in the translation of the titles of the dishes (particularly the references to the provenance of recipes and ingredients) so that the menu presupposes a certain competence from their readers in terms of linguistic but also of cultural knowledge in order to unpack all of the complex references that they include. In semiotic terms, they presuppose a very specific Model Reader (Eco 1979). This is constituted by an individual that can decipher the menu in all its complexity on his/her own, because s/he possess the necessary cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). For those who do not possess such competencies, only a partial understanding of the gastronomic offerings is attainable, through the English explanatory captions or through other intermediary figures, represented by the front of the house staff of Cucina. These figures constitute *helpers* supporting the *subject* in his/her quest (Greimas 1969). However these *helpers* cannot completely substitute for the diners' lack of cultural capital, at stake here there are

issues of 'linguistic exclusions – an insider/outsider distinction based on what food is called' (Kennison 2001: 124). This linguistic competence that sees 'speakers lacking the legitimate competence [...] excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required' (Bourdieu 1991: 55) constitutes an element of cultural capital that can signal social positioning and distinction (Bourdieu 1984). Distinction is achieved, among other things, not only through the kind of food consumed but also through the way it is spoken about, as discourses about food represent another form of cultural capital that is 'required in some circles' (Caplan 1997: 146).

Similarly, at Maison Moschino, the use of Italian language also contributes to create a sense of Italianicity by mentioning names of ingredients, dishes or cooking methods. However, unlike in the case of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh, that is associated with a creative and playful use of Italian. In fact Clandestino Milano restaurant is characterised by an Italianised and revised version of Japanese sushi that Cedroni coined as *susci*, a term that graphically represents the Italian pronunciation of the Japanese word sushi. In this respect Cedroni's creative use of the Italian language might resemble the one of Italian restaurants abroad which employ a linguistic strategy aimed at creating and reinforcing connotations of Italianicity through simulating Italian words (Girardelli 2011: 315), but in Clandestino's case the new word *susci* is not a 'mock' Italian word created to wrap in an aura of Italianicity gastronomic offerings that might have little or no claim in that regards, but a not-so-subtle clue of the Italianicity of Cedroni's dishes, that present typical Italian produce and recipes under a patina of exoticism, as explored later in more detail.

### **b. Local dishes and recipes**

A second trait of Italianicity that features within the gastronomic offerings of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, anchoring them once again to the country of origin of their parent brands Missoni and Moschino, is constituted by the references to local culinary traditions of Italy.

The philosophy of Cucina restaurant is one of creating dishes that are inspired by classic Italian cuisine and refers to the totality of recipes and practices that can be found within the boundaries of

Italy, in this respect presenting similarities with the approach to Italian gastronomy of one figure that is regarded as the founder of Italian cooking, Pellegrino Artusi. Artusi published in 1891 a collection of recipes from all over Italy that aimed to bring the nation, which at the time had been politically unified for only thirty years, together through the creation of a national cuisine that conceptualised 'Italy as a diverse collection of regions where difference was a point of pride' (Helstosky 2003: 123).

On the other hand Clandestino Milano, despite featuring dishes that are typically Italian, like *Tiramisú* for example, is strongly rooted in the culinary traditions of the Le Marche region, where Cedroni comes from. However, the valorization of local diversity within Italian cuisine that Cucina and Clandestino Milano restaurants present is not the norm in the international food industry (Albrecht 2011: 107). This demonstrates a tension within the commodification of Italian culinary traditions in the food industry between a homogenising tendency that transcends local difference contributing to the myth of Italy as a homogeneous entity, and a separatist tendency that on the other hand emphasises the local and small-scale. In this respect, the references to regional dishes and tradition in Cucina and Clandestino Milano contribute to create a myth of authentic Italianicity, where 'the "local" is fixed as the producer of "authentic" foods for the cosmopolite to consume' (Bell and Hollows 2007: 30). Within those restaurants the references to local difference in the gastronomic offerings are a function of a process of commodification that sees the 'staging and (re)construction of cultural difference' so that 'constructed meaningful knowledges about (food) commodities and their geographies [...] become a crucial means of adding value to those commodities' (Cook and Crang 1996: 133).

### **c. Italian ingredients and produce**

The Italianicity of the gastronomic offerings at Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino is also deployed through the use of Italian produce, although with different modalities.

The gastronomic offerings of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh refer to the Italianicity of its produce in



many ways. Firstly by featuring elements that are produced in Italy and that are more broadly associated with it (like mozzarella) and secondly by using produce that is associated with specific locales (like Parmigiano cheese), in a form of double valorization that sees the positive connotations of Italy and the small-scale contributing to the creation of a myth of quality and authenticity. This is in line with international policies of 'geographical indications' aimed at trademarking and protecting traditional produce (Moran 1993: 264). These policies validate and valorize the local and Cucina follows this trend, that links food to places as explicitly as possible (Ashley et al. 2004: 88). As observed by Montanari (2010: 74), however, this is not simply an innocent return to local roots, but a trend that hides economic interests as labels such as 'genuine', 'traditional' and 'authentic' are functional in boosting sales of Italian food-related items, especially to foreign consumers.

References to the locale in food products convey the impression that they possess additional value, contributing to create and enhance a myth of authenticity that is supported also by food writing (Caplan 1997: 78) and by the media, which often actively contributes to make these produce part of the 'circuits of culinary culture' (Cook and Crang 1996: 141). This increases the 'monetary value' of such products the more the 'consumer knowledge about the commodity in question' increases (Arce and Marsden 1993: 303).

However, within the gastronomic offerings of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh ingredients that are not the exclusive domain of Italy can nonetheless connote Italianicity, as exemplified in the case of *Basilito*, an Italianised version of the Cuban cocktail *mojito*. *Mojito* is transformed into an Italian drink through the use of fresh basil leaves instead of mint ones. This can work due to the metonymic relationships between Italy and certain elements that, like basil, are commonly associated with it, so that the nation can be represented by one of its smaller parts (Barthes 1977: 50).

Also Clandestino Milano presents references to Italian produce. The most notable innovation of Cedroni's *susci* is constituted by the fact that he does not use any soy sauce or wasabi alongside the raw fish, like in the Japanese tradition, but instead uses extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar

to complement the flavours of the protein, which is often partially cooked or marinated according to traditional Italian techniques with a modern twist. According to a similar logic, Cedroni's *susci* is accompanied by bread. Cedroni is committed to local ingredients and limits the use of exotic ingredients, like kombu seaweed to complement and balance the different dishes. In other words, Cedroni wants to achieve a type of cooking that, under a patina of innovation and exoticism, refers to the particular locale where the dish is produced, addressing the importance of 'having terroir in your cooking style' (Ottenbacher and Harrington 2009: 242).

Cedroni's practice is closely intertwined to ideas of 'exotic within' (Bell and Valentine 1997: 194), as he sources ingredients that come from small-scale terroirs. In the high-end culinary field where Cedroni operates, there is a trend towards 'reterritorialization' and references to local identities 'because we are dealing with an elite culture that has developed in reaction to world-wide standardization of food' so that 'globalization of fine dining, in the sense of one homogenized world cuisine, is not embraced by Michelin-starred restaurants' (Lane 2011: 707). At the same time, however, haute cuisine chefs cannot offer food that is only strongly rooted in a specific locale as they also face considerable pressure towards the exotic both from their customers and cultural intermediaries that regulate legitimisation within the culinary field like food critics and, in particular, the inspectors of the Michelin guide.

Locales contribute to "re-enchant" (food) commodities and to differentiate them from the devalued functionality and homogeneity of standardized products' (Cook and Crang 1996: 132). In semiotic terms, Italian produce is presented by Cucina and Clandestino Milano as an 'object of value', valorized products that are characterised by connotations of 'authenticity' but also 'quality'.

#### **d. Italian gustatory isotopy and Italian culinary style**

At Cucina restaurant, typical Italian cooking techniques are employed to 'Italianize' ingredients that do not come from Italy. As Matteo Camorani, executive chef at Cucina, observes 'Italian cuisine is not only a function of recipes or ingredients but also of particular cooking methods' (author's

interview). This is particularly evident in classic dishes like 'fillet steak with spinach and mushroom', which belongs to the tradition of fine dining but that Cucina transforms into an Italian course by preparing the mushrooms in a typically Italian way, *trifolati*.

Cucina's practice aims to recreate that specific Italian flavour that is defined, in semiotic terms, as the Italian gustatory isotopy. The Italian gustatory isotopy is constituted by a series of culturally established characteristics that involves the taste, aroma, temperature and consistency of food (Grignaffini 2004). In terms of cooking methods, traditional Italian gastronomy is characterised, in opposition to forms of conceptual cuisine, by the homogenisation of ingredients, that are manipulated in a way to enhance the unity of the dish.

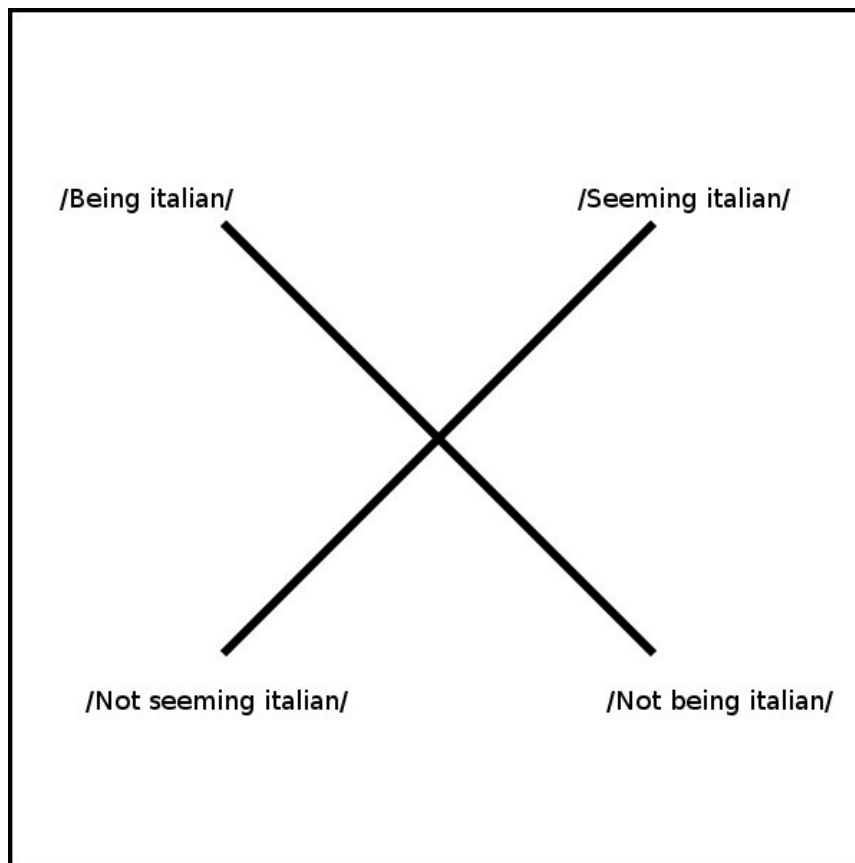
This emphasis on creating dishes that are characterised by the Italian gustatory isotopy is in line with Cucina's quest for an authenticity that privileges autochthonous forms of Italian cuisine over 'creole' Italian dishes that were created abroad by Italian immigrants. Italian food has undergone significant transformation in its encounters with other cultures, particularly as a result of Italian immigration to the USA (Levenstein 2002: 88).

Cucina also strengthens connotations of Italianicity through references to other characteristics that are associated with Italy and its cuisine like the freshness of the ingredients, a strong attention to seasonality and the simplicity of the dishes. Freshness is an attribute that is widely associated with Italianicity, as already recognised by Barthes (1977: 34). Attention to seasonality refers to the supposed Italian custom of living according to a temporality that respects the rhythms of seasons and transcends modernity. In fact 'Italy has a long literary history of functioning as an idealized site outside modernity (for non-Italians)' (Parkins 2004: 258). Simplicity is another characteristic of Italian food that is commonly recognised abroad (Girardelli 2004: 308). These same characteristics to which Cucina refers to are also a characteristic of the Slow Food movement, whose philosophy is associated with Italy and the Italian way of life (Parkins and Craig 2006). In this sense, Cucina anchors itself also to the discourses of this movement to create a sense of Italianicity that can contribute to its prestige.

However, these elements are not emphasised at Clandestino Milano restaurant, where the menu changes only yearly. Moreover, the Italianicity of Clandestino Milano is not as evident as the one of Cucina. The distinctive trait of Cedroni's *susci* is represented by the fact that the chef respects the philosophy of Japanese sushi, revolving around the use of raw fish paired with rice and seaweed (Ishige 2001), but re-interprets it in an Italian perspective that is strongly rooted in the culinary traditions of Le Marche and that re-creates some elements of the Italian gustatory isotopy.

In Clandestino, the practice of deconstruction that exposes the 'culinary ideologies' upon which tradition is built (De Solier 2010: 163), coupled with a fascination for Japanese cuisine and the signature playful attitude of Cedroni results in a series of dishes that speak of his creativity but also of the Italian gastronomic heritage, that he proposes in new forms with the aim to surprise customers. Cedroni, in line with the conventions of the high-end culinary field he operates in, uses the 'incongruity between the appearance of foods (and beverages) and their flavor or aroma [...] as a resourceful tool to give rise to deliver surprise' (Spence 2013: 15). In this respect, Cedroni represents the culinary counterpart of fashion label Moschino, which is also characterised by the desire to surprise, playfulness and deconstruction as a creative method.

The food at Clandestino Milano might not seem Italian but underneath the influence of Italian cooking is recognisable. On the veridictory square (Greimas and Courtes 1986), Cedroni's *susci* belongs to the dimension of the 'secret' ([figure 1](#)), that concerns /being/ and /not seeming/ with regards to Italianicity (whereas on the contrary the 'illusion' of exoticism is created by the chef through the encounter of /not-being/ and /seeming/).



[Figure 1](#)

Here, the dimension of /seeming/ is related to the 'surface' of the dish, its exterior characteristics, whereas the dimension of /being/ is conceptualised as concerning the 'essence' of the dish. Clandestino Milano's cuisine might not seem Italian, but that is because the artifices envisioned by Cedroni aimed to present it as such, in order to surprise the customer with something different from what s/he was expecting. However, the secret Italianicity of Clandestino is easily discovered, as Cedroni's masquerade is one that is intended to be revealed. Verbal cues that connote Italianicity (e.g. *susci* versus sushi) and references to produce (e.g. balsamic vinegar), traditional dishes and techniques that belong to the Italian heritage function to unmask the essence of Cedroni's cooking, which was the intention of the chef all along. Cedroni guides patrons through a path of discovery in his specific version of Italianicity and helps them see through the disguises to recognise that his exoticism hides deep local roots. This also opens up an ulterior level of meaning in his food, aimed

at stimulating a reflection regarding Italian traditions, to question what they are and what are their constitutive characteristics.

### **A tale of two Italies**

Both Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino, as discussed earlier, employ Italianicity traits to strengthen the association between the hotels and their parent brand Missoni and Moschino, to increase their prestige, but also to augment their offerings, maximising the brand extension potential of those labels. However, in so doing they propose versions of Italianicity that revolve around different values, which are in line with the ones that characterize the parent brands Missoni and Moschino. Hotel Missoni Edinburgh focuses on sociality, informality and friendliness whilst Maison Moschino emphasizes creativity and playfulness.

However both the different versions of Italianicity portrayed by Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino contribute to the creation of a myth of Italy that involves the commodification of the Italian identity and promotes its symbolic consumption. Missoni Hotel Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalise, through forms of cultural opportunism, on the presence of certain positive traits associated with Italy and their widespread recognition, referring to a series of stereotypes and images that are deeply rooted in culture and represent powerful tools to foster and reinforce the labels' narratives, nourishing corporate myths.

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh features references to characteristic traits that are associated with Italy such as sociality, friendliness and informality, traits that also characterise the public persona of the

Missonis, creating a strong sense of coherence.

The Italian way of life is associated with ideas of sociality and conviviality (Bell and Hollows 2007: 32). However, if Italian traditional meals are often presented as the epitome of sociality in opposition to Northern customs (Ashley et al. 2004: 55), these forms of conviviality are not as idyllic as suggested as women are often relegated to the position of cooks and servants rather than diners (Parkins and Craig 2006: 114). In this respect, however, Cucina's conviviality presents a far more comprehensive model where all diners are included. Moreover, Cucina proposes a sharing menu where there are no singular portions of food, referring to a way of eating that epitomises the values of sociality, conviviality and informality that are associated with Italy and the Missonis.

Another trait of Italianicity emphasised within Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is the informality associated with the relaxed Italian lifestyle that is epitomised in the Missonis' public persona. Service at Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is centred around values of informality, emphasising a general tendency towards informality in the hospitality business and transforming it into a sign of the Missoni label.

Staff culture at Hotel Missoni Edinburgh, is also centred around values of friendliness, an element closely associated with the Italian lifestyle and the values of the Missoni fashion brand. This is pursued, through the 'policy of selecting and recruiting waiting staff on the basis of their personalities - or, more accurately, on their self-presentation of certain attributes of their performative personalities' (Bell and Valentine 1997: 126). This tendency is becoming more and more widespread in the restaurant business (Crang 1994), where the performance of staff is essential to create a particular experience (Edwards 2013: 227). At Cucina, staff friendliness serves the purpose of preventing any form of 'intimidation of the waiters' (Bell and Valentine 1997: 127), which is in line with similar strategies employed in other areas of the hotel, creating a coherent environment in terms of values. In this respect, staff at Missoni Hotel Edinburgh have to embody certain traits that are in line with the brand values by being welcoming and friendly, attributes that are associated with the Missonis and, more broadly, also with Italy. In this double form of

commodification of embodied dispositions of staff, employers are looking for 'individuals with personal characteristics likely to make them interact or “perform” spontaneously' in a way that is in line with the brand values, in other words they are looking for people that possess, in Bourdieu's terminology, a certain *habitus* (Witz et al. 2003: 47). This *habitus* is constituted by certain embodied dispositions that are inculcated into individuals since childhood through learning and experience, becoming second nature (Bourdieu 1984), which are attractive for employers because they can then recruit staff that are naturally able to convey the brand values in a convincing way.

Maison Moschino's Italianicity revolves around different elements than the ones employed by Hotel Missoni Edinburgh. The version of Italianicity conjured up by Maison Moschino focuses on the myth of Italian creativity and playfulness, in line with the brand values of fashion label Moschino.

Maison Moschino capitalises on the positive connotations of Italian creativity by featuring pieces developed by the most renowned Italian design companies alongside some inventive interior design solutions developed especially for the hotel, for example the animal shaped lamps placed in the stairs. However, notions of creativity are also present in the gastronomic offerings of Maison Moschino through Cedroni's take on a series of Moschino fragrances.

At Maison Moschino guests can enjoy cocktails that replicate the eponymous Moschino fragrances *Uomo?*, *Love Love* and *Happy Fizz*, or a dessert inspired by the perfume *Funny*, that similarly recreate the experience of the perfume in gustatory terms, augmenting the sensory dimension of the brand (Lindstrom 2005). Moreover, Cedroni devised for Maison Moschino inventive ways to present his culinary creations, as the chef opted to serve his breakfast in shoe boxes. In this respect, also Cedroni's practice, so strictly intertwined with ideas of playfulness and creativity, allows Maison Moschino to capitalise on the positive connotations associated with such traits of Italianicity to enhance the value and prestige of the hotel. This is in line with the practice of the Moschino fashion labels that also capitalises on Italy's reputation as a land of creativity (Krogh et al. 2000: 70-71).



Moschino endorses ideas of imaginativeness and capitalises on myths of Italian creativity, and is similar in this respect to Maison Moschino. This is in line with Spinelli (2004: 3), who argues that Italian companies have been particularly successful in capitalising on Italy's reputation as a creative country. Here, creativity has been crystallised as a distinctively Italian trait in order to be exploited for business purposes in a variety of areas including fashion, design and gastronomy. However, those practices that see brands employ notions of Italian creativity as a means to increase the prestige of the brands also ultimately contribute to reinforce the myth of Italian creativity.

## **Conclusions**

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino employ strategies of cultural opportunism and capitalise not only on the reputation of parent brands Missoni and Moschino but also on the positive connotations associated with Italy and its lifestyle. This is a function of the fact that national affiliation, and Italianicity in particular, can provide differentiation, competitive advantage and act as a reserve for the brands in question, even in a world that is increasingly globalised.

Globalisation does not involve the annihilation of local or national differences, because it is precisely through global availability that their distinctiveness is reinforced. An international presence does not mean that brands are not still 'heavily imbued with geographically contextualised notions' (Pike 2009: 636), as the cases of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino demonstrate. Naisbitt (1996) refers to this as the 'global paradox' that sees a growing relevance of the local in a global economy. The global and the local are closely intertwined in a situation that Pieterse (1995: 49) defines as the 'globalization of diversity', that sees local difference being

globalised (Bell and Valentine 1997: 190), in a 'glocal' perspective (Lotman 2006). Differentiation between products is one of the key elements in the modern economy, that Callon et al. (2002: 194) describe as an 'economy of qualities' that focuses more and more on the 'singularization' of goods.

In this respect, the national affiliation of brands becomes more and more important as a means of differentiation and uniqueness (Ferraresi 2000: 262) and this is particularly relevant for luxury brands, that are closely intertwined with such values. Companies emphasize national affiliations because their connotations are considered 'useful marketing tools as the brand circulates in other markets' (Moor 2007: 123). Many brands focus on their country of origin 'in their international communication strategies' (Godey et al. 2012: 1461) and benefit from 'national perceptions...based on the country's heritage, industrial focus and popular conceptions supported by the media and individual's travelling experiences' (Jackson 2004: 159).

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino capitalize on the prestige and positive connotations associated with Italian fashion, design and food. These are the areas where 'Made in Italy' goods are more generally associated with ideas of beauty, excellence and quality (Spinelli 2004). As Pagnoncelli (2009) argues, Italian fashion, design and food are the topics that recur more often in international media, contributing to create and reinforce this myth of Italianicity. Thus, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh, Maison Moschino, and their parent brands, can gain a competitive advantage by maximising their Italianicity and capitalising on the reputation and prestige of 'Made in Italy'.

This is a virtuous circle where the positive connotations associated with the 'Made in Italy' phenomenon enhance the reputation of its members, which are the ones that created that very connotation through their activity in the first place, as demonstrated by the case of Missoni and Moschino, labels that have contributed to establish the reputation of Italian fashion and that now benefit from the connotations of quality and prestige associated with it.

The strength of Italy is constituted by immaterial traits and values (IPSOS & Camera di Commercio di Roma 2010) that are very strongly rooted in the consumers' mind and that represent a competitive advantage for brands like Missoni and Moschino and their venture into the hospitality industry. As

Snaiderbaur (2009: 64) observes, Italy is 'recognised for its culture of quality and a certain aesthetic sense that is in some way connected with an appealing and desirable lifestyle'. Brands that aim to make the most of their association with Italy need to 'seduce' people not only through their products but also by exporting its culture (Lombardi et al. 2000: 298).

National identity is an invaluable reserve for brand culture (Ferraresi 2000: 266), it can nourish it and provide a better communicative impact. Moreover, as the cases of Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino demonstrate, national identity is a powerful tool when brand extension is involved, particularly when that concerns areas unrelated to the core market of the parent brand, as in the case of *luxury fashion flagship hotels*. As discussed earlier, in those cases national affiliation can provide, through forms of cultural opportunism, additional elements and narratives that can complement the ones employed by the parent brand and add richness and depth to brand extensions in the hospitality business.

However, places like Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino can also be pivotal sites for shaping and mobilising notions of Italianicity. In a time where the prestige of the label 'Made in Italy' is under scrutiny for their delocalisation practices, the positive elements of Italianicity evoked by Missoni Hotel Edinburgh and Maison Moschino and their parent brands Missoni and Moschino (alongside the ones of other Italian luxury fashion labels), contribute to re-shape conceptualisations of Italy through myths that increase the value and desirability of Italianicity. Brands do not simply capitalise on ideas of Italianicity that are already present but contribute, in an ongoing process, to re-create them through narratives that emphasise certain positive values associated with them, that in turn contribute to reinforce the good reputation of the brands.

Italianicity is a complex entity that is associated with different elements and not all of them are positive, Italy is associated with positive notions like the ones that Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino rely on. However, in branding discourses only the positive traits are featured and the negative ones are forgotten.

Italianicity is intrinsically characterised by ambiguity and is a conglomerate of different traits that

allows enough diversification for Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino to pick and choose the most appropriate characteristics to portray a coherent myth of the brand. Sometimes Italy is also associated with contradictory elements, like luxury and elegance but also rusticity. Italy has a long history of being considered as placed outside of modernity, but those narratives co-exist alongside the ones celebrating its modern design (Snaiderbaur 2009: 64).

Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino conjure up ideas of Italianicity through different traits, in line with the values of their parent brand, but both versions are nonetheless presented as authentic to the public. Hotel Missoni Edinburgh and Maison Moschino draw on the attributes of Italianicity previously identified and naturalises them by presenting them as authentically Italian. However, in doing so they leverage on different elements, supporting the claim that authenticity is a narrative construction. This is in line with the analysis of the contrasting narratives of authentic Italian craftsmanship with regards to fashion-making explored in Dallabona (2014).

Authenticity is a problematic concept as it is 'culturally determined' (McIntosh and Prentice 1999: 593) and always open for redefinition. It is extremely problematic to conceptualise authenticity in relation to its correspondence to an objective reality because, as McIntosh and Prentice (1999: 593) argue, authenticity is a culturally determined entity and not a self-evident concept. In fact 'things appear authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers' (Wang 1999: 351).

In semiotic terms, authenticity is then represented by a textual strategy, an effect of sense conjured up through narratives that support such a modality of discourse (Greimas 1984). This is the inherent paradox of authenticity, which is seen as something that is 'unstageable, the untouched and the real (thing)' (Knudsen and Waade 2010: 22) but nonetheless it can be staged (MacCannell 1973).

Myth possesses the faculty of naturalising elements and concepts by hiding their nature as social and ideological constructs by wrapping them in an aura of reality (Barthes 1972), 'confusing nature and history' translating concepts that are culturally constructed 'into self-evident laws of nature thereby reinforcing social stereotypes and making them appear inevitable' (Bronwen and Ringham

2006: 213). The myths of authentic Italianicity that Missoni Hotel Edinburgh and Maison Moschino convey in their narratives are presented as obvious, but they are actually the result of narrative strategies that work as a 'lustral bath of innocence' (Barthes 1977: 51) that naturalise connotations of Italianicity.

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