

# PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE COVID-19 ERA

PERCEPCIONES SOBRE EL EMPRENDIMIENTO EN LA ERA DEL COVID-19

PERCEPÇÕES SOBRE O EMPREENDIMENTO NA ERA DA COVID-19

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## Abstract

This work sought to specify a model for the study of the coffee-growing sector. A cross-sectional and exploratory research with a non-random selection of 100 coffee traders was carried out. From a structural model reliability and validity, five dimensional perceptions of economic, financial, sales, social, and environmental opportunity were identified. Based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, we propose to study the entrepreneurial perceptions of vulnerable groups dedicated to the trading of coffee byproducts as a subsistence means. The findings allow us to establish a link between rational choice theory and the theory of human capital with respect to the theory of the commons and the theory of social entrepreneurship as conceptual frameworks to highlight the intervention in microfinance made with entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, finance, sales, environment.

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### **Resumen**

Este trabajo tuvo como objetivo determinar un modelo para el estudio del sector cafetero a través de una investigación transversal y exploratoria con una selección no aleatoria de 100 comerciantes de café y sus derivados. A partir de un modelo estructural, se identificaron las percepciones en torno a cinco dimensiones de oportunidad: económica, financiera, comercial, social y ambiental. Con base en los marcos teóricos y conceptuales abordados, proponemos estudiar las percepciones en torno al emprendimiento por parte de grupos vulnerables dedicados a la comercialización de subproductos del café como medio de subsistencia. Los hallazgos permiten establecer un vínculo entre la teoría de la elección racional y la teoría del capital humano frente a la teoría de los comunes y la teoría del emprendimiento social, los cuales surgen como marcos conceptuales pertinentes para la intervención financiera de este tipo de emprendedores.

**Palabras clave:** emprendimiento, finanzas, ventas, medio ambiente.

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### **Resumo**

O objetivo deste trabalho é determinar um modelo para o estudo do setor cafeeiro por meio de uma pesquisa transversal e exploratória com uma seleção não aleatória de 100 comerciantes de café e seus derivados. A partir de um modelo estrutural, foram identificadas as percepções em torno de cinco dimensões de oportunidade: econômica, financeira, comercial, social e ambiental. Com base nos referenciais teóricos e conceituais abordados, propomos estudar as percepções sobre o empreendimento por parte de grupos vulneráveis dedicados à comercialização de subprodutos do café como meio de subsistência. Os achados permitem estabelecer um vínculo entre a teoria da escolha racional e a teoria do capital humano ante a teoria dos comuns e a teoria do empreendimento social, os quais surgem como referenciais conceituais pertinentes para a intervenção financeira desse tipo de empreendedores.

**Palavras-chave:** empreendimento, finanças, vendas, meio ambiente.

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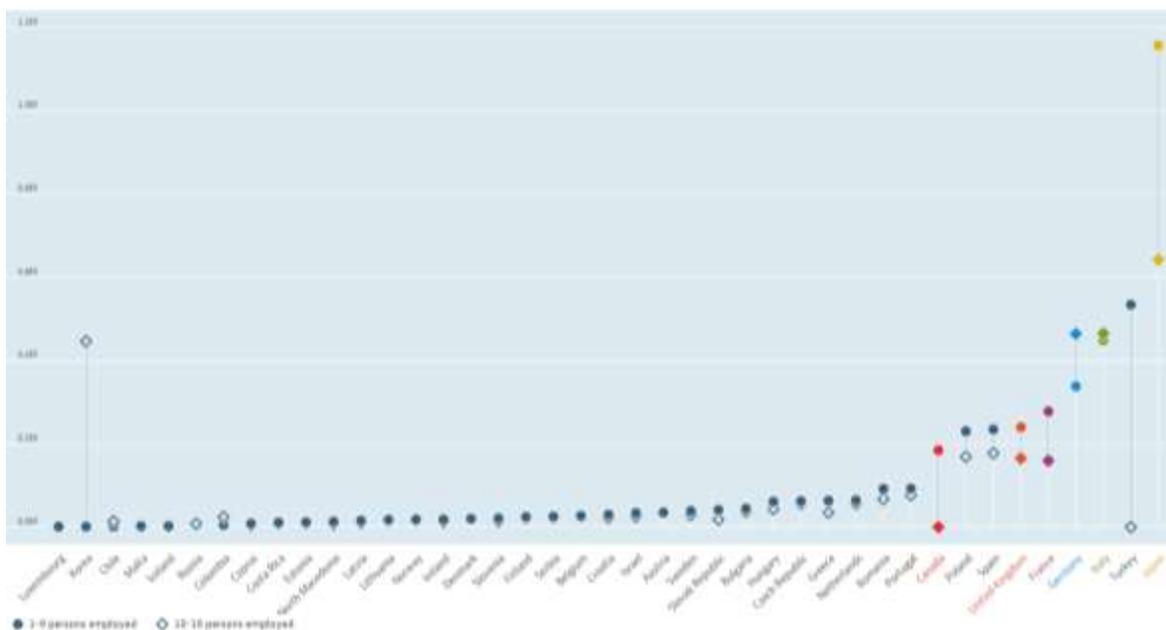
### **Introduction**

Until August 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had claimed the lives of more than four million people around the world, although under-records have been recognized by all governments. In the case of Mexico, the figures associated to this pandemic could reach one million victims (WHO, 2021). Amidst this health catastrophe, entrepreneurial sectors and local governments have established strategic alliances in order to overcome the effects of the pandemic, even when governments followed a policy of containment and mitigation that resulted in social distancing and confinement (PAHO, 2021)

Defined as the use and generation of opportunities around the optimization of resources and the innovation of processes focused on trust, commitment and satisfaction, entrepreneurship is a central factor on the public agenda (INEGI, 2020). Business development policies make up a conglomerate of political and social actors, as well as public

and private sectors, working towards achieving common objectives, tasks and goals. Thus, the level of entrepreneurship in most of the member countries of the OECD is similar considering company size (figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Employees by business size in OECD countries



Source: authors with data from the OECD (2021).

It is estimated that four out of every five new jobs were created by the effects of the pandemic (Adams, 2020). In other words, confinement and social distancing have created new jobs from sectors suffering from the coronavirus crisis (Anguiano, 2020). Various studies have shown that stigma has focused on health workers as carriers of the virus, the so-called high-risk jobs. (Bermudez *et al.*, 2021). Associated with this stigma, biosafety has emerged as a moderating factor for infections, diseases and deaths in high-risk jobs due to the unavoidable contact of professionals in this positions with other people (Bouls, 2020).

An increase in biosafety implies an increase in opportunities, as well as the optimization of resources and process innovation (Bustos, 2020). That is, the avoidance and prevention of accidents and illnesses suggests a redistribution of objectives, tasks and goals. If the crisis or risk events intensify, then process innovation emerges. The transition from austerity to transforming entrepreneurship begins with risk communication. Projects often emerge from a type of transformational leadership that activates initiatives. In the case of solutions with common resources, an environment that affects the parties involved is necessary. Such is the case of the pandemic and containment and mitigation policies (Pérez, 2020). This is so because the State generates risk communication that impacts the culture of organizations with leaders motivated to transform crisis into opportunities. In this way, the type of relationship between authorities and leaders fosters synergies in the face of a prolonged risk event. Both actors, entrepreneurs and managers, complement a structure that demands

human capital training. In this training sub-phase, the talents who optimize outnumber those who propose innovations (Coronado, 2019); that is, the work environment becomes goal-oriented based on thrifty tasks.

However, when the relationship builds more asymmetries between leaders and talents, it induces self-management as an effect of the leadership vacuum (Juárez, 2020). This instance of opaque management, production and transfer favors the emergence of enterprising actors that are distinguished by taking advantage of scarce opportunities and creating their own lines of production or realization. It is about self-management as an innovation of processes where trials of errors proliferate more than successful events (Quintero *et al.*, 2021). Once stabilized, self-management will induce the transfer of knowledge that distinguishes innovation from optimization. Consequently, entrepreneurship reaches its most abstract level by showing more proposals than problems (Molina, 2020). Hence, anticipating crises supposes the scope of innovation as the final stage of entrepreneurship.

Within this context, the objective of this study was to establish the impact of the communication of the pandemic on the perceptions about entrepreneurship in a sample of 100 coffee merchants in Central Mexico, posing the following research question: Are there significant differences between the literature reported from December 2019 to August 2021 with respect to the observations made on the perceptions about entrepreneurship in a sample of coffee growers from Central Mexico?

The premises that guide this work suggest that the literature has reported a kind of entrepreneurship that has been conditioned by COVID-19 mitigation and containment policies, which have been focused on distancing and confinement and complemented with immunization (Quiroz, 2020). In this sense, the findings reported by other studies will be different from the perceptions of coffee growers' entrepreneurs, since they did not follow the State guidelines, except for micro-financing (Sandoval, 2020). In this way, the dimensions of entrepreneurship consist of perceptions of opportunities related to the health and economic crisis, coupled with the environmental crisis, that converge in the scarcity of resources.

## Method

This research is a non-experimental, cross-sectional and exploratory study. The sample is comprised by a non-probabilistic selection of 100 micro-entrepreneurs, who were selected considering that their main activity was oriented to the commercialization of coffee and its derivatives, such as sweets, drinks and bread, as well as their access to microfinance, as registered in the municipal register.

### Instrument

This study applied the Scale of Perception of Entrepreneurship elaborated by Garcia (2020), which includes 20 items related to the perception of economic opportunity (e.g., the promotion of magical towns will attract investment to Xilitla), perception of social opportunity (e.g., I will receive support from my family by selling coffee sweets), perception of environmental opportunity (e.g., coffee will be sold in winter due to the local

cold), perception of financing opportunity (e.g., the sale of coffee will be financed by the local government), and the perception of sales opportunity (e.g., coffee is a priority need for tourists). Each item is answered with one of five options ranging from 0 (not likely) to 5 (very likely).

### Procedure

The Delphi technique was used to homogenize the meanings of the words included in the reagents. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured and participants were informed that the results of the study would not affect their economic, political, social or community status. The surveys were applied in establishments that commercialize coffee and its derivatives. The information was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and analysis of momentum structure. The mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, chi square, factorial weights, betas, goodness of fit and residual were estimated.

### Results

The internal consistency of the overall scale (alpha 0.724) and specific subscales (economy alpha 0.718; financing alpha 0.796; sales Alpha 0.771; social alpha 0.701; environmental alpha 0.703) reached Cronbach's alpha values above 0.700 (table 1).

**Table 1.** Description, reliability and validity of the instrument

R	M	SD	A	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
r1	4.24	1.03	0.793	0.401				
r2	4.14	1.25	0.704	0.524				
r3	4.93	1.47	0.771	0.621				
r4	4.31	1.25	0.771	0.501				
r5	4.30	1.82	0.704		0.402			
r6	4.23	1.47	0.754		0.542			
r7	4.81	1.36	0.782		0.512			
r8	4.26	1.26	0.791		0.405			
r9	4.39	1.58	0.732			0.521		
r10	4.40	1.12	0.714			0.578		
r11	4.18	1.32	0.798			0.442		
r12	4.27	1.46	0.713			0.642		
r13	1.02	1.05	0.724				0.406	
r14	1.27	1.47	0.741				0.443	
r15	1.48	1.35	0.782				0.543	
r16	1.59	1.44	0.762				0.476	
r17	1.04	1.01	0.780					0.531
r18	1.92	1.03	0.732					0.543
r19	1.46	1.05	0.714					0.480
r20	1.22	1.06	0.746					0.421

Extraction method: main components, sphericity and adequacy [KMO = 0.796;  $\chi^2 = 346.456$  (23gl)  $p = 0.000$ ]. F1 = Perception of economic opportunity (32% of the total variance explained); F2 = Perception of financial opportunity (22 % of the total variance explained); F3 = Perception of sales opportunity (16% of the total variance explained); F4 = Perception of social opportunity (10% of the total variance explained); F5 = Perception of environmental opportunity (3% of the total variance explained). Each item is answered with

one of five options ranging from 0 = "not likely" to 5 = "very likely. Each alpha value corresponding to each item is excluding its internal consistency weight.

Source: authors.

Regarding the adequacy and sphericity, [KMO = 0.796;  $\chi^2 = 346.456$  (23gl)  $p = 0.000$ ], and reached minimum values necessary for the factorial analysis of principal components with varimax rotation. Five factors related to economic (32% of the total explained variance), financing (22% of the total explained variance), sales (16% of the total explained variance), social (10% of the total explained variance), and environmental opportunity (3% of the total variance explained). The dependency relationships between the established factors and the emerging construct indicate that the social opportunity perception factor reflects the entrepreneurship perception construct, followed by the perception of economic opportunity ( $\beta = 0.30$ ), and the perception of environmental opportunity (table 2).

**Table 2.** Correlations between factors

	M	SD	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
F1	24,31	13,25	1,000					1,872	,546	,650	,549	,430
F2	25,46	17,21	,435*	1,000					1,978	,632	,612	,654
F3	20,31	14,35	,421**	,423***	1,000					1,765	,547	,653
F4	29,31	10,32	,567*	,307*	,512*	1,000					1,809	
F5	28,46	13,56	,397*	,465*	,657*	,439**	1,000					1,865

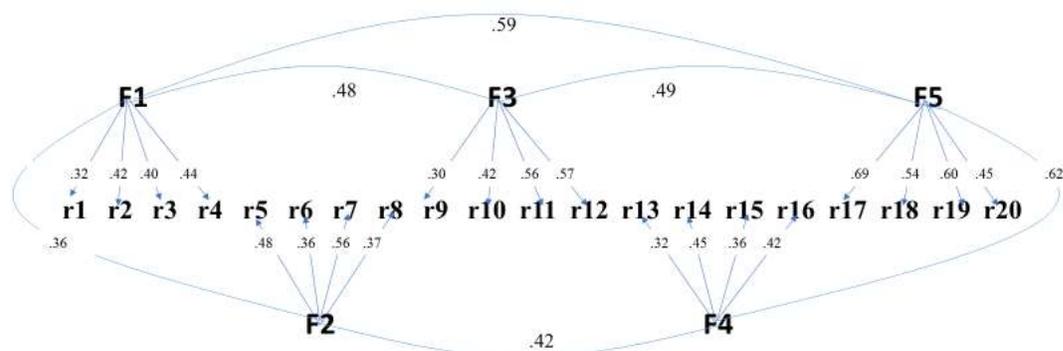
F1 = Perception of economic opportunity; F2 = Perception of financial opportunity; F3 = Perception of sales opportunity; F4 = Perception of social opportunity; F5 = Perception of environmental opportunity; \*  $p < ,01$ , \*\*  $p < ,001$ ; \*\*\*  $p < ,0001$ .

Source: authors.

The relationships between the factors suggest the prevalence of a common factor that the literature identifies as opportunism, in order to explain the response to crisis and entrepreneurship where expectations exceed decisions, and both are indicated by the absence of losses and hegemony of gains. With the purpose of noticing these structures of axes, trajectories and relationships, we estimated a model of structural equations (figure 2).

Finally, the goodness of fit and residual values confirm the acceptance of the null hypothesis regarding the fit of the theoretical dimensions with respect to the empirical dimensions of the perception of entrepreneurship [ $\chi^2 = 1.335$  (5gl)  $p = 0.935$ ; GFI = 0.982; AGFI = 0.947; RMSEA = 0.000].

**Figure 2.** Structural equation modelling



R = Reactive; F = Factor; F1 = Perception of economic opportunity; F2 = Perception of financial opportunity; F3 = Perception of sales opportunity; F4 = Perception of social opportunity; F5 = Perception of environmental opportunity; r = Reactive; e = Error measurement reactive; d = Error measurement factor; ← formative; → reflective.

Source: authors.

## Discussion

The objective of this work was to specify a model for the study of coffee-related entrepreneurship in a region of Central Mexico, known for its name of magical town and Huasteca Potosina tourist route.

The findings related to a five-factor structure can only be considered for the study sample, as they suggest the extension of the proposal to other risk scenarios due to the asymmetry between political and private actors, as well as lack of coordination between the public and private sectors in terms of financing. Lines relating to the effects of credit for business development and cooperative management will reveal differences and similarities between local and regional entrepreneurship structures.

Since social entrepreneurship reflects the coffee-growing activity, it is necessary to orient financing towards the creation of cooperative networks, family or community businesses in order to be able to observe the differences in opportunities and sales in each social sector. The development of research on the asymmetries between coffee growing organizations due to their uses and customs, as well as their traditions, will allow anticipating conflict scenarios between stakeholders.

In that vein, the theory of the social entrepreneurship warns that tourism and coffee production are ideal opportunities for local development as long as they are directed to sectors with purchasing power, regardless of their economic condition or consumption preference. This work showed that both axes are converging, at least in their dimensions perceived as social

entrepreneurship. In other words, the expectations of migratory flows and native communities seem to reflect five dimensions related to economy, financing, sales, solidarity and environmentalism, but it is the social dimension that reflects with the greatest value coffee-growing expectations associated with tourism. Research lines around this social dimension, such as solidarity, fraternity, support, commitment, empathy, trust, satisfaction and happiness, will allow the model to be extended to sectors that are known for their purchasing approach and their sense of belonging to society.

Studies on social entrepreneurship, by emphasizing regulated consumption and unregulated consumption, have shown the complexity of the phenomenon by pointing out the dependency relationships between the two dimensions. It is an emerging process to risk areas and events that seem to encourage the break with the urban habitat, the pleasure of displacement, satisfaction with the accommodation service, and the systematic return to places, not only because of its low cost but also because of its shared significance.

The theoretical, conceptual and empirical specification of the model and its two characteristic axes—one from hedonism to materialism and the other from eudaimonism to postmaterialism—seems to enhance its convergence in entrepreneurial projects of tourist services and coffee growers' endeavors, with which this product stands out as the main associated symbol to breaks, crossings, stays, and systematic returns to emblematic, unexplored or ceremonial places. In the present work, the convergence of both axes in a social entrepreneurship model that includes the inclusion of these categories has been highlighted. Future studies related to the analysis of communities and sectors involved in both axes will make it possible to anticipate promotion, consumption and sale scenarios.

In summary, the exploration of coffee-related entrepreneurship in its social dimension seems to show that two axes coexist: one that goes from hedonism to materialism and another that transits from eudaimonism to post-materialism. Both should be investigated as models of business development or economic reactivation from a strategic planning that develops these competitive advantages for the local benefit.

## **Conclusions**

The contribution of this work to the state of knowledge lies in the establishment of the reliability and validity of an instrument that measures five factors related to the perception of entrepreneurship in a town in Central Mexico.

Future lines of research regarding factors that were not include nor estimated in the model could be carried out, considering that the commercialization of products and services derived from coffee is an economic activity driven by business development and microfinance policies, that is also part of the social and community uses and customs of the studied location. Furthermore, environmental conditions also play a decisive role in the perceptions regarding the entrepreneurship of agricultural products and services, and on the perceptions of opportunity around coffee.

In this sense, the ecological validity that consists of the systematic observation of the uses and customs, as well as its correlation with the scales that measure the perceptions of opportunity, would provide a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon that coffee supposes, its environment, administration, commercialization and consumption.

Therefore, the specification of a model and the estimation of the indicators that explain the peculiarities of the localities dedicated to coffee-related entrepreneurship becomes necessary, since —although the venture is a structure of perceptions— general decisions and strategies for the success of these projects depend on local specificities. This is the case of the sectors dedicated to the sale of coffee and the commercialization of its derived products and services.

The characteristics of each sector require a thorough analysis of the habits and customs that make this business' survival possible. In this sense, female heads of households are an example of groups dedicated to the retail sale and diversified entrepreneurship of products that include coffee.

Finally, the analysis of the values, perceptions and beliefs of female heads of households engaged in coffee-related entrepreneur businesses will foster scenarios that explain and anticipate environmental, economic, political and social crises, but also the resilient and social nature of entrepreneurship.

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