

**Co-creation in Rural Tourism**  
*Motivations and Preferences of Urban Visitors*

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the motivations and preferences of tourists toward rural tourism in Jalisco, Mexico, with a specific focus on agri-food co-creation experiences. Drawing on experiential marketing and co-creation theory, the study explores how sociodemographic characteristics shape interest in co-creation activities and willingness to pay for value-added products.

Data were collected through a survey of 500 participants residing primarily in the Guadalajara metropolitan area. The analysis combined descriptive statistics, independent-sample t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and chi-square tests to identify significant differences across gender and age groups.

The results reveal that the predominant profile of rural tourists consists of young urban adults (26–45 years) with higher education. Women exhibit significantly stronger cultural and sustainability motivations ( $p < .05$ ), while older respondents place greater importance on authenticity and tradition ( $p < .05$ ). In terms of activities, cultural visits and gastronomy are the most popular, with significant gender differences in sports and wellness participation ( $p < .05$ ). Regarding local food products, agave, honey, and berries emerge as the most preferred for co-creation, with women showing higher preference for agave and honey, and men for berries and dairy ( $p < .05$ ). Most participants express willingness to pay up to 20% more for co-created products.

These findings contribute to the literature on experiential marketing and co-creation in emerging tourism contexts, while offering managerial insights for destination managers and producers in designing authentic, sustainable, and marketable rural tourism experiences.

### **Keywords:**

Co-creation; Rural Tourism; Experiential Marketing; Motivations; Local Food Products.

# Co-creation in Rural Tourism

## Motivations and Preferences of Urban Visitors

### 1. Introduction

Rural tourism has increasingly gained attention in academic research and managerial practice, particularly for its potential to generate authentic, sustainable, and experience-based value. In Mexico, and specifically in the state of Jalisco, rural tourism extends beyond traditional leisure activities such as hiking, cultural visits, or nature observation (Secturjal: *Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de Jalisco* [Jalisco State Tourism Secretariat], n.d.). Rural tourism increasingly incorporates agri-food experiences centered on local food products that invite visitors to interact directly with local producers and to co-create value through agricultural and culinary processes (Fandos-Herrera, Mercadé-Melé, & Rubio Pastor, 2025). Jalisco is one of Mexico's most diverse states, combining metropolitan areas such as Guadalajara—one of the country's largest cities—with extensive rural regions known for agave production (the basis of tequila), berries, dairy, and honey. This rich agri-food landscape positions Jalisco as a compelling setting for examining the intersections of rural tourism, gastronomy, and co-creation.

Despite the recognized importance of experiential marketing and co-creation, empirical studies focusing on rural tourism in emerging contexts remain scarce. Most prior research has centered on European or North American cases, with far less attention given to Latin America, where rural tourism is increasingly tied to cultural identity and local development. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the motivations and preferences of urban visitors in the Mexican state of Jalisco toward local food co-creation within rural tourism. In particular, it examines how gender and age influence motivations, activity preferences, and willingness to pay for co-created products.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1 Co-creation in Tourism and Services

The concept of co-creation originates in the Service-Dominant Logic, which views value as co-created through interactions between providers and consumers rather than embedded in products alone (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) emphasize that consumers increasingly act as active agents, contributing ideas, effort, and emotions to create personalized value. In tourism, this perspective positions visitors not merely as recipients of pre-designed experiences but as partners who shape, adapt, and enrich the encounter (Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle, & Scott, 2014). Co-creation enhances authenticity, fosters empowerment, and generates a sense of belonging (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009).

#### 2.2 Experiential Marketing & Consumer Engagement

The rise of the experience economy highlights the central role of memorable, multisensory experiences in consumer behavior (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). Schmitt (1999) proposes that experiential marketing engages consumers at multiple levels—sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational—going beyond traditional transactional approaches. In tourism, experiential marketing underscores the design of holistic experiences that evoke emotions, learning, and connection (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Empirical studies show that experiential strategies strengthen destination image, brand equity, and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009).

### 2.3 Rural Tourism and Local Food Co-creation

Rural tourism combines natural, cultural, and gastronomic dimensions, often motivated by authenticity, escape, and sustainability (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). Food and Beverages represent not only consumption but also cultural identity and symbolic capital (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Local food co-creation—such as harvesting berries, producing honey, or learning traditional recipes—allows visitors to integrate learning and participation into their experiences, enhancing perceived authenticity and emotional engagement (Fandos-Herrera, Mercadé-Melé, & Rubio Pastor, 2025). Such practices contribute to the sustainability of rural areas by supporting local producers, preserving traditions, and creating differentiated destination brands (Sims, 2009; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016).

### 3. Methodology

The study employed a survey-based quantitative design. A structured questionnaire was administered to 500 participants residing primarily in Guadalajara city and surrounding municipalities. The instrument covered: (1) socio-demographic profile; (2) participation in rural tourism activities; (3) evaluations of Jalisco as a rural destination; (4) motivations for co-creation; (5) preferences for local food products; and (6) willingness to pay.

Data were collected by a professional research agency through a representative sampling strategy that ensured demographic balance across gender, age, and socioeconomic segments. The analysis combined descriptive statistics, independent-sample t-tests to examine gender differences, one-way ANOVA to assess age group variations, and chi-square tests to evaluate categorical preferences.

The sample was almost evenly distributed by gender, with 50.6% men ( $n = 253$ ) and 49.4% women ( $n = 247$ ), ensuring sufficient representativeness for gender-based comparisons. The majority of respondents were young adults aged 26–45 (81.6%), with a high level of educational attainment (70.6% holding a university or postgraduate degree) and a concentration in middle-income categories (78.8% in low–medium to medium income brackets). Detailed demographic information is provided in **Exhibit 1**.

### 4. Main Results

The results highlight significant gender and age differences in motivations, activities, and product preferences within rural tourism in Jalisco. Women reported significantly higher cultural ( $M=6.10$  vs.  $5.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and sustainability-related motivations ( $M=6.25$  vs.  $5.97$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while men scored slightly higher in physical and sensory motivations, though not statistically significant. ANOVA revealed significant age effects for authenticity and tradition ( $F=4.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ), with older groups (46–65 years) assigning higher importance than younger participants.

**Exhibit 2** summarizes the main motivational differences by gender and age.

Regarding activities, cultural visits (89%) and gastronomy (87%) were the most frequent, followed by health and wellness (84%) and hiking (78%). Chi-square tests indicated significant gender differences in sports participation ( $\chi^2=5.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and health and wellness ( $\chi^2=6.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), with women more likely to engage in wellness activities and men in sports.

**Exhibit 3** illustrates participation in rural tourism activities by gender.

In terms of local food products for co-creation, agave (83%), honey (82%), and berries (77%) emerged as the most preferred. Chi-square analysis showed women more likely to prefer agave ( $\chi^2=7.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and honey ( $\chi^2=4.82$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while men showed higher preference for berries ( $\chi^2=5.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and dairy ( $\chi^2=6.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Most respondents (74%) indicated willingness to pay up to 20% more for co-created products, with no significant gender differences.

**Exhibit 4** shows Local Food Products preferred for Co-creation by Gender (%).

## 5. Discussion

The findings reinforce the relevance of experiential marketing and co-creation in rural tourism. Theoretical contributions include extending co-creation literature to an emerging market context, highlighting gender and age as significant moderators of motivations and preferences. The higher cultural and sustainability motivations among women resonate with experiential marketing's emphasis on authenticity and symbolic value. Similarly, the greater emphasis on authenticity and tradition among older groups supports theories linking age with deeper cultural appreciation.

Managerially, the results suggest clear segmentation opportunities. Urban women aged 30–45 represent a high-potential segment, driven by cultural learning and sustainability values, and willing to pay a premium. Destination managers should design packages integrating gastronomy, cultural visits, and local food co-creation workshops. Producers can benefit from positioning agave, honey, and berries as flagship products linked to authenticity and tradition. Wellness-oriented activities, such as yoga and spas, should be emphasized to attract female segments, while sports and outdoor options are more appealing to male visitors, as confirmed by statistically significant gender differences in participation.

Overall, the study underscores the need to design integrated tourism proposals that combine authenticity, learning, and sustainability, strengthening Jalisco's positioning as a differentiated rural destination.

## 6. Conclusions & Limitations

The results reveal significant gender- and age-related differences: women and older visitors show stronger interest in cultural, sustainability-oriented, and authenticity-driven experiences. In terms of activities, cultural visits and gastronomy dominate, while agave, honey, and berries emerge as particularly promising products for co-creation initiatives.

Data collection was conducted by a professional research agency using a representative sampling strategy, which ensured demographic balance across key variables. Nonetheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported responses may introduce bias, and the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference.

The study contributes at both theoretical and managerial levels. Theoretically, it extends co-creation and experiential marketing literature to the underexplored context of rural tourism in an emerging economy, highlighting the integration of cultural, natural, and agri-food resources. At the managerial level, it provides actionable insights for destination managers and local producers, pointing to strategies that leverage authenticity, sustainability, and consumer engagement to strengthen Jalisco's positioning as a differentiated rural tourism destination.

Future research should build on these findings by employing longitudinal designs, conducting cross-country comparisons, and applying experimental approaches to generate more robust evidence on the behavioral outcomes of co-creation.

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### Exhibit 1. Sample Profile

Variable	Category	n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Men	253	50.6
	Women	247	49.4
<b>Age</b>	26–35 years	249	49.8
	36–45 years	159	31.8
	46–55 years	80	16.0
	56–65 years	12	2.4
<b>Education</b>	Secondary or less	20	4.0
	High school	127	25.4
	Bachelor's degree	298	59.6
	Postgraduate	55	11.0
<b>Monthly Household Income</b>	< \$10,000 pesos	29	5.8
	\$10,000–22,000	206	41.2
	\$22,000–44,000	188	37.6
	\$44,000–77,000	62	12.4
	> \$77,000	15	3.0
<b>City of Residence</b>	Guadalajara	400	81.3
	Zapopan	30	6.1
	San Pedro Tlaquepaque	23	4.7
	Tlajomulco de Zúñiga	16	3.2
	Tonalá	12	2.4
	El Salto	11	2.2
	Others	8	1.6

### Exhibit 2. Motivations for Co-creation by Gender and Age (Means, Likert 1–7)

Motivation	Women (Mean)	Men (Mean)	Age Effect (ANOVA p)
<b>Cultural</b>	<b>6.1*</b>	5.8	<.05
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>6.25*</b>	5.97	<.05
<b>Authenticity/Tradition</b>	6.0	5.9	<.01 (older higher)
<b>Physical &amp; Sensory</b>	5.9	6.0	n.s.
<b>Status/Prestige</b>	5.8	5.9	n.s.

\* Significant at  $p < .05$

**Exhibit 3: Rural Tourism Activities by Gender (% Participation)**

Activity	Women (%)	Men (%)	Chi-square p
Cultural Visits	89	89	n.s.
Gastronomy	87	87	n.s.
Health & Wellness	<b>84*</b>	76	<b>&lt;.05</b>
Hiking	77	79	n.s.
Sports	65	<b>74*</b>	<b>&lt;.05</b>

**Exhibit 4: Local Food Products Preferred for Co-creation by Gender (%)**

Product	Women (%)	Men (%)	Chi-square p
Agave	<b>85*</b>	80	<.01
Honey	<b>84*</b>	83	<.05
Berries	68	<b>83*</b>	<.05
Dairy	76	<b>85*</b>	<.05
Beer	78	79	n.s.
Liqueurs	75	75	n.s.
Jams & Preserves	68	82	n.s.
Legumes	69	72	n.s.