

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

What impact will the Versace-centric docudrama have on the brand?

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Promotional image for "The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story." Image credit: FX

By SARAH JONES

An upcoming miniseries is turning the mystery surrounding the murder of designer Gianni Versace into television drama.

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Airing on FX from Jan. 17, "The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story" is inspired by true events surrounding the 1997 death of Italian fashion label Versace's founder. The Versace family has already distanced itself from the project, but what effect will this true crime-style drama have on the brand?

"Without a doubt - not having creative and editorial control in how your brand is represented across every media platform is a potential risk," said Daymon Bruck, CCO and partner at [The O Group](#), Seattle.

"In this new docudrama by Ryan Murphy about a very tragic period in the Versace timeline is not without possible negative impact to the brand but we see the benefits far outweighing the risks," he said.

"By retelling the story of the founder's life and eventual death, the myth and legend of Gianni as creative visionary is brought back into focus and a topic for discussion," he said. "The brand will likely benefit from a spike of media and social relevancy. If the production is a success—critically or commercially—the brand would also benefit greatly from the connection.

Mr. Bruck is not affiliated with Versace, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Versace](#) was reached for comment.

Fashion meets fiction

In 1997, Mr. Versace was shot outside his home in Miami Beach, FL by Andrew Cunanan. The designer was the last of five men killed by Mr. Cunanan, who committed suicide eight days after murdering Mr. Versace.

To this day, the motive behind Mr. Cunanan's spree killings remain a mystery.



Promotional image for "The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story." Image credit: FX

The second season of producer Ryan Murphy's *American Crime Story* delves into the case. Based on journalist Maureen Orth's book "Vulgar Favors: Andrew Cunanan, Gianni Versace, and the Largest Failed Manhunt in U.S. History," the series written by Tom Rob Smith and produced by Fox 21 Television Studios and FX Productions presents dramatized versions of both the designer and his killer, played by Edgar Ramirez and Darren Criss, respectively.

Actress Penelope Cruz takes on the role of Donatella Versace, the victim's younger sister who took over design duties at her brother's fashion house following his death. Mr. Versace's long-term boyfriend Antonio D'Amico is being played by Ricky Martin.

Per [Page Six](#), Mr. Murphy has said he believes that Mr. Versace's murder was political, as Mr. Cunanan targeted people to "out" them and to get back at them for living a life he felt he could not.

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/WrXL4URRbTc>

Official trailer for The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story

Ms. Orth said in a piece for *Vanity Fair* that Mr. Cunanan was angry that Mr. Versace was a gay icon while he was not.

Ahead of the show's premiere, the Versace family issued a statement, saying, "The Versace family has neither authorized nor had any involvement whatsoever in the forthcoming TV series about the death of Mr. Gianni Versace. Since Versace did not authorize the book on which it is partly based nor has it taken part in the writing of the screenplay, this TV series should only be considered as a work of fiction."

Brand placement

This unaffiliated show comes as Versace finds its own ways to look back at the legacy of Mr. Versace.

For spring/summer 2018, Ms. Versace used iconic prints that Mr. Versace had developed for the brand and updated the ready-to-wear pieces for today's consumer.

During Versace's Milan Fashion Week presentation, Ms. Versace also recreated an iconic brand moment where her brother and 1990s supermodels, Carla Bruni, Claudia Schiffer, Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford and Helena Christensen, closed the show arm-in-arm and holding hands at the spring/summer 1998 show ([see story](#)).

Mr. Versace's mansion, put on the market after his murder, was turned into a boutique hotel. Many of the touches made by the designer during his reported \$33 million renovation of the 1930s property were left in tact, allowing guests to stay in rooms once occupied by Mr. Versace or his famous family and friends.

The Villa Casa Casuarina, owned by Victor Hotels, is a four-star property with room prices upwards of \$1,000 a night.

Luxury brands and the people behind them are frequently fodder for pop culture. Often brands do not get a say in where they appear, but they are able to choose whether or not to align with placements.

In comparison to its distance from the FX show, Versace leaned into its association with pop star Bruno Mars, turning its mention in the recording artist's song into a broader branding opportunity. For the music video for the Bruno Mars track "Versace On The Floor," the luxury house created custom attire for the singer and his co-star Zendaya ([see story](#)).

"The official response by the Versace family that this production should be taken as a work of fiction is totally appropriate and a great response by any brand to a project where creative control of a story telling is not completely ownable," O Group's Mr. Bruck said.

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