

Fiat's "Seduction" Super Bowl Ad: the Same Old Postcard from Italy?

Francesca Giuliani (February 08, 2012)



Fiat 500 Abarth's Ad has boosted the traffic to the model-related webpages: sex still sells, even if American ladies are #NotBuyingIt on Twitter. When comparing Fiat/Chrysler's marketing campaigns for the Italian and American markets, a blunt contradiction arises.

In the province of the blogosphere and online media that's inhabited by Mad Men and Ad junkies, Fiat's advertising choices for the American market have been a hot topic since the Super Bowl this past Sunday.

The Super Bowl Ad for the Fiat 500 Abarth, entitled "Seduction," which aired during the game, features Romanian swimsuit model Catrinel Menghia as a sexy, feisty Italian girl. During the clip, a nerdy guy holding a latte is caught gazing a little too long at her as she adjusts a strap on her shoe, leading to a swift slap as she berates him in Italian.

The girl then changes her tone to a more gentle and flirtatious one, whispering in the guy's ear and



dipping a finger in the foam of his latte, smearing some on his lips and dropping some on her chest.

Just as the guy leans in to kiss her, with the Abarth scorpio-shaped logo tattooed on the back of her neck, she disappears and metamorphoses into the sports version of Fiat's super-compact car, set to hit the US market later this year.

Ray Wert on [Jalopnik](#) [2] is the first to provide a translation for the dialogue in the ad, which is:

"What are you looking at? Uh!? What are you looking at?! (slap) Are you undressing me with your eyes? Poor guy...you can't help it? Is your heart beating? Is your head spinning? Do you feel lost thinking that I could be yours forever?"

Wert then adds a quick and pretty self explanatory comment at the bottom: "So hot."

Fox Sports' [Brian Lowry](#) [3] believes that the ad is "Perhaps the best illustration of the relationship between buying a car and testosterone I've seen in a while," and his appreciation of the ad seems to be representing the views of many.

The automotive website [Edmunds.com](#) [4] tracked the jumps in research traffic to the model's page on their site, which leapt 3,354 percent in the moments after the ad ran. Measuring the traffic in 7 different moments during the game, Edmunds registered a 138% increase in activity at the end of the show. [AutoTrader.com](#) [5] traffic data confirmed that after the end of the show, searches for the Fiat 500 Abarth continued at a high level.

But if the European-style sex-sells ad appears to be working well (it got over 6 million views on YouTube so far), the sheer objectification of women doesn't seem to be very much appreciated by the ladies on the web, who tweeted their disappointment @Fiat and at other sexism-guilty brands who advertised during the Super Bowl ([Teleflora](#) [6] and [GoDaddy](#) [7] were close runner-ups).

The [#NotBuyingIt](#) [8] campaign, as it is referred to on feminist portals such as [Missrepresentation.org](#) [9], has reached over 1 million people through user activity on Twitter during the game, and it quickly spread to other websites and blogs.

On [hollaback.org](#) [10], the Fiat Ad is also accused of reinforcing not only gender, but race stereotypes, as the skin tone of the Romanian model acting the "classically hyper-sexualized woman of color" is more tanned than the one of the geeky guy she slaps and almost kisses. "She is seen as provocative, voiceless and tattooed," the article states, and adds about the ad that "we just plain don't like it."

AOL Autos poses the question of the acceptability of Fiat's ad on US TV networks, and David Kiley, editor in chief of the website, is interviewed as former editor and columnist at Adweek magazine "Networks in the U.S. have much stricter standards, which makes the ads we see in the U.S. routinely less interesting than what you see in Europe and South America," he said.

"The other issue you have in the U.S. is that religious-based 'family' organizations will start issuing press releases and organizing boycotts if they think an ad is corrupting on some level, or has too much sexual innuendo," he added.

In the [article](#) [11], Fiat's global marketing manager Olivier Francois is also quoted. He created the ad, which was "intended to be viral," and told the website that Fiat is considering running it on TV too, although "it may be too much."

The sister-company of Fiat is Chrysler, and the two-minute Super Bowl Ad "It's Halftime in America," featuring Clint Eastwood and an intensely idealistic speech on Detroit as a model for American recovery, has a completely different feel than the Fiat campaign for the US market, but it does follow the same inspiration as the 90-second TV ad for Fiat Panda that is currently being broadcast in Italy.

Filmed in Naples, in the Pomigliano establishment of Fiat, the ad sends a strongly socially motivating message to Italians in a particular moment of their national history. "We can choose which Italy we



want to be. Now it's the time to decide whether to be ourselves or to accept the views imposed on us," the voice-over says.

Fiat invites Italy to be "The Italy we like" without accepting any imposed views of itself, just as Chrysler invites America to find the strength to play the other two-quarts of the game to recover from a very harsh economic crisis. At the same time, Fiat shows America the same old postcard from Italy, where seductive cover girls and flashy cars are the same thing, and nothing more.

A contradictory policy to say the least.

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Links

- [1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/fiat-500-seduction-commercial.jpg>
- [2] <http://jalopnik.com/5882504/this-is-what-catrinel-menghia-the-hot-girl-from-fiats-super-bowl-ad-is-saying>
- [3] <http://msn.foxsports.com/nfl/story/super-bowl-advertisements-rating-good-silly-bad-fiat-chrysler-metlife-volkswagen-020512>
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- [5] <http://www.autotrader.com>
- [6] <http://www.teleflora.com>
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- [9] <http://www.missrepresentation.org>
- [10] <http://www.ihollaback.org>
- [11] <http://autos.aol.com/article/fiat-500-abarth-ad/>