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Building a Sustainable Fashion Identity for Made in Vietnam through Insights from Made in Italy

Xây dựng bản sắc thời trang bền vững cho Made in Vietnam thông qua những hiểu biết từ Made in Italy

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Abstract

The global fashion industry recognizes the value of cultural identity, craftsmanship, and sustainability in shaping competitive advantage. While Made in Italy has become a symbol of design excellence and cultural value, Made in Vietnam remains predominantly associated with manufacturing capacity. This study investigates how insights from the Italian fashion system can contribute to the development of a sustainable fashion identity for Vietnam. Using a comparative qualitative approach, the research analyzes literature, industry reports, and representative fashion brands from Italy and Vietnam, complemented by semi-structured interviews with designers, educators, cultural experts, and fashion entrepreneurs. The findings reveal that craft heritage, cultural identity, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding are key dimensions underpinning the success of Made in Italy. Although Vietnam possesses rich cultural resources and traditional craft knowledge, these assets have yet to be strategically integrated into a distinctive fashion identity. The study proposes a conceptual framework for transforming Made in Vietnam from a manufacturing-oriented label into a culture-driven and sustainability-oriented fashion identity, contributing to the broader discussion on development and branding of sustainable fashion.

Keywords: Made in Vietnam, Made in Italy, sustainable fashion, fashion identity, fashion design, fashion industry

Tóm tắt

Bản sắc văn hóa, nghề thủ công và tính bền vững ngày càng khẳng định vai trò như những nguồn lực chiến lược trong việc tạo dựng lợi thế cạnh tranh trên thị trường thời trang toàn cầu. Trong khi Made in Italy đã trở thành biểu tượng của sự xuất sắc trong thiết kế và giá trị văn hóa, Made in Vietnam vẫn chủ yếu gắn liền với năng lực sản xuất. Nghiên cứu tập trung tìm hiểu cách thức những hiểu biết từ hệ thống thời trang Ý có thể đóng góp vào việc phát triển bản sắc thời trang bền vững cho Việt Nam. Sử dụng phương pháp định tính so sánh, nghiên cứu phân tích tài liệu, báo cáo ngành và các thương hiệu thời trang tiêu biểu từ Ý và Việt Nam, đồng thời thực hiện thêm các cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc với các nhà thiết kế, nhà giáo dục, chuyên gia văn hóa và doanh nhân thời trang Việt Nam. Kết quả cho thấy di sản nghề thủ công, bản sắc văn hóa, đổi mới thiết kế, tính bền vững và xây dựng thương hiệu quốc gia là những khía cạnh quan trọng làm nền tảng cho sự thành công của Made in Italy. Mặc dù Việt Nam sở hữu nguồn tài nguyên văn hóa phong phú và kiến

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thức nghề thủ công truyền thống, nhưng những tài nguyên này vẫn chưa được tích hợp một cách chiến lược vào bản sắc thời trang riêng biệt. Nghiên cứu đề xuất một khung khái niệm để chuyển đổi Made in Vietnam từ nhãn hiệu định hướng sản xuất thành bản sắc thời trang hướng đến văn hóa và tính bền vững, góp phần vào cuộc thảo luận chung về phát triển và xây dựng thương hiệu thời trang bền vững.

Từ khóa: Made in Vietnam, Made in Italy, thời trang bền vững, bản sắc thời trang, thiết kế thời trang, ngành công nghiệp thời trang

1. Introduction

The global fashion industry is increasingly shaped by sustainability, cultural authenticity, and creative innovation as key sources of competitiveness. Beyond cost-driven manufacturing, consumers now value products that embody craftsmanship, heritage, and meaningful narratives [8]; [24]. Consequently, the concept of Made in has evolved from indicating manufacturing location to representing a broader system of cultural, economic, and symbolic values associated with a nation.

This shift is closely linked to the country-of-origin (COO) effect and nation branding. Studies show that product origin significantly influences perceptions of quality, authenticity, prestige, and purchase intention [2]; [16]. In fashion, COO encompasses not only manufacturing capabilities but also design traditions, craftsmanship, and cultural identity. Leading fashion-producing countries therefore create competitive advantage by integrating cultural heritage, design excellence, and storytelling into coherent national fashion identities rather than relying solely on production efficiency. Among these, Made in Italy is widely recognized as a successful example of culture-driven value creation. Its global reputation stems from the integration of craftsmanship, regional production systems, design innovation, and cultural heritage. Brands such as Bottega Veneta, Brunello Cucinelli, Loro Piana, and Salvatore Ferragamo demonstrate how traditional artisanal knowledge can be reinterpreted through contemporary design while maintaining strong local identity. Moreover, the Italian fashion system illustrates that sustainability extends beyond environmental performance to include preserving traditional craftsmanship, supporting local production networks, and ensuring cultural continuity. This holistic approach has strengthened the long-term competitiveness of Made in Italy and provides valuable lessons for countries seeking to develop distinctive fashion identities.

Vietnam has followed a different trajectory. Over the past three decades, it has become one of the world's leading textile and garment exporters, yet Made in Vietnam remains primarily associated with manufacturing capacity, contract production, and competitive labor costs rather than creativity or cultural identity [23]. Although Vietnam possesses abundant cultural resources, including ethnic textile traditions, craft villages, silk weaving, embroidery, and natural dyeing, these assets have not been systematically transformed into a distinctive national fashion identity. Although an increasing number of designers have incorporated local heritage into contemporary collections, such efforts remain fragmented and have yet to significantly contribute to the longer-term repositioning of Made in Vietnam in international markets. In this study, “Made in” is understood not merely as a designation of manufacturing origin, but as a broader cultural and strategic signifier through which a country communicates its craftsmanship, design capabilities, cultural heritage, and national identity. Accordingly, “Made in Vietnam” refers to the emerging fashion identity associated with Vietnam’s cultural resources, design

capabilities, craftsmanship, and production practices, rather than solely its role as a manufacturing base.

Recent sustainability debates further emphasize the importance of cultural heritage in fashion development. Cultural sustainability is now widely recognized alongside environmental, economic, and social sustainability [22]; [27]. Traditional craftsmanship and indigenous knowledge are increasingly viewed not only as heritage to preserve but also as drivers of innovation, resilience, and sustainable value creation. However, while extensive research has examined Made in Italy, luxury branding, and COO effects, relatively few studies have explored how these experiences can guide the development of sustainable fashion identity in emerging fashion economies such as Vietnam. Existing research on Vietnam mainly focuses on export performance and manufacturing competitiveness, leaving limited understanding of how cultural heritage, design innovation, and country branding can be strategically integrated.

Four strands of literature point to an unresolved research issue. First, studies of Made in Italy demonstrate how craftsmanship, cultural heritage, design innovation, and institutional support can transform a manufacturing origin into a distinctive fashion identity [21]; [17]; [20]. Second, research on country-of-origin (COO) and nation branding shows that national origin can generate symbolic value beyond product attributes, yet this literature has largely examined consumer perceptions and country image rather than the cultural and design processes through which fashion identity is constructed [2]; [16]. Third, research on sustainable and cultural fashion increasingly recognises craftsmanship, indigenous knowledge, and cultural continuity as resources for sustainable value creation [22]; [27], but these perspectives have rarely been connected systematically to COO-based fashion identity. Finally, research on Vietnam has focused predominantly on manufacturing competitiveness and export performance, with limited attention to how cultural heritage, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding can be integrated to reposition Made in Vietnam [23]. The gap, therefore, is not the absence of these individual concepts, but the lack of an integrated and context-sensitive framework that connects them in the development of a national fashion identity. Building on Made in Italy as a reference case while focusing empirically on Vietnam, this study addresses this gap by synthesising these established dimensions into a Sustainable Fashion Identity (SFI) framework for Made in Vietnam. The contribution lies not in proposing five entirely new dimensions, but in demonstrating how their integration and contextualisation can provide a conceptual pathway for moving Made in Vietnam from a manufacturing-oriented label towards a culture-driven and sustainability-oriented fashion identity.

To address the gap mentioned above, this study investigates how insights from Made in Italy can inform the development of a Sustainable Fashion Identity for Made in Vietnam. Using a comparative qualitative approach, it synthesizes academic literature, policy documents, industry reports, and representative fashion brands, complemented by semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese designers, educators, cultural experts, and industry practitioners. Based on the findings, the study proposes a conceptual framework linking craft heritage, cultural identity, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding. By extending discussions on COO branding and sustainable fashion, the research offers both theoretical contributions and practical

implications for policymakers, fashion educators, and industry stakeholders seeking to strengthen the global identity of Made in Vietnam.

2. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative, reference-case approach to explore how insights from the development of Made in Italy can inform the construction of a sustainable fashion identity for Made in Vietnam. Made in Italy was used as a reference case through which established principles of fashion identity formation could be identified, while Vietnam constituted the focal context in which the relevance and potential adaptation of these principles were examined. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research aims to examine complex socio-cultural phenomena, including craftsmanship, cultural heritage, design values, and national identity, which cannot be adequately understood through quantitative indicators alone [7]. Therefore, the analysis compares the two contexts at the level of conceptual dimensions and transferable principles, rather than industrial performance or equivalent national fashion systems. The unit of comparison was defined as the principles and dimensions through which cultural resources are transformed into fashion identity, rather than the national fashion systems themselves. Five provisional analytical dimensions were initially identified to structure the comparison: craft heritage, cultural identity, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding. These dimensions were used as an initial analytical framework rather than as fixed categories imposed on the data. For Italy, these dimensions were examined through documentary evidence and selected brand cases to identify established practices and mechanisms. For Vietnam, they were examined through documentary evidence, selected emerging fashion initiatives, and semi-structured interviews to assess existing resources, practices, and opportunities for contextual adaptation.

The research employed data triangulation by integrating multiple sources of qualitative evidence to enhance the credibility and richness of the findings [9]. The first source consisted of documentary analysis, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, industry reports, and official publications related to fashion, cultural heritage, sustainability, and country-of-origin branding. Academic literature provided the theoretical foundation for understanding the evolution of Made in Italy and sustainable fashion identity. Policy documents and strategic reports issued by organizations such as UNESCO, the Italian Trade Agency, Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, the Vietnam Textile and Apparel Association (VITAS), and the Vietnamese Government were analyzed to understand the institutional and industrial contexts shaping fashion development in both countries [27]; [21]; [26].

To complement the documentary evidence, the study also examined representative fashion brands as illustrative cases of how cultural heritage and craftsmanship are translated into fashion identity. For Italy, the analysis focused on internationally recognized brands, including Bottega Veneta, Brunello Cucinelli, Salvatore Ferragamo and Loro Piana, which exemplify the integration of artisanal craftsmanship, design innovation, and national branding. In Vietnam, selected brands and initiatives were examined for their engagement with local materials, traditional craftsmanship, indigenous knowledge and cultural narratives. These cases were not intended to represent the entire fashion industries of either country but to provide illustrative evidence of different pathways through which cultural resources can contribute to fashion identity.

The second source of data comprised semi-structured interviews with twelve Vietnamese participants who possess professional expertise relevant to fashion, design, culture, and traditional crafts. Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants capable of providing rich and diverse perspectives on the development of Made in Vietnam. The interviews were conducted during two months at the begining of 2026, through online/in-person semi-structured interviews, with each session lasting approximately 30 - 45 minutes. The participants included five fashion designers and fashion managers, three fashion design educators, two cultural experts, and two master artisans from traditional craft villages (see more in Table 1). The interviewees were selected based on their demonstrated experience in fashion design, design education, cultural heritage preservation, or traditional craftsmanship, particularly where these intersect with sustainable fashion practices. The interviews explored four main themes: (1) current perceptions of Made in Vietnam within the fashion industry; (2) the role of cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship in creating fashion value; (3) opportunities and challenges for developing a distinctive sustainable fashion identity; and (4) perspectives on the applicability of lessons derived from Made in Italy. The interviews focused exclusively on Vietnamese stakeholders because their purpose was not to provide a parallel dataset for the Italian case, but to examine how principles identified from Made in Italy could be interpreted and contextualised within Vietnam. Besides, the interview sample was relatively small and purposively selected, with all participants based in Vietnam. Although the inclusion of designers, educators, cultural experts, artisans, and fashion managers provided diverse perspectives, the study did not directly include policymakers, manufacturers, or international fashion stakeholders. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as representative of the entire Vietnamese fashion industry. Future research could broaden the participant pool to include these stakeholder groups and further examine the framework across different institutional and market contexts.

Table 1. Demographic profile of interview participants

Participant ID	Professional role	Affiliation/Organization	Year of professional experience
P1	Fashion designer	Local fashion brand	12
P2	Fashion designer	Local fashion enterprise	10
P3	Fashion designer	National fashion brand	15
P4	Fashion design educator	Public university	18
P5	Fashion design educator	Public university	16
P6	Fashion design educator	Private university	12
P7	Cultural expert	Cultural heritage institute	20
P8	Cultural expert	Cultural and development institute	17
P9	Master artisan	Silk weaving craft village	25
P10	Master artisan	Bamboo weaving craft village	20
P11	Fashion manager	Independent sustainable fashion brand	10
P12	Fashion manager	Fashion enterprise	18

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework [5]. A hybrid deductive–inductive coding process was employed. The five provisional analytical dimensions identified from the literature and the comparative analysis of Made in Italy provided the initial deductive framework for organizing the evidence. Initial coding was then conducted inductively to identify concepts, meanings, practices, and relationships emerging from the documentary sources, brand cases, and interview transcripts. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes through an iterative comparison across the two national contexts. The emerging themes were reviewed against the full body of evidence, and the initial analytical dimensions were refined where necessary to ensure that they adequately reflected the empirical findings and the contextual specificities of Vietnam. Finally, the identified themes were synthesized to develop a conceptual framework explaining the key dimensions of Sustainable Fashion Identity for Made in Vietnam. The integration of documentary evidence with expert perspectives enabled the study to generate a contextually grounded and theoretically informed interpretation of how cultural heritage, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding may collectively contribute to the future development of Vietnam's fashion industry.

Drawing on the comparative analysis and empirical findings, this study proposes a Sustainable Fashion Identity (SFI) framework comprising five interconnected dimensions: craft heritage, cultural identity, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding. The five SFI dimensions were developed through a deductive–inductive process. Initial codes were compared across documentary, brand-case, and interview evidence and subsequently clustered into broader themes. These themes were then synthesised into five interconnected dimensions, craft heritage, cultural identity, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding. Thus, the framework was refined through the triangulation of theoretical and empirical evidence.

Table 2. From initial codes to the five dimensions of the SFI framework

Initial codes	Emergent theme	SFI dimension
Craft skills, artisans, traditional techniques	Heritage-based resources	Craft heritage
Cultural narratives, authenticity, identity	Cultural meaning	Cultural identity
Contemporary reinterpretation, creativity	Heritage–innovation transformation	Design innovation
Ethical production, community, continuity	Long-term value	Sustainability
National image, storytelling, global positioning	External communication	Country branding

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Understanding Made in Vietnam

The documentary analysis indicates that Made in Vietnam has historically been associated with manufacturing capability rather than with fashion identity or brand value. Since the economic reforms (Đổi Mới) initiated in 1986, Vietnam has become one of the world's leading textile and garment exporters, integrating deeply into global apparel value chains through foreign direct investment, export-oriented production, and contract manufacturing. The textile and garment industry remains one of the country's largest export sectors, contributing substantially to employment and economic growth [26]. However, despite its manufacturing strength,

Vietnam continues to participate primarily in the lower value-added segments of the global fashion value chain, particularly through original equipment manufacturing (OEM) and original design manufacturing (ODM), while relatively few domestic brands have established international recognition.

This manufacturing-oriented trajectory has significantly influenced the international perception of Made in Vietnam. In contrast to countries where country-of-origin functions as a marker of design excellence or cultural prestige, Vietnam's national image in fashion is still closely linked to production efficiency, competitive labor costs, and supply chain reliability. COO effects are shaped not only by the physical origin of products but also by consumers' accumulated perceptions of a country's industrial capabilities, technological development, and cultural reputation [16]. In Vietnam's case, decades of export-led industrialization have strengthened its reputation as a reliable manufacturing base, yet this success has not been accompanied by an equally strong international identity in fashion design or branding. The evolution of Made in Italy demonstrates a markedly different trajectory. Although Italy also developed its fashion industry through strong manufacturing traditions, the country gradually transformed production excellence into symbolic value by integrating craftsmanship, regional identity, design innovation, and luxury branding [10]. Successful nation brands derive their competitiveness not solely from economic performance but also from their ability to communicate distinctive cultural values and narratives [2]. Consequently, Made in Italy has evolved into a globally recognized symbol of creativity, authenticity, and craftsmanship, whereas Made in Vietnam continues to be interpreted largely through the lens of industrial production.

The interview findings strongly support this observation. Across all participant groups, including fashion designers, educators, cultural experts, and master artisans, Made in Vietnam was predominantly described as an indication of manufacturing origin rather than a representation of Vietnamese fashion identity. Participants frequently associated the label with factory production, export manufacturing, and global supply chains, while relatively few immediately connected it with creativity, traditional craftsmanship, or cultural heritage. Several interviewees suggested that this perception reflects Vietnam's historical role in the international apparel industry, where local enterprises have primarily focused on production for foreign brands rather than developing indigenous fashion labels with global visibility. These findings reveal an important gap between manufacturing capability and symbolic value. While Vietnam has successfully established itself as a major apparel producer, the country has yet to develop a coherent fashion identity capable of generating cultural and emotional value comparable to internationally recognized fashion nations. This observation echoes recent discussions on creative economies, which argue that long-term competitiveness increasingly depends on the capacity to transform cultural resources into high-value creative products rather than relying solely on production efficiency [24].

Rather than viewing this manufacturing identity as a limitation, however, it may be understood as the first stage of a broader developmental pathway. The documentary evidence suggests that many successful fashion nations initially developed strong manufacturing capabilities before progressively investing in design, branding, and cultural value creation. Consequently, the challenge for Vietnam is not to abandon its manufacturing strengths but to build upon them by integrating craftsmanship,

cultural heritage, and design innovation into a more comprehensive and sustainable national fashion identity.

3.2. Vietnam's cultural and craft resources

Although Made in Vietnam is still widely perceived as a manufacturing label, both the documentary analysis and interview findings indicate that Vietnam possesses substantial cultural and creative resources for developing a sustainable fashion identity. Participants consistently argued that the country's strengths extend beyond competitive production costs to include skilled artisans, long-standing craft traditions, indigenous knowledge, and rich cultural diversity. As one of the world's largest textile and garment exporters, Vietnam has built a strong manufacturing base [26]. However, sustaining long-term competitiveness increasingly requires shifting from manufacturing efficiency toward creativity, design innovation, and cultural value creation.

Interview participants identified traditional craftsmanship as one of Vietnam's greatest strategic assets. Techniques such as silk weaving, embroidery, natural dyeing, brocade production, and bamboo weaving remain actively practised in craft villages, preserving specialised knowledge across generations (P2; P5; P7; P8). This observation is consistent with UNESCO's recognition of traditional craftsmanship as intangible cultural heritage that supports cultural diversity and sustainable development [27]. Rather than preserving heritage as a static tradition, participants emphasised its reinterpretation through contemporary fashion.

Indigenous knowledge was also viewed as an underutilised source of innovation. Vietnam's ethnic communities possess distinctive knowledge of local fibres, natural dyes, weaving techniques, and symbolic motifs that can enrich contemporary design. Documentary evidence supports this perspective through brands such as Kilomet109, Chula Fashion, Metiseko, Viet Silk House, and Hmong Sisters, which successfully combine traditional craftsmanship with sustainable fashion and cultural storytelling (P3; P6). Although these initiatives remain relatively small, they demonstrate the potential of transforming Vietnam's cultural heritage into distinctive and internationally competitive fashion identities (see more in Table 3).

Table 3. Documentary evidence and interview findings

Theme	Documentary evidence	Interview findings
Skilled workforce	Vietnam among the world's leading garment exporters [26]	Participants recognised skilled labour as a major competitive advantage
Craft heritage	More than 5,400 traditional craft villages [14]	Crafts remain active and are transmitted across generations
Indigenous knowledge	Diverse ethnic textile traditions and local materials	Underutilised resource for design innovation
Emerging brands	Kilomet109, Chula, Metiseko, Viet Silk House	Successful but fragmented examples
Policy support	National strategy for cultural industries; programmes supporting craft villages	Increasing government attention, but stronger coordination is needed

Despite these promising examples, participants agreed that such initiatives remain fragmented and have yet to influence the broader development of Made in Vietnam. Several interviewees observed that traditional crafts continue to be viewed primarily as elements of

cultural preservation, tourism, or rural development rather than as strategic resources for fashion innovation and national branding. This finding reflects a fundamental difference between Vietnam and Italy. The success of Made in Italy has not depended solely on the existence of traditional craftsmanship but on the systematic integration of craftsmanship into design education, industrial development, luxury branding, and national identity. Italian fashion demonstrates that cultural heritage becomes economically valuable when it is continuously reinterpreted through design innovation and effectively communicated to international markets [10]. By comparison, Vietnam possesses comparable cultural richness but lacks equally coherent institutional mechanisms linking artisans, designers, universities, cultural organisations, and fashion enterprises.

The above findings suggest that Vietnam already possesses many of the cultural resources necessary for developing a sustainable fashion identity. The principal challenge therefore lies not in creating new cultural assets but in establishing stronger connections between craft heritage, indigenous knowledge, design innovation, and brand development. From the perspective of sustainable fashion, these resources should be understood not simply as traditions to be preserved but as dynamic foundations for creating distinctive cultural value within contemporary fashion markets.

3.3. Unlocking the potential of craft heritage and indigenous knowledge

The documentary analysis and interview findings indicate that Vietnam possesses rich cultural resources for fashion innovation, yet these remain insufficiently integrated into the development of Made in Vietnam as a distinctive fashion identity. Although craft villages and indigenous knowledge have gained recognition in cultural preservation, rural development, and tourism, their contribution to fashion branding is still limited. Previous studies show that craft communities support cultural heritage, local livelihoods, and sustainable development [11]; [18], while indigenous knowledge systems provide living cultural assets that can create new economic opportunities when incorporated into contemporary development strategies [14].

The interview findings reveal that these cultural resources have not yet been systematically translated into contemporary fashion branding. Across all participant groups, respondents agreed that traditional craftsmanship, craft villages, and indigenous knowledge continue to occupy a relatively marginal position within Vietnam's mainstream fashion industry. Although these resources are widely acknowledged for their cultural significance, they are still more frequently associated with heritage conservation or tourism than with fashion innovation and international brand development. The fashion designer (P1) observed that Vietnamese fashion has abundant cultural materials but lacks effective mechanisms to transform them into globally recognised fashion products. Likewise, a fashion educator argued that collaboration between designers and craft communities remains sporadic and is rarely supported through long-term institutional partnerships (P6).

Participants identified brands such as Kilomet109, Chula Fashion, Metiseko, and Viet Silk House as successful examples of integrating indigenous textiles, traditional craftsmanship, and cultural storytelling into contemporary fashion. However, these initiatives remain isolated. Unlike the Italian fashion system, Vietnam lacks a coordinated ecosystem linking artisans, designers, educational institutions, industry, and national branding. Consequently, the symbolic and economic value of traditional

craftsmanship remains underutilised. These findings suggest that the key challenge is not the lack of cultural resources but the capacity to transform them into innovation, differentiation, and sustainable competitive advantage, enabling Made in Vietnam to evolve beyond a manufacturing label toward a sustainable fashion identity.

3.4. Learning from Made in Italy

The documentary analysis and interview findings indicate that Made in Italy provides valuable strategic insights for Vietnam; however, participants consistently emphasised that these lessons should be adapted rather than replicated. Across all interview groups, there was broad agreement that Italy's fashion success is the result of a long historical process involving craftsmanship, industrial development, design education, cultural institutions, and nation branding. Consequently, Vietnam should not attempt to reproduce the Italian model directly but should instead identify principles that can be reinterpreted within its own cultural and socio-economic context.

The literature shows that Made in Italy was built not only on manufacturing excellence but through the gradual development of a strong cultural and economic identity. After the Second World War, Italy integrated regional craftsmanship, textile industries, and design capabilities into a national fashion system centred on quality, creativity, and cultural heritage [21]. Fashion events in Florence during the 1950s, led by Giovanni Battista Giorgini, played a pivotal role in establishing the international reputation of Italian fashion and promoting an image of elegance and craftsmanship [13]; [19]. Consequently, Made in Italy evolved from a manufacturing label into a symbol of creativity, authenticity, and national identity. Its enduring success lies in the continuous integration of craftsmanship with innovation. Traditional artisanal knowledge has been reinterpreted through contemporary design, enabling Italian fashion to preserve cultural authenticity while maintaining global competitiveness [17]; [20]. Design has therefore become a strategic tool for transforming cultural resources into internationally recognised brand identities [4]. This development has been supported by strong collaboration among designers, manufacturers, educational institutions, industry associations, and government agencies [6]; [25]. Today, Made in Italy continues to evolve by combining craftsmanship with sustainability, circular design, digital technologies, and artificial intelligence, demonstrating its capacity to remain competitive while preserving its cultural foundations [12].

The analysis of representative fashion brands further reinforces the proposed framework by illustrating how cultural heritage and craftsmanship can be transformed into distinctive fashion identities through different development pathways. Among the Italian cases, Bottega Veneta exemplifies the transformation of artisanal leather craftsmanship into a globally recognised luxury identity through its signature Intrecciato weaving technique and long-standing commitment to handcraftsmanship. Brunello Cucinelli illustrates how craftsmanship, ethical production, and human-centred entrepreneurship can be combined to create a luxury brand closely associated with sustainability and social responsibility. Salvatore Ferragamo demonstrates the successful integration of traditional shoemaking expertise with continuous technological and material innovation, while Loro Piana highlights the importance of exceptional natural materials, artisanal excellence, and traceable production in reinforcing the international reputation of Made in Italy. Although these brands differ in their

market positioning and design philosophies, they share a common characteristic: cultural heritage is not preserved as a static tradition but continuously reinterpreted through innovation, quality, and storytelling.

These findings align with the interview data. Participants acknowledged that Vietnam cannot simply replicate the Italian fashion system because of differences in historical development, industrial maturity, market positioning, and international recognition. Instead, they argued that Vietnam should adopt a gradual and context-sensitive strategy that builds upon its own strengths, including traditional craft villages, indigenous knowledge, and local materials. Several interviewees noted that Italy's greatest lesson lies not in its luxury brands but in its long-term commitment to valuing craftsmanship, investing in design, and consistently communicating a coherent national identity (P2; P7). Participants also emphasised that Vietnam should avoid viewing Made in Italy as a model to imitate. Rather, it should be understood as an example of how cultural heritage can be transformed into economic and symbolic value through sustained investment in design capability, education, branding, and institutional collaboration. This perspective reflects broader discussions within comparative development studies, which suggest that successful policy learning depends on adapting international experiences to local cultural, institutional, and economic conditions rather than reproducing them without modification.

The documentary evidence, case study analysis and interview findings suggest that the future development of Made in Vietnam should follow a pathway of contextual innovation. Italy demonstrates that sustainable fashion identity emerges through the long-term interaction of craftsmanship, design, education, branding, and cultural values. For Vietnam, the challenge is therefore not to become another Made in Italy, but to develop its own internationally recognised fashion identity by transforming its unique cultural resources into contemporary design and sustainable competitive advantage.

3.5. Sustainable fashion identity framework

The research results suggest that the future competitiveness of Made in Vietnam depends not only on strengthening manufacturing capacity but also on transforming cultural resources into sustainable creative value. Rather than viewing fashion as an industrial sector driven primarily by production efficiency, this study argues that national fashion identity should be understood as a dynamic system in which craftsmanship, cultural heritage, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding interact to generate long-term economic and symbolic value.

The findings indicate that Vietnam possesses many of the essential resources required for this transformation. Participants consistently recognised traditional craftsmanship, indigenous knowledge, local materials, and cultural diversity as distinctive assets that differentiate Vietnam from other manufacturing countries. However, these resources remain fragmented and are rarely connected through coherent design strategies or national branding initiatives. As a result, Made in Vietnam continues to be internationally associated with production rather than creativity or cultural identity. Drawing on the evolution of Made in Italy and the empirical findings of this study, a Sustainable Fashion Identity (SFI) framework is proposed to explain how Vietnam can progressively reposition its fashion industry (Figure 1). The framework comprises five interrelated dimensions. In this study, sustainability is understood primarily through its cultural, social, and economic dimensions, including the continuity of craft knowledge, support for artisan communities,

responsible production, and the long-term creation of cultural and economic value.

The first dimension, craft heritage, represents the preservation and contemporary reinterpretation of traditional craftsmanship. Rather than treating artisanal knowledge as static cultural heritage, the framework recognises craftsmanship as a source of innovation capable of generating distinctive fashion products and strengthening cultural continuity.

The second dimension, cultural identity, refers to the integration of local narratives, indigenous knowledge, traditional aesthetics, and regional materials into contemporary fashion design. This dimension emphasises that national identity should emerge from authentic cultural resources rather than from symbolic imitation of global fashion trends.

The third dimension, design innovation, functions as the mechanism through which cultural resources are translated into products, services, and fashion experiences that respond to contemporary markets. Consistent with the Italian experience, innovation is understood not as replacing tradition but as continuously reinterpreting heritage through creative design processes.

The fourth dimension, sustainability, refers primarily to cultural, social, and economic continuity. It encompasses the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge, support for artisan communities, responsible production, and the long-term creation of social and economic value.

Finally, country branding represents the external expression of these interconnected resources. Rather than communicating manufacturing capability alone, country branding should articulate a coherent narrative that positions Made in Vietnam as a fashion identity rooted in craftsmanship, creativity, and cultural authenticity. In this sense, branding becomes the outcome of sustained interactions among cultural heritage, innovation, and sustainability rather than a purely marketing-oriented activity.



Figure 1. Sustainable Fashion Identity (SFI) framework

The proposed framework also illustrates that these five dimensions should not be implemented independently. Instead, they operate as an integrated system in which each component reinforces the others. Craft heritage provides the cultural foundation; cultural identity creates authenticity; design innovation transforms heritage into contemporary value; sustainability ensures long-term resilience; and country branding communicates this value to international audiences. Together, these dimensions facilitate the transition of Made in

Vietnam from a manufacturing-oriented label to a globally recognised sustainable fashion identity. Therefore, this framework contributes to the literature by extending discussions on country-of-origin and Made in branding beyond manufacturing performance toward a more holistic understanding of fashion identity. Rather than proposing a replication of Made in Italy, the framework advocates a context-sensitive approach in which Vietnam builds upon its own cultural strengths while selectively adapting international experience. It therefore provides a conceptual foundation for future research on fashion policy, design education, and cultural industries, as well as practical guidance for designers, educators, policymakers, and fashion enterprises seeking to strengthen the international position of Made in Vietnam.

These implications should nevertheless be considered in light of the methodological scope and limitations of the present study. The interview sample was relatively small and focused exclusively on Vietnamese stakeholders, while the Italian case was examined through documentary and selected brand evidence rather than primary interviews. The brand cases were illustrative rather than representative of the two national fashion systems, and the study did not include consumer or international stakeholder perspectives. Furthermore, the proposed SFI framework has not yet been empirically validated. Future research could address these limitations through larger and more diverse stakeholder samples, comparative consumer studies, and empirical testing of the framework across different fashion-producing contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how lessons from the evolution of Made in Italy can inform the development of a sustainable fashion identity for Made in Vietnam. Using documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese designers, educators, cultural experts, and master artisans, the findings show that although Made in Vietnam is still primarily associated with manufacturing, the country possesses rich cultural resources, including traditional craftsmanship, indigenous knowledge, local materials, and cultural diversity, that can support a stronger fashion identity. The study highlights that the success of Made in Italy is rooted in the integration of craftsmanship, design innovation, cultural identity, institutional support, and nation branding rather than manufacturing alone. Instead of replicating the Italian model, Vietnam should adopt a context-sensitive approach that builds on its own cultural strengths. Accordingly, the study proposes an SFI framework comprising five interconnected dimensions: craft heritage, cultural identity, design innovation, sustainability, and country branding. This framework extends discussions of Made in beyond country-of-origin and manufacturing competitiveness toward fashion identity as a cultural and strategic resource. The findings also provide practical implications for policymakers, educators, designers, and industry stakeholders seeking to enhance the global competitiveness and long-term value of Made in Vietnam.

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