

The State of the Art of Methodological Research on the Role of the Brand in Local Products

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ABSTRACT

The products of the territory play an important role in the economic life of a country. They provide the right framework for economic and social development at the local and national levels. In the Albanian literature, there are no in-depth studies regarding the methodology used to increase the value of the local brand, and as a result of not researching this factor, this study helps the brand with local indicators. The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the methodology in general and the method used in the research on the role of the brand with indicators of origin in local products in Albania. Methodologies are suggested, which consist of the examination of all methodological approaches for the role of the brand with local indicators and the identification of the method for researching the case study. For the importance of branding agricultural and livestock products with local indicators and preserving their originality and development, the concept of the methodology and method that must be followed in order to give accurate results and the values that the local brand carries in itself in development is important of it and the area that is applied to increasing the economic performance of agro-processing industries. The literature shows that the impact of increasing the value of the territorial brand in our country is based on the case study method and the cross-case research methodology. Meanwhile, in order to prove the importance of the local brand in increasing the consumption of products and increasing the income of the industries in this sector, the STATA program was used to process the data collected from consumers, and the "R" program was used to process the data of the collected industries. From the results of the research, it has been established that the local brand affects the increase in consumption and income in the agricultural and livestock agro-processing industries. This paper serves as a methodology for studies in this field that are necessary for the case of Albania.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the general methodology used in research on the role of branding in local products. More recent research may reveal further developments and updates in this area. The paper begins with the philosophical approaches to the methodology of the local brand, where in this case the main philosophical approaches of the social sciences and, in particular, those of the field of economics are addressed. The case study is based on Popper's formulations and perspectives. It continues with the source of data and their types, such as qualitative, quantitative, mixed research, and the primary and secondary data necessary for the research of the case study, and closes with the research method, which deals with the case analysis study method as a method that finds multiple uses in the field of marketing. In this study, the methodology is organized according to five components, which show step by step how the research process will be developed. The main purpose of these concepts is to study and analyze the factors affecting the industries that buy and produce agricultural and livestock products. In the following figure, the theoretical description of the methodology and its philosophical approaches is carried out, and it continues with the description of the research scheme as a continuous process for the detailed examination of the research problem. Further, the case study method for this paper is also determined, as is the research methodology, which is of the cross-case type. These types of approaches match the purpose of the study. It continues with the collection of primary and secondary data, as well as recommending how the analysis and interpretation of the collected data will be done.

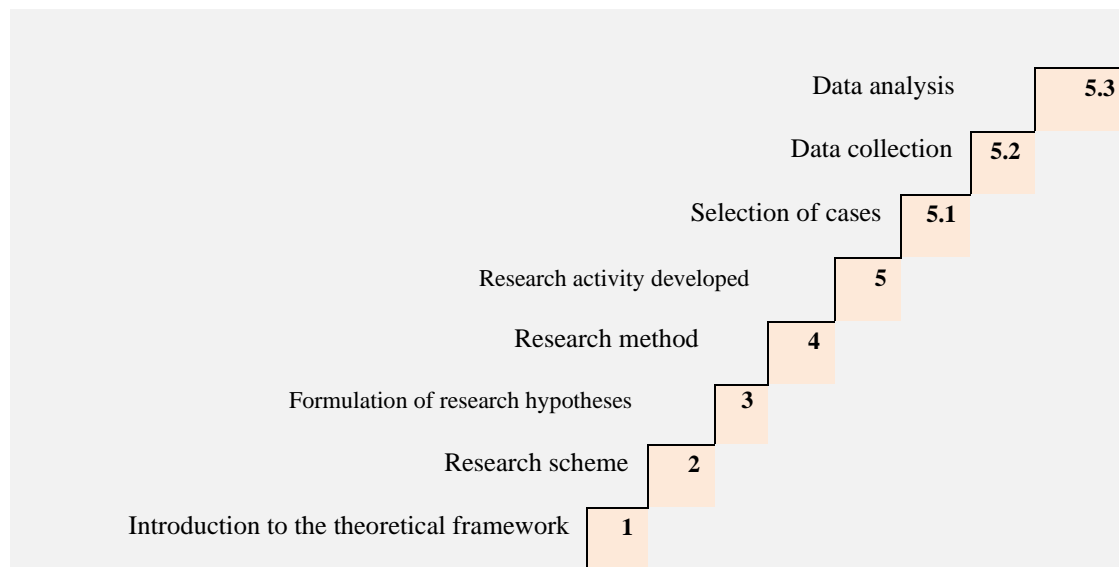


Figure 1. *The conceptual framework of the methodology*

Source: Authors own work

2. Literature Review

2.1. Philosophical Approaches to Local Brand Methodology

In this case, the main philosophical approaches of the social sciences, and in particular those of the field of economics, are addressed. The case study is based on Popper's formulations and perspectives.

The philosophy of science (Popper, 2000) aims to clarify the structural rules of scientific discussion from two perspectives:

- Logical positivism, where it is possible to empirically verify the theory or hypothesis.

- Popper's to falsify the theory, that is, a theory or hypothesis is considered scientific when it can be refuted by data.

Between two perspectives, the methodology can perform a marking function (limitation) guaranteeing verification or refutation, preparation of procedures for receiving, coding, and processing of data, classification, measurement of variables, assessment of deficiencies, and confidence limits of specific actions. Methodology is placed in an intermediate position between philosophy and research technique, given the operational tools developed and practiced in empirical research work. The task of the methodology is to verify the connection between the concepts used to build the theory and the correctness of the procedures and to check the ways of making cause-and-effect explanations (De Toni, 2005; Bocchi, 2007). The methodology used for the realization of this paper interweaves the cases examined, the scientific procedures chosen from the literature, and the tools adopted in relation to the purpose of the research. In scientific research, it is important to follow certain "quality criteria" because there is a risk of reaching false conclusions and not contributing to the truth. At the first level of methodology, there is a connection between it and the philosophical reflection on the conception of science. From this point of view, methodology deals with the rules of scientific research as a whole or of specific scientific research that requires a certain known methodology, assuming that the research is always inspired by clear scientific criteria (Bassani, 2009). The methodology depends on the theoretical orientations and occupies an intermediary role between (Bassani, 2009; Guala, 2007):

- Discussed cases.
- Science procedures.
- Instruments are adopted gradually in relation to a certain research context.

A fundamental methodology in any research is the systematic review of existing literature. This allows for a comprehensive overview of previous research, theories, models, and findings in the field of local product branding. Descriptive research does not follow the statistical generalization of the results but aims through the refinement of research statements (ideas) until the construction of a theoretical framework related to the researched phenomenon. The case study method follows the principle of a hierarchy that gives it a completely exploratory (exploratory) function. The hierarchical/rationalist approach to research methods can be contrasted with the constructionist approach in the sense that any research method can fulfill different purposes (exploratory, descriptive, and causal) provided that these the basic purposes are respected, and the chosen method is appropriate to the research to be carried out (Mari, 1994). Despite different philosophical approaches, i.e., achieving the result through the application of the "case" method (which can include a case study or several case studies), it has been observed that this problem is solved by accepting the conceptual difference between the inductive and the deductive methods. Compared to the methods that follow the transition from the general rule to the explanation of the special situation (deductive), the case study is suitable when it goes from the facts, empirical data, or special situation to the general rule (inductive) (Mari, 1994; Yin, 2003; Marino, 2009).

2.2. Research Scheme

Descriptive research does not follow the statistical generalization of the results but aims through the refinement of research statements (ideas) until the construction of a theoretical framework related to the researched phenomenon. The two types of research schemes, exploratory and descriptive, can be considered stages of a continuous process, where each of them responds to a detailed examination of the research problem and passes from one stage to another to benefit from an increase in knowledge. obtained (Mari, 1994). The exploratory

research scheme has been developed through the use of bibliographic material (Mari, 1994; Yin, 2003; Marino, 2009) for research topics and their comparison. Also, the literature analysis (Scatton & Schmitz, 2016; Gentric et al., 2014; Green et al., 2016) has made it possible to formulate in-depth research ideas in empirical research (the descriptive phase). Regarding data sources, considering the research problem and its nature, it was decided to use both the data collected for the specific purpose of the research (primary data) and data that are available for other case studies, but that can also be used in our case (secondary data). This is for the following reasons:

- ✓ Finding and understanding appropriate data source approaches.
- ✓ Focusing on special and specific aspects of the researched problem not documented by other sources.

Finally, based on the necessary information collected and the specification of the sources of these data, the method for collecting primary and secondary data has been determined (Bonoma, 1985). This choice was made in accordance with the objective of the research, which is related to the degree of scientific accuracy given by the method of case study (multiple case study) (Yin, 2003; Marino, 2009). The case study method follows the principle of a hierarchy that gives it a completely exploratory (exploratory) function. The hierarchical/rationalist approach to research methods can be contrasted with the constructionist approach in the sense that any research method can fulfill different purposes (exploratory, descriptive, and causal) provided that these basic purposes are respected and the chosen method is appropriate to the research to be carried out (Mari, 1994). Despite the different philosophical approaches, i.e., achieving the result through the application of the "case" method (which can include a case study or several case studies), it has been observed that this problem is solved by accepting the conceptual difference between the inductive and the deductive methods. Compared to the methods that follow the transition from the general rule to the explanation of the special situation (deductive), the case study is suitable when it goes from facts, empirical data, or a special situation to the general rule (inductive) (Mari, 1994; Yin, 2003; Marino, 2009). In addition, the purpose of empirical measurements towards the theory (hypotheses) that distinguishes this study also fulfills any limitation (error) related to the accuracy of the data, which in this paper is placed at a secondary level in terms of importance in relation to the need to determine a general picture of reality through the examination of various analyses and facts.

2.3. Types of Research

Qualitative research is a type of scientific investigation that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the role of the brand in local products through the detailed analysis of non-numerical information such as interviews, participant observations, documents, or audiovisual recordings (Sasso et al., 2015). Unlike quantitative research, which is based on the collection and analysis of numerical data, qualitative research aims to explore and understand consumers' meanings, perceptions, and experiences of local products. Scholars using qualitative research often seek to capture the complexity and richness of unstructured data to gain in-depth insight into the phenomenon under investigation (De Lillo, 2010). The main objective is to explore consumers' opinions, emotions, and motivations towards local brands and to understand consumer purchasing behavior more deeply. It includes in-depth interviews, focus groups, content analysis, and observation (Duccio, 2020).

Quantitative research collects numerical data through surveys, questionnaires, and data analysis studies. This approach provides quantifiable data on various aspects of consumer behavior, such as brand awareness, associations between brand and local product, and purchase intentions (Corbetta, 2014). Online and offline consumer behavior analytics tools can provide

valuable insights into how consumers interact with local brands. This includes monitoring social media interactions, analyzing sales data, and using eye tracking technology (Corbetta, 2015). The purpose of quantitative research is to ensure the objectivity of the data obtained by minimizing possible influences deriving from external situations. Clearly, such a rigid procedure helps facilitate the replicability of the study and ensures the generalization of the results obtained (Benardi, 2005).

Mix search: Mixed research is a concept used in the field of economics to study and apply the principles and methods of mixed research in the study of different fields of economics. In the context of economics, "mixed research" can be used to combine and analyze data from different sources, such as statistical data, econometric modeling, empirical studies, surveys, etc. (Amaturo et al., 2016). The goal is to get a broad and complete perspective on various economic aspects, and to provide better and more accurate results in the analysis of economic problems, specifically in the role of macro- and local indicators in the economic performance of agro-processing industries. Interdisciplinary research methods can be used to analyze the effects of economic policies, understand the behavior of financial markets, and identify the influences of external factors on the economic performance of agro-processing industries. In essence, "mixed research in economics" uses interdisciplinary research methods to combine and use data from different sources to better understand economic phenomena and make informed decisions about the case study (Trinchero et al., 2019).

2.4. Sources of Data and Their Types

The sources of data are primary, secondary, qualitative, and quantitative. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the primary data. Subjects of interviews and questionnaires can be presidents of industries and agritourism, managers, and consumers. Considering the specific objective of the work in data collection, the following tools can be used: (Mari, 1994):

- Secondary data.
- Direct interviews.
- Consumer questionnaire.

For the development of the research work, secondary data can be collected through the review and analysis of the literature (Rini, 2019), which is related to the marketing of local products, branding, and agritourism in Albania. These data can be obtained from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT, 2022) the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MBUMK, 2022), agro-processing industries, and agro-tourism. The following table shows the number of agro-processing industries that will be the subject of research, as well as the management staff of these industries for whom the interviews will be conducted.

Table 1.
Data collection from interviews

Industries	Role	Name & Surname	Focus Group
Dairy Industry Number 20	1. The President		
	2. Marketing Director		
	3. Inside sales manager		
	4. Foreign sales manager		
Meat Industry Number 20	1. The President		
	2. Marketing Director		
	3. Inside sales manager		
	4. Foreign sales manager		
Wine Industry Number 20	1. The President		
	2. Marketing Director		

Industries	Role	Name & Surname	Focus Group
Olive Oil Industry Number 20	3. Inside sales manager		
	4. Foreign sales manager		
	1. The President		
	2. Marketing Director		
Agrotourism Number 20	3. Inside sales manager		
	4. Foreign sales manager		
	1. President/Farmer		
	2. Marketing Director		
	3. The manager		

Source: Authors own work

Interviews can be semi-structured, closed-ended, Likert-type questionnaires, or open-ended questions. The other data are questionnaires in electronic format, such as Google Forms, for the target consumer group.

2.5. Types of Data

For the study of the brand with local indicators of agricultural and livestock products, two types of data can be used, which are divided into:

Primary data serves for:

- Determination and selection of the necessary samples that will be included in the observation.
- Preparation and testing of questionnaires.
- Ad hoc interviews for entrepreneurs of agro-processing businesses and industries to gather information about the implementation of the study.
- Data processing and drawing conclusions.

Secondary data:

- Can be processed and evaluated according to our purpose, which is the formulation of interviews and questionnaires.
- To assess the rates of development of agro-processing industries and agro-tourism.
- They serve to draw conclusions about the current situation and identify problems for the future.
- Etc.,

Finally, based on the necessary information collected and the specification of the sources of these data, the method for collecting primary and secondary data has been determined (Bonoma, 1985).

3. Research Method

In connection with the study of the role of the brand with local indicators, the case study method can be used, which finds many uses in the field of marketing. This method, as stated in the literature (Yin, 2003; Rini, 2019; Khalifa, 2020), refers to the analysis of case studies, which, compared to the traditional study (a case study), finds use in a critical test of an existing theory when it presents a single event or has a revealing purpose. Empirical data generated through the multiple case study method creates different costs and benefits compared to the single case study method. In general, the case study method is associated with the rules of scientific research and has great explanatory power for the purposes of the study, despite the loss of time for finding and collecting data. The basic logic of the case study method is that of schematization (repetition of dependent or independent experiments), a principle analogous (similar) to that used in various experimental phases but very different from the logic of the

sample (Marino, 2009; Khalifa, 2020). Repetition of the experiment assumes that separate cases are the subject of analyses that are observed and treated as separate experiments and not as a combination of analyses within the same experiment, while the research methodology turns out to be of the cross-case type (similarities and detailed insights between different cases) and not of the within-case type (study of a single case) (Yin, 1999; Daphne, 2022). For the above reasons, the case study method was chosen in this paper.

3.1. Selection of Industries and Determination of the Sample of Consumers for Data Collection

The criterion for choosing the cases (agro-processing industries and agro-tourism) for the study is a function of the descriptive typology of the research, especially in relation to the quality of the subjects involved.

The reasons for choosing the cases are:

- ✓ It was chosen based on the locality (Vlora) due to the fact that there are no previous studies in this field.
- ✓ The selection of agro-processing industries was made thanks to the fact that their products are in demand in the European and domestic markets (Skreli et al., 2017).
- ✓ The choice of branding for agricultural and livestock products was made to improve the economic performance of businesses in these categories and in the locality.
- ✓ An important component for the selection of these subjects lies in the fact that even after the granting of support funds by the European Union in the sector of agro-processing, agricultural, and livestock industries, there are still deficiencies in terms of the marketing of these products, the adaptation of the legal framework, and the improvement of economic policies in their service (Zhllima, 2020).

Based on the low economic performance of the agro-processing, agricultural, and livestock industries in the city of Vlora, it was considered right to study the causes of this phenomenon by evaluating the interest of consumers in products with local brands and the evaluations and attitudes of the management staff of these industries towards local brands. Data collection began in January 2023 and continued until March 2024. Different categories of consumers participated in the research, starting from students, employed in the state, employed in the private sector, managers, administrators, and various categories of professions, as well as the industry's management staff (president, marketing director, and managers), who are people who influence the financing, creation, and realization of the brand. Selected industries and agritourism are interdependent with each other. The survey ended with the inclusion of 204 consumers and 100 representatives of the agritourism and agro-processing industries of products such as milk, meat, olive oil, wine, where 20 industries were selected for each product. The inclusion of consumers from different categories in the research and representatives of agro-processing industries provided a complete framework of necessary data for the objective of the study.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data from consumers, a questionnaire with closed questions was used in electronic format, Google Forms type, according to the Likert scale from 1 (not at all agree) to 5 (completely agree). The results of the questionnaire proved the importance of the local brand in increasing consumer demand for agricultural and livestock products and increasing the demand for consumption of locally branded products in agritourism.

The consumer questionnaire was organized into three sections, as follows:

1. The first section consisted of seven questions on the demographic data of the study sample.
2. The second section consists of two questions, which consist of the type of preferred unit for purchasing products and preferences for purchasing products with a local brand or a foreign brand.
3. The third section contains 27 questions, which consist of the reasons for selecting the local brand and its attributes.

For the collection of industry and agritourism data for management or decision-making staff, a semi-structured interview was used, with closed questionnaire-type questions according to the Likert scale, from 1 (not at all agree) to 5 (completely agree), plus questions with an open version.

The interview was structured in two sections as follows:

1. The first section contains four questions on the distinctive features of industries.
2. The second section consists of 8 questions, where 5 of them are questions with closed answers and 3 are questions with open answers. The questions consist of the role of the brand in promoting sales, in increasing the demand for agritourism, in the role of the local brand in creating a strong identity, in improving the economic performance, and in the market positioning of the industries and agritourism.

Industries and agro-tourism were contacted through the email addresses found on their website to set the date and time of the meeting depending on their availability and free will to participate in the study.

The analysis and interpretation of the collected data were carried out according to a qualitative and quantitative approach developed in several stages according to the need for additional information related to the research work. In the first stage of primary data analysis (semi-structured interviews of research subjects and consumer questionnaires), a report was drawn up on their responses. The second phase analyzed the reports of the first phase, which needed further analysis according to the research objective. In this case study, the econometric model of the nominal type was used for the data collected from consumers since the dependent variables are of the nominal type (Osmani, 2017). Ordinal models are used among the nominal models because the categories or levels of the dependent variable are ordered from the lowest to the highest. While the program used for quantitative data processing is STATA. While the data collected from the interviews that were conducted with representatives of 100 industries and agritourism were processed with the econometric model of the multinomial type, using the "R" program. The results of the data proved the important role that brands with local indicators have in improving the economic performance of agro-processing industries and agro-tourism and their positioning in the market.

4. Conclusion

It is important to keep in mind that methodological effectiveness depends on the specific objectives of the study and the reference population (where it is applied). When conducting research, it is essential to use a rigorous methodological approach to obtain accurate and reliable results. Due to the importance and role of agricultural and livestock products in the economic development of our country, marking these products with territorial indicators is of particular importance for the economic development of agro-processing industries. Therefore, for the case of Albania (Vlora), the methodological approaches that best suit the case study are: the case study method, which finds many uses in the field of marketing, where the basic logic of which consists in schematization (repetition of dependent or independent experiments), a principle similar to that used in various experimental phases but different from the logic of the

sample. Replication of the experiment assumes that separate cases are the subject of analyses that are observed and treated as separate experiments rather than as a pool of analyses within the same experiment. This method generates important data about the brand, the originality of the brand, the identification of the area, and also satisfying the customers. While the research methodology is of the cross-case type (similarities and detailed insights between different cases) and not of the within-case type (study of a single case) (Yin, 1999; Daphne, 2022). For the above reasons, and not only in this paper, the case study method has been chosen, which will guarantee the verification and preparation of the procedures for receiving, coding, and processing data and can serve the scientific researchers in the field.

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