

Tourist industry as a lever to expand export markets: an empirical analysis

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Tourism one of the world's largest industries mobilizing millions of travelers every year. While on holiday, tourists seek for experiencing the identity and authenticity of the hosting destination buying and consuming local wine, food and local handcrafts. Further, local wine, food and handcrafts are one of the most common type of "memento" tourists buy for themselves or for friend and relatives. This means that experiencing a place as a tourism destination can affect future purchasing of those products thus contributing to the internationalization of local producers. This implies that a country's tourist industry can be leveraged to expand export markets. Hence, knowing which are the main determinants that influence the actual buying behavior of local products at the destination and the intention to keep on purchasing these products while back at home is pivotal for tourism practitioners, producers, manufactures and policy makers. Only a handful of studies have been devoted to analyze this topic using a representative and stratified random sample. This is even more relevant for countries such as Italy, whose tourist image is strongly linked to food, wine and handcrafts. This study was therefore carried out to investigate whether, and the extent to which, socio-demographic (gender, age, level of education) and trip-related (travel party, length of stay, prior experience with the destination, type of tourism product/experience, accommodation, mean of transport) characteristics affect the actual buying behavior of local products and the consumers' willingness to repurchase these products while back at their place of residence. To achieve this aim, probability models were applied on a stratified random sample of 1,445 non-residents tourists who spent their holidays in Sardinia during the period Aprile-October 2012. Specifically, strata were nationality (Italian vs. international), time of tourists' stay (low season vs. high season) and gateway to the island (port and airport, but also standard and low-cost airlines). Our findings contribute to the current debate on how effective is a region' tourist industry as a lever to internationalize the local productions. Further, they provide useful information to support marketing operations of producers, manufacturers and policy makers in their attempt to find new markets to which to sell their products.

Key words: *tourism, food, wine, handcrafts, willingness to repurchase, exports.*

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