

Cristo-Rey Sanctuary in Cerro de las Noas: Marketing Plan and Market Positioning. A case of study in Northern Mexico

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Abstract

This research aims to promote religious tourism at the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary in Cerro de las Noas. The sanctuary is located in the city of Torreón, Coahuila. This site holds high symbolic, spiritual, and cultural value within the Comarca Lagunera region of northern Mexico. Despite its significant regional recognition and constant flow of visitors, the sanctuary lacks a marketing model to promote religious tourism. This marketing plan should serve as a catalyst for local economic development, market positioning, and financial sustainability. The objective of this study is twofold. First, a situational analysis of the Sanctuary and a potential market analysis were conducted in the Comarca Lagunera Metropolitan Area. This first part of the research identifies visitor habits, motivations, expectations, and development opportunities to promote religious tourism at the site. Based on the aforementioned theoretical and empirical findings, a Marketing Plan was designed to strengthen market positioning and consolidate its recognition as a religious tourist destination. Religious tourism represents a strategic opportunity to harmoniously integrate faith, culture, and economic development in the Comarca Lagunera region. This case study demonstrates that strategic planning does not reject spirituality, but rather transforms it into a tool that strengthens its mission and ensures its long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Religious tourism, Marketing Plan, Market positioning, Strategic management, Cristo-Rey Sanctuary.

1. Introduction

More than just spiritual significance, sanctuaries are spaces with tourism potential due to the constant influx of visitors who generate economic activity through transportation, food services, commerce, and cultural activities. These dynamics allow sanctuaries to be part of the local tourism offerings, strengthening cultural heritage and promoting religious experiences for visitors in an organized, planned, and respectful manner (Ministry of Tourism [SECTUR], 2019). In Mexico, religious tourism is highly relevant due to its historical and cultural richness. Sanctuaries in Mexico consistently receive pilgrims and visitors, and therefore, this segment enriches the diversification of the national tourism offerings (SECTUR, 2014; Ruezga Gutiérrez & Martínez Cárdenas, 2016). In tourism, the Marketing Plan allows for defining market segments, selecting the target market, positioning the destination, and designing the marketing strategy based on the variables of product, price, place, and promotion. In the case of religious tourism, a marketing plan strengthens its image, projection, and competitiveness, in accordance with its spiritual and social vocation (Kotler and Keller, 2016; Fernández, 2007).

In the city of Torreón, Coahuila, the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas is one of the main religious, cultural, and tourist attractions of the region. This site is a symbolic and spiritual landmark for the local community and for visitors from all over the country. This is due to its religious, heritage, and scenic value. Marketing, planning, and financial management strategies will strengthen the sanctuary's tourism projection. This research aims to propose a Marketing Plan for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas, based on the methodological model of Fernández R (Fernández R, 2007), which integrates strategic, operational, and financial tools.

Globally, there are many examples of shrines that are integral to regional tourism. The Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora of Fatima in Portugal, St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, and the Basilica of Nuestra Señora of Guadalupe in Mexico receive millions of visitors each year. These sites are not only spiritual sanctuaries but also an important part of local economic development. These tourist destinations generate significant economic benefits, jobs, and tourism services, thus improving financial sustainability (UNWTO, 2019). According to the UNWTO, religious tourism attracts between 300 and 330 million visitors annually. Religious tourism is one of the most stable and

fastest-growing segments of the international tourism system (UNWTO, 2019; Ministry of Tourism [SECTUR], 2014). The Vatican recognizes that religious sanctuaries receive pilgrims and visitors and promote faith experiences integrated into the cultural and social context of the territories where they are located (Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1998). Religious tourism is linked to faith, spirituality, and devotional practices. The origins of religious tourism can be traced back to pilgrimages and journeys to sacred sites since antiquity. Several studies analyzing the transformation of these religious movements into contemporary tourism dynamics provide evidence of the convergence between pilgrimage and tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Religious tourism includes the movement of people to sacred spaces, integrating religious, cultural, and historical motivations. Various studies agree that religious tourism represents approximately 20% of cultural tourism worldwide. Furthermore, it has a close relationship with the historical and religious heritage of the destinations (Tobón Perilla & Tobón Perilla, 2013; Secretariat of Culture, 2014). This type of tourism involves complementary activities typical of traditional tourism, such as the consumption of transportation, lodging, food, and local commerce services (Tobón Perilla & Tobón Perilla, 2013).

Several studies indicate that tourism organizations and destinations operating with a Marketing Plan exhibit better levels of positioning and performance. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) point out that strategic planning improves the efficiency and coherence of marketing strategies. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicates that destinations with clear marketing strategies achieve longer visitor stays and an improved perception of the destination's value (UNWTO, 2019). In the case of religious tourism, the UNWTO recognizes that Marketing Plans integrate the spiritual dimension with complementary tourism services, fostering experiences that are structured and consistent with the destination's identity. SECTUR (2014) notes that tourist destinations with clearly structured and communicated products exhibit higher levels of competitiveness and tourist appeal.

At the local level, the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas, in Torreón, Coahuila, boasts adequate and significant infrastructure, high symbolic value, and regional recognition as a place of faith. However, the Sanctuary has not yet established itself as a religious tourism destination. Currently, its operation and maintenance depend on contributions from benefactors. This indicates the lack of a tourism management and promotion model that would allow for financial self-sufficiency and its integration into the tourism offerings of the Comarca Lagunera region.

This demonstrates a central problem: the lack of a Marketing Plan based on strategic and financial tools. This Marketing Plan will allow the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas to improve its positioning as a religious tourism destination, diversify its tourism offerings, enhance the visitor experience, and generate income sustainably without compromising its spiritual essence. The proposed Marketing Plan is a formal methodological model that will contribute to the Sanctuary's economic sustainability and its positioning as a competitive religious tourism destination. This study proposes the development of a Marketing Plan for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas in Torreón, located in the city of Torreón. This marketing plan aims to improve its positioning as a religious tourism destination in relation to traditional tourism. The marketing plan will be designed using strategic and financial tools to structure its management and projection. The overall objective of this research is to propose a marketing plan for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas, contributing to its improved positioning as a tourist destination. This plan will focus on structuring activities geared towards religious tourism, while also considering traditional tourism.

This research analyzes religious tourism as a generator of economic benefits and as an alternative to strengthen the financial sustainability of the Sanctuary. The Marketing Plan will allow for the structuring of tourism activities that contribute to the orderly increase of visitors, the generation of local revenue, and the gradual reduction of dependence on donations and contributions from benefactors. The influx of tourists will boost the local economy by increasing the consumption of complementary services such as transportation, food, and local commerce, indirectly generating jobs, and creating opportunities for new businesses linked to religious tourism. Furthermore, strategic tourism planning can influence the improvement of mobility and accessibility infrastructure. This will positively impact hotel occupancy and regional economic development.

The research also enhances collective identity, community unity, and the promotion of spaces for coexistence, reflection, and faith; in addition, it improves the balanced relationship between pilgrims, parishioners, and visitors. This allows tourists to experience a more structured and holistic spiritual journey. Furthermore, it allows the

Sanctuary to consolidate itself as a meeting place where religious, cultural, and touristic elements coexist harmoniously, strengthening the social fabric of the local community.

This research is important because the increase in visitors to religious sites requires responsible management of the surrounding natural environment. The Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas has limited space for reforestation, and environmental management is needed to improve the environment, including the use of planters, areas with artificial shade, green improvements to the infrastructure, and the protection and conservation of the Noa, an endangered agave species. This agave gives its name to Cerro de las Noas and is also known as Agave Victoria, in reference to Queen Victoria of England. The care and preservation of existing specimens within the Sanctuary contributes to the conservation of natural heritage, improving the responsible relationship between tourism and the environment. Solid waste management is handled in partnership with the cleaning department of the municipality of Torreón. In addition, environmental awareness and education campaigns are conducted within the Sanctuary. This research also proposes the design of an institutional image for the Sanctuary, including logos, graphic materials, photographs, and other visual materials exclusively for academic purposes. Furthermore, the research adheres to current regulations regarding cultural, religious, and tourism heritage. The research adheres to current regulations regarding cultural, religious, and tourism heritage. It follows the ethical principles of academic research, without accessing or using sensitive or confidential information of the Sanctuary. This research contributes to improving the Sanctuary's pastoral function with actions that enhance the visitor experience without compromising its sacred and spiritual character. The proposed strategies are based on spirituality as the primary focus. The aim is to complement, not replace, its religious mission through sound tourism and religious management. Finally, this work enriches the generation and application of knowledge about religious tourism and marketing in underexplored and poorly documented contexts. Therefore, it becomes a scientific methodological reference that can be replicated in other religious sanctuaries. This justifies the relevance and feasibility of the study.

2. Preliminaries

Religious Sanctuaries

In addition to their religious function, sanctuaries possess symbolic, historical, and cultural values that position them as part of a nation's cultural heritage. International organizations such as the UN recognize that these spaces safeguard tangible and intangible expressions and enhance the collective identity and historical memory of the communities where they are located (Secretariat of Culture, 2014). This heritage dimension broadens the relevance of sanctuaries beyond the strictly religious sphere.

Sanctuaries such as St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, the Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora of Fatima in Portugal, and the Basilica of Nuestra Señora of Guadalupe in Mexico represent established examples of religious spaces integrated into tourism. These success stories demonstrate how well-organized services, infrastructure, and visitor attention can create a spiritual and tourist experience without compromising their sacred character. (UNWTO, 2019).

Table 1. Main religious sanctuaries and their tourist impact

SANCTUARY	COUNTRY	ANNUAL VISITORS (approx.)	RELEVANT TOURISM IMPACT
Basilica of Guadalupe	Mexico	+20 million	Economic spillover, employment and infrastructure.
Sanctuary of Fatima	Portugal	+6 million	Internationalization of the destination
Vatican City (Saint Peter's)	Vatican	+10 million	Integrated religious and cultural tourism
San Juan de los Lagos	Mexico	+7 million	Regional development and local trade

Source: Prepared by the author based on UNWTO (2014), SECTUR (2022) and Tobón Perilla and Tobón Perilla (2013)

Religious tourism generates economic and social impacts similar to those of traditional tourism, as it also involves the consumption of transportation, lodging, food, and local commerce services (Tobón Perilla & Tobón Perilla, 2013). This leads to religious sites being considered spaces with tourism potential, provided that their tourism management respects the sacred nature of the place. Therefore, religious tourism represents an economic opportunity for tourist destinations with religious infrastructure and symbolic value. These religious sanctuaries allow for the diversification of the traditional tourism offerings and the generation of economic benefits that contribute to their conservation and sustainability, without losing their spiritual essence.

Table 2. Participation of Religious Tourism in World Tourism

INDICATOR	ESTIMATED DATA
Religious tourism visitors worldwide	Between 300 and 330 million annually
Participation within cultural tourism	Approximately 20%
Average annual growth (pre-pandemic)	6% - 7%
Main religious destinations	Vatican, Fatima, Guadalupe, Jerusalem
Predominant type of expenditure	Transportation, food, souvenirs and accommodation

Source: Prepared by the author based on UNWTO (2019), SECTUR (2019) and Tobón Perilla and Tobón Perilla (2013)

Marketing

Marketing plays a strategic role due to the intangible nature of the services and experiences offered. According to Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2017), marketing in tourism allows for understanding visitor behavior, segmenting markets, and structuring value propositions aligned with consumer expectations. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) mention that consumption decisions are influenced by cultural, social, and psychological factors. These elements are relevant to religious tourism, where spiritual motivation carries significant weight.

In the case of religious destinations, the application of marketing must be carried out carefully, considering the spiritual, cultural, and social values of the site. Marketing does not seek to commodify faith, but rather to facilitate the encounter between the visitor and the destination, improve the tourist experience, and contribute to the sustainability of the religious space. In this sense, the Marketing Plan helps strengthen the positioning of these sites.

The Marketing Plan is a strategic tool that allows for better structuring of actions aimed at the positioning and development of products, services, and tourist destinations. Fernández (2007) defines a marketing plan as a document that integrates the analysis of the environment, the market, and the organization, as well as the definition of objectives, strategies, and action plans. Its implementation is fundamental for expanding the product or service offering, guiding decision-making, and aligning available resources with the expectations of the target market.

Table 3. Components of the Marketing Plan applied to religious tourist destinations

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	APPLICATION IN SANCTUARIES
Environmental analysis	Evaluation of the internal and external context of the Sanctuary.	SWOT Analysis
Market research	Obtaining and analyzing visitor information	Identifying visitor profiles
Target market	Selection of the priority segment.	Marketing efforts focused on the priority segment.

Marketing mix (Product, Price, Place and Promotion)	Product: Tourist and spiritual experience. Price: Perceived value and accessibility. Plaza: Access and distribution channels. Promotion: Communication and positioning.	Product: Guided tours, religious and cultural events. Price: Donations, symbolic service fees. Plaza: Access, signage and connectivity. Promotion: Social networks, support with government agencies to publicize events, advertising and promotion within the venue (Institutional Communication) and tourism alliances.
Evaluation and control	Measuring results	Measure marketing efforts using indicators (Marketing Mix).

Source: Own elaboration based on Kotler and Armstrong (2012), Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2017), Fernández (2007) and OMT (2019).

Sanctuaries that have incorporated tourism marketing strategies have improved their image, the visitor experience, and diversified their tourism offerings without compromising their spiritual purpose. Examples such as the Sanctuary of Fatima in Portugal, St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, and the Basilica of Nuestra Señora of Guadalupe in Mexico are leading examples of faith, culture, and tourism, thanks to strategic planning (UNWTO, 2019; Prazeres & Carvalho, 2011; Kim & Seongseop, 2018). In Latin America and Mexico, the importance of market research, visitor segmentation, and identity communication is highlighted as key factors for the success of marketing strategies in religious sanctuaries (Tobón Perilla & Tobón Perilla, 2013; García-Muñoz, 2025). Academic studies in Latin America address the application of marketing in religious institutions from an organizational and strategic perspective. One example is the research conducted by the Archdiocese of Trujillo, Peru, where a Marketing Plan for the Catholic Church was designed based on market research, segmentation of parishioners, and analysis of the micro and macro environment. This study shows that adopting marketing tools improves relationships with the faithful, enhances institutional communication, and expands the range of religious services offered (Valera-Azañero, Pretel-Justiniano & Felipe-Bravo, 2022).

Table 2.7. Success stories in religious tourism and strategic management of Sanctuaries

SANCTUARY	LOCATION	RELEVANT STRATEGIES	TOURISM INTEGRATION	SUSTAINABILITY
Sanctuary of Fatima	Portugal	Tourism planning, scheduled religious events, and pilgrim services	Religious and cultural tourism	Reinvestment in infrastructure
St. Peter's Basilica	Vatican	Flow management, institutional communication and cultural offerings	Religious and cultural and historical tourism	Heritage conservation
Basilica of Guadalupe	Mexico City	Visitor segmentation, mass events, complementary services	Religious and urban tourism	High economic impact
Christ the Redeemer	Brazil	Destination branding, accessibility and tourist services	Religious and nature tourism	Environmental protection
Cristo Rey del cubilete	Guanajuato	Religious events, festivities and regional promotion	Religious and cultural tourism	Local economy

San Juan de los Lagos	Jalisco	Pilgrim services, local businesses and hospitality	Traditional religious tourism	Regional levy
Holy Child of Atocha	Zacatecas	Pilgrimages and regional identity	Religious tourism	Cultural preservation

Source: Prepared by the author based on UNWTO (2019), SECTUR (2014), Secretariat of Culture (2014) and Notebook 14.

Cristo-Rey Sanctuary in the Cerro de las Noas: Torreón, Coahuila

The Sanctuary is located on Cerro de las Noas, on Calle de los Ministerios, in the Nueva Creación neighborhood of Torreón, Coahuila. Its elevated position overlooking the city affords it a privileged scenic value. This makes it a natural viewpoint from which the urban sprawl of the Comarca Lagunera region can be seen. Its location as a site for pilgrimage, devotion, and tourism is strategic, as it combines a spiritual experience with an excellent view of the natural surroundings.

A few years after the Diocese of Torreón was established, and when the Jesuit community took possession of the new parish of San José, Father Manuel Herrera suggested to Bishop Fernando Romo, in 1960, the idea of building an icon on Cerro de las Noas to bless the conurbation of Torreón, Gómez Palacio, and Ciudad Lerdo: a statue of Cristo Rey. The bishop agreed, and Father Manuel Herrera enlisted the help of a group of friends to carry out the project.

The first challenge was building the access road, which at that time was a simple, rough, and difficult-to-access dirt track. The access road was eventually laid out, much as we know it today, but in a rudimentary fashion. As the saying goes, "with pick and shovel." Dozens of volunteers from all over wanted to help. After six years, the rustic access road was finally passable for vehicles and pedestrians. On February 6, 1966, the road and the first eight-meter-tall statue of Cristo Rey were blessed and inaugurated. The statue was made of reinforced concrete, with the face and hands cast in aluminum. A small chapel dedicated to Nuestra Señora of Guadalupe was built next to Cristo Rey. Mass was celebrated in this chapel. Although Cerro de las Noas was geographically within the territory of the Parish of Nuestra Señora of Mount Carmel, the new chapel was served by the priests of the Society of Saint Joseph. Later, the Bishop decided to expand the original Christ of the Noas project. In 1980, Father José Rodríguez Tenorio, in charge of the Cathedral of Nuestra Señora of Mount Carmel, assisted and took charge of the project.

The sculptor Vladimir Alvarado, from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, created the Cristo Rey sculpture, with the assistance of architect Jaime Andrade and engineer Sergio Burciaga. Cristo Rey measured 19 meters in height, plus a two-meter base, for a total of 21 meters. The sculpture was transported from Ciudad Juárez in blocks and assembled on Cerro de las Noas. On September 2, 1981, Bishop Fernando Romo Gutiérrez blessed the cornerstone of the site where the monument would stand. For the 25th anniversary celebration of the diocese, on April 7, 1983, the monument was inaugurated and blessed in the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio, Girolamo Prigione, and 36 bishops and priests from the local and neighboring dioceses.

The first statue, built by Father Herrera, was demolished with dynamite on March 15, 1983. From then on, Father Rodríguez Tenorio became the driving force behind the project. Many projects remained unfinished at the Sanctuary: the access staircase, the paved road, the esplanade, and of course, the church. Many citizens still remember Father Rodríguez's tenacity, dedication, and perseverance in building the Sanctuary of Christ of the Noas, which is now a place of pilgrimage and religious devotion, a viewpoint, and a tourist attraction, offering panoramic views of the Laguna metropolitan area of Coahuila and Durango. On April 4, 1998, the Governor of the State of Coahuila, Rogelio Montemayor Seguy, accompanied by the Bishop of Torreón, Luis Morales Reyes, Bishop Emeritus Fernando Romo, the Mayor of the City, Jorge Zermeno, Father Rodríguez, and other priests and guests, inaugurated the "Avenue of the Mysteries," a 2.5-kilometer-long causeway. This causeway now provides much safer access for vehicles, athletes, and visitors alike.

Father Rodríguez Tenorio dedicated nearly forty years of his life to this project in the Laguna region. Its completion is a testament to his faith and commitment to the diocesan Church. This project received generous

support from many residents of the Laguna region and from the board of trustees, whose president was Benjamín Aguilar Reyes. Upon his death on December 4, 2014, Bishop José Guadalupe Galván appointed Father José Luis Escamilla, Vicar General and parish priest of the Cathedral, as Administrator of the sanctuary. Today, the administration continues in the same manner, with the support of a team of nuns who serve the pastoral center. The appointment of the fourth Bishop of Torreón, Luis Martín Barraza, brought about further changes in parish priests and clergy at the Cathedral of Nuestra Señora of Mount Carmel. The new parish priest, Víctor Manuel Gómez, is responsible for the Cristo Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas.

Mission and Vision

The Sanctuary currently lacks a comprehensive strategic plan. This is why the present project proposes one. This section outlines the current mission and vision. The Sanctuary's mission is to ensure that every visitor experiences the peace of prayer emanating from the Sanctuary. Furthermore, it aims to provide comprehensive information about the history, relics, chapels, and replicas from the Holy Land. The objective is for each visitor to feel like a man or woman of faith, ascending Cerro de las Noas for their encounter with God. Since the Sanctuary does not have a vision statement, one will be proposed as part of the Marketing Plan.

Visual identity: Logo and slogan

The Sanctuary currently has an institutional logo. However, it lacks a slogan to identify its identity and communication style. The marketing plan includes the proposal of a slogan aligned with its mission, vision, and values. The objective of the marketing plan is to improve market positioning and communication consistency.



Figure 3.1. Sanctuary Logo

3. Scope and Methodology

The scope of this research is both descriptive and propositional. It is descriptive because it analyzes the characteristics of tourism and visitor behavior. It is propositional because the study culminates in the design of a Marketing Plan, without its operational implementation. In this sense, the research is limited to the design of the proposal.

The primary data collection technique used was a survey, administered to a representative sample of visitors to the Cristo Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas. The data collection instrument was designed based on the market research rules of Zikmund and Babin (9th edition). This yielded information on the visitor's sociodemographic profile, their motivations for visiting, their perceptions of the Sanctuary, their level of satisfaction with their visit, and their expectations regarding the services and activities at the sanctuary. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Complementarily, qualitative techniques such as focus groups and in-depth interviews were employed. These techniques allowed for a detailed exploration of the visitor's perceptions, experiences, expectations, and evaluations of the service and activities undertaken. Finally, the Marketing Plan design is based on the Fernández model (Fernández R, 2007). This Plan includes environmental analysis, market research, market

segmentation, target market definition, market positioning, the marketing mix, and financial management. This model is supported by the theoretical contributions of Kotler and Armstrong, Kotler, Bowen and Makens, and Gitman and Zutter (CITA), focused on guaranteeing the spiritual nature of the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas.

The central variable of the study is market positioning. The dimensions of market positioning allow us to understand how the Sanctuary is perceived, remembered, and valued by visitors. Market positioning is understood as the place the Sanctuary occupies in the minds of visitors, compared to other tourist and religious attractions. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), market positioning is formed from the perceptions and experiences of the services and activities carried out, and influences the decision to visit and word-of-mouth recommendations.

For analysis purposes, positioning is divided into the following dimensions: Recognition of the Sanctuary, Perception of tourist appeal, Perception of religious appeal, Marketing and marketing mix.

The design of the marketing plan, in its first phase, requires an analysis of the internal environment (SWOT) and the external market. This stage also includes an analysis of the tourism context, the visitor profile, their motivations for visiting, their expectations and behavioral patterns, as well as the identification of opportunities and challenges within the regional tourism system. The information obtained allows for strategic decision-making.

The strategic marketing design also includes defining the target market, the desired market positioning, and formulating the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion), adapted to religious tourism. All this information is geared towards improving the visitor's tourist experience without altering its spiritual essence or religious mission. The proposed marketing model also considers criteria of social, cultural, and environmental sustainability, aligned with the principles of responsible tourism and with national and local regulations regarding sites of heritage and religious value. The potential impact of the Marketing Plan on the community is therefore the conservation of religious heritage and the improvement of the visitor's tourist experience, through balanced and respectful management. Finally, the marketing model can be adjusted or adapted based on changes in the environment, changes in tourist demand, or changes in the Sanctuary's institutional objectives. The value of this proposed marketing plan lies in establishing strategic and marketing planning as a basis for strategic decision-making, which can be replicated in other religious sanctuaries with similar characteristics.

The research subjects are current and potential visitors to the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas. They also include stakeholders involved in the management of the Sanctuary and tourism activities. The selection of subjects was based on the need to obtain information about market perceptions, preferences, and expectations, as well as the institutional criteria for managing the religious site. For the quantitative approach, the study population is defined by the number of inhabitants of the Comarca Lagunera Metropolitan Area, comprised of the municipalities of Torreón, Coahuila, Gómez Palacio, and Lerdo, Durango. This area is the main market of influence and source of visitors to the Sanctuary. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2020), the total population of this area is 1,256,911 inhabitants. This population is considered the universe for calculating the sample size. The type of sampling used for the quantitative research is probabilistic sampling. This ensures that all elements of the population have the same probability of being selected and allows for the generalization of the results obtained. The sample size was calculated using an online sample size calculator (Raosoft), with a confidence level of 94.7% and a margin of error of 5.3%. This resulted in a representative sample suitable for the statistical analysis of the study.

Table 4.1. Population of the Metropolitan Area of the Comarca Lagunera

LOCALITY	POPULATION
Keep	720,848 inhabitants
Gómez Palacio	372,750 inhabitants
Dull	163,313 inhabitants
Total	1,256,911 inhabitants

Source: INEGI (2020 Census). Own elaboration.

For the qualitative approach, non-probability purposive sampling was used, intentionally selecting key informants—Sanctuary directors and representatives of the tourism sector—to participate in a focus group.

The primary qualitative data collection instrument was a survey, specifically designed for this research. A questionnaire developed by the project author, Edna Márquez Hidrogo, was used. It is based on the variable operationalization framework and was validated by Dr. Ivette Yazmín Dovalina Montenegro, a Market Research expert (Professional License No. 052201067). The questionnaire consisted of 36 items: 26 focused on the Sanctuary's strategic planning, 4 collected general information about the respondents, and 6 assessed the respondents' socioeconomic level. The questionnaire allowed us to gather information on the visitor profile, their perception of the Sanctuary, their motivations for visiting, their assessment of religious tourism, and their opinion of the Marketing Plan.

In-depth interviews and focus groups were used as instruments for collecting qualitative data. In-depth interviews were conducted with Sanctuary directors and representatives of the tourism sector to understand their perceptions of the current management of the Sanctuary, its tourism potential, and opportunities for developing the tourist destination. Focus groups were used as a guided group discussion technique, following an application guide. This technique was designed to explore the participants' perceptions, expectations, and opinions regarding religious tourism and their experience at the Sanctuary. Zikmund and Babin (2009) indicate that focus groups allow for the generation of relevant qualitative information through interaction among participants, facilitating the identification of trends, attitudes, and potential strategic approaches for marketing decision-making.

The application of these data collection instruments provided an overview of the subject of study. The quantitative data provided general information, while the qualitative data added analytical depth. This combination enhances the Marketing Plan, resulting in a solid and methodologically sound proposal.

4. Results and Discussion

Diagnosis of the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas

This phase of the project allowed for the identification of the strengths, areas for improvement, and strategic lines of the Cristo Rey religious sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas. This information was used to develop the proposed Marketing Plan. Two qualitative techniques were employed for this phase of the project: in-depth interviews and focus groups, the results of which are presented in this section.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with key individuals involved in the outreach, management, and tourism promotion of the Cristo Rey sanctuary. These interviews were conducted using a semi-structured script to obtain detailed information about the current situation of the Sanctuary, its tourism and religious vocation, as well as its main strengths and areas for improvement. The participants were: the Rector of the Sanctuary, Father Víctor Manuel Gómez Hernández; Paulo Vaquera, Administrator of the Sanctuary; Natalia Hoyos, Director of Tourism for the municipality of Torreón; and Sujeyl Alvarado, Director of the Torreón Convention and Visitors Bureau (OCV). The following are the main findings obtained from these in-depth interviews: There is a clear consensus among the informants regarding the high symbolic, spiritual, and touristic value of the Cristo Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas. The interviewees agree that the Cristo Rey Sanctuary has the necessary conditions to become a competitive tourist destination at the regional, national, and international levels. It was also found that the Sanctuary's main area of opportunity is the lack of a formal positioning and advertising strategy, as well as the need to structure and improve its tourist and religious offerings. These findings form the basis for the design of the focus group and market research, aimed at measuring visitor perceptions, what they seek, and what they expect from the sanctuary.

With the aim of complementing the qualitative diagnosis of the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas, a focus group was conducted. The focus group allowed for exploring the participants' general perceptions, opinions, and expectations about the Sanctuary, as well as inquiring about its tourism offerings and market positioning. The focus group had an exploratory and descriptive approach. A pre-designed script was used, based on a literature review, the research objectives, and the variable operationalization table. The selected group of people had diverse profiles: individuals with prior tourism experience at the Sanctuary, and individuals with regional tourism and cultural interests. This diversity broadens the overall perception of the Sanctuary from both religious and tourism perspectives. The participants reside in the Metropolitan Area of the Comarca Lagunera region and are familiar

with the main tourist attractions of Torreón. These characteristics enrich the comparative opinion and reflection on the Sanctuary's market positioning in relation to other local destinations.

Based on the analysis of the information obtained, the following main themes were identified: General perception of the Sanctuary, Motivation for the visit, Visit experience and use of the space, Expectations for a comprehensive and family-friendly experience, Promotion and communication of the Sanctuary, and Participant recommendations. Regarding promotion, the need to improve the Sanctuary's digital communication, particularly on social media, was identified. More dynamic digital content, greater interaction with visitors, and better dissemination of activities, events, and available services are required.

Another result of the focus group is that the Sanctuary is perceived as a place of high symbolic, spiritual, and touristic value, associated with experiences of peace, tranquility, and well-being. Furthermore, the Sanctuary is recognized as one of the main icons of identity for the city of Torreón and the Comarca Lagunera region. It was also identified that visits to the Sanctuary have a mixed tourism dynamic, in which religious, cultural, and recreational motivations converge. While some visitors come for religious reasons, others are drawn by tourism, family activities, and contemplation, confirming its potential as a traditional tourist destination. Participants also indicated a significant gap between the site's tourism potential and the current experience. This is due to a lack of scheduled activities, areas for improvement in signage, visitor services, complementary amenities, and informal promotion based on word-of-mouth recommendations.

In summary, the qualitative diagnosis of the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas was conducted through in-depth interviews and a focus group. The results indicate that the sanctuary holds high symbolic, spiritual, and touristic value, and is an icon of identity for the city of Torreón and the Comarca Lagunera region. Furthermore, the study identified the Sanctuary's main challenge as improving its market positioning, activity programming, and the professionalization of its tourism outreach and management strategies. The focus group confirmed that visiting the Sanctuary is a mixed tourism activity, driven by religious, cultural, and recreational motivations. A gap was also detected between its tourism potential and the current experience, particularly regarding activity programming, tourist services, signage, security, and promotion. These findings constitute the market research.

Market Research

The IM (Information Management) survey is part of the Sanctuary's diagnostic process. The survey was administered to 376 visitors to the sanctuary, with no missing data. This ensures the statistical rigor of the analysis and the reliability of the results. The data collection instrument is a structured questionnaire with 36 items. These items are classified into general data, socioeconomic level, market positioning, visitor perception, and marketing. The processing and analysis of the information was performed using SPSS statistical software. This analysis includes descriptive statistics with frequency tables, percentages, means, and contingency tables. The complete statistical reports are not included in this document, but the most important findings of the analysis are extracted.

The analysis of the respondents' profiles shows that the Sanctuary primarily receives local and regional visitors. To a lesser extent, the presence of foreign visitors is identified. This confirms the sanctuary's regional tourism relevance. The gender distribution is balanced. There is diversity in age ranges, with a predominance of the adult population. Regarding the sanctuary's recognition, the results show a high level of identification as a tourist and religious attraction in Torreón and the Comarca Lagunera region. More than 80% of respondents stated that they recognized the Cristo de las Noas as an important tourist landmark. This indicates a consolidated position in the minds of visitors, even without the support of a formal marketing strategy. The tourist experience was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. The results indicate an overall average greater than 4, suggesting a positive perception of the Sanctuary. The best-rated aspects were the Cristo de las Noas monument, the panoramic views of the city, and the atmosphere of tranquility and contemplation. However, aspects such as signage, the organization of activities, and the availability of tourist information had averages close to 3.5, indicating areas for improvement in the visitor's experience. In the religious dimension, a significant proportion of respondents stated that visiting the Sanctuary contributes to personal reflection and strengthens their faith. Furthermore, over 70% believe it is important to combine religious activities with tourist and recreational activities. This confirms the coexistence of spiritual and tourist motivations sought by visitors. The results also indicate that the main way visitors learn about the Sanctuary is through personal word-of-mouth recommendations, followed by social media.

Items related to the promotion and dissemination of the Sanctuary received a moderate evaluation, with averages between 3.4 and 3.6. This indicates a need to improve tourism communication efforts. A high level of interest in incorporating new activities and events was also identified. Over 70% of respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement with the implementation of experiences aimed at families, children, and special events. This presents an opportunity for developing experiential marketing strategies aimed at increasing visitor length and frequency of stay.

Contingency table analysis revealed that local visitors value the religious and symbolic component of the Sanctuary the most. While foreign visitors place greater importance on the tourist and visual appeal, repeat visitors exhibit higher levels of satisfaction and a greater likelihood of recommending the site. This represents significant potential for loyalty strategies. To assess the internal consistency of the data collection instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied, yielding a value of 0.89. This indicates a high level of reliability and statistically validates the questionnaire used. In summary, the market research results indicate that the Cristo Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas enjoys a strong market position and a highly positive visitor experience. However, there are areas for improvement related to promotion, diversification of activities, and professionalization of marketing strategies. These findings form the basis for the proposed marketing plan.

Marketing Plan Proposal Design

Based on the market research and needs assessment, a Marketing Plan was designed to improve the Sanctuary's positioning as a religious and cultural destination. The proposal incorporates visitor perceptions, identified areas of opportunity, and the Sanctuary's symbolic, spiritual, and touristic attributes. The objective is to enhance the market positioning of the Cristo Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas, based on the market research and needs assessment, while respecting its spiritual identity and promoting sustainability.

Reference model for the Marketing Plan

The marketing proposal for religious tourism must balance spiritual, touristic, and organizational aspects. This proposal is based on the Fernández model (Fernández R, 2007), whose methodology begins with an analysis of the destination's current situation, continues with market research, strategic definition, and the design of the marketing mix. It also incorporates financial management as a tool to support decision-making. This methodology is appropriate for the Cristo Rey Sanctuary, which carries a strong symbolic, social, and cultural weight, because it requires institutional sensitivity, respect for the spirituality of the site, and a focus on the visitor experience. Figure 3 shows the structure of the proposed strategic marketing model for religious tourism at the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas. This diagram provides a general overview of the Marketing Plan, including financial management focused on sustainability.

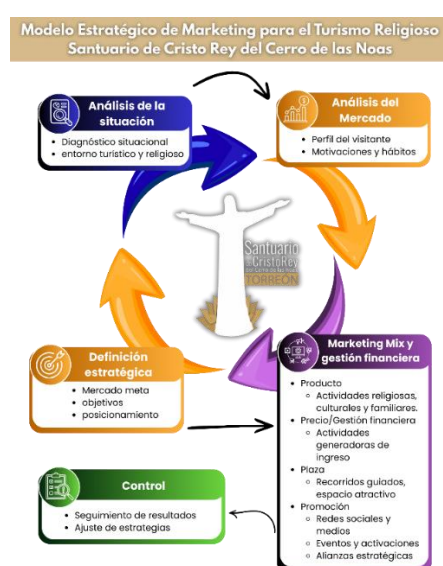


Figure 5.1. Strategic marketing model for religious tourism proposed for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas

The design of the marketing plan begins with an analysis of the Sanctuary's current situation. This analysis allows for the identification of internal and external factors that influence its operation. It also allows for the identification of marketing strategies that respect its religious, social, and cultural mission.

■ Analysis of the Current Situation of the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas

The current situation of the sanctuary is described based on an analysis of marketing elements: the product and its competitive advantages, the target market, the consumer profile, the competitive environment, and the SWOT analysis. Analyzing these elements allows for the formulation of the Marketing Plan strategies, ensuring the sanctuary's spiritual alignment with the research objectives.

Product and competitive advantages

The research results show a positive visitor perception of the Sanctuary, particularly regarding the emotional experience, the contemplation of the landscape, and the symbolic value of the monument. In contrast, areas for improvement were identified concerning the use of physical space, signage, accessibility, and the availability of ongoing activities. These areas for improvement directly influence the visitor's tourist experience.

Target market

The target market for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas is local and regional visitors interested in religious, spiritual, and family tourism. Another segment of the target market comprises national tourists, attracted by the cultural, historical, and scenic value of the destination. This target market includes families, senior citizens, young people, and groups of visitors seeking a space filled with peace, reflection, community, and spiritual significance, as well as cultural and recreational activities. The diversity of the target market reflects the Sanctuary's mixed motivations, encompassing both religious and touristic interests within a single tourist experience.

Consumer profile

The typical visitor profile consists of individuals who value spirituality, tradition, and regional identity, but who also seek organized, accessible, and visually appealing experiences. A significant segment of visitors is motivated by tourism, photography, and digital content. This indicates the need to target marketing efforts toward younger audiences, not necessarily religious practitioners. Common characteristics regarding motivations, expectations, and behaviors can be identified in the consumer profile. These shared characteristics allow for the development of the Sanctuary's buyer persona. This buyer persona encapsulates the target market profile toward which decision-making, marketing strategy design, communication strategies, and experience development should be directed, all while maintaining the Sanctuary's identity. The buyer persona is presented below.

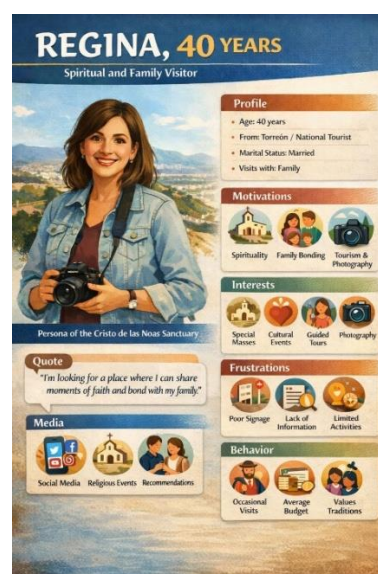


Figure 5.2. Buyer Persona, created with AI.

The Sanctuary's indirect competition includes religious, cultural, and recreational tourism destinations, both regionally and nationally. Direct competition includes emblematic local parishes such as Nuestra Señora of Perpetuo Socorro and regional sanctuaries such as the Sanctuary of the Holy Child of Atocha. At the national level, established shrines such as the Basilica of Guadalupe, the Sanctuary of San Juan de los Lagos, and the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary in Guanajuato are considered competitors. The Sanctuary also competes with cultural tourism destinations such as historical centers, regional museums, urban parks, family recreation centers, and **panoramic viewpoints, all of which offer leisure, social, and visual experiences.**

Environmental analysis (SWOT)

The SWOT analysis is presented graphically in the formulation of strategies for the Marketing Plan.

■ **Strategic Planning**

In this sense, strategic planning functions as a framework for decision-making in marketing, communication and experience development, ensuring coherence between the religious vocation of the Sanctuary and the strategic actions proposed for its strengthening and sustainability.

Institutional mission

The Sanctuary's current mission focuses on enabling each visitor to experience the peace that emanates from prayer and the spiritual environment of the site, as well as transmitting, in a catechetical manner, the history of the relics, chapels, and replicas from the Holy Land that comprise the Sanctuary. Through this experience, the aim is for each visitor to transcend their role as a mere spectator and become a pilgrim, a man or woman of faith ascending to an encounter with God. This mission constitutes the guiding principle of the current strategic planning, informing the design of the Marketing Plan and ensuring that all proposed actions respect and strengthen the spiritual essence of the Sanctuary.

Vision (proposal)

To consolidate the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas as a benchmark for religious and cultural tourism at the regional and national level, recognized for offering significant spiritual experiences, an adequate organization of its activities and services, and an environment of peace, reflection and family coexistence, always maintaining respect for its spiritual identity and contributing to its long-term sustainability.

Values (proposed)

The values proposed below serve as guiding principles for the development and implementation of the Marketing Plan and are aligned with the institutional mission of the Sanctuary: Faith and spirituality, Respect, Identity, Hospitality, Social commitment, Sustainability.

Strategic alignment

The institutional mission, along with the proposed vision and values, establishes a clear strategic foundation for the development of the Marketing Plan for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas. This alignment ensures that the proposed strategies and actions remain consistent with its spiritual identity, while also responding to the opportunities identified in the situational analysis and market research.

Based on this strategic planning, the guidelines that guide the formulation of the target market are defined, integrating the consumer profile, the objectives, the desired positioning and the marketing strategies, which are developed in the following sections of the case study.

■ **Strategic Definition**

Target Market

The Sanctuary's target market consists of men and women of middle and upper-middle socioeconomic status, between 25 and 65 years old, from the city of Torreón, the Comarca Lagunera region, and national visitors. This segment includes families, adults, and young people interested in religious, spiritual, and cultural experiences,

spaces for family gatherings, reflection, and contact with the visually appealing environment. A group of people interested in photography, experiential tourism, and digital content consumption has also been identified. This latter aspect expands the Sanctuary's tourism reach to younger audiences.

Marketing Plan Objectives

The objectives of the Marketing Plan for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas guide the strategies and ensure consistency with the institutional mission. The objectives are: To improve the overall visitor experience with more and better activities, services, and spiritual, cultural, and family spaces; To improve the positioning of the tourism and cultural market at the regional and national levels, increasing its visibility and recognition; Promote the sustainability of the Sanctuary through activities and services that generate income without affecting its spiritual and social essence.

Positioning

To be a benchmark for religious and cultural tourism, offering an experience of faith, family togetherness, and spiritual tourism in a natural and visually emblematic setting of the region. Based on the target market, objectives, and market positioning, the marketing strategies for the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas are designed using an experiential marketing approach. Development will be through the marketing mix, considering the variables of product, price, distribution, and promotion. The purpose is to improve the visitor experience, consolidate market positioning, and contribute to its sustainability, while maintaining respect for its spiritual identity and religious vocation.

■ Marketing Strategies

Product

The product strategy is to present the Sanctuary not only as a space for religious worship, but as a collection of spiritual, cultural, family, and tourist experiences that create an emotional connection with the visitor. The product strategy has three main pillars: Improvement of the infrastructure and environment; Development of a symbolic product; and Implementation of experiential activities. The creation of the Urn of Miracles, "The Echo of Faith," is proposed. This Urn is a symbolic and experiential element where visitors deposit intentions, expressions of gratitude, or petitions. This symbolic element reinforces the spiritual experience and active participation in the Sanctuary. In short, the product strategy offers a spiritual experience, a sense of identity, and sustainability. This improves the Sanctuary's market positioning as a benchmark for religious and cultural tourism.

Pricing and Financial Management

The pricing strategy for the Marketing Plan considers the value perceived by visitors, accessibility, and financial sustainability, as well as the spiritual, social, and cultural nature of the site. In this way, the actions of the Marketing Plan are coherent, accessible, viable, and aligned with the Sanctuary's positioning and continuous improvement objectives.

Distribution

The distribution strategy is direct, offering products, services, and experiences directly on the site, leveraging its infrastructure, symbolic spaces, and the natural flow of visitors.

Physical distribution

Physical distribution allows for the direct offering of products and services in the spaces and contact points available within the premises.

Special activities and events

Special activities and events take place in spaces within the premises and are part of the direct offering to visitors.

Digital channels

Communication channels provide information on the schedule of activities and events, times, costs, participation procedures, activity registration, and support for inquiries. Digital channels reinforce physical distribution,

improve visit planning, and provide a more organized and satisfying experience.

The distribution strategy is consistent with the product and pricing strategies. Furthermore, it respects the spiritual identity of the Sanctuary and enhances its market positioning as a religious and cultural tourism destination.

Promotion

The promotional strategy coherently communicates its religious identity and social function, improving its market positioning as a regional spiritual, cultural, and tourist destination. The promotional strategy has four dimensions: Organic content for identity and positioning; Strategic promotions for visitors; Interactive dynamics and digital engagement. The strategic schedule is as follows: Digital promotion, income-generating activities, and institutional activities.

► **Evaluation and Control**

This process measures the performance of actions, identifies areas for improvement, and makes timely adjustments. Evaluation will be continuous and systematic, through the monitoring of performance indicators and following the established schedule: Evaluation Indicators, Frequency and Responsible Parties, Use of Evaluation Results, and Continuous Improvement Approach.

► **Plan Implementation Proposal**

The Sanctuary's management is responsible for the operational, administrative, and financial execution of the Marketing Plan. Implementation of the marketing plan includes assigning responsibilities, defining timelines, and ensuring the efficient use of available resources. The Plan's execution is progressive, allowing for the evaluation of each action's performance and the implementation of necessary adjustments. In summary: Implementation Stages, Key Stakeholders, Required Resources, and Scope.

5. Conclusion

This research analyzed the potential of religious tourism to diversify and enrich the tourism offerings of the Comarca Lagunera region, specifically in the city of Torreón, using the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary on Cerro de las Noas as a case study. The diagnostic assessment revealed that the Sanctuary boasts a privileged location, good infrastructure, regional recognition, and high symbolic value. However, it also identified the absence of a tourism management system that sustainably leverages these available resources while respecting its spiritual vocation. The analysis of tourist habits, preferences, and expectations of visitors to the Comarca Lagunera Metropolitan Area allowed for the identification of the target market and a methodology for strategic decision-making. The theoretical model of Fernandez (CITA) facilitated the design of the Marketing Plan, incorporating the following elements: market positioning strategies, diversification of experiences, sustainable revenue generation, structured implementation, and evaluation and control mechanisms.

In general, the marketing plan focused on religious tourism improves the Sanctuary's market positioning in tourism and culture, establishing it as a regional landmark with national reach. Furthermore, it enhances the visitor experience and contributes to the sanctuary's economic stability, always adhering to ethical and spiritual principles. Finally, the religious tourism marketing plan promotes the identification of the Cristo-Rey Sanctuary of Cerro de las Noas as a space for faith, culture, and encounter. This demonstrates that strategic planning is compatible with the spiritual mission of a religious sanctuary.

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