

WHO SWITCHED OFF OLD TV?

EXPLORING THE RECONTEXTUALISATION OF BROADCAST CONTENT BY INTERNATIONAL STREAMING PLATFORMS IN THE ITALIAN TELEVISION MARKET

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Abstract: The article examines the evolving relationship between global streaming services and national broadcasters in the Italian television market, situating the analysis within the broader European regulatory and industrial context. By exploring platform originals, continuation deals, licensed content, and the reuse of broadcast imagery, the study investigates how streaming services recontextualise and reorganise television within subscription video on demand (SVOD) environments while drawing on legacy texts, genres, temporalities, and cultural memory. Finally, the article argues that the rise of streaming platforms reveals processes of institutional adaptation and industrial continuity, through which television is strategically reframed rather than replaced.

Keywords: broadcast television, digital disruption, European television, Italian television, streaming platforms, SVOD

1 Introduction

When Netflix launched in Italy on October 22, 2015, *Wired Italia* featured the company's co-founder Reed Hastings on its cover as he symbolically switched off an old television set; the headline proclaimed: 'This gentleman will shut down old TV forever.' A decade later, that promise appears strikingly overstated. Rather than replacing broadcast television, the catalogues of the main global streaming platforms increasingly resemble the very medium they were once expected to supersede, as platforms have progressively incorporated 'old TV' texts, genres, and viewing traditions, turning broadcast television into a central resource for their own market consolidation. It is this gap between the

promotional rhetoric of disruption that permeates platform discourse and the concrete practices of streaming services that frames this analysis.



Figure 1. The cover *Wired* announcing the arrival of Netflix in Italy. Source: *Wired Italia* 2015.

Over-the-top players emerged within a broader narrative of digital revolution and detachment from legacy media, a discourse that has progressively turned 'revolution' into a brand and a catchword, attracting concepts such as innovation and disruption under the promise of radical and inherently positive change.¹ Within this logic, rupture from the past is both described and performed, as SVOD services actively cultivate an image of themselves as game changers vis-à-vis linear television. The case of Netflix illustrates this dynamic particularly well. Through targeted campaigns supported by industry and financial publications, commissioned research, and carefully orchestrated narratives of transformation, the platform positioned itself as technologically and culturally superior,

promising plenitude, participation, prestige, and personalisation. In doing so, it reinforced a broader imaginary of digital rupture.²

At the same time, media scholarship has adopted the term ‘disruption’ to describe these shifts, albeit with greater caution. Rather than implying subversion, disruption has been used to denote a disturbance of existing structures that compels industries to reorganise without fundamentally overturning hegemonic systems.³ In this sense, technological innovation may alter distribution practices and audience habits, yet it rarely dismantles the institutional logics underpinning media industries.⁴ It is in this context that, Amanda Lotz’s definition of SVOD services as ‘portals’ is especially pertinent: she describes them as channels of internet-distributed television, spaces in which programmes often resemble the television we have long known, even as modes of access, content availability, and underlying business models differ.⁵ The concept of portals thus captures the structural ambivalence of streaming services, suspended between claims of novelty and enduring forms of televisual continuity.

This article intervenes within this tension between rhetoric and reorganisation. Without seeking to resolve the broader debate surrounding the disruptive potential of SVODs, it focuses on a specific national context – the Italian market – to examine how these apparent competing logics unfold in practice. At the centre of the analysis are the processes through which broadcast content circulates within on-demand environments and the ways in which international streaming services interact with Italian broadcasters.⁶ Examining strategies of acquisition, repackaging, and the reuse of broadcast imagery makes it possible to show that, far from signalling a clean break with the past, the rise of streaming platforms reveals ongoing processes of institutional adaptation and industrial continuity, in which old television is reorganised, reframed, and strategically redeployed within new digital ecosystems.

2 Platforms Originals in the European Context

Before turning to the Italian case, it is necessary to situate it within the broader European context. Since the early 2010s, global streaming platforms have expanded unevenly across European countries, shaped by differences in infrastructural conditions, competitive environments, audience behaviours, and national regulatory frameworks.⁷ The 2018 revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) introduced a degree of supranational coordination by extending regulation to SVOD services and mandating that platforms operating in the EU ensure that at least 30% of their catalogues consist of European works. Its implementation, however, has varied across Member States. France, for instance, aligned SVOD obligations with those long applied to broadcasters by setting a 60% European content requirement, including 40% French-language works. Italy retained the 30% European quota established by the Directive, while stipulating that half of this share must consist of works originally produced in Italian. In addition, several countries – including Flanders, France, Germany, and Italy – have introduced measures requiring non-domestic SVOD services to support local audiovisual industries by contributing a percentage of their revenues generated in the national market to domestic production funds.⁸

Within this fragmented yet partially harmonised regulatory environment, the increasing presence of European productions in platform catalogues should be understood as the outcome of both financial and cultural dynamics. On the one hand, regulatory obligations and investment requirements create economic incentives for platforms to commission and acquire local works; on the other, such content serves strategic purposes of market positioning, audience engagement, and cultural legitimisation. It is against this dual backdrop that

recurring production and acquisition models can be identified across the European market. To this end, the fourfold typology of Netflix originals identified by Afilipoaie et al. provides a useful analytical framework, which can be extended beyond Netflix to account for the strategies employed by most global streamers operating in Europe.⁹

First, **full originals** are commissioned and owned by over-the-top (OTT) platforms that deliver streamed content via internet-connected devices. Notable examples include German sci-fi drama *Dark* (2017–2020), Spanish historical series *Cable Girls* (2017–2020), French political thriller *Marseille* (2016–2018), and Italian crime narrative *Suburra* (2017–2020), as well as Disney+ queer drama *Le fate ignoranti* (2022), and Prime Video teen series *Prisma* (2022–2024). Conceived as high-budget, prestige-oriented series, these productions mobilise established names, brands, or auteur figures. In so doing, they position themselves in deliberate contrast to the conventions of traditional broadcast television, mirroring the launch and legitimisation strategies associated with the rise of original scripted programming on U.S. premium cable in late 90s and early 2000s, revolving around discourses of differentiation and cultural distinction.¹⁰

Second, series produced through **co-production or co-financing arrangements**. In co-productions, ownership and revenues are shared among partners, potentially allowing greater creative flexibility but also generating tensions – as in the case of *Lilyhammer* (2011–2014) which, commissioned by Norwegian TV channel NRK1 from Rubicon TV and Renegade TV in association with Netflix, was cancelled after budgetary and creative conflicts.¹¹ In co-financing deals, platforms provide early-stage funding in exchange for worldwide distribution rights, a practice that can prove contentious when broadcasters are overshadowed by the OTT's control over first-window distribution and branding.¹²

At this stage, it is worth noting that while the first two categories result in series that remain stable across their entire lifecycle, the next ones presuppose processes of re-elaboration, repackaging, and repurposing of pre-existing television texts. In fact, the third category, **continuation deals**, involve a platform extending an existing broadcast series after its initial release, either by contributing additional funding or by assuming full production control. A paradigmatic example is *La casa de papel* (*Money Heist*, 2017–2021): produced by Atresmedia and originally aired on the Spanish network Antena 3 in 2017 as a fifteen-episode limited series, the show was later acquired by Netflix for international distribution. The platform then re-edited the episodes into twenty-two instalments, released globally in two parts, and shortly thereafter renewed it for a third season commissioned as a Netflix exclusive.¹³ This operation has been described as 'how Netflix found a lost gem in linear television's junkyard',¹⁴ framing the platform as a site of rescue and revaluation, but it has also been recognised as a case of content being 'branded by Netflix'¹⁵ rather than merely (re)distributed by it, highlighting how streamers can function as branding devices that absorb acquired content into their global identity.¹⁶

Similar mechanisms are also at work in the fourth category, **licensed originals**, series produced and initially aired by national broadcasters, for which streamers subsequently acquire distribution rights and market them as originals in selected territories – therefore re-packaging, re-framing, and symbolically repositioning them within the platforms' catalogues. It is from this perspective that the following section turns to the Italian case.



Figure 2. *La casa de papel* by Atresmedia (Source: Atresmedia 2017) and *Money Heist* by Netflix (Source: Netflix 2021).

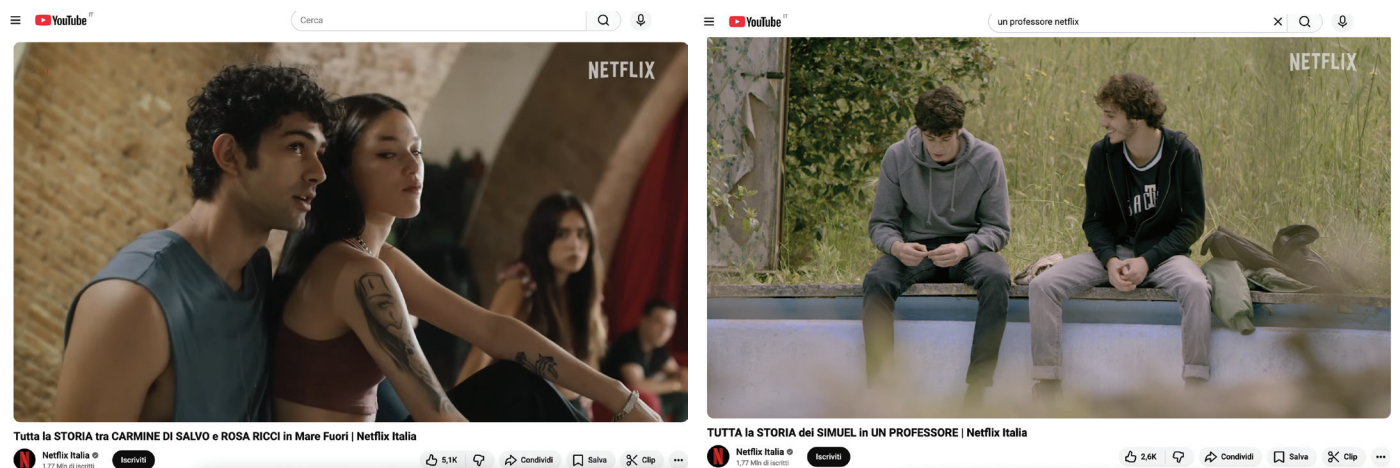


Figure 3. Screenshots from two videos made by Netflix Italy and uploaded to its YouTube Channel. On the left, a supercut of *Mare Fuori*; on the right, a supercut of *Un Professore*.

3 Licensed Originals in the Italian Market

While the most visible outcome of European quota requirements has been the proliferation of platform originals, SVOD services also responded to these obligations through a more discreet but equally significant strategy: the acquisition of licensed broadcast content. A cursory search of the catalogues of three major U.S. streaming services operating in Italy makes this dynamic immediately apparent.

As of December 2025, Prime Video's Italian catalogue features the first season of *Distretto di polizia* (Canale 5 2000–2012), a police drama originally aired on the flagship broadcast channel of Mediaset Group, owned by the Berlusconi Family. On Disney+, a search for 'Italian series' returns long-running and emblematic public service (Rai) titles such as *Don Matteo* (2000–), a prime-time procedural centred on a small town priest who gently solves criminal cases in collaboration with the police, alongside medical drama *Doc – Nelle tue mani* (2021–) and female-led crime procedural *Le indagini di Lolita Lobosco* (2021–), rebranded by the platform simply as *Lolita Lobosco*. Similarly, Netflix's Italian catalogue features early–2000s broadcast 'classics' such as family comedy *I Cesaroni* (2006–2014), for which Mediaset announced a revival, as well as ongoing Rai productions like high school drama *Un Professore* (2021–) and prison-set teen drama *Mare Fuori* (2020–).

This pattern too is not entirely foreign to the logic of the traditional television system. Turning to the U.S. again, basic cable television also benefited extensively from the redistribution of broadcast network series during its period of consolidation in the 70s and 80s, using syndicated familiar content to legitimate emerging distribution technologies and new channels. Repetition and repurposing thus functioned paradoxically in the service of innovation, allowing the 'old' to legitimise the 'new'.¹⁷ Likewise, the incorporation of domestic titles into SVOD catalogues allows platforms to anchor themselves within national media cultures by mobilising established series as strategically repurposed assets capable of generating symbolic legitimacy, audience trust, and cultural continuity. In the Italian case, these are predominantly generalist titles originally designed to secure weekly prime-time ratings and to foster co-viewing practices. Once relocated within on-demand environments, however, these texts are effectively relaunched under a new industrial and cultural frame: addressed primarily to digitally oriented audiences, they are made available through modes of access that encourage re-viewing and binge-watching, thus transforming both their circulation and their experiential context.

The benefits of this circulation are mutual. On the one hand, platforms gain EU and Italian quota, content volume, visibility, and cultural anchoring within the national television landscape. On the other, broadcasters are able to reactivate dormant assets in the case of concluded series, or to leverage platform redistribution to reach new audiences, who may first encounter a series via streaming and subsequently follow new episodes on linear television. In this respect, the case of *Mare Fuori* is particularly illustrative: conceived within a public service framework and oriented toward co-viewing, yet characterised by a strong youth appeal, the series managed to attract audiences younger than Rai's average viewership partly thanks to its redistribution on Netflix, which funnelled new viewers back into subsequent broadcast premieres¹⁸. A similar dynamic can be observed in the high-school drama *Un Professore*, whose presence on Netflix – supported by a dedicated promotional campaign, including newly produced, platform-specific videos for social media – boosted fan engagement and extended its circulation beyond the constraints of linear scheduling. In both cases, platform distribution functioned both as an additional window and as a mechanism of recontextualisation, reshaping broadcast series through on-demand consumption and algorithmic visibility.

3 Repurposing Broadcasting Imagery

Among the platform originals most prominently promoted in the Italian market, several titles reveal how repurposing operates at a deeper level, involving the reworking of televisual languages, genres, formats, and performance repertoires historically associated with generalist television. Based on a qualitative reading of selected cases, two recurring trends can be identified in the Italian context.

The first trend concerns the adoption by streaming platforms of broadcast genres, most notably reality formats, which have historically occupied a marginal position in critical discourse but a central one in broadcast programming.¹⁹

Prime Video's *LOL – Chi ride è fuori* (2021–), the Italian adaptation of the Japanese format *LOL*, brings together comedians and entertainers strongly identified with Italian broadcast television and reconfigures a familiar reality-comedy hybrid within the platform environment. Similarly, *Italia's Got Talent*, a long-running global format that has circulated across Italian generalist and pay television since 2009, has, since 2023, been repositioned as a platform-exclusive production on Disney+. In both cases, SVODs do not introduce radically new forms, but rather repackage established broadcast genres and star systems, capitalising on their recognisability and accumulated cultural capital.

Importantly, these formats are released weekly, mirroring linear television programming strategies and underscoring the extent to which platforms selectively reintegrate broadcast temporalities. This tendency has been further reinforced by Netflix's recent decision to adopt a weekly release model for *Love Is Blind: Italy* (2025), a reality show distributed over the course of three weeks in clearly segmented batches of episodes, therefore combining elements of binge-watching with appointment viewing, and sustaining audience attention over time while preserving moments of collective anticipation. Significantly, the final episode was made available on December 22nd, 2025, at 9:00 p.m., the symbolic time slot of Italian primetime, ultimately reinscribing platform distribution within national scheduling conventions.

The second trend concerns the actual reuse of broadcast television materials, events, and personalities as the basis for the creation of new, platform-native narratives. Two emblematic cases are Netflix's *Wanna* (2022) and *Miss Italia non deve morire* (2025). *Wanna*, structured as a true-crime docuseries, revisits the media and judicial adventures of teleshopping icon Wanna Marchi and her daughter Stefania Nobile, whose rise to fame in the 1980s and 1990s was inseparable from Italian broadcast television imagery. Their fraudulent practices, eventually exposed by *Striscia la notizia* (1988–), Mediaset's long-running satirical infotainment programme, marked one of the most enduring media scandals in Italian TV history. The docuseries draws heavily on broadcast archive footage, reassembling teleshopping segments, news reports, and satirical exposés that are deeply embedded in the collective memory of Italian audiences. In doing so, *Wanna* repurposes television's own images to construct a platform-native narrative that simultaneously reactivates nostalgia, reframes past media events, and underscores how platform originals can be built upon the symbolic capital of legacy broadcasting.



Figure 4. Promotional poster for Netflix's *Wanna*, featuring an 1980s television-inspired RGB colour palette. Source: Netflix Italia, key art distributed in September 2022.

Although it addresses a different object, *Miss Italia non deve morire* performs a comparable operation. The documentary film focuses on the beauty contest Miss Italia which, founded in 1939 and televised from 1979 onwards, became a cornerstone of Italian popular culture and generalist television. The documentary turns to the present-day backstage of the competition, using it to interrogate the causes of the show's current decline and the transformation of its public perception. In fact, nowadays, critiques of objectification, body-positivity discourses, and shifting ideals of beauty intersect with *Miss Italia*'s re-emergence as a largely social-media-driven phenomenon, where clips circulate as sources of memes and 'cringe' content²⁰. Central to this operation is, once again, the reuse and resignification of archival material, which is reassembled and re-read through an often ironic, almost satirical lens that re-activates Italian cultural and televisual memory and repurposes broadcast television as a repository of images and as an object of critique. In both cases, while presenting itself as a detached, almost supra-partes observer, Netflix simultaneously capitalises on the notoriety of these cases, immersing itself in their symbolic economies and ultimately making them its own.



Figure 5. Screenshot of the use of archival material in *Miss Italia non deve morire* (Source: Netflix 2025).

A further confirmation of the strategic appeal of this approach can be seen in HBO Max's entry into the Italian market. Shortly after its launch in Italy, in January 2026, the platform debuted its first Italian original series, *Portobello*, directed by Marco Bellocchio. The series revisits the judicial and media case of Enzo Tortora, the television presenter falsely accused of Camorra affiliation in the 1980s – one of the most traumatic scandals in Italian (broadcasting) history. By transforming a foundational episode of Italian television memory into a premium streaming drama, HBO Max similarly demonstrates how global platforms draw upon nationally embedded media events and personalities as narrative raw material. This tendency reinforces the broader argument advanced throughout the article: rather than breaking with television, streaming platforms repeatedly return to its archives, scandals, genres, and institutional histories, reorganising them within new distribution ecosystems. What appears as innovation is often grounded in the strategic reworking of existing cultural forms.

4 Conclusion

Among the Italian cases discussed in this article, satirical comedy *Boris* occupies a particularly revealing position. Originally aired by Sky Italia between 2007 and 2010, the series has long been recognised as a cult comedy whose satire lays bare the routines, hierarchies, and informal power relations of the Italian television industry, staging the backstage of a generalist soap opera as a condensed metaphor of the system as a whole.²¹ After its conclusion with a third season in 2011, *Boris* circulated for a period within Netflix's catalogue, where it experienced renewed visibility and rediscovery, contributing to an increase in its cultural value. It was this renewed relevance that led Disney+ to acquire the rights for a fourth season, repositioning the series within the ecosystem of global streaming platforms. In this new season, director René Ferretti and his crew come back to pitch a series to an international streaming platform newly arrived in the Italian market. Although framed as innovative and disruptive, the platform quickly becomes entangled in the same dysfunctional practices that have historically defined the national television industry, becoming part of it and, ultimately, complicit in its logics. In its metatelevisual narrative, *Boris* thus suggests that the platform is not an alternative to television, but its continuation by other means, framing the encounter between global streaming services and national broadcasters as a story of integration and mutual adaptation. Crucially, before arriving at this final insight, the series systematically ridicules the promotional rhetoric of disruption surrounding platforms, exposing its contradictions and limits.

Such narratives of disruption do indeed belong to long-standing strategies of platform legitimization as global OTT players have positioned themselves as technologically, culturally, and creatively superior to broadcast television. Yet, the current configuration of streaming services, observed through the European landscape and examined in depth via the Italian case, appears far closer to what has been fittingly described as a 'reinvention of television',²² as 'generalist libraries'²³ add up to a reintroduction of television's established logics: advertising-based subscription, weekly scheduling and appointment viewing, sports and live events, etc.

In this sense, this article has examined the interplay between innovation and continuity in the contemporary television landscape, arguing that the relationship between national broadcasters and global streaming services is shaped by processes of strategic coexistence and ongoing institutional adaptation between linear and on-demand logics. The Italian case illustrates how these dynamics unfold through multiple forms of content recontextualisation: on the one hand, broadcast series are redistributed, repackaged, and rebranded as licensed originals, functioning as cultural anchors that provide platforms with symbolic legitimacy and facilitate audience integration within national markets. On the other, platform originals themselves increasingly repurpose broadcast genres, formats, celebrities, and archival materials, drawing explicitly on the expressive resources and collective memories of generalist television. These processes of recontextualisation may ring a bell, as they resonate with Bolter and Grusin's notion of **remediation**, understood as the representation of one medium within another.²⁴ Streaming platforms re-present broadcast television within digitally mediated environments, reworking its forms while altering modes of access and circulation. Yet the dynamics described here extend beyond remediation in a strictly textual sense, encompassing industrial strategies, regulatory constraints, algorithmic arrangements, and branding practices. What emerges, then, is not the supersession of television, but its strategic reorganisation within new distribution ecosystems. And importantly, in this scenario, broadcast television remains a central reservoir of cultural value. Reed Hasting may as well have switched off the television set, but not television as a 'cultural form'.²

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Notes

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Biography

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