



The impact of local food specialities on the decision to (re)visit a tourist destination: Market-expanding or business-stealing?



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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1100 Italians interviewed about five local food specialities coming from three different mountain resorts.
- Questions also concern their intention to visit the Place of Origin (POO) and Other Similar Mountain Resorts (OSMR).
- Experience of local specialities impacts positively on intention to visit the POO and OSMR (market-expanding effect).
- Knowledge of the place of origin increases [decreases] the intention to visit the POO [OSMR] (business-stealing effect).
- Strong appreciation for a local food speciality has a positive effect only on the intention to visit the POO.

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies how local food specialities can affect the attractiveness of tourist destinations, distinguishing between market-expanding and business-stealing effects. We surveyed 1100 Italians in their home about their intention to visit or revisit three popular mountain resorts in Northern Italy (Valtellina, Valle d'Aosta, Trentino), and about their experience, knowledge, and appreciation of five well-known local food products of these places (Pizzoccheri pasta, Bresaola dried beef, Fontina cheese, Melinda apples, Speck smoked ham). We find that product experience positively affects the likelihood of (re)visiting both a product's place of origin and the other mountain destinations (market-expanding effect). Conversely, the correct identification of the product's place of origin may reduce the intention to (re)visit the other destinations (business-stealing effect). Finally, strong appreciation for a local food speciality has a positive effect only on the intention to (re)visit the place of origin.

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1. Introduction

The tourism literature has broadly documented that local food specialities and cuisine significantly affect holiday destination choice (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004; Quan & Wang, 2004), and greatly influence the

enjoyment of the stay (du Rand & Heath, 2006; Fox, 2007; Nield, Kozak, & LeGrys, 2000; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002).¹ The food

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¹ According to Zago and Pick (2004), local food specialities are "agricultural commodities or finished products with specific organoleptic characteristics related to a production area or technology (p. 150)". Pacciani, Belletti, Marescotti, and Scaramuzzi (2001) noted that "typical products are strictly tied to their area of origin, as they derive their characteristics from the paedoclimatic, technical and organizational peculiarities of the 'terroir' they come from". Such local products are often protected by designations of origin and quality labels, which strengthen their geographic connection to the place of origin (Giovannucci, Barham, & Pirog, 2010).

literature has indeed widely emphasized the importance of local products and gastronomy as a driving force of economic growth (Telfer & Wall, 1996). In mountain resorts, for example, agricultural activities help to preserve environmental equilibrium and soil conservation, which are necessary prerequisites for tourism development. Having said that, agriculture, the food industry, and tourism are therefore complementary, and characterized by upstream and downstream linkages and strong inter-sectoral multiplier effects (Lorenzini, 2011).

In many mountain resorts, the development and the promotion of local products have grown in parallel with the acknowledgement of the importance of food for customer loyalty (Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003) and the attraction of new visitors (Sims, 2009). At the place of vacation, local food specialities help to convey a sense of authenticity and uniqueness (Sims, 2009), and reinforce the external image of the area (Boyne & Hall, 2004). Outside the strict tourist locations, they serve as an additional promotional channel. Because of the important role played by local food products in local tourism economies, in recent years they have increasingly become marketing and branding tools for tourism promotion (du Rand & Heath, 2006; Fox, 2007; Frochot, 2003; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Tellstrom, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2006). Since local food specialities evoke the identity, culture, and sustainability of the place of origin, many authors suggest that they should be considered explicitly and implicitly when the marketing strategies of local and regional destinations are designed. Moreover, protected designations of origin and quality labels are frequently recognized as being capable of promoting tourism and conveying a feeling of quality and typicality (Berg and Sevón, 2014; Bessiere, 1998; Harris & Deacon, 2011; Santagata, Russo, & Segre, 2007).

Contrary to local cuisine that is not really marketable outside the charming restaurants of a tourist region, local food specialities are also sold outside the place of origin. The availability of these products in food stores near their homes allows prospective visitors to get some idea of local traditions, and thereby increase their perception of the authenticity and attractiveness of the supposed place of origin. Moreover, for those travellers who have already spent a vacation in a tourist destination, the consumption of its local products (far from the place of origin) may help to keep an interest in that destination alive. In both cases, these local food products should make it more likely for customers to visit (or revisit) a tourist location.

Although there are plenty of works which highlight the benefits of local food on tourism, less attention has been devoted to verify the existence of a statistically significant effect of local products on the intention to visit or revisit a tourist destination. Some exceptions are Barros and Assaf (2012), Kivela and Crofts (2006) and Sparks et al. (2003), who all find a positive correlation between food quality perception and the intention to revisit. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, the existing literature on the subject has not yet analysed what effect local products exert on competing tourist destinations.

This paper aims to fill this empirical gap by analysing the impact of local food specialities on the decision to visit (and revisit) a destination, by means of an ad hoc survey. We selected three popular mountain tourist areas in Northern Italy (Valtellina, Valle d'Aosta, Trentino), and five well-known local products of these places sold in food stores all over the country (Pizzoccheri pasta, Bresaola dried beef, Fontina cheese, Melinda apples, and Speck smoked ham). The need to have a sufficient number of respondents acquainted with these products suggested that we should limit our survey to Italians. Moreover, the choice of selecting only Italian

people helps to satisfy the requirement that interviewees predominantly share the same food culture and the same opportunity to buy typical products in a supermarket in their place of residence.

Using computer-assisted telephone interviews, we surveyed 1100 people in their home. The interview contained questions on: the experience, appreciation, and presumed place of origin for a selection of local food specialities; the interviewee's intention to visit or revisit the three mountain destinations; the satisfaction with the visited places; and the interviewee's sociodemographics. The peculiar structure of the collected data allows us to investigate the different roles played by local food products and their market-expanding and/or business-stealing impact. A Multivariate Probit methodology is employed to exploit the features of the data structure.

We find that experience of a local food speciality positively and significantly affects the likelihood of (re)visiting both the place of origin and the other mountain destinations, which suggests that typical food products have a market-expanding effect. Moreover, it also emerges that the correct identification of the product's place of origin in some cases reduces the intention to (re)visit the other competing mountain destinations, which suggests the existence of a business-stealing effect. Finally, strong appreciation for a local product has a positive effect on the intention to (re)visit the place of origin, but no significant effect on the intention to (re)visit other destinations.

These results can help policy makers to better develop their place branding strategies in mountain destinations. For instance, some possible joint territorial actions could be undertaken in order to strengthen the distribution channels of local food specialities in the whole national territory. Other sale channels such as product-specific e-marketplaces could be enhanced, and product packaging could be designed in order to contain images capable of evoking the link between local food and mountain resorts. In addition to this, some possible measures could be activated in the various stages of the supply chain in order to amplify the promotional role of local food specialities for specific mountain destinations. In particular, attention should be paid to improve the quality content, guarantee, and recognisability of local products, and to increase the awareness of their use among local operators, such as restaurants, inns and wine bars.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 explores the background literature for the study of the market-expanding and business-stealing effects of local food specialities on tourist destinations. Section 3 sets out the hypotheses to be tested. Section 4 describes the data and the econometric model employed in the analysis. Section 5 discusses the results. The main implications for tourism policies and practices are outlined in the concluding section of the paper.

2. Local food specialities and their promotional role

In this section we introduce our background analysis concerning the market-expanding and business-stealing effects of advertising. Marshall (1919) was the first to identify two broad types of advertising: 'constructive' as opposed to 'combative' advertising. The former type corresponds to the case in which advertising has positive effects on the whole industry, i.e. a firm's advertising campaign attracts new customers into the market, increasing all firms' sales, revenues and profits. The latter type corresponds to the case where an advertising campaign generates a positive effect for the promoting firm, but a negative one for the others, i.e. the number of market consumers does not grow, and there is a reallocation of sales towards the advertising firm. In accordance with

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