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A classification model for formal high-end menswear retailers in Italy

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite menswear is gaining a significant relevance in terms of retail sales, it represents a neglected topic within the academic literature. Therefore, this paper aims at providing a better understanding of the formal menswear market by developing a tailor-made classification model for the identification of retailers' clusters and at discovering the critical success factors (CSFs).

Design/methodology/approach – This research looked at most formal high-end menswear retailers in Italy adopting a methodology based on the Analytic Hierarchy Process and multiple case studies. Thirty interviews were conducted with experts, managers and shopkeepers from case studies.

Findings – The study develops for the first time a classification framework of formal high-end menswear retailers and a matching matrix to jointly analyse retailers' clusters and customer profiles in Italy. The results identify the CSFs pursued by menswear retailers and highlight the existence of four clusters of retailers (Differentiated Fashion Firms; Formal Menswear Leaders; Tailoring Firms and Luxury Brands) and seven customer profiles (Habitual Professionals, Special Events, Young People, Occasional Professionals, Foreigners, VIPs and Fashionistas).

Originality/value – The formal high-end menswear represents one of the most traditional Italian heritage markets while being almost ignored in the academic literature. Thus, the value of this research lays in deepening our understanding of this market from the retailers' perspective, by providing for the first time a taxonomy of its players and contributing to identifying the CSFs and the main customer profiles.

Keywords Critical success factors, Analytic hierarchy process, High-end fashion, Menswear, Menswear retailers

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In recent years, men are demonstrating renewed interest in their appearance (Barry, 2018; Roux *et al.*, 2017) and sales of high-end menswear are growing at a faster speed than womenswear, with a trend that is expected not stopping soon (Indvik, 2018). The French conglomerate LVMH has recently announced to plan to capture even more of the rising market for high-end menswear (Guilbault and Sherman, 2019). However, despite menswear is gaining a significant relevance in terms of retail sales (Bain and Company, 2019), it represents a neglected topic within the academic literature (Kim *et al.*, 2019).

Italy is worldwide recognized as one of the main countries for high-end menswear and over the years the awareness of Italian brands has increased internationally (Danese *et al.*, 2016). Menswear brands such as Ermenegildo Zegna or Cesare Attolini have contributed to connote the Made in Italy of intangible values associated with menswear artisanship and tailoring tradition (D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015). However, a strong brand reputation represents only one of the major drivers of success for high-end fashion retailers (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Arrigo, 2015). In fact, also the whole supply chain and critical success factors (CSFs), namely those factors that must be pursued by retailers to achieve a competitive advantage, have

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proven to be relevant for effectively evolving in the luxury fashion industry (Macchion *et al.*, 2015; Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun *et al.*, 2017b).

The academic research pertaining to menswear is very underdeveloped (Chen-Yu and Yang, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Chan *et al.*, 2005; Sindich and Black, 2011; Kang *et al.*, 2011; Dongsheng and Qing, 2003) and, while previous studies explored CSFs in luxury fashion supply chains (Brun *et al.*, 2019; Brun *et al.*, 2017a, b; Macchion *et al.*, 2015; Danese *et al.*, 2016; D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015; Caniato *et al.*, 2011; Caniato *et al.*, 2009), to the best of our knowledge, no study to date has examined CSFs in the formal high-end menswear market. Therefore, a research gap emerges in the academic literature about the CSFs useful to classify retailers in the formal high-end menswear market and to provide both researchers and menswear retailers with update knowledge about their competitive scenario. The study focuses on the Italian formal high-end menswear market, acknowledged its artisanship and tailoring tradition (Amatulli and Guido, 2011; D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015) and aims at three purposes: developing a tailor-made classification model for the identification of retailers' clusters, exploring the CSFs pursued by retailers in this market and building a matching matrix between customer profiles and retailers' clusters.

This study is part of a wider research project at Politecnico di Milano dealing with luxury supply chain management. The research methodology included a number of steps, carried out to map the formal high-end menswear market and to classify its players and customer profiles. In particular, the research has been structured as follows:

(1) First, a literature review has been carried out to define the research framework.

(2) Secondly, by applying the AHP (Saaty, 2008, 2013) a tailor-made classification model has been developed, and an examination of 33 retailers operating in this particular and heterogeneous market has been carried out to position them within the model.

(3) Based on a set of contingent variables derived from previous studies (Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun *et al.*, 2017a; Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; Caniato *et al.*, 2009, 2011), dissimilarities and peculiarities among retailers have been highlighted, and retailers' clusters have been identified in the proposed tailor-made classification framework.

(4) Then, through in-depth case studies on a smaller sample of ten retailers, a broad description of each cluster and main customer profiles has been provided.

(5) Finally, a matrix showing the matching between different retailers' clusters and consumers' profiles has been proposed.

Thus, the findings provide for the first time a better understanding of the formal high-end menswear market by proposing a new classification model, which helps to classify retailers into four clusters (i.e. "Differentiated Fashion Firms", "Formal Menswear Leaders", "Tailoring Firms" and "Luxury Brands"). More importantly, the study examines the CSFs and targeted customer profiles for each cluster, by offering important managerial implications in the formal high-end menswear sector.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: after the Introduction, the theoretical background is examined in Section 2, which is followed by the research gap definition in Section 3 and methodology description in Section 4. Results are presented in Section 5 and discussed in Section 6. Finally, conclusions, limitations and future research directions are provided in Section 7.

2. Theoretical background

To examine the high-end menswear competitive scenario from a retailer's perspective, the theoretical background dealt with the academic contributions addressed to menswear research and CSFs in luxury fashion.

2.1 Menswear

As stated in the introduction, a very limited number of papers about menswear have been published in management journals. In fact, the first article dates back to 2003, when Morris Jones (2003) provided a statistical review of the menswear sector in the UK on the Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management. In the same years, Dongsheng and Qing (2003) studied the clothing pressure for men's suit comfort evaluation meanwhile Chan *et al.* (2005) examined men's shirt pattern based on 3D body measurements. Few years later, Sindicich and Black (2011) offered an assessment of fitting and sizing of men's business clothing, and Kang *et al.* (2011) explored also the perceptions of young professionals about the use of clothes. The authors showed that often males wear work outfits to communicate professionalism and confidence to others, by establishing in this way their work identity (Kang *et al.*, 2011). More recently, through an online survey on US customers, Chen-Yu and Yang (2020) have identified specific characteristics that act as predictors of purchase intentions (PI) of men's mass-customized (M-C) apparel. Fashion innovativeness, self-efficacy, time availability, experience in M-C apparel and age resulted to be predictors of the intention to acquire menswear. Furthermore, based on store types, generational cohorts and retail attributes, Kim *et al.* (2019) highlighted the existence of three main customer segments in menswear, namely: Gen Y composed of males who normally shop at specialty stores; Gen X of males who frequently shop at discount stores and online stores, and Baby Boomers and Seniors who commonly shop at department stores. The authors also proved that experiential retail attributes (Parment, 2013) are very appreciated by Gen Y, while promotion is preferred by Baby Boomers and Seniors.

2.2 Critical success factors in luxury fashion

The notion of CSFs has been studied since the 1970s by considering them as those areas that a business should concentrate on to preserve its competitiveness (Badini *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Ahn, 2008). Thus, CSFs represent strategic factors that are handled by managers who must excel to improve their firm's competitive position (Colla and Lapoule, 2012). Several scholars consider CSFs as factors that companies must develop to successfully face the competitive challenges; thus, they can be perceived also as a systematic set of activities that supports a retailer in reaching its objective (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2020). Although different methods have been proposed in previous academic literature to identify CSFs (Rockart, 1979; Huang and Kuo, 2020), scholars commonly discover CSFs by asking senior managers what kinds of factors can provide companies with a competitive advantage position (Bairi and Manohar, 2011).

CSFs vary between industries and businesses (Trkman, 2010) and especially in the luxury fashion industry, an increasing significance of CSFs for the company's success has been demonstrated regardless of the specific sector of belonging. In fact, some CSFs are common to all luxury fashion companies that consequently develop similar supply chain management strategies (Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun *et al.*, 2017a; Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; Caniato *et al.*, 2011; Brun and Castelli, 2008). In particular, the following list of CSFs has been proven to characterize the high-end fashion market: premium quality, heritage of craftsmanship, exclusivity, emotional appeal, brand reputation, recognizable style and design, country of origin, uniqueness, superior technical performance and innovation and lifestyle creation (Caniato *et al.*, 2009; Brun *et al.*, 2017a; Brun and Moretto, 2012). Typically, a high-end fashion brand combines a mix of four or five CSFs as a result of each single unique selling proposition and the "one-size-fits-all" approach cannot be applied in any situation (Brun *et al.*, 2017a, 2019; Caniato *et al.*, 2011).

By examining the supply chain configurations of 132 high-end fashion firms in Italy, craftsmanship resulted to be the key distinctive CSF of Italian manufacturers with a long expertise in tailoring and handmade traditions (Macchion *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, other studies found high quality and heritage of craftsmanship as key CSFs for Italian luxury companies (Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun *et al.*, 2017a; Castelli and Sianesi, 2015). Furthermore, CSFs were also used to clarify the motivations that lead customers to be attracted by specific high-end products and to provide in this way a taxonomy of customer profiles according to CSFs (Brun and Castelli, 2013).

Despite the highlighted significance of CSFs in high-end fashion, there are still some markets where the CSF's concept has not yet been investigated, as in the case of the high-end menswear.

3. Research gap

To summarize, CSFs have been investigated in Italian high-end fashion supply chains (Brun *et al.*, 2017a, b; Caniato *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Macchion *et al.*, 2015; Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun and Moretto, 2012), but very little is known about the formal high-end menswear. In fact, academic research on menswear is very underdeveloped and the few existing studies are mainly focused on examining menswear customers (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Chen-Yu and Yang, 2020). The retailers' perspective is completely absent, neither theoretical developments nor managerial tools have been developed to date to show how retailers operating in the formal high-end menswear can analyse the competitive market, the competitors and even address the customers. Therefore, a research gap emerges in the academic literature about the analysis of the formal high-end menswear market from the supply side of retailers and this research contributes at filling this gap. The research questions investigated in this study are the following ones:

RQ1. Is there a theoretical framework useful to cluster retailers in the formal high-end menswear market?

RQ2. Is it possible to identify common patterns of pursued CSFs within the identified clusters of retailers characterizing the market?

RQ3. Which are the main customers' profiles in the market? Which are the main CSFs typically asked for by customers in each customer profile?

To address these research questions, an exploratory research design was carried out, based on multiple case studies (Yin, 2017) and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Saaty, 2008, 2013; Deb and Lomo-David, 2014).

4. Methodology

Case studies are particularly appropriate for theory building in management studies (Voss *et al.*, 2002). In this context, it is possible to generate a new theory inductively from case studies with no theoretical foundations (Ketoviki and Choi, 2014). Managerial issues represent highly unstructured problems, which can be dealt with an exploratory research design using case studies (Seuring, 2005; Yin, 2017). Case studies allow tackling a new problem on which little or no previous research has been done and are an appropriate methodology to map companies by allowing identification and description of critical variables (Stuart *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, case studies are particularly well suited to new research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate (Eisenhardt, 1989), as it is in the case of menswear market. Thus, the case study methodology was chosen as worthy approach to develop a theoretical framework useful to cluster retailers, explore clusters' peculiarities and identify possible common patterns based on CSFs.

The study looked at the majority of formal high-end menswear retailers in Italy and following previous research (Brun *et al.*, 2017b; Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015), for the theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989) heterogeneous retailers were purposively selected in order to build a model applicable across the target organization types by considering only the high-end market. Retailers were chosen based on secondary sources such as specialised menswear magazines, blogs and retailers' websites; only retailers having a price range per formal suit of 1,000–5,000 euros were included. The resulting purposive sample resulted composed of 33 retailers that include both global and traditional retailers. This sample proved way larger than the minimum size required reaching theoretical saturation as data gathering on additional retailers would add nothing-new (Bowen, 2008; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In the paper, because some retailers expressed their willingness to remain anonymous, they are referred to with fictitious names and without providing any information that could reveal their identities.

Multiple case studies were conducted on this purposive sample of 33 formal high-end menswear retailers in Italy following Yin (2017)'s guidelines and previous qualitative research in supply chain management (Danese *et al.*, 2016; D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015; Caniato *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Brun and Castelli, 2008).

With regard to RQ1 *(Is there a theoretical framework useful to cluster retailers in the formal high-end menswear market?)*, from the literature analysis, two main dimensions were considered: how much a retailer is focused on formal high-end menswear (Focus on formal high-end menswear) and how much its brand reputation is linked to symbolic values rather than to its craftsmanship (Brand vs Craftsmanship). Being such dimensions qualitative, an approach based on the AHP (Saaty, 2008, 2013) was applied, and 10 high-end menswear experts were interviewed to define the criteria and sub-criteria and the relative weights (relevant to describe the formal high-end menswear market) and to identify the proper classes for annual volumes of suits sold useful to classify retailers. Interviews (Barriball and While, 1994) were conducted in Milan and Verona in accordance with a research protocol (in the Appendix) with the support of structured questionnaires with questions arranged in advance to drive the interview and facilitate data collection. Experts (one tailoring shopkeeper, one fashion blogger, four fashion shopkeepers, three tailors, one fashion trading agent) were properly selected based on their own experience and competence in the formal high-end menswear in order to be considered reliable information sources. Then, information and data about the initial sample of 33 formal high-end menswear retailers were collected mainly through secondary sources such as official websites, specialised magazines and blogs and e-mail communications with retailers.

About RQ2 *(Is it possible to identify common patterns of pursued CSFs within the identified clusters of retailers characterizing the market?)*, from the initial sample of 33 retailers, in-depth case studies (Yin, 2017) were carried out on a small sample of 10 retailers, selecting at least two representatives for each discovered cluster. This choice appeared rational since, usually, a number between 4 and 10 cases is recognized good to provide sufficient data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Moreover, to reduce the risk of reaching premature or even false conclusions, a cross-case search for patterns supported the within-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Karaosman *et al.*, 2020). CSFs were properly selected in relation to their relevance in menswear from those proposed in previous high-end fashion literature (Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun *et al.*, 2017a; Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; Caniato *et al.*, 2009, 2011). The CSFs considered were product quality, emotional appeal, heritage of craftsmanship, brand reputation, recognizable style, country of origin and lifestyle creation. An additional factor ("price competitiveness") was also added to highlight possible differences between or within clusters because price was found to represent the most important factor influencing young consumers' preferences (Lee *et al.*, 2020).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 managers (one for each case study), between September and November 2018, trying to perform the analysis in the most rigorous and reliable way (Rowley, 2012; Barriball and While, 1994). Each interview lasted about 45–60 min and was conducted in Italian, digitally recorded and fully transcribed. To maximize both efficiency and effectiveness of the meetings, all the required material and specific questions were prepared in advance to guarantee rigor and unbiased answers. Contextually, official press releases, promotional material and company websites were useful to both contextualize and increase the robustness of the findings through triangulation (Yin, 2017). Managers were asked their average selling price and, following previous research (Bairi and Manohar, 2011) were asked to identify on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is for "not considered factor" and 5 for "pursued factor") the most relevant CSFs within a prefixed list. However, an optional open space was created where managers could eventually indicate new key factors and their relative importance. (The research protocol for interviews is in the Appendix).

About RQ3 (*Which are the main customers' profiles in the market? Which are the main CSFs typically asked for by customers in each customer profile?*), face-to-face interviews with case studies' shopkeepers (one for each case study) were performed in a structured way (Rowley, 2012). In September and November 2018, 10 individuals were selected based on their seniority from the case studies' retail staff by choosing for the interview the most senior shopkeeper in each case study. Each interview lasted for at least 50 min and respondents were asked to describe the most significant consumer profiles, both in terms of recurrence and importance for the retailers' turnover. The choice of assessing CSFs through shopkeepers was judged suitable because this allowed relying on the experience they developed as component of the in-store retail staff. In fact, shopkeepers are considered as real experts in the luxury retail environment (Arrigo, 2018) and especially in menswear. Thus, for each customer profile, shopkeepers denoted the typical age, employment, purchase occasion and frequency of their in-store buyers. Then, they rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is for "not considered factor" and 5 for "very relevant factor"), the relative importance of CSFs for their clients during the purchasing process. We decided to use the same CSFs for interviews from managers (company side) and shopkeepers (customer side) to allow assessing the potential matching between retailers' strategies and consumers' needs. However, also in this case, shopkeepers had the opportunity eventually to indicate new factors and their relative importance in an optional open space. (The questionnaires used as a guide for interviews are displayed in the Appendix).

4.1 The proposition of a tailor-made classification model

To propose a tailor-made classification model for the formal high-end menswear market (see Figure 1), the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Saaty, 2008, 2013; Ishizaka and Labib, 2011; Pandey *et al.*, 2020) was applied by being a multi-criteria decision-making approach whose mathematical properties and simplicity represent the main attractiveness. In fact, it enables to split a decision problem into a hierarchy of criteria and sub-criteria and to convert subjective evaluations into numbers. In this case, as explained above, the definition and comparison among criteria were carried out relying on the ten experts' judgments. Each expert was asked to judge how much a criterion was more important than another in a scale from one to nine (from "the criteria have the same importance" to "criterion X is extremely more important than criterion Y"). Then, the average value of the experts' judgements was assessed through the AHP approach in a matrix that was normalized by allowing computing the weights related to each criterion.

According to previous research (Brun *et al.*, 2019; Caniato *et al.*, 2009, 2011), *brand reputation* was chosen as first dimension to assess how much it depends on "symbolic" values (intangible aspects such as exclusivity, prestige, etc.) or "technical" ones (tangible aspects such as manufacturing, quality, materials' excellence, etc.). In our framework, brand reputation was assessed with "brand vs craftsmanship" and was broken down into two

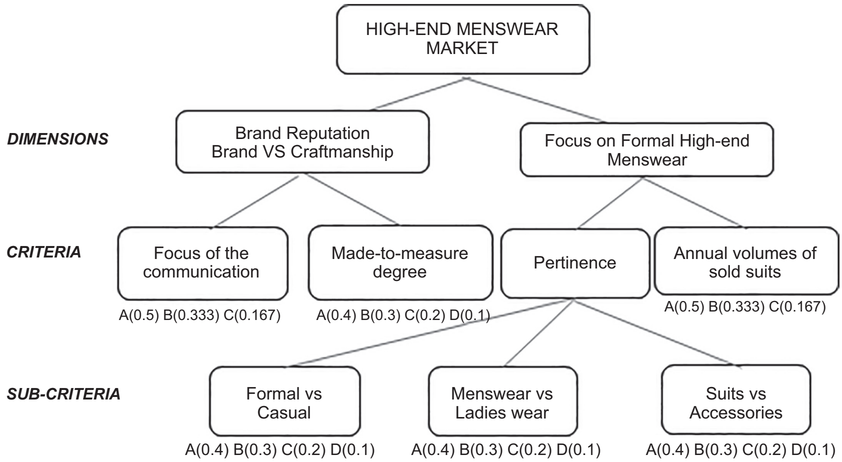

Figure 1.
Adopted hierarchy for the AHP model

criteria: the retailer's focus of communication on symbolic values (*focus of the communication*) or technical values (*degree of made-to-measure*).

Based on the first criterion, three different classes of retailers were considered: Class A (total focus on technical aspects, weight = 0.5), Class B (focus on symbolic and technical aspects, weight = 0.333) and Class C (focus on symbolic aspects, weight = 0.167). Similarly, based on the importance given to the made-to-measure degree, four classes were identified: Class A (mainly made-to-measure, weight = 0.4), Class B (balanced between made-to-measure and ready-to-wear, weight = 0.3), Class C (mainly ready-to-wear, weight = 0.2) and Class D (only ready-to-wear, weight = 0.1).

The second dimension chosen to classify retailers was the focus on formal high-end menswear, namely whether a retailer operates only in this market or also elsewhere. The second dimension (focus on formal high-end menswear) was examined through two criteria: *pertinence level* of the retailer's product range and *annual volumes of formal suits sold*. Then, the pertinence level was divided into three sub-criteria:

(1) the focus on formal clothing rather than casual one: Class A (retailers focused only on formal clothing, weight = 0.4), Class B (mainly focused on formal clothing, weight = 0.3), Class C (balanced between formal and casual clothing, weight = 0.2) and Class D (focused mainly on casual clothing, weight = 0.1);

(2) the focus on menswear rather than ladies wear: Class A (focused only on menswear, weight = 0.4), Class B (mainly focused on menswear, weight = 0.3), Class C (balanced between menswear and ladies wear, weight = 0.2) and Class D (focused mainly on ladies wear, weight = 0.1);

(3) the focus on suits rather than accessories: Class A (retailers focused only on suits, weight = 0.4), Class B (mainly focused on suits, weight = 0.3), Class C (balanced between suits and accessories, weight = 0.2) and Class D (focused mainly on accessories, weight = 0.1).

Concerning annual volumes of formal high-end suits sold, three classes were identified: Class A (High Volumes: more than 40,000 suits per year, weight = 0.5), Class B (Medium Volumes: 10,000–40,000 suits per year, weight = 0.333) and Class C (Low Volumes: less than 10,000 suits, weight = 0.167).

5. Results

By applying the AHP process, two final ratings were obtained per each brand, one per each dimension of the proposed model (ratings are indicated in the last columns of Table 1). These ratings were used to position the 33 retailers into the reference model (Figure 2). In Table 1, the values indicated in parentheses below each criterion refer to its percentage weight of relative importance (as assessed by the experts).

Figure 2 contains the results of retailers' plotting in the reference model using the AHP final ratings, respectively as *x* value (brand reputation) and *y* value (focus on formal high-end menswear).

In Figure 2, four main groups/clusters visually stood out and were named (from left to right and top to bottom): "Differentiated Fashion Firms", "Formal Menswear Leaders", "Tailoring Firms" and "Luxury Brands". A cluster analysis (Johnson, 1967) was then performed with the aim of validating quantitatively the emerged clusters and identifying the best number of clusters according to a properly selected similarity or distance level. The statistical software Minitab was used to carry out the cluster analysis, as it provides an agglomerative hierarchical clustering and, according to the research purposes, the complete-linkage method with Euclidean distances was chosen since it usually produces well-separated and compacted clusters (see the Appendix for the cluster analysis results). Table 2 illustrates the centroids' computation.

Table 3 shows the retailers' occurrences for each criterion with a detailed view for each cluster of retailers.

Tables 4 and 5 report the clusters' description and the average values of CSFs per each cluster collected through interviews with case studies' managers. Managers did not report any additional CSF beyond those listed, demonstrating that the chosen CSFs were the fundamental ones.

The results of interviews with shopkeepers about customer profiles and their assessments about the customer appreciations for CSFs are presented in Table D (in Appendix); in this case also, respondents did not report any additional CSF beyond those listed. Table 6 displays how much each customer profile resulted attracted by technical, emotional or symbolic CSFs.

By matching the identified customer profiles with the aforementioned clusters, it was possible to obtain a novel roadmap of the formal high-end menswear market, illustrating how retailers in different clusters provide the best match for specific consumer profiles (where an empty field represents a poorly or not-at-all-relevant match).

6. Discussion

As emerged in the theoretical background, menswear has traditionally not received much attention from academic scholars (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Chen-Yu and Yang, 2020) and no theoretical model has been proposed to date to describe the competitive scenario. The results displayed in Tables 1 and 2 allowed building, for the first time, a concrete framework for mapping retailers and their CSFs in the formal high-end menswear market in Italy.

With regard to RQ1, in Figure 2, the new tailor-made classification model has identified four clusters of retailers that were named: "Differentiated Fashion Firms", "Formal Menswear Leaders", "Tailoring Firms" and "Luxury Brands" (a detailed description of the clusters is provided in Table 4). As shown in Table 3, a good internal consistency was found within each cluster since retailers resulted mainly concentrated in either only one class or continuous classes. Therefore, inside a specific cluster, each retailer can define its competitive strategy by being aware of the market environment, checking the competitors' positioning and carrying out a benchmarking analysis. As the case studies were purposively selected to describe the heterogeneity of the formal high-end menswear market, the discovered clusters and their centroids (in Table 2) can be considered as representatives of the dynamics characterizing the

Table 1. Results from the application of the AHP model

Company	Brand reputation brand vs Craftmanship		Focus on formal high-end menswear Pertinence of the company's offer (0.848)					
	Focus of the communication (0.873)	Made-to-measure degree (0.127)	Formal vs Casual (0.353)	Menswear vs Ladies wear (0.5002)	Suits vs Accessories (0.127)	Annual volumes (0.152)	Brand reputation	Focus on formal high-end menswear
1	0.167	0.300	0.200	0.400	0.200	0.500	*0.184*	*0.334*
2	0.333	0.300	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.323*	*0.349*
3	0.333	0.300	0.300	0.300	0.300	0.333	*0.329*	*0.305*
4	0.333	0.300	0.300	0.400	0.200	0.333	*0.329*	*0.339*
5	0.500	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.167	*0.487*	*0.365*
6	0.333	0.300	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.329*	*0.349*
7	0.167	0.200	0.200	0.400	0.500	0.500	*0.171*	*0.366*
8	0.167	0.200	0.100	0.200	0.200	0.333	*0.171*	*0.190*
9	0.167	0.200	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.167	*0.171*	*0.110*
10	0.167	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.167	*0.158*	*0.110*
11	0.167	0.100	0.100	0.200	0.100	0.167	*0.158*	*0.154*
12	0.167	0.100	0.100	0.200	0.200	0.167	*0.158*	*0.165*
13	0.167	0.200	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.333	*0.171*	*0.135*
14	0.500	0.300	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.475*	*0.349*
15	0.333	0.200	0.400	0.300	0.300	0.333	*0.316*	*0.335*
16	0.500	0.300	0.300	0.400	0.200	0.333	*0.475*	*0.338*
17	0.500	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.167	*0.487*	*0.365*
18	0.500	0.300	0.400	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.475*	*0.379*
19	0.500	0.300	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.475*	*0.349*
20	0.500	0.100	0.300	0.400	0.200	0.333	*0.449*	*0.338*
21	0.500	0.400	0.400	0.300	0.300	0.167	*0.487*	*0.309*
22	0.500	0.200	0.300	0.300	0.300	0.167	*0.462*	*0.279*
23	0.500	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.167	*0.487*	*0.365*
24	0.333	0.200	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.316*	*0.349*
25	0.333	0.200	0.300	0.300	0.300	0.333	*0.316*	*0.305*
26	0.333	0.100	0.300	0.200	0.300	0.333	*0.303*	*0.261*
27	0.167	0.100	0.200	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.158*	*0.319*
28	0.167	0.100	0.300	0.200	0.400	0.500	*0.158*	*0.297*

(*continued*)

Company	Brand reputation brand vs Craftmanship		Focus on formal high-end menswear Pertinence of the company's offer (0.848)					
	Focus of the communication (0.873)	Made-to-measure degree (0.127)	Formal vs Casual (0.353)	Menswear vs Ladies wear (0.5002)	Suits vs Accessories (0.127)	Annual volumes (0.152)	Brand reputation	Focus on formal high-end menswear
29	0.333	0.200	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.316*	*0.349*
30	0.333	0.100	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.303*	*0.349*
31	0.167	0.100	0.300	0.300	0.300	0.333	*0.158*	*0.305*
32	0.167	0.100	0.100	0.200	0.200	0.167	*0.158*	*0.165*
33	0.500	0.200	0.300	0.400	0.300	0.333	*0.462*	*0.349*

Table 1.

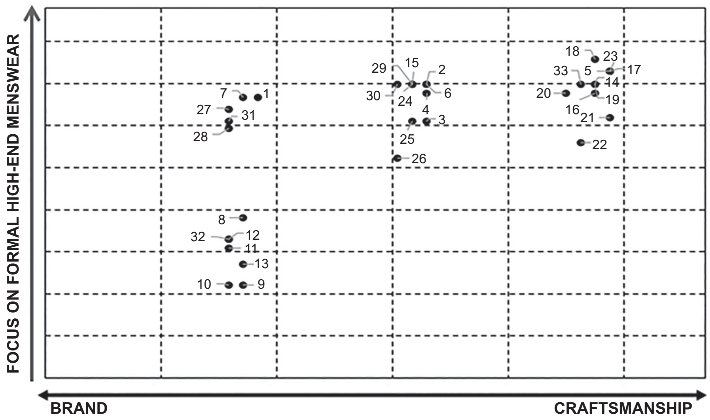

Figure 2.
Retailers' plot in the proposed classification model

Variable	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Grand centroid
Brand reputation	0.165823	0.318987	0.4746684	0.163653	0.314730
Focus on formal high-end menswear	0.317728	0.330445	0.344262	0.147150	0.294243

Table 2.
Cluster centroids' computation

formal high-end menswear market. Moreover, taking such centroids as reference, any new retailer could be added and properly positioned in the two-dimensional diagram and based on its distance from the identified centroids, the retailer could be regarded as belonging to the closest cluster.

Concerning RQ2, "product quality" resulted to be the CSF with the highest values (5, 5, 5, 4.5 in Table 5) across clusters. Similarly, "country of origin" represents a key CSF (5, 5, 5) for the three clusters at the top of the classification framework. These results likely descend from the fact that the sample was purposively composed of formal high-end menswear retailers that pay great attention in selecting items manufactured with the best materials. In so doing, they can provide customers with premium quality suits and leverage the excellence of the Made in Italy, a signal of superior quality (Kauppinen-Räisänen *et al.*, 2018).

An element of dissimilarity among the clusters refers to the third most pursued CSF. In fact, while "Differentiated Firms" and "Luxury Brands" aim at reinforcing their brand reputation, "Formal Menswear Leaders" and especially "Tailoring Firms" focus on their craftsmanship heritage, by being more technical-oriented. On the other side, "Luxury Brands" resulted to be the most symbolic-oriented cluster, aiming at crafting a recognizable style. Therefore, the examination of the CSFs (Brun *et al.*, 2017a; Macchion *et al.*, 2015; Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; Caniato *et al.*, 2009) pursued by retailers allows ordering them from "Luxury Brands" to "Tailoring Firms" according to an increasing focus on formal high-end menswear. Findings in Tables 4 and 5 showed that retailers with higher focus on formal high-end menswear and craftsmanship tend to pursue more technical and tangible CSFs (by being product-oriented). Similarly, retailers with preeminent focus on symbolic values tend to pursue more intangible factors, such as brand reputation, recognizable style and lifestyle creation (by being symbolic-oriented).

With reference to RQ3, the findings allow also, for the first time, highlighting seven different menswear customer profiles: "Habitual Professionals", "Special Events", "Young People", "Occasional Professionals", "Foreigners", "VIPs" and "Fashionistas" (briefly described in Figure D in Appendix). These profiles are sortable from "Habitual

Table 3.
Retailers' occurrences per classes within clusters

	Brand reputation											Focus on formal high-end menswear										
												Pertinence										
	Focus of the communication			Made-to-measure degree				Formal vs Casual				Menswear vs Ladies wear				Suits vs Accessories				Annual volumes		
Classes	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C
Cluster 1	0	0	5	0	1	1	3	0	2	3	0	3	1	1	0	1	2	2	0	3	2	0
Cluster 2	0	10	0	0	4	4	2	0	10	0	0	7	2	1	0	0	9	1	0	0	10	0
Cluster 3	11	0	0	4	4	2	1	5	6	0	0	10	1	0	0	3	6	2	0	0	6	5
Cluster 4	0	0	7	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	7	0	0	4	3	0	0	3	4	0	2	5

Differentiated fashion firms	Moderate-to-high focus on formal high-end menswear, companies leverage on emotional and symbolic brand aspects and some of them operate also in ladies' wear. Difficulties were reported in entering new business areas, in fact three out of five companies are still centred only on menswear. The cluster is perfectly homogeneous in brand communication, while some discrepancies appear in the criterion made-to-measure degree, and in formal vs casual, and suits vs accessories sub-criteria. Their annual volumes are on average the highest among the clusters and this is probably due to lower prices fixed by some firms. The most pursued CFSs beyond "product quality" and "country of origin" are "brand reputation" since they provide customers with premium quality suits, and "emotional appeal" and "recognizable style" by which they try to offset the absence of a strong focus on formal menswear and the heritage of artisanship
Formal menswear leaders	They have a strong sartorial heritage with a certain variance in the made-to-measure degree criterion, as some companies are still strongly concentrated on customization to deliver a superior customer service, while others are more focused on ready-to-wear that supports large volumes of suits sold. Beyond "product quality" and "country of origin", firms have a strong focus on "heritage of craftsmanship", whereas "recognizable style" and "creation of a lifestyle" are less important factors. Among the clusters present at the top of the classification model, these firms have the lowest value of "price competitiveness" since their customers have high economic availability and low price sensitiveness
Tailoring firms	Companies are highly specialized in suits' manufacturing due to their origin of traditional tailoring boutiques. Brand communication is totally focused on technical aspects such as craftsmanship and sartorial quality and in fact, "product quality", "country of origin" and "heritage of craftsmanship" are the most chased CSFs. This cluster has the strongest focus on formal menswear, although some large fashion companies sell also casual wear and small tailoring firms with great expertise in formal menswear provide clients with a whole offer of suits and formal accessories such as ties and pocket squares. Due to their outstanding technical expertise, low attention is devoted to CSFs related to symbolic factors, such as "recognizable style" and "creation of a lifestyle", though emotions (emotional appeal) play a relevant role during the shopping experience. In fact, collected data highlighted their aptitude to develop robust and emotional relationships with customers. Annual volumes of sold suits are medium-low, due to the small size, low brand awareness, and strong specialization on menswear of most of the companies in this cluster. Finally, this cluster offers the highest made-to-measure degree, since companies manufacture all their suits exclusively tailored or customized. It is interesting to note that the value of "price competitiveness" (3) is the highest among the clusters and, in fact, the price-quality ratio emerged during the interviews as very relevant for customers
Luxury brands	This cluster is arguably the most different from the previous ones as it is populated by large luxury brands, with wide offer and wide businesses' portfolio. The focus is on women casual wear and "brand reputation" and "recognizable style" are the most pursued CSFs while heritage of craftsmanship is the less chased (2). "Country of origin" is not much considered as these companies leverage on a global appeal and outsource manufacturing; however, an excellent "product quality" must be preserved in order to maintain a good competitive position in menswear where the sartorial heritage is a key aspect. The annual volume of formal menswear suits sold is low since luxury brands commercialize a massive range of products and accessories and, thus, the share of revenues deriving from menswear is limited. Companies focus their brand communication on symbolic and intangible aspects by reinforcing brand awareness and image

Table 4.
Clusters' description

Professionals" to "Fashionistas" based on a decreasing appreciation of the suits' technical value (as shown in Table 6) and are characterized by different levels of importance towards CSFs. However, product quality resulted to be the most chased CSF in four customer profiles out of seven; this confirms that Italians are good connoisseurs of high-end fashion (Godey *et al.*, 2013; Kauppinen-Räisänen *et al.*, 2018), and the pursuit of prestige represents a key motivator of luxury consumption in Italy (Kapferer and Michaut, 2020).

Moreover, in line with Kang *et al.* (2011), "Habitual Professionals" and "Occasional Professionals" wear formal suits to communicate their professionalism and confidence and craft their work identity. However, two customer profiles ("Fashionistas" and "VIPs") were proven to look firstly for brand reputation and lifestyle creation at the expense of the product quality that, in any case, must be guaranteed in this specific market. Again, a positive store retail experience (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Parment, 2013; Kauppinen-Räisänen *et al.*, 2020) was reported as very important especially for the "Special Events" profile where customers purchase a formal suit for a special occasion.

Furthermore, the matching matrix (in Figure 3) made possible to understand why, in certain clusters, some customer profiles are missing or present in a limited way and prove a connection between technical-oriented profiles and product-oriented retailers or between fashion-addicted profiles and brand-oriented retailers. "Formal Menswear Leaders" and "Tailoring Firms" address customers who are particularly knowledgeable about formal menswear and look for an excellent quality. "Tailoring Firms" are strongly associated with the traditional Italian heritage and a classic style and, therefore, they do not attract consumers looking for fashion trends such as "Young People", "Fashionistas" and "VIPs". Instead, "VIPs" match perfectly with "Luxury Brands" for their symbolic values and fashion-oriented factors. Finally, "Differentiated Fashion Firms" are chosen by several customer profiles, because these retailers are able to combine features of the other clusters, in fact they are trendy enough to attract stylish-oriented profiles but also formal enough to raise the interest of more technical-oriented ones.

7. Conclusions

The formal high-end menswear represents a premium market niche academically mostly unaddressed although being strictly related to the Italian heritage and Made in Italy. Despite menswear sales are growing significantly (Bain and Company, 2019), academic research about menswear is much underdeveloped and, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the

Table 5.
Average values of CSFs within clusters

	CFSs							
Classes	Product quality	Heritage of craftsmanship	Emotional appeal	Brand reputation	Recognizable style	Country of origin	Creation of a lifestyle	Price
Cluster 1	5	3.667	4.167	4.667	4.333	5	4	2.667
Cluster 2	5	4.75	4	4	3	5	3	2.5
Cluster 3	5	4.833	4.333	3.5	2.333	5	3	3
Cluster 4	4.5	2	3.5	5	5	3.5	4	1.5

Table 6.
Average values of technical and emotional CSFs in customer profiles

Customer profiles	Technical value	Symbolic value
Habitual professionals	4.08	3.38
Foreigners	4.31	3.66
Special events	3.97	3.45
Occasional professionals	3.94	3.79
VIPs	3.33	4.29
Young people	2.78	3.75
Fashionistas	2.67	4.5

Brand ↔ *Craftsmanship*

Focus on Formal High-end Menswear →

Technical-oriented ↕ *Symbolic-oriented*

Customers Profiles	**Main Features**	**Clusters:** **LUXURY BRANDS**	**DIFFERENTIATED FASHION FIRMS**	**FORMAL MENSWEAR LEADERS**	**TAILORING FIRMS**
	Pursued CSFs	*Brand Reputation, Recognizable Style, Product Quality*	*Brand Reputation, Product Quality, Country of Origin, Recognizable Style*	*Product Quality, Country of Origin, Brand Reputation*	*Product Quality, Country of Origin, Heritage of Craftsmanship*
Habitual Professionals	*Brand loyalty, Seasonal purchases, Product awareness*	–	Product Quality, Price	Product Quality, Brand Reputation	Product Quality, Heritage of Craftsmanship, Country of Origin
Foreigners	*Foreign tourists, Mostly occasional purchases*	Brand Reputation, Creation of a Lifestyle, Recognizable Style	Product Quality, Country of Origin, Brand Reputation	Country of Origin, Product Quality, Brand Reputation	Country of Origin, Product Quality, Heritage of Craftsmanship
Special Events	*Single purchases, Full purchases, Special occasions*	–	Creation of a Lifestyle, Price	Brand Reputation	Heritage of Craftsmanship
Occasional Professionals	*Occasional purchases, Product awareness*	–	Product Quality, Brand Reputation, Price	Product Quality, Brand Reputation	–
VIP	*Huge economic availability, High social class*	Brand Reputation, Recognizable Style	–	Product Quality, Heritage of Craftsmanship	–
Young People	*25-30 years old, Low product awareness, High price sensitivity*	Brand Reputation, Recognizable Style, Creation of a Lifestyle	Brand Reputation, Product Quality, Price	–	–
Fashionistas	*Fashion trends followers, Brand loyalty*	Brand Reputation, Recognizable Style, Creation of a Lifestyle	–	–	–

Figure 3.
Matching matrix

first to provide a tailor-made classification framework and explore CFSs by identifying different clusters of formal high-end menswear retailers and describing seven profiles of consumer segments. Then, through data collected on customer profiles and their most chased CSFs, a connection was proved in a matching matrix between different customer profiles and specific clusters. Moreover, according to earlier studies on CFSs in the high-end fashion market (Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; Brun *et al.*, 2017a, 2019; Caniato *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Brun and Castelli, 2008), also in the formal high-end menswear market, "product quality" resulted to be the most chased CSF, underlining the relevance of a premium quality in the Italian tailoring tradition and Made in Italy (Danese *et al.*, 2016; D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015).

Despite the exploratory research design, the theoretical contributions of this study are many. Firstly, it contributes to the academic literature pertaining to menswear (Sindicich and Black, 2011; Kang *et al.*, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Chen-Yu and Yang, 2020) where the few existing management studies focused on a customer perspective of analysis (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Chen-Yu and Yang, 2020). On the contrary, for the first time, this study has adopted the perspective of retailers and, applying the AHP method, different types of high-end menswear retailers have been identified and classified into four clusters, moreover also seven customer profiles have been highlighted. Again, the findings contribute to the academic literature on CSFs in luxury fashion (Castelli and Sianesi, 2015; Danese *et al.*, 2016; Brun *et al.*, 2017b, 2019; Caniato *et al.*, 2009; Brun and Castelli, 2008) by examining for the first time CSFs in this relevant market although almost ignored in academic studies. Additionally, the proposed new classification model contributes to the academic literature on fashion marketing (Kapferer and Bastien, 2017; Kapferer and Michaut, 2020; Amatulli and Guido, 2011) by providing a better understanding of the formal high-end menswear competitive scenario and customer profiles.

The findings provide also managerial implications for practitioners. In fact, the results can support menswear managers with tools useful to: (1) map the competitive scenario, (2) classify the actors and (3) suggest managerial guidelines in addressing consumers. Moreover, from a marketing perspective, clustering groups of retailers according to their focus on formal high-end menswear and technical vs symbolic brand values may orientate their marketing communications to appeal specific target customers. A deeper understanding of why different consumer profiles address different clusters, based on the pursued CFSs, may also elicit a greater customer satisfaction and additional retail sales by supporting the growth of the formal menswear market.

Beyond the current relevant findings, the present research project gives rise to several future possible research avenues. Firstly, the present study highlighted the key peculiarities of the formal high-end menswear market; however, it may be replicated in other fashion markets or even industries, by modifying or adapting the criteria and sub-criteria to apply the AHP process (Ishizaka and Labib, 2011; Pandey *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the research is focused on the specific context of the Italian menswear, since Italy is globally renowned for its excellence in high-end fashion market (D'Avolio *et al.*, 2015; Macchion *et al.*, 2015); however, future research could be replicated in other countries to confirm or refuse findings about CFSs.

Finally, the research has some limitations; the most evident is the reliance on data collected through experts' interviews and case studies. Although we consider empirically valid the proposed tailor-made classification framework since the purposive sample of 33 retailers represent a large component of formal high-end menswear retailers in Italy, to generalize the results, future studies could rely on a higher number of interviews with managers and shopkeepers. The developed framework and the CSFs could also be used to compare other types of clothing to menswear.

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Appendix

The appendix files are available online for this article.

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