

COLUMNS

## Importance of ecommerce for "Made in Italy" post-pandemic

July 15, 2020



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With the world slowly starting back again after the global COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, the Italian fashion industry is at a crossroads between challenge and opportunity.

As forecasted by trend researchers such as Zuzanna Skalska at the beginning of the pandemic, one inevitable result of the COVID-19 crisis will be the return to localized and regionalized purchase and consumption.

The trend researcher argues that with restricted international exchange, consumers and brands alike will turn to more local approaches of consumption and conducting business. This shift in mindset will also impact the fashion industry.

Home run

As futurist Lidewij Li' Edelkoort told *Dezeen* in this context, "Local industries and activities will gain momentum."

For luxury in Italy this will be of great importance.

Local manufacturing facilities will be in an advantageous position, as the Italian supply chain will mean an even greater added value, amidst closed borders and restricted exchange with overseas suppliers.

After the pandemic caused severe disruptions, brands have been taking steps to localize their supply chains and move production closer to their headquarters.

Businesses eager to produce smaller quantities from ethical sources now look to Italy instead of China or Bangladesh.

In turn, this will add an extra layer of exclusivity to "Made in Italy," the romanticized artisan ideal that has placed Italy at the center of the luxury supply chain.

Italian and European luxury businesses will also be driven by their consumers' growing demand for a different kind of fashion system.

With a new sense of appreciation for locally produced goods, consumers have reevaluated their consumption and take the global crisis as an opportunity to quit wasteful fashion practices.

Paired with the new sense of local belonging caused by the lockdown, "Made in Italy" could actually grow beyond the acclaimed Italian craftsmanship.

But while being a great opportunity for "Made in Italy," the current situation is also inevitably challenging.

Digital in fashion

Due to closed factories amid the lockdown, many brands were not able to deliver and retailers who had to close their physical stores were not able to pay their rents.

Although in Italy mortgages were suspended and people were guaranteed welfare, most of it did not come through, meaning brands and retailers that relied on physical stores, faced an impossible predicament.

At the same time, with capacity and cash flow being scarce during the pandemic, many factories and brands could not invest in new technologies or experiment with ecommerce. Scaling "Made in Italy" during and after the pandemic was deemed impossible.

However, the global luxury consumer has not stopped asking for authentic Italian fashion, despite or maybe precisely because of the call for locally conscious consumption.

In light of obvious bricks-and-mortar limitations and the pandemic-induced shift towards digital shopping experiences, Italian luxury brands need to recalibrate to serve their customers' demand for "Made in Italy."

Traditionally slow in adapting to change, though, the Italian luxury fashion industry, now more than ever, has to future-proof itself for the digital era.

Considering that shops have been closed for months, the necessity of digital sales is acutely evident.

Finding a way to sell their goods and, in many cases, not being able to do so themselves, Italian luxury brands have been turning to ecommerce platforms in an effort to push their products online.

Having understood the physical limitations, established partners ecommerce players were naturally equipped for the situation that emerged, and have been able to drive sales for Italian luxury brands across the globe.

That said, ecommerce partnerships will be of an unprecedented importance for Italian fashion brands to scale the business of "Made in Italy."

THE PANDEMIC has taught the world connectedness through Internet applications and ecommerce will inarguably be a major driver post- COVID-19 for "Made in Italy."

But even if the global situation can be considered an opportunity, "Made in Italy" will not be able to save luxury fashion brands that miss the inevitable step of digitizing the way that they conduct their business.

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