

The Determinants of Tourists' Satisfaction in the Sicilian Agritourism Structures: A Factor Analysis

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Abstract

Agritourism is a particular form of rural tourism that has as its objective the enhancement of the territory and the rural heritage. The main motivation for the tourist is linked to the attention for the territory to food, tradition, environment and culture. In order to study the customer satisfaction in the Sicilian agritourism, we have analysed the factors that affect the customer's judgment of the overall experience, applying two statistical methods: a Factor Analysis and a Logit model. From the study, it has emerged that the satisfaction of the tourist essentially depends on how and how much the agritourism structure is able to satisfy the tourists' expectations.

Keywords: customer; tourism; rural; agritourism; satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Agritourism is a particular form of rural tourism whose main objectives are the diversification of entrepreneurial activity and the enhancement of the rural territory through the promotion of typical products, and the recovery of traditions. The average tourist of the farm usually travels because he appreciates the genuineness, the direct contact with the managers, and the good value for money. The main motivation for tourists is related to the attention given to the quality of the gastronomic products that plays a fundamental role in this activity (Albayrak and Caber, 2018; Panzone *et al.*, 2016). The farm allows the visitor to rediscover the close bond that exists between food and its territory of origin, but also to safeguard and promote territorial specificities, developing its potential (Hung *et al.*, 2015; Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2014a). Agritourism in Italy has experienced uninterrupted growth in the last twenty years, reaching 12.7 million presences in 2017, with an increase in revenue of 6.7% compared to the previous year, reaching 1.36 billion euros, with a total offer of 23,406 active companies. In Italy, Sicily the region with 307 structures and a capacity of 6,444 beds represents a constantly growing reality and which we believe deserves special attention. Following other studies that measure the customer satisfaction, which focuses on perceptions and attitudes (i.e. Vega-Vázquez *et al.*, 2017; Pizam and Ellis, 1999). This study focuses on measuring the agritourist's satisfaction level in the Sicilian agritourism structures, through the evaluation of a Logit model on the overall satisfaction of their experience in the structure (Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2015; Ascianto *et al.*, 2013).

2. Methods and data

A questionnaire ad hoc was designed to measure the agritourist's perceptions and satisfaction levels towards the services and facilities provided by the agritourism farm in Sicily. Data was collected in the spring and summer of 2018. Ninetythree agritourist customers form the sample used in our analysis. Subjects were mostly female (72%) and the age ranging from 18 to 30 years old. Customers were asked demographic information

such as gender and age, also their attitudes, and the behaviour in their lifestyle. The agritourism attributes were believed to cover some relevant elements considered important to customers in relation to agritourism evaluation such as room quality, service provider, guest interaction, the judgement on the local food tasting and the explanations of the history of the place. For all these questions, a -point scale was used to indicate a growing level of judgement of the customer of the attributes considered. In order to study the customer satisfaction in the Sicilian agritourism, we analysed which factors affect the customer's judgment of the overall experience. Two statistical methods have been used for the analysis of the survey respondents, a Factor Analysis (FA) and a Logit model. In particular, the Factor Analysis was applied to reduce, the number of the variables present in the dataset, into a smaller set of variables called factors (Spearman, 1904). The list of all the items used is reported in the next Section (Tab.1). In general, the unobservable factors describe the correlation between the original variables considered in the dataset. This technique extracts maximum common variance from all the variables and puts them into a common score. The predicted scores were used as independent variables to estimate the overall satisfaction of the customers with the agritourism farms, applying a Logit model. In our Logit model we have considered as dependent variable a dummy variable that takes the value equal to 1 if the judgment of the subject on the overall satisfaction of his/her experience is excellent and 0 if otherwise. Between the independent variables we consider the age of the subjects (Age: 1 = age is ranged between 18-20 years old; 2 = 21-25; 3 = 26-30), the gender of the subject (gender: 1 = woman; 0 = man), if the structure is present on the web (Internet: 1 = yes; 0 = otherwise), and the three predicted scores by the factorization procedures (Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2016).

3. Results

Using the scree plot, which is a decreasing function showing the variance explained by each factor in a factor analysis and assuming that each of the original variables has as Eigenvalue

equal to 1, we found that three factors extracted together account for 85% of the total variance in the dataset. In this manner, we have reduced the number of variables from 19 to 3 underlying factors. To test the reliability between the items used

in the factor analysis, before performing the factorization on our variables, we calculated their reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.79). In the following table (Tab. 1), we report the results of our factor analysis.

Items	Variable	Factor1 Agritourism attitude	Factor2 Services and Facilities	Factor3 Customer attitude
How important is the total cost of the holiday	Price	0.006	-0.208	0.379
How important is the variety of services offered	Variety services	0.385	-0.251	0.221
How important is the quality of the services offered	Quality services	0.291	-0.113	0.382
How important is air quality	Air quality	0.354	-0.329	0.400
How important are the climatic factors	Climatic factors	0.226	-0.176	0.481
How the services offered have affected the booking	Services booking	0.502	-0.068	-0.076
How the structure was integrated with the environment	Integrated	0.313	-0.010	-0.036
How many times could you taste the typical local products	Tasting frequencies	0.679	-0.340	-0.024
How she/he has been involved in farm activities	Involvement	0.567	-0.065	-0.055
How the history and traditions of the place were explained	Traditions	0.545	-0.042	-0.307
Received information on production techniques	Production techniques	0.539	-0.243	-0.357
Evaluation of waiting times at the reception	Reception waiting	0.192	0.396	0.194
Evaluation on the common areas of the structure	Common areas	0.345	0.419	-0.044
Evaluation on the tasting service of local specialties	Specialty tasting	0.744	-0.249	-0.152
Room cleaning rating	Cleanliness room	0.155	0.465	0.255
Evaluation of the quality of the attractions carried out	Attraction quality	0.636	0.196	-0.040
Evaluation on the ability to cope with particular requests	Urgencies	0.414	0.241	-0.225
Evaluation on the resolution of problems / requests	Problem solving	0.328	0.620	-0.017
If she/he has been received with courtesy at the reception	Courtesy	0.534	0.394	0.343

Table 1. Items used in the Factor Analysis

The first factor "agritourism attitude" includes items that identify the very essence of agritourism, that is, an integrated accommodation facility that blends with the environment and local traditions. The second factor "services and facilities" regards the quality of staff and the general services of the structure. The third factor "customer attitude" regards the attitude and behaviour of the customers in the environmental element. Using the predicted score factors as independent variables; we have estimated the probability of being overall satisfied with the experience in the agritourism applying a Logit model. The estimation results (coefficients and marginal effects), are reported in the following table (Tab. 2). The estimated coefficients indicate that the quality of the services that are directly linked to the territory such as, the possibility to taste the local food, explanation of the tradition (Agritourism attitude) and the quality of the structures and of the staff (Services and Facilities), have a positive and significant impact on the tourist is overall satisfaction. The attitude of the subjects versus the environmental values influences negatively their level of satisfaction, and we have the same effect if the coefficient associated to this score factor is not statistically significant. The results show that demographic variables and if the structure has or does not have an Internet site, they are not relevant variables in the evaluation of the tourist is overall satisfaction. Through the analysis of the marginal effects, we can better interpret our results. In particular, if the perceived quality of the services related to the "agritourism attitudes" increases by one unit, then the probability of being satisfied increases by 33%. A unit increase in the perceived quality of the "Services and Facilities" factor will result in an estimated 25% increase in consumer' probability satisfaction.

Overall satisfaction	Coef.	Std. Err.	P. value	dy/dx	Std. Err.	P. value
Factor 1	1.38	0.39	***	0.33	0.09	***
Factor 2	1.03	0.34	**	0.25	0.08	**
Factor 3	-0.18	0.34		-0.04	0.08	
Age (ref. 18-20)						
21-25	-0.24	0.87		-0.06	0.21	
26-30	-0.18	0.91		-0.04	0.22	
Gender	-0.43	0.62		-0.10	0.15	
Internet	0.53	0.71		0.12	0.16	
Constant	-0.32	1.15				

Notes: * $P < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Logistic regression on overall satisfaction

4. Discussion and conclusion

The results of our statistical analysis, underline the importance of several factors related to the perception of the actual service performed by agritourism in Sicily. Factors that can affect positively or negatively the propensity to being satisfied with the agritourism farm. In addition, if in this study, we cannot take into account the future behaviour of the subjects (i.e., González *et al.*, 2007; Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2014b; Baker and Crompton, 2000); we can consider these as a consequence of their overall level of satisfaction. In this sense, understanding the factors that can affect the judgement of the customers becomes relevant. We can suppose that a customer satisfied today, will be more inclined to repurchase the same product and, in this particular case, do the same kind of experience staying again at an agritourism, or will start to pass on positive word of mouth. Moreover, from our study emerges the importance of the traditions and the environment that the agritourism farm represents. The possibility to taste the typical local products, the explanation of the production techniques and the history and the traditions of the place, are the attributes, which are relevant for the tourist. Although for the customers who pay more attention to environmental issues, such as the importance of air quality and climatic factors, the propensity to be satisfied decreases, this factor does not seem to be significant. Instead, the customer's expectations assume a significant importance. Expectations of a customer on the agritourism product, in fact fall within the Factor 1 and in a positive manner. This means that the expectations that the customer has at the time of booking based on the services offered are not disappointed. Therefore, the positive association between expectation and the judgement of the services used (experience) are matched, and the agritourist is driven to increase the psychological comfort generated by the assonance of the states (Oliver, 1981). Agritourism has become a new profitable business opportunity, not only for the farms, which can be used in an alternative and complete manner, but also as an input for the local economic development (Lanfranchi, M., 2010; Fleischer and Pizam, 1997).

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