

Heterogeneity of countryside visitors regarding information search: A segmentation analysis

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Structure

1. Relevance and objectives

2. Theoretical background

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4. Methodology – data analysis

5. Results and discussion

6. Conclusions and implications

Relevance



Relevance of rural areas as tourism destinations

- Rural areas have become very popular as tourism destinations worldwide as a result of endogenous and exogenous factors (Anderson, Bakir & Wickens, 2015).

Tourism in rural areas

- Tourism has assumed a crucial role in many rural areas due to the growing investment in tourism activities by local agents as a consequence of the decline in traditional economic activities such as agriculture (Sharpley, 2005).

"New tourists"

- The emergence of a "new tourist", who is more environmentally friendly, looking for authenticity and for high contact with nature, has also contributed to the growing attractiveness of these destinations (Lane, 2009).

However

The competitiveness of rural tourism destinations depends, among other factors, both on the type of tourism products offered and on the promotion strategies adopted to attract the target market.

In order to accomplish this objective

The definition of the promotional strategies is crucial in the tourism context, since they may influence the image of the destinations, the selection of these destinations and consequent travel choices (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010)

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Objective

This paper aims to analyse the heterogeneity of the rural tourism market regarding information sources used

Theoretical background

There is a wide range of information sources that visitors may use in order to get information from destinations and plan their trips

These information sources encompass:

Traditional sources

- more controlled by marketers (e.g. television , brochures)

Sources that are out of marketers' control

- much more influenced by visitors' experiences and by their networks (e.g. word of mouth, travel experience)

High technology sources

- e.g. Websites, Social Media

The internet has been increasingly used as an information source in tourism and has greatly changed the way, both tourists engage in travel planning and destination choice and how tourism agents communicate with target markets (Luo et al., 2004).

Theoretical background



The information sources used by visitors have already been widely studied in the tourism context
(Carneiro & Crompton, 2010)

However

Despite the relevant role of information search for developing efficient promotional strategies, only a limited number of studies consider information sources used by travellers as a segmentation basis.

This research gap is even greater in the market studies regarding rural tourism destinations.

The success of destinations that are in early stages of tourism development, of small dimension, with many small businesses, as is the case of rural tourism destinations, is largely dependent on good segmentation strategies that provide relevant inputs to the design of promotional strategies.

Methodology

- data collection -



Population of the study:

- A questionnaire applied to a sample of the Portuguese population over 14 years old (between 11/2013 and 10/2014), combining personal and online administration .



Sampling approach:

A quota sampling approach was adopted based on the following criteria:

- The municipality of residence categorized in three levels (most urban, the intermediate, the most rural)
- The parish of residence (categorized in two groups: urban or rural, according to INE classification)
- Gender
- Age

Sample size:

- A total of 1853 valid questionnaires were obtained

Methodology

- data collection -



In this study only the respondents who had visited a Portuguese rural area in the last three years with tourism purposes were included



**A total of 919
questionnaires were
selected (49.6%)**

Questions included in the questionnaire analysed in this study:

- A) Information sources used to plan the visit
- B) Images and discourses on Portuguese rural areas
- C) Travel behaviour (e.g. tourism activities carried out during the visits, types of accommodation and transportation more frequently used, composition of travel group and the frequency of the visits to a Portuguese rural destination)
- D) Familiarity with rural areas (e.g. experience as rural inhabitant or worker, rural origin, parents' rural origin, consumption of rural food products)
- E) The sociodemographic profile

Methodology - data analysis-



Objective:

1) To identify homogenous groups regarding the information sources used to plan the trips to Portuguese rural areas



- A cluster analysis - A hierarchical agglomerative technique (Ward) with the Squared Euclidean Distance was used to segment the respondents who visited Portuguese rural areas in the last three years.
- The input variables used in this analysis were the information sources used to plan the trip (travel agencies, television, newspaper and magazines, internet, brochures, art works, previous travel experience, friends and relatives)

2) To characterize the clusters known



Qualitative variables – Chi-square test

Results and discussion



Clusters identified:

Cluster 1 – *The multisource-based visitors* (who represent 51% of the sample)

Cluster 3 – *The Experience-based visitors* (who represent 21% of the sample)

Cluster 2 – *The E-based visitors* (who represent 28% of the sample)

Conclusions and implications

Cluster 1 – *The multisource-based visitors*



- Use a wider range of information sources.
They are most likely:
- to consider rural areas as idyllic and developed spaces.
 - to travel with friends.
 - to undertake tourism activities related to local culture.

Cluster 2 – *The E-based visitors*



- They are the most likely:
- to use the internet as an information source.
 - to see rural areas as disadvantaged places.
 - to use rural-specific accommodation.
 - to carry out nature activities and recreational and sport activities.
 - to be younger and to have higher education level

Cluster 3 – *The Experience-based visitors*



- They are most likely:
- to rely on their travel experience as information source.
 - to have lived in rural areas.
 - to use house of friends and relatives as a tourism accommodation.
 - to travel to other rural areas with relatives or alone.
 - to undertake activities that involve interaction with the local community.
 - to be older.

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Conclusions and implications



This study reveals that the rural tourism market is a heterogeneous market concerning the information sources used to plan the trips to rural areas

This study also reveals that the segmentation strategy based on information sources used to plan the trips to rural areas is very useful for designing promotional strategies in order to increase the number of visitors in this kind of tourism.

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Thank you!
Obrigada!

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