

**Research program:**  
***“Made in Mediterranean: an innovative perspective for marketing strategies and branding”***

**Annex Code 2**

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**Description**

In the last decades marketing scholars have developed a large amount of research aimed at investigating which cultural values affect local consumer behavior (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Penaloza et al., 2012). Results of these research have unveiled how cultural belongingness and social embeddedness affect consumers' attitudes, choices and behavior (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; McAuley & Pervan, 2014).

Among the different streams which focused on the effects of local cultures on consumers' practices and firms' strategies, Mediterranean scholars have provided theoretical justifications supporting the need to look at the Mediterranean markets and consumption in a different fashion (Cova & Cova, 2002; Cova, 2005; Firat, 2005; Cuomo et al., 2009; Visconti, 2010; Dalli & Romani, 2012).

Although the theory of Mediterranean marketing and branding is now established as an autonomous stream of research (Cova, 2005; Cuomo et al., 2009), additional efforts are needed.

Two main gaps can be identified.

The first gap is theoretical. The analysis of consumption and market phenomena in the Mediterranean needs to be further advanced through the development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks resulting from the intertwining of sociology and anthropology at first, as well as from the cross-fertilization of this body of knowledge with contributions of other disciplines such as economics, human geography, political studies, etc.

The second gap is empirical. The few empirical works issued to date have shown how firms can achieve a different competitive positioning by enriching their brand meanings with Mediterranean values (Visconti, 2010; Dalli & Romani, 2012), but did not provide any empirical observation on Mediterranean customers and their identity(ies).

The purpose of this research is hence to fill the aforementioned gaps. Its main objectives can be formalized as follows.

First, throughout the review of the literature, to provide a cross-disciplinary set of values that allow to define the preliminary nomological network of Mediterranean-ness as an element characterizing both consumers and brand identity. Our effort is hence to draw from an interdisciplinary body of theories to develop analytic theoretical frameworks that can illuminate the sociocultural dynamics that drive consumption in the Mediterranean.

Second, to validate the Mediterranean-ness concept by following the construct and measure development process generally adopted in the marketing discipline (Churchill, 1979). This construct, once developed, can be applied to both consumers and brands as an element characterizing their respective identities. Thus Mediterranean-ness will be conceived a nongeographically bounded characteristic of consumer and brand identity, in favor of a value oriented definition.

Third, to push forward the current knowledge of Mediterranean brands by studying how Mediterranean-ness affect consumer behavior and customers' brand choices. The fulfillment of this object will provide practical evidences of the relative importance that Mediterranean-ness play in shaping consumers decisions, choices and actions.

Fourth, to provide managerial implications which can help marketers to set up customer oriented marketing strategies within and outside the Mediterranean.

The results this research is expected to achieve will stimulate research and managerial advancements. From a research perspective, it contributes to strengthen the scientific dignity of Mediterranean marketing. Moreover, the development and establishment of a newly defined and tested theoretical construct and its respective measures, will stimulate an intense debate among scholars and the adoption of this construct is following research.

From a managerial perspective, since the research is expected to identify the cultural, sociological, anthropological and cognitive traits of the Mediterranean, and apply these traits to develop and test the construct of Mediterranean-ness, the results will be of help for marketers facing Mediterranean markets, and for marketers willing to develop a Mediterranean brand positioning. This will inspire the elaboration of different managerial tools such as a Mediterranean brand equity model that takes into account Mediterranean-ness as an exploitable brand asset, and processes and best practices assisting managers when setting up branding strategies addressed to the Mediterranean.