

## PERSPECTIVES ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES IN AGRITOURISM

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***Abstract:** This research paper aims to provide an overview of the factors that influence consumer preferences in agritourism, as well as examining consumer and stakeholder perceptions of agritourism and rural tourism. Previous research on consumer preferences in agritourism has highlighted the importance of authenticity, thrill-seeking behaviour or alternatively, relaxation and education opportunities for families, and the willingness of consumers to purchase fresh produce from farmers. Additionally, consumers enjoy spending their time in open spaces and feeling closer to nature. Our analysis of previous research in the field of agritourism reveals several trends that can significantly impact the performance of agritourism businesses.*

***Key words:** consumer preferences for agritourism, consumer typology in agritourism, consumer expectations*

### INTRODUCTION

Agritourism has garnered significant attention in recent years due to its potential for fostering economic development in rural areas [1]. Understanding consumer preferences in agritourism is crucial for the success of businesses operating in this sector. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing consumer preferences in agritourism and explores how these preferences are shaped by the nature of rural tourism and the specific experiences it offers. By analyzing existing research in the field, the study seeks to illuminate key trends that can significantly impact the performance of agritourism businesses.

As agritourism continues to evolve, it becomes increasingly evident that consumer preferences are multifaceted and dynamic. They are influenced by various factors, including demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and personal values [8]. Moreover, the experiential aspect of agritourism plays a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences. This entails tourists actively participating in rural activities and engaging with the natural and cultural landscape [26]. Therefore, it is not solely the tangible offerings of agritourism businesses that hold significance, but also the intangible experiences they provide [30]. This paper endeavors to analyze these elements that influence consumer preferences in agritourism.

Additionally, the paper delves into the role of the rural environment and cultural heritage in shaping consumer preferences in agritourism. The distinct rural setting and the cultural richness of agritourism sites exert a significant influence on the appeal of agritourism for consumers [2]. The authenticity of rural life and the cultural narratives associated with these sites can greatly impact the perception of agritourism and, consequently, consumer preferences [24]. By examining the intersection of these aspects, valuable insights into the dynamics of consumer preferences in agritourism can be gleaned.

Finally, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on agritourism by providing a holistic view of consumer preferences in this sector. The findings of this study are expected to enhance academic understanding and offer practical recommendations for businesses in the agritourism sector. By gaining a better understanding of consumer preferences, businesses can tailor their offerings to align with these preferences, leading to

enhanced customer satisfaction, increased profitability, and sustainable growth of the agritourism sector.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study conducts a comprehensive literature review on consumer preferences in agritourism and rural tourism, employing a systematic approach and qualitative research methods to delve deeply into the subject matter [38].

The primary research method employed in this review is document analysis, a qualitative technique that involves interpreting and evaluating documents to gain empirical insights into the research area. This method is complemented by secondary research, which leverages existing studies and data to enhance the breadth and depth of the review.

The search for relevant literature was conducted using three renowned academic databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. These databases were selected for their extensive collection of peer-reviewed articles spanning various disciplines, ensuring a comprehensive and diverse selection of literature for review [17].

To ensure the retrieval of the most pertinent literature, a careful selection of search terms was employed. The primary search terms were "agritourism" and "rural tourism," which are the focal areas of this study. However, these terms were used in conjunction with other relevant terms such as "consumer preferences," "consumer behavior," and "tourist satisfaction". This approach facilitated a broad yet targeted search, encompassing a wide range of literature that addresses the various dimensions of consumer preferences in agritourism and rural tourism.

The literature search was limited to studies published from 2000 to the present. This time frame was chosen due to the significant changes that have transpired in the tourism sector over the past two decades, characterized by a shift towards sustainable and experiential tourism practices [31]. Consequently, focusing on literature from this period ensures that the review captures current and pertinent insights into consumer preferences in agritourism and rural tourism. The selection criteria for inclusion in our analysis were based on the relevance of the studies to consumer preferences in agritourism, the quality of the research, and the recency of publication. After the screening process, we identified a final set of studies that formed the basis of our analysis.

Following the literature search, the articles underwent thematic analysis, a qualitative method that entails identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data [4,5]. This approach facilitated a systematic identification of key themes and trends in the literature, thereby providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of consumer preferences in agritourism and rural tourism. An overview of the relevant research was compiled, allowing for the identification of common themes and findings. Different perspectives were also documented and presented in a critical manner. The main findings are presented in the research and results section of this paper.

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

Consumer behavioral theory is a crucial tool for comprehending the factors that either restrict or enhance consumers' inclination towards agritourism [6]. In this context, understanding consumer behavior is of utmost importance when it comes to designing experiences that align with consumers' preferences.

Research focusing on the factors influencing customers' decision to visit agritourism farms can yield valuable insights, such as the very important roles that motivation and destination image play in the decision-making process of tourists. These insights can assist farm operators in tailoring their services to better appeal to the interests of potential visitors [40].

Moreover, further exploration is needed to understand the impact of agritourism on consumers' local food purchasing behavior, as an integral component of agritourism. Investigating this aspect can enable agritourism operators to potentially influence consumer behavior, encouraging increased purchases of local produce and subsequently fostering local economies [6].

Consumer preferences in agritourism have been a significant area of research in recent years. The increasing interest in sustainable living and locally sourced food has resulted in a surge of visitors to rural areas, eager to experience farm life, participate in agricultural activities, and purchase directly from producers [32].

Consumer preferences are influenced by a myriad of factors, ranging from personal interests to environmental consciousness. For instance, research indicates that consumers who prioritize environmental sustainability are more likely to engage in agritourism activities such as farm tours, pick-your-own operations, and farmers' markets [25]. Moreover, personal interest in food production, animal welfare, and rural lifestyle also plays an integral role [18,21]

The demographic profile of consumers also impacts agritourism preferences. Studies show that families with children, for example, are more drawn to farms offering educational activities such as animal feeding, crop harvesting, and cooking classes [39,42]. On the other hand, older adults or couples without children might be more interested in winery tours, farm-to-table dining experiences, or peaceful retreats [13,16]. Other sources in the literature highlight that tourists value experiences that allow them to learn new skills, such as cheese making or wine tasting. They also appreciate experiences that provide them with a deeper understanding of the rural lifestyle and sustainable farming practices [3,35].

Furthermore, our analysis revealed that consumers expressed a strong affinity for open spaces and a deep-rooted desire to reconnect with nature. The serene and tranquil rural environment, the picturesque and scenic landscapes, and the opportunity to escape from bustling urban settings were highly valued by consumers in their agritourism experiences [7,14]. This finding highlights the importance of preserving and promoting the natural beauty and rural charm of agritourism destinations as they significantly contribute to attracting and satisfying consumer preferences. Authentic experiences in agritourism allow visitors to immerse themselves in the rural way of life. These experiences can range from participating in farming activities, such as harvesting fruits or vegetables, to learning about traditional farming practices.

Another significant finding that emerged from the analysis was the diversity of consumer preferences in the realm of agritourism. It became evident that different consumers sought distinct types of experiences within the agritourism context. For instance, some consumers were inclined towards seeking thrill and excitement through adventure activities or engaging in outdoor sports [22, 34, 41]. On the other hand, there were those who preferred more relaxed and educational opportunities, particularly families seeking enriching experiences for their members [23, 34]. In this regard, it is worth noting that the theoretical framework proposed by Plog, which classifies tourists on a spectrum between allocentrism and psychocentrism, could offer a valuable lens for understanding and explaining these diverse consumer behaviors within the agritourism context [28].

Plog's theoretical model serves as a cornerstone in the realm of travel and tourism, providing an understanding of how people's travel preferences are shaped by their unique personality traits, values, and life experiences [9]. This model categorizes tourists into three distinct groups: allocentric, psychocentric, and midcentric, each representing a spectrum of travel behaviors and preferences [27].

Allocentric tourists, characterized by outgoing and self-confident behavior, are often early adopters of new and unusual travel destinations. These individuals seek

adventure and cultural immersion, often choosing to explore unfamiliar territories before they become popular amongst the masses [9].

On the other hand, psychocentric tourists are less adventurous. They prefer the comfort and familiarity of known destinations and experiences, often returning to the same places and activities during their trips [9].

Midcentric tourists represent those who fluctuate between these two extremes, embodying traits from both categories [28]. This classification system, when viewed as a bell-shaped curve, illustrates the rise and fall of a destination's popularity, correlating directly with the types of tourists it attracts [19].

Plog's model, as seen in fig. 1, is commonly referenced in tourism and hospitality literature, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior and preferences in developing successful, sustainable agritourism experiences [12,15,29].



**Figure 1. The spectrum of psychocentrism and allocentrism**

However, it's not just the consumer's characteristics that influence preferences. The type, quality, and novelty of agritourism offerings also play a crucial role. Farms that provide unique experiences, high-quality products, and excellent customer service are more likely to attract and retain visitors [36,37]

Quality service in agritourism goes beyond providing basic amenities. The quality of interaction between hosts and visitors plays a significant role in defining the quality of service. Visitors appreciate it when hosts show genuine interest in their well-being. This includes giving them the opportunity to participate in farm routines, providing detailed information about the farm and its processes, and offering a comfortable stay [10,20].

In addition to understanding consumer behavior, agritourism operators should also consider the effect of the environment on visitors. Studies have found that people who visit natural environments have improved mental wellbeing [33]. This suggests that agritourism operators can benefit from creating experiences that prioritize the natural elements of their farms. Furthermore, research has shown that when people are immersed in nature, they are more likely to be motivated to support sustainable practices [11]. Thus, by emphasizing the environmental aspects of their farms, agritourism operators may be able to increase consumer support for sustainable development in the local area.

## CONCLUSIONS

Agritourism has gained attention for its potential to foster economic development in rural areas. Understanding consumer preferences in agritourism is crucial for business success in this sector. This paper provides an overview of factors influencing consumer

preferences and explores how they are shaped by rural tourism and specific experiences. Consumer preferences are multifaceted and dynamic, influenced by demographics, values, and experiences. The natural environment and cultural heritage of agritourism sites significantly impact consumer preferences.

To study consumer preferences, a comprehensive literature review was conducted using document analysis and secondary research. The analysis identified key themes such as the importance of authenticity, diverse consumer preferences, and the desire to reconnect with nature. The findings highlight the importance of tailoring offerings to align with consumer preferences.

Quality service and the novelty of agritourism experiences are crucial factors. Farms providing unique experiences, high-quality products, and excellent customer service attract and retain visitors. The quality of interaction between hosts and visitors is also important. Environmental factors play a role, as visits to natural environments improve mental well-being and can motivate support for sustainable practices.

This study contributes to the understanding of consumer preferences in agritourism and provides practical recommendations for businesses. However, limitations exist, such as the reliance on existing research and the exclusion of other stakeholders. Future research could explore emerging trends and consider the perspectives of farmers and policymakers.

In conclusion, understanding consumer preferences is essential for agritourism businesses. By considering the diverse factors that shape these preferences, businesses can design authentic experiences that meet consumer needs. The natural environment, cultural heritage, and quality of service play significant roles in attracting and satisfying consumers. This research enhances understanding and provides guidance for the sustainable growth of the agritourism sector.

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