

# The role of Branded Museums in revitalizing tourism after disruption: a qualitative research

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## Abstract

In a situation where different countries are nowadays competing on a shrank EU tourism market, patterns of distinctiveness should be explored by Italian destinations to increase tourists' engagement and attractiveness. Accordingly, while Italy is recognized for its unique cultural offering and for Made in Italy, little attention has been dedicated to investigating features at the intersection between “cultural” and “shopping” tourism, two of the most relevant sources of tourism attraction in Italy. Hence, the role of Made in Italy Branded Museums might improve the attitude toward different Italian destinations and, consequently, the potential absolute flow of tourists. This study uses an explorative analysis with 88 qualitative semi-structured interviews to European consumers to gain deeper insights into the relationship between the presence of a high-end fashion branded museum and the willingness to visit the place where it is located. We conclude by presenting an overarching model and identifying and connecting different antecedents to monitor and increase Italian cities' overall attractiveness, willingness to visit and prolong the stay.

**Keywords:** Museums, Made in Italy, High-end fashion products, Tourism, Willingness to visit

## Introduction

The interplay between geopolitical events and tourism is a critical area of concern, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery efforts. Extensive research has highlighted the profound influence that geopolitical occurrences can exert on the tourism sector, underscoring the need for strategic measures to mitigate their potentially adverse effects (Pandey *et al.*, 2023). As the global tourism industry strives to recuperate from the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the specter of conflicts and wars looms large, posing unique challenges and threats.

The pandemic has already left an indelible mark on the tourism landscape (-56.1% of foreign tourists), causing widespread disruptions and economic losses (ISTAT, 2022). As destinations and businesses work tirelessly to regain their footing, the emergence of geopolitical conflicts can deal a severe blow to these nascent recovery efforts. A notable example of this vulnerability is the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, contributed a substantial 3% to the global tourism spending (Pandey *et al.*, 2023).

In light of these concerns, it becomes imperative for cities and regions heavily reliant on tourism to develop and implement innovative strategies aimed at bolstering their attractions. These include investments in infrastructure development (Mandić *et al.*, 2018), as well as efforts to reposition destinations (Scott *et al.*, 2018), and to promote specific micro-sites within each destination (Botiş *et al.*, in 2017). Accordingly, to thrive in this competitive landscape, Italian destinations must explore distinctive features to enhance tourist engagement and overall

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attractiveness. As a result, since Italy is recognized for its unique cultural offering, for fashion and luxury background and for Made in Italy, this research aims to investigate whether the presence of high-end fashion Made in Italy museums can positively impact tourists' perceptions of various Italian destinations and, consequently, increase the absolute number of tourists visiting the country.

## **Theoretical Background**

The *Made in Italy* label has been a topic of academic and cultural discussion, and is now widely accepted as a crucial factor in the advancement of cultural and fashion tourism in Italy (Bertoli, 2013; Lazzeretti & Oliva, 2022). As a result, it has been researched from different points of view. Some of the extant literature has analyzed the influence of *Made in Italy* on consumer behavior and attraction (Insch & McBride, 2004). Many studies have been conducted on *Made in Italy*, with various goals focused on Fashion (Belfanti, 2015) and Luxury sector (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). In addition, it is noteworthy that another section of the literature emphasizes the cultural significance of *Made in Italy*, as well as its intimate association with cultural heritage (Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023). As regard, prior research indicates that cultural heritage is becoming increasingly important at many levels of the economy, and that regions can increase their competitiveness by exploiting their historical tradition and artistry (Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2008; Alberti *et al.*, 2012). In this perspective, as culture and fashion are signatures of an authentic and unique experience for tourists visiting Italy (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007), *Made in Italy* high-end fashion Museums should play a key role in communicating the Italian creativity (Lazzeretti *et al.*, 2017), craftsmanship (Farsani & Jamshidi, 2021) and culture (Lazzeretti & Oliva, 2022).

Moreover, the presence of Made in Italy high-end fashion museums, in specific Italian cities, allows for an authentic and unique experience (Kotler *et al.*, 2008), involving consumers in the complex cultural, socio-political and behavioral surroundings (Calinao *et al.*, 2017). In particular, these museums – for example Ferrari in Maranello, Prada in Milan, Ferragamo in Florence - contribute strongly to increasing the value of the destination by sharing the coolness (Loureiro & Blanco, 2023), distinctiveness (Farsani & Jamshidi, 2021) and quality (Oh *et al.*, 2007) of their offerings and by enriching the nature and scope of the experience developed by tourists.

Extant research dedicated specific attention to the role of tourists' perceptions (Lazzeretti *et al.*, 2017) in evaluating cultural experience in high-end fashion and luxury museums (Jansson *et al.*, 2010). As far as tourists' authenticity perception of the museum in its birthplace is concerned, it plays a significant role in establishing a solid relationship between the visited exhibition and the culture of the country (Scarpi *et al.*, 2023), similarly affecting the willingness to travel (Calinao *et al.*, 2017) and return (Loureiro *et al.*, 2023) to the specific region/city. As a result, if enacted successfully, cultural tourism will capitalize on location's tradition to give depth to the experience, and thus stimulating and enhancing tourists' desire to visit the country (Chen & Rahman, 2018).

To the best of our knowledge, limited attention has been dedicated to the impact that high-end Fashion *Made in Italy* museums have on tourists' willingness to travel or prolong their stay in the country. In particular, the present study employs qualitative analysis to explore the impact of high-end fashion-branded museums on travel decisions, specifically with regard to the length of stay and the willingness to visit a city. The aim of this study is also to uncover the underlying thoughts, emotions, motivations, and trends that influence the travel decisions of European tourists. The ultimate goal is to create a rational framework that can be used to better understand and predict the travel behaviors of this population. By shedding light on the underlying drivers

of travel decision-making, this research has the potential to inform and enhance strategic decision-making in the travel industry.

## **Materials and Methods**

### *The qualitative analysis*

To carry out the study, we conducted interpretive qualitative research to understand how high-end fashion branded museums affect the choice to visit a city, also in terms of length of stay, willingness to travel and visit. Specifically, we intend to unveil the perceptions, motivations and trends that influence travel decisions, linked to the presence of well-known high-end fashion Made in Italy museums. According to Galletta (2012), semi-structured interviews method is successful in enabling reciprocity between the interviewer and participant and allowing space for participants' individual verbal expressions.

The data collection process was administered through a survey, delivered via Prolific, with 14 open-ended structured questions (*See Appendix 1*) to 88 European customers (Mage = 31.58, SD = 7.14).

Subsequently, we firstly started to read through each interview transcript, coded it for units of meaning and assigned each unit an open code (using the exact words of the participants), thus categorizing information into *first-order concepts*. Secondly, we started seeking similarities and differences among the many sub-categories - similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) notion of axial coding -, a process that eventually streamlines the relevant categories into a more manageable quantity, thus framing information into *second-order concepts* and giving those categories labels and phrasal descriptors (*See Appendix 2*). Once we had collected the *first* and *second order concepts*, we then proceeded to discern the relationships between the observations and organize them into broader categories or *aggregate dimensions*. This step is of utmost importance, as it illuminates the evolution from unprocessed data to themes in our analytical process, ultimately allowing us to establish a hypothetical rational framework. In other words, the act of building a data structure leads us to begin thinking about the data from a theoretical perspective, comparing it with existing literature not only to see if what we are finding has precedents, but also if we have discovered new concepts.

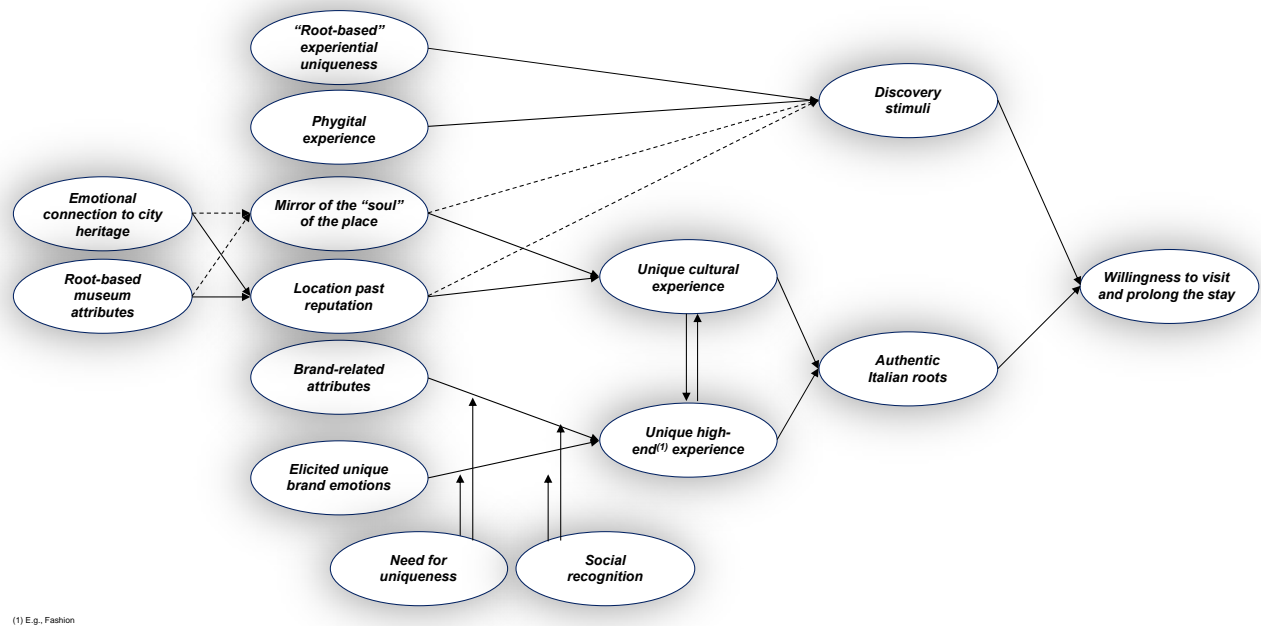
## **Findings**

We present our findings supported by representative quotations from the semi-structured interview transcripts delivered by 88 respondents. The open-coding analysis led us to define 128 subcategories (or 1st-order concepts) that group the participants' most recurrent expressions in response to each interview questions (*See Appendix 1*). As the research progresses, we started seeking similarities and differences among the many categories and we then assigned them phrasal descriptors retaining informant terms. Accordingly, results from the axial-coding analysis showed the existence of 12 categories (or 2<sup>nd</sup> order concepts) distinguished in: a) brand-related attributes b) elicited unique brand emotions c) phygital experience d) root-based museum attributes e) emotional connection to city heritage f) need for uniqueness g) social recognition h) mirror of the "soul" of the place i) location past reputation l) root-based experiential uniqueness m) discovery stimuli n) authentic Italian roots.

Once having identified these categories, each of them strictly correlated with its own associations, we assigned a dominant framework (or 3<sup>rd</sup> order concepts) with the aim of showing the dynamic relationships between emerging concepts describing the phenomenon of branded Made in Italy museums in boosting Italian tourism and making clear all relevant connections between data.

Among those, we can distinguish between i) attitudes and behaviors towards high-end fashion products ii) attitudes and behaviors towards branded museums iii) emotional response to high-end fashion products iv) museum authenticity and v) willingness to visit and prolong the stay. In order to comprehend the role of Branded Made in Italy museums and establish correlations between *second* and *third order concepts*, we created a conceptual framework aimed at highlighting the associations and relationships between our variables (See Figure 1). Through this approach, we were able to pinpoint the factors that impact a European consumer's choice to visit specific Italian cities, including their attitudes and emotional responses.

Specifically, our analysis revealed that the distinctiveness of these experiences appears to hinge on two critical factors: 1) the authenticity of the museums, rooted in their capacity to articulate locally embedded traditions and lifestyles; and 2) the perceived emotional connection between the showcased luxury products and their place of origin. Significantly, respondents expressed a desire to visit Italy for both cultural and fashion reasons through these museums. The cultural experience offered by the museums preserved the country's knowledge in exhibits, fostering admiration for Italy's heritage. Simultaneously, the fashion experience provided a unique exploration of the high-end fashion industry, shaping respondents' attitudes toward luxury products. In light of these findings, High-End Fashion Brand Museums should prioritize the promotion of authenticity by meticulously curating exhibitions and narratives to convey genuine stories about the brand and its host culture.



**Figure 1. Connections between second and third Order Concepts**

## General Discussion

This paper sought to investigate the role of Made in Italy Branded museums in revitalizing the attractiveness of specific Italian destinations, and consequently the overall flow of tourism. Moreover, the research is strategically located at the intersection of cultural and fashion tourism, two pivotal strands that typify the concept of "Made in Italy".

Accordingly, this research provides several theoretical contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the evolving landscape of tourist preferences by delving into their interest in experiences that seamlessly integrate fashion and culture. Secondly, the analysis brings attention to factors that potentially enhance these museums' capacity to offer compelling experiences, thereby influencing tourists' perceptions of a destination. Thirdly, the study underlines travelers' perceptions and behavioral intentions, underscoring the pivotal role played by the museum's authenticity and emotional connection with its place of origin in shaping the willingness of tourists to visit and prolong their stay. These insights assume particular significance in light of the declining vacation durations among European tourists and their escalating desire for distinctive and memorable experiences.

Moreover, the findings of the qualitative analysis have revealed a comprehensive framework of interrelated variables that effectively bridge the gap between the two knowledge streams. Results showed that European customers' willingness to visit and extend their stay in Italy is influenced by both "static" and "dynamic" factors. The static component includes Italy's heritage and origins, while the dynamic component encompasses the stimuli for discovery. Starting from the dynamic part of our framework, in order to effectively appeal to a wider audience of tourists, it is imperative to provide experiences that genuinely connect with the rich cultural heritage of Italy. These experiences should be emotionally evocative and firmly entrenched in traditional Italian customs. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the shopping experience also serves as a critical factor in this equation. While in-person experiences remain crucial nowadays, there is a burgeoning acceptance of incorporating digital touchpoints (e.g., 2D, 3D settings) to reach the omnichannel presence.

On the other hand, the static part of the roots and origins of Italy is mutually reinforced by the presence of two kinds of experience: cultural and high-end fashion. While the latter is, in turn, influenced by attributes and emotions that are directly elicited by the use of a particular high-end fashion brand and moderated by specific personality traits (e.g., need for uniqueness, social recognition), the former is strictly correlated with other two relevant cultural variables: "Mirror" the soul of the place and location past reputation. The underlying idea is that storytelling alone cannot create an emergent connection between past, present, and the city, as this would compromise the root-based uniqueness. Therefore, specific locations in Italian cities must be carefully selected to establish the high-end fashion museum.

To sum up, through this conceptual framework, we are able to conceptualize that the overall European tourists' willingness to visit and prolong the stay is the results of roots and stimuli that, in turn, are both influenced by other attitudinal, emotional and behavioral variables. As a result, when establishing high-end Made in Italy fashion museums, it is crucial to take these variables into consideration. For instance, destination management organizations are encouraged to leverage High-End Fashion Brand Museums to (a) foster tourism in carefully selected cities aligned with the place's culture and heritage; (b) spotlight specific brands possessing an authentic heritage; (c) evoke emotional experiences, thereby intensifying tourists' desire to visit the country; and (d) pioneer innovative "phygital" communication touchpoints (e.g., physical, digital, and virtual) to create an interconnected journey for experiential travelers.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

This study was carried out paying close attention to the methods of data collection and processing and ensuring that all criteria were followed to prevent any bias. However, as with any research, there are limitations that could be used as recommendations for future studies. First, although the sample represents European tourists, it may still be limited. In the future, researchers should use a more diverse population of tourists from other countries and

investigate how the characteristics of branded museums and the attractiveness of Italian cities vary across cultures. Second, the semi-structured interviews were administered through Prolific, an online platform, which did not allow respondents to express their ideas for a long time or fully reflect their opinions on the topic. Therefore, future studies should conduct face-to-face interviews in order to deeply analyze participants' emotions, inner thoughts or body movements. Third, our research includes a qualitative analysis of the data. Thus, future research could develop quantitative analyses by investigating the impact of the presence of the high-end fashion museums on the perceived destinations' attractiveness and observes the serial mediation effects of location/brand fit and attitudes toward the brand and toward museums on the variable. Other studies could also explore specific personality traits as moderators for the serial mediation model.

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## Appendix 1

**Table 1. Open-ended structured questions**

Semi-structured interview's questions
<b>Q1:</b> What was the role of the brand during your last in-store purchase experience?
<b>Q2:</b> How did you feel about high-end fashion products?
<b>Q3:</b> Where are you willing to buy high-end fashion and luxury products?
<b>Q4/5:</b> When you travel to a new city, how interested are you in visiting museums? And why?
<b>Q6:</b> Imagine that the people (e.g., friends, family, colleagues) encourage or push you to buy a high-end fashion or luxury product. What would your reaction be?
<b>Q7:</b> How do you feel when wearing high-end fashion and luxury products?
<b>Q8:</b> When you visit a high-end fashion museum, how important is for you to experience a connection between the museum itself and the city where the museum it is located?
<b>Q9:</b> Thinking about a high-end fashion museum, where would you locate it in relation to Italian cities? And where would you not place it? Why?
<b>Q10:</b> Which characteristics should a museum have to be considered “authentic”?
<b>Q11:</b> Imagine you have booked a trip to a new destination and that you have to choose between a city-tour visit (day 1) and a tour visit to a high-end fashion museum (day 2). Are you willing to extend your stay and complete the itinerary, or would you choose only one of the two alternatives?
<b>Q12:</b> How interested are you in visiting Italy? What are the main reasons?

## Appendix 2

**Table 1. First and Second Order Concepts**

Sub-categories (1 <sup>st</sup> Order Concepts)	Categories (2 <sup>nd</sup> Order Concepts)
<i>Q1</i>	
-Sophisticated customer experience	<b>Brand-related attributes</b>
-Authenticity	
-Assurance of quality	
-Reputation and reliability	
-Differentiation	
-Exclusivity	



-Durability	
-Willingness to show off	
-Price constraint	
-Logo rejection	
-Guarantee of quality standards	
<b>Q2</b>	
-Satisfaction	<b>Elicited unique brand emotions</b>
-Pride	
-Gratitude	
-Comfort	
-Personal ego	
-Admiration	
-High status-symbol	
-Uniqueness	
-Coolness	
<b>Q3</b>	
-Reliable online retailers	<b>Phygital experience</b>
-Detailed online research	
-In-store personalized service	
-Online shopping	
-Try before buy formula	
-Local luxury boutiques	
<b>Q4</b>	
-Need for immersive experience	<b>Root-based museum attributes</b>
-Completeness	
-Connection with local communities	
-Contact with culture, heritage and history	
-Need for uniqueness	
-Search for interactive exhibitions	
-Personal background's growth	
-Escape from reality	
-Fulfillment	
-Enhancement of the overall travel experience	
-Education	
-Preservation of country-knowledge	
<b>Q5</b>	
-Immersion	

-Love	<b>Emotional connection to city heritage</b>
-Inspiration	
-Passion	
-Pleasure	
-Appreciation	
-Admiration	
-Reflection	
-Entertainment	
-Enjoyment	
<b>Q6</b>	
-Narcissism	<b>Need for uniqueness</b>
-WOM Supported	
-Money Saver	
-Financial issue	
-Pressure	
-Individualism	
-Search for help and calmness	
-Reasoned purchase	
-Careless of others' opinions	
-Judgement, shame	
-Research	
<b>Q7</b>	
-Self-confidence	<b>Social recognition</b>
-Superiority, high-status, notoriety	
-Self-realization, self-rewarding	
-Pride, social value	
-Empowered, sophisticated, special	
-Self-esteem, sense of worth	
-Perception of economic stability	
-Guilty, discomfort	
-Representative, sense of prestige	
-Social standing, inclusivity	
-Sense of belonging or identity	
-Sense of vanity, coolness	
-Refined, trendy, stylish, likeable, fashionable	
<b>Q8</b>	
-Engagement with local culture and communities	<b>Mirror of the "soul" of the place</b>

-Deeper understanding and appreciation	
-Perceived uniqueness	
-Sense of belonging, sense of place	
-Enhancement of the travel experience, full involvement	
-Essentiality	
-Unveiling the soul of the city	
-Reflection of the cosmopolitan experience	
-Fashion as mirror of the city	
<b>Q9/10</b>	
-Milan and Florence as top of mind	<b>Location past reputation</b>
-Centrality and accessibility of the city	
-Popularity, attractiveness	
-City with fashion background	
-Rome for its reputation as a capital	
-Rejection of Naples, symbol of robbery and crimes	
-Authenticity with the birthplace	
-Connection with fashion	
-Tourism-oriented cities, no smaller cities	
-Milan as representation of the Italian fashion industry	
-Focus on heritage and cultural cities	
<b>Q11</b>	
-Need for uniqueness, rarity	<b>Root-based experiential uniqueness</b>
-Perceived connection with history	
-Need for originality, transparency, trust, credibility	
-Accuracy, meticulous attention to details, cure	
-Consistency, integrity	
-Professionalism, inclusivity, dedication	
-Alignment with purpose and mission	
-Need for innovation, engagement	
-Focus on customer experience, to boost the 5 senses	
-Perceived connection with the birthplace	
<b>Q12</b>	
-Bundle solution (City tour + museum's visit)	<b>Discovery stimuli</b>
-Deeper understanding and appreciation of the place	
-Triggering curiosity	
-Preference for city tour rather than museum	

-Passion and love for fashion museums	
-Willingness to prolong the stay	
-Willingness to discover	
-Brand's preference	
-Search for unique and valuable experiences	
-Laziness	
-Equilibrium between the urban and artsy side of the city	
-Grasping the essence of the place	
<i>Q13/14</i>	
-Culture and Heritage	<b>Authentic Italian roots</b>
-Art, architecture	
-Museums, history	
-Food, Mediterranean diet	
-Climate, friendly atmosphere	
-Fashion, luxury and design	
-Italian lifestyle	
-Natural beauty, simplicity	
-Diversity	
-Iconicity	
-WOM, high reputation, popularity	
-Friendly people	
-Dream vacation, Italian excellence	
-Warm hospitality	