

## **Agricultural shows: visitor motivation, experience and behavioural intention**

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# **Agricultural Shows: Visitor Motivation, Experience and Behavioural Intention**

## **1. Introduction**

In the past decade agricultural events have seen many changes, including some major losses such as the ‘Jewel in the show season crown’, the Royal Agricultural Show, ceasing operation in 2009 after over 170 years (Farmers Guardian, 2012; RASE, 2014) as well as a welcome resurgence in attendance more generally after the devastation of the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001. The net effect of these mixed fortunes is that there are still over 400 agricultural show days per year attracting over seven million attendees across the UK (ASAO, 2017) with a sizeable economic impact. Many of these events are integral to our rural heritage, developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries’ as opportunities to ‘showcase’ livestock breeding. Nowadays, they are used more strategically to create links between the farming community and the non-farming public (Holloway, 2004; Gray, 2010).

Despite the significant number, importance and popularity of these events, they have been neglected from a research perspective, while attention continues to be focussed on more mainstream and often urban counterparts, both in general terms and in relation to the consumer experience. Given the lack of academic research, the background to this research relates more to context than previous studies, and fundamentally has to rely on industry based research. Darian-Smith (2011) argues that agricultural events offer a multi-faceted encounter due to their sheer complexity, but what components contribute to constructing individual and unique experiences? As agricultural events continue to evolve, their design becomes increasingly critical as the agricultural societies seek to maintain their attendance, within a competitive outdoor events sector. A more sophisticated consciousness of how these events can be improved from the visitor perspective and more effectively designed to produce positive cognitive, affective and conative responses is therefore fundamental to future success.

This study attempts to address this gap in the literature and is broadly concerned with agricultural event motivation and experience to develop an understanding of key issues for the design of visitor experiences. It also identifies the factors which are critical for show visitation, re-visitation and product purchases based on visitor experiences at agricultural shows.

## **2. Context and Theoretical Background**

### *2.1 Agricultural events*

Agricultural shows are steeped in history and tradition dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and are seemingly as popular today as ever, with attendance growing from five million to seven million over the last 10 years (Scott, 2014). One of the first agricultural shows to be established, the Royal Lancashire Show, started in 1767 (Royal Lancashire Show, 2018), notwithstanding some periods of financial uncertainty and bad weather which forced the society to cease all activities for some years. Some of the larger events having also been established for over two centuries; for example the Royal Cornwall Show is now in its 222<sup>nd</sup> year, attracting over 120,000 attendees to this three day event (Royal Cornwall Show, 2017). These events were originally designed to showcase ‘best in breed’ livestock, but soon developed into the highlight of the farming social calendar, viewed as the ‘must-go to’ events within rural communities (Darian-Smith, 2011). Formerly, the role of agricultural shows was

also to promote the food production effort, particularly in the post war period (Farmers Guardian, 2011; 2012).

Research carried out in 2011 by the Farmers Guardian evidences the positive attendee perception of agricultural shows: 49% of respondents believed shows are better now than they used to be, while only 23% felt agricultural shows were worse than they used to be (Farmers Guardian, 2011). However, given the terms of reference of many agricultural societies: to educate the non-farming public and showcase British agriculture, the low (<50%) positive endorsement is disappointing. Essentially, this highlights the importance of conducting research in order to contribute to the limited existing knowledge of consumer motivations and experiences relating to these events. Encouragingly, recent campaigns carried out by the National Farmers Union (NFU), including 'Great British Food Gets My Vote', launched in February 2015 (NFU, 2015a), are inspiring people to buy British, and to connect more with the countryside (NFU, 2015b). According to Paul Hooper, secretary of the ASAO (cited in Farmers Guardian, 2012) 'shows have got to stay fresh and remain proactive ...making sure they provide a cost effective and durable outing for the family'. Not surprisingly, this broadened and proliferated visitor base is creating challenges for the event designers of agricultural shows.

The largest casualty of all agricultural events, the Royal Show, closed its doors to the public in 2009 after 170 years of operating (McSmith, 2009; Farmers Guardian, 2012; RASE, 2014). While the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) blamed disease and rain on its closure, they failed to foresee required changes in show management and diversification from show traditions, which ultimately led to the demise of this hallmark event (Farmers Weekly, 2009; Mukherjee, 2009; Pitcher, 2009). Although various operating and environmental factors impacted upon the Royal Show, many other large scale agricultural events remain unaffected. For example, the Royal Cornwall, Royal Highland and Royal Welsh shows continue to report up to a 15% increase in attendance based on previous years (McSmith, 2009; Farmers Weekly, 2010; Exhibition News, 2013a; Exhibition News, 2013b; Royal Cornwall, 2017).

In terms of economic impact, events were reported by the Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP) as contributing £1.1bn to the UK economy (BVEP, 2014). However, this encompasses a breadth of major festivals, music events, agricultural shows, sporting and charity events through to small village and craft events (BVEP, 2014). Conversely, the report also refers to music events and festivals as a separate contribution of £1.3bn, which suggests that the actual economic impact of agricultural and rural events within the UK is largely unknown. Nevertheless, many of the multi-day agricultural events report regional economic impacts in excess of £30 million. For example, the Royal Welsh show: £40 million (Exhibition News, 2013b); the Royal Three Counties Show: £70 million (BBC, 2011); and the Royal Bath and West Show: £37m (Roger Tym and Partners, 2005). Such is the resilience of some rural events that many have diversified in line with audience expectations and also developed spring and autumn shows to further extend their popularity and economic impact. For example, the events which took place at the Great Yorkshire Showground in 2012 reportedly generated £47million of regional economic impact for Yorkshire (YAS, 2013).

Like many other events, agricultural shows are annual attractions with loyal patronage. Nonetheless, the challenge is to continue the long established traditions and unique heritage of each show whilst creating a contemporary experience which appeals to both repeat and

first time visitors, where many of the latter may have a general interest rather than a specific bond or association with agriculture. The tangible 'make-up' of agricultural events fluctuates significantly with fundamental regional differences, reflecting and replicating agricultural practices and traditions from the nearby rural communities. As such, agricultural shows based in the south west provide a different experience to those based in the north of England, the east of England or the Scottish border; in particular, regional shows located in rural locations experience a 'supra-local' geographical hinterland (Gray, 2010). In addition to regionalism within the sector, the scale of the events impacts upon consumer experiences; many one day shows attract just 5,000 visitors, whereas the larger events can attract in excess of 40,000 per day on multi-day events (Aslet et al., 2015; ASAO, 2017). Whilst challenging to analyse, this adds to the uniqueness and immensely varying experiences derived from these events.

Traditionally, agricultural show attendees included farming families, livestock breeders and those in associated services. However, in the context of an overall decline in the UK farming industry (NFU, 2015c), the audience profile is becoming increasingly diverse, including urban residents seeking a connection, however insignificant, with the countryside or 'a simpler way of life' (Darian-Smith, 2011; Scott, 2014). The growing audience diversity is also linked with changing consumer lifestyles relating to health, well-being and greater transparency in food origins, with 86% of consumers wishing to purchase more traceable food produced on British farms (NFU, 2015b). Agricultural shows also offer an ideal platform for educating attendees and 're-imagining' agriculture (Holloway, 2004) by facilitating knowledge transfer between farmers, food producers and consumers. In light of these developments, the design of experience at agricultural shows must evolve in response to consumer demands to ensure the longevity of their appeal.

## *2.2 Visitor Motivation and Experience*

Motivation research on events has centred on a number of studies. Crompton and Mackay's (1997) seven domains offers one of the original perspectives, while subsequent research has augmented this area of study. Increasingly, the research considers satisfaction, emotions, togetherness, a state of need, novelty, nostalgia and escapism as key variables (Scott, 1996; Nicholson and Pearce, 2001; Lee et al., 2004; Duran and Hamarat, 2014; Pope et al., 2017). There has been a growth in studies in the area of experience design (Schmitt 1999; Poulsson and Kale, 2004; Smilansky 2009; Zomerdijs, 2010) but particularly in the sphere of event design (Monroe, 2006; Berridge, 2007; Kale et al., 2010; Björner and Berg, 2012) demonstrating how events and the physical spaces within events can be purposefully choreographed to create the right conditions for memorable experiences to be derived (Pine and Gilmore, 2000; Getz, 2012).

Creating meaningful experiences is often regarded as one of the quintessential outcomes of events (Getz, 2012; Silvers, 2009). Modern event consumers have evolved in terms of knowledge and expectation, not to mention familiarity with such things as event themes, decor and settings, and so the demand has grown for unique and differentiated experiences. Practitioners have responded to this demand by seeking new ways to create event memorability. For many events, and indeed for many businesses, memorability is at the core of that experience (Schmitt, 1999; Diller, Shedroff and Rhea, 2006; Shaw, 2009; Bowdin et al., 2011; Matthews, 2015).

Products and services contained within engagement settings are seen as experience encounters with several dimensions of experience on offer, each influenced by the way an experience is infused or enhanced (O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998). Such experiences, argues Beard (2014), have six dimensions that embrace the event context: activities, senses, emotions, knowledge and change (in oneself). In order to facilitate these different dimensions events should, ideally, be planned with each one in mind to match audience motivations for attending. In a similar vein, there are four quadrants that make up the Experience Realm model, namely aesthetics, education, entertainment and escapism (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Whilst all are required for an event to truly fulfil all dimensions of experience, an equal balance between each dimension is not essential. The key to achieving a successful experience, in any dimension, is to include the emotional connection for attendees. A way of doing this is to consider 'eventscape' and atmospherics, where the eventscape involves the shaping of the event environment to stimulate emotions and experiences to meet objectives (Tattersall and Cooper, 2014).

Attaining high levels of memorability can be linked to achieving optimal experiential flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). It can be further understood in terms of the liminal zone (Turner, 1974), a concept that seeks to highlight the importance of *communitas* at an event. This refers to a transient state where attendees are together away from everyday life and are at the event for a perceived common goal. Together, these ideas suggest an umbrella of experience is available that covers the multitude of feelings and emotions that individuals get on a physical and cognitive level from their presence at an event (Getz, 2012). The meaning and therefore memorability attributed to the event and the experience is then transmitted via a variety of symbols and objects that reaffirm the spatial and temporal purpose of the event for the audience and connect, or engage, emotionally on several levels with the attendees.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Participants*

Data was obtained in 2015, following ethical approval from the university, through an intercept survey using an iPad to record visitor responses to the questionnaire. A pilot survey with 12 participants resulted in minor changes to increase question clarity and reduce item non-response. A convenience sample was taken at four agricultural festivals: the Royal Highland Show ( $n = 259$ ), the Royal Norfolk Show ( $n = 74$ ), the Royal Three Counties Show ( $n = 151$ ) and the Royal Cornwall Show ( $n = 341$ ). See Table 1 for show details. Refusal rates averaged 2.02% across the four shows and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Thirty questionnaires were deleted because of missing values, leaving 825 cases available for analysis. The sample profile is given in Table 2. There are statistically significant differences between the four shows with respect to their demographic and behavioural characteristics with the exception of visitor age, which is fairly consistent. Key differences are that females outnumber male visitors at all the shows, but the gender imbalance is particularly marked at the Royal Highland show. Twice as many visitors at the Royal Three Counties show attend on their own compared with the Royal Highland and Royal Norfolk shows, where more visitors attend with their partners. While there is a distance decay effect with respect to the visitor catchment areas at the Royal Three Counties and Royal Cornwall shows, as would be expected, at the Royal Norfolk and particularly the Royal Highland shows, the large majority of visitors travel over 40 miles to the event. This is reflected in both the significantly higher number of short break visitors and lower number of local visitors to the Royal Highland and Royal Norfolk shows compared with the Royal

Three Counties and Royal Cornwall shows. However, significantly more visitors attended the Royal Cornwall show as part of a longer break compared with the other events. It is also notable that the Royal Norfolk show attracts significantly more first time visitors compared with the Royal Highland and Royal Cornwall shows, while the latter enjoys more repeat visitor patronage from those who have attended seven or more times compared with the Royal Norfolk and Royal Three Counties shows.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

### *3.2 Measures*

In the post-positivist tradition, the survey was designed to examine 1) visitor motivation to attend the agricultural shows and 2) visitor experience at the shows and to identify any significant differences on the basis of demographic and behavioural variables. Given the lack of previous research on agricultural events, the motivation and experience items for the measurement scales were drawn from the more general festival and events literature (Crompton and McKay, 1997; Schmitt, 1999; Getz, 2012) and from a content analysis of the promotional literature from the four shows. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement with seven items relating to their motivation for attending the show, and with three items relating to future behavioural intention. They were also asked to rate the importance of 11 items relating to their experience at the show. The questionnaire also elicited information on a range of demographic and behavioural variables (see Table 5). The dimensional structure of visitor ratings on the motivation and experience variables was assessed together with their predictive validity in relation to visitor intention to revisit each individual show, other shows and to purchase products on the basis of their experience at the shows.

### *3.3 Procedure*

Following a normality test of the variable ratings, base 10 logarithmic transformations were used to normalise all variables which violated the assumption of normality. To test the dimensionality of visitor motivation and experience, respondents' ratings on a range of relevant variables were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the underlying dimensions relating to the inter-relationships between the observed variables (Preacher and MacCallum, 2003). Principal axes factoring extraction was used to identify any weak dimensions (De Winter and Dodou, 2012) and items were included in the analysis if they loaded on factors above 0.3 and had less than 0.10 difference in loadings between two or more factors (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The number of factors to be retained was determined by minimum eigenvalues of 1; visual examination of the scree plot and the results of a Monte Carlo parallel analysis (O'Connor 2000; Watkins, 2008); in addition, the internal consistency was calculated. Promax rotation with Kaiser normalisation was employed because oblique rotation more appropriately reflects reality for most social science constructs (Costello and Osborne, 2005). Dimensions were labelled on the basis of a thematic analysis of items loading on each factor and convergent and discriminant validity measures were determined for each dimension. The factors, rather than the 18 variables, were used in subsequent analyses to reduce multicollinearity in the data (Tabachnik and Fidel, 2007). Independent samples t-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were employed to identify differences in the motivation and experience factors on the basis of visitor behaviour and demographics. A Games-Howell procedure was used for the post-hoc multiple

comparison tests because it controls for Type I error rate while maintaining both statistical power and accuracy when sample sizes are unequal (Field, 2009). Ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression analyses were then undertaken to assess the influence of the factors on visitor intention to revisit each show, to visit other shows and to purchase products based on their experience at the shows.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### *4.1 Dimensional structure of the data*

Respondents' ratings on the motivation items ( $n = 7$ ) and the experience items ( $n = 11$ ) were subjected to EFA following the decision criteria outlined above. Bartlett's test of sphericity, the KMO test of sampling adequacy and Cronbach's reliability alphas indicate that the factor structures for both motivation (Table 3) and experience (Table 4) are reliable. The results show that visit motivation has a three dimensional structure, accounting for 66.03% of the variance in the data before rotation, with all seven items loading on one of the three dimensions. Factor 1 relates to spending time with friends and family, socialisation, interaction and escape from everyday life; the latter relates to getting away from the stress of everyday life (Crompton and McKay, 1997); it was therefore labelled 'Socialisation and Relaxation'. Factor 2 relates to expanding knowledge and new experiences and was named 'New Knowledge and Experiences', while Factor 3 consists of items concerned with 'Prestige and Tradition' and was labelled accordingly. These factors represent the key dimensions of agricultural show visit motivation and reflect the primary push factors driving visitation to these annual events. This finding addresses the gap in the extant literature on visitor motivation for attending agricultural events.

The important aspects of the visitor experience at agricultural shows also has a three dimensional structure, which accounts for 64.87% of the variance in the data before rotation (Table 4). Three experience variables: new equipment/products, countryside pursuits and vintage/historical activities were removed due to  $<0.10$  difference in cross loadings between two or more factors. Factor 1 consists of two items relating to 'Machinery and Livestock'. Four items loaded on Factor 2: clothing stands, vehicle stands, food and drink, and child friendly activities; as such, it represents 'Exhibitors and Amenities'. Factor 3 relates to equestrian displays and main ring events and was therefore labelled 'Equestrian and Main Ring Events'. These factors represent the important experience dimensions, and key push factors, for major agricultural shows; as such, this finding also adds to knowledge about this hitherto neglected area of events, which are significant rural visitor attractions.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE  
INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

### *4.2 Variation in show motivation and experience by demographics and behaviour*

The variation across the six independent factors and the three dependent variables on the basis of the visitor behaviour and demographic variables is shown in Table 5. The results show that the majority of variables (57.1%) significantly differentiate either the factor scores (61.9%) or the dependent variable scores (47.6%), but most have small effect sizes ( $\eta^2$ ), particularly in relation to the motivation dimensions, which indicate that the shows have broad appeal. By comparison, more of the experience dimensions are significantly differentiated on the basis of the demographic and behavioural variables with either medium

or large effect sizes; this indicates that while the shows attract a wide range of visitors in relation to their demographic profiles, certain elements of these agricultural events appeal to particular groups.

#### INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Visitor perceptions of Prestige and Tradition (M3) as a motivating factor vary significantly, with a medium effect size, between the different shows. Post hoc tests showed that the Royal Highland show has significantly higher ratings for Prestige and Tradition (M3) motivation than the Royal Norfolk and Royal Three Counties shows, while the Royal Norfolk show has significantly higher ratings than the Royal Cornwall show. There is also a significant variation with a medium effect size in the importance of Equestrian and Main Ring Events (E3). Again, the Royal Highland show has significantly higher importance ratings for this aspect of the visitor experience compared with the other three shows.

Socialisation and Relaxation (M1), as a motivating factor, varies significantly, with a large effect size, depending on visitor age. It has a stronger influence on the 18-25 age group compared with those aged 36 and above, and on the 26-35 age group compared with those aged 50 and above. Moreover, in relation to the event experience, Exhibitors and Amenities (E2) are significantly more important, with a medium effect size, for those under 50 years of age compared with older visitors.

While visitor motivation is not differentiated on the basis of gender, it is highly significant, with a large effect size, for the visitor experience of both Machinery and Livestock (E1) and Equestrian and Main Ring Events (E3). The former is significantly more important for the male visitor experience while the latter is significantly more important for females.

Those visiting with their partner and children have significantly higher ratings, with a large effect size, for Socialisation and Relaxation (M1) than those visiting with their partner without children. Moreover, those visiting with a group of friends or colleagues also have significantly higher ratings than those visiting with their partner alone. Party composition is also highly significant, with a medium effect size, for Exhibitors and Amenities (E2). People visiting with others rate this factor significantly higher than people visiting on their own. Moreover, as with Socialisation and Relaxation (M1), the ratings of those who visited with their partner and children are significantly higher than those who visited with their partner (without children); they are also higher than those who visited with a friend or with a group of friends or colleagues. The importance of this factor for these groups is not surprising given that it includes items such as child friendly activities and food and drink.

The importance of Machinery and Livestock (E1) in the visitor experience varies significantly, with a large effect size, in relation to the number of previous visits to shows; those who have visited a show seven or more times rate this factor as being significantly more important in their experience than those who visited for the first time, or visited either twice, three times or four times. Clearly, this dimension, which is a unique feature of these events, is an important experiential element for repeat visitors.

Visitors' Intention to Revisit the Same Show (D1) varies significantly by show, party composition, and number of previous visits, while Intention to Buy New Products (D3) varies significantly by show and by trip context. However, for both dependent variables the effect size is small. By comparison, Intention to Visit Another Show (D2) varies significantly by



distance travelled to a show and trip context, with a medium and large effect size, respectively. Post hoc tests show that those who travelled over 100 miles to a show are significantly more likely to visit another show compared with those who travelled shorter distances, up to a maximum of 70 miles, and are more likely to visit the nearer (local) show. Moreover, and not surprisingly, those who visited a show as part of either a short break or a longer holiday are significantly more likely to visit another show compared with local visitors and day trippers.

#### *4.3 Predicting repeat visitation, visiting other shows and purchasing new products*

The predictive ability of the motivation and experience factors was examined in relation to the three dependent variables (D1, D2, D3). All six factors were found to be significant predictors for at least one dependent variable at one of the shows. The results for each individual show (Royal Highland; Royal Norfolk; Royal Three Counties; Royal Cornwall) are given in Table 6 and a summary of the findings from the regression analysis is presented in Table 7.

INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE  
INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

##### *4.3.1 Intention to revisit the same show*

There are three significant predictors of intended repeat visitation to the Royal Highland show, compared with only two for the other shows. Socialisation and Relaxation (M1) is uniquely significant for intended revisitation to this show and also accounts for the most variance in the dependent variable: for a one unit increase in this factor, Royal Highland show revisitation increases by 0.25 units. Equestrian and Main Ring Events (E3) has a similar impact on revisitation (0.23); this factor is also significant for intended revisitation at the Royal Norfolk show. Additionally, Machinery and Livestock (E1) is uniquely significant for intended revisitation to the Royal Highland show, but has less influence (1.6) than M1 and E3. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Machinery and Livestock (E1) only drives repeat visitation at one agricultural show.

By comparison, Prestige and Tradition (M3) is the key predictor of intended revisitation at the Royal Norfolk (0.57), Royal Three Counties (0.31) and Royal Cornwall (0.38) shows. Indeed, it is the only significant predictor of revisitation at the Royal Cornwall show, and in the case of the Royal Norfolk show, both the size of the beta value and its influence on the high degree of variance in the outcome variable explained (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.50$ ;  $p < .001$ ) should also be noted. While, Prestige and Tradition (M3) is not a significant predictor of revisitation at the Royal Highland show, it is interesting to note that the ANOVA results presented earlier showed that visitor ratings were significantly higher for Prestige and Tradition (M3) at this show compared with the other three. This indicates that overall, Prestige and Tradition (M3) is the key driver of revisitation to all of the shows, but that other factors are also influential. For example, Socialisation and Relaxation (M1), Equestrian and Main Ring Events (E3) and Machinery and Livestock (E1) have more influence on intended revisitation at the Royal Highland show.

It should also be noted that New Knowledge and Experience (M2) is uniquely significant for predicting intended revisitation to the Royal Three Counties show. Moreover, it is interesting that while intended revisitation was influenced by a wider variety of factors than intention to

visit other shows or intention to buy new products, the motivation factors were the main drivers of intended revisitation at the individual shows, in terms of both their frequency and predictive power, compared with the experience factors.

#### *4.3.2 Intention to visit other agricultural shows*

Machinery and Livestock (E1) is the prominent factor in the prediction of intention to visit other agricultural shows, and is uniquely significant for intention to revisit the Royal Highland show. This seems to indicate that visitors who were interested in machinery and/or livestock were disappointed with their experience at three of the four shows, although it may reflect their intention to visit other shows in addition to, rather than instead of, visiting the show where they were surveyed to experience regional variation.

Equestrian and Main Ring Events (E3) is a significant predictor of visits to other shows at two events: the Royal Norfolk and Royal Cornwall shows, while Prestige and Tradition (M3) and Socialisation and Escape (M1) are uniquely significant for intention to visit other shows at the Royal Highland and Royal Three Counties shows, respectively. Overall, it is notable that compared with the motivation factors, which were more prominent in the prediction of intended revisitation to each show, the experience factors were the main drivers of intended visitation to other shows in terms of their frequency and predictive power.

#### *4.3.3 Intention to purchase new products (based on the experience at the show)*

There are three significant predictors of intention to buy new products at the Royal Cornwall show, compared with only two for the other shows. New Knowledge and Experience (M2) is a significant predictor of intention to buy new products at all four shows, while Exhibitors and Amenities (E2) is a significant predictor at the Royal Highland, Royal Three Counties and Royal Cornwall shows. Although New Knowledge and Experience (M2) influences intention to purchase new products at more shows than Exhibitors and Amenities (E2), the latter has more predictive power at the three shows where they are both significant predictors of this outcome (Table 6). While, as might be expected, intention to buy new products was influenced by the least variety of factors compared with intention to revisit or to visit other shows, it is interesting to note that Prestige and Tradition (M3) significantly influences intention to buy new products at the Royal Cornwall and particularly the Royal Norfolk show. Indeed, at the latter, Prestige and Tradition (M3) has the highest beta value (0.35) for this dependent variable compared with the other shows. This suggests that the stature and kudos of these shows has influence beyond visitor exposure to new products, new knowledge and new experiences at these events.

### **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

Agricultural shows have hitherto been neglected because festival and event research has focussed on urban areas at the expense of rural locations. This study has attempted to address this gap in knowledge by examining motivation to visit agricultural shows and visitor experience at these events, with specific reference to four royal shows.

Three visitor motivation dimensions and three experience dimensions were identified, which represent the primary push and pull components of agricultural show attendance. These factors represent the distinctive character and appeal of agricultural shows in relation to historical tradition and countryside heritage in general, and various aspects of farming such as

agricultural equipment and animal husbandry more specifically. The shows attract a broad demographic because of their wide range of attractions and amenities; as such, they can satisfy the needs of particular visitor interests relating to age, gender, lifestyle and lifecycle stages. Nevertheless, while the four shows examined in this study share many common elements, for example, the Machinery and Livestock dimension of the visitor experience, which has a particular appeal for both male and repeat visitors, they are also differentiated in relation to their particular characteristics and distinctive visitor appeal based on their regional distinctiveness. For example, the Socialisation and Relaxation dimension is a uniquely significant motivating factor for repeat visitation at the Royal Highland show.

The results show that all of the motivation and experience factors are significant predictors of at least one of the three dependent variables examined in this study. Most notably, Prestige and Tradition is the prominent motivational driver of revisitation and is one of only three predictors of intention to purchase new products, while being the only dimension to significantly predict all three dependent variables. Similarly, New Knowledge and Experiences, together with Exhibitors and Amenities, are key motivational influences on visitor intention to purchase new products; the former also influences repeat visitation at the Royal Three Counties show. By comparison, Machinery and Livestock represents the key experiential factor underpinning visitor intention to visit other shows, while also being a uniquely significant predictor of repeat visitation at the Royal Highland show. These findings should be noted in relation to the planning and promotion of future shows together with the specific recommendations below.

From a theoretical perspective, although the findings indicate that the shows share common motivation factors with other events such as Socialisation and Relaxation, and New Knowledge and Experiences, they highlight key differences. For example, music and arts events more often provide escapism, hedonism and vivid memories (Duran and Hamarat 2014; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014), while agricultural shows seem to offer an authentic connection to rural traditions, and a unique experience of the farming community, its heritage and values. This connection is built on a sense of *communitas* among attendees (Getz, 2012), which is perhaps best exemplified through the large numbers of loyal repeat visitors (> 7 returns) at all of the shows. The uniqueness of these events contributes to the memorability of the show experience, which the findings highlight as multi-dimensional. There is evidence to support the notion that the design and consequent audience engagement is steadfastly grounded in a human centric set of experiences that reflect several key dimensional features identified by Beard (2014): the event activities, context, senses, emotions, knowledge and change (in oneself). The key experiential dimensions reflect the authenticity of the show activities through exposure to livestock and traditional pursuits, for example, the equestrian and other main ring events. Furthermore, the findings show that context also rates highly, indicating that agricultural shows offer opportunities for social interaction in a traditional and distinctive setting together with a range of experiences that are not easily replicated elsewhere.

From a managerial perspective, it is notable that the motivation factors were more prominent in the prediction of intended revisitation to the four shows, while the experience factors were the main drivers of intended visitation to other shows in terms of their frequency and predictive power. This indicates that a combination of the key motivation and experience factors should be used in promotional material to attract both repeat and first time visitors to the shows. Moreover, given the overall importance of tradition and heritage, whilst agricultural shows must evolve to address contemporary needs and expectations, the

prominence of these traits in the psyche of visitors suggests that innovation in event design must acknowledge and preserve the integrity and character of the shows to secure their continuing appeal and longevity. Therefore, the use of new technology, widely embraced and expected by modern audiences, should be employed appropriately to complement the conventional elements of agricultural shows. Its sensitive application has the potential to positively enhance visitor activities, experiences and memories.

The need to preserve the prestige and tradition of the events and address the key motivational and experiential issues for effective planning and promotion notwithstanding, the findings also highlight the potential for market penetration and market development strategies. In relation to both, it is recommended that the Socialisation and Relaxation dimension is both highlighted in event promotion to attract younger visitors (< 35) and families, and further emphasised in the royal show experience to enhance visitor satisfaction in these key markets to ensure the long term viability of the events. Featuring Exhibitors and Amenities more prominently would also increase the attractiveness of shows for the under 50s, particularly for families with children. The results also indicate that the significant gender imbalance among show audiences could also be addressed by placing further emphasis on Machinery and Livestock in both promotion and the visitor experience to attract more males; this would also secure the continuing appeal of the shows for the loyal repeat visitors.

In addition to these general proposals, the findings also suggest specific recommendations for the development of individual shows. At the Royal Highland show, particular emphasis should be placed on Socialisation and Relaxation and Machinery and Livestock to promote repeat visitation and increase the number of male visitors, respectively while maintaining patronage from its loyal repeat visitors (> 7 returns). By comparison, the Royal Norfolk show should attempt to convert its comparatively high number of first time visitors to repeat visitors by placing emphasis on Prestige and Tradition and Equestrian and Main Ring Events. It should also increase its appeal to younger visitors by enhancing the Socialisation and Relaxation dimension, while maintaining its appeal to the over 50s. The Royal Three Counties show should promote New Knowledge and Experience in addition to Prestige and Tradition to increase repeat visitation among its relatively high number of first time visitors; it should also attempt to extend its geographic catchment area. Recommendations for the Royal Cornwall show include retaining the emphasis on Prestige and Tradition to satisfy its committed repeaters (> 7 returns) who represent the majority of visitors. It should also emphasise the Socialisation and Relaxation dimension of the visitor experience thereby increasing its appeal to younger visitors to ensure the long term sustainability of the event. Given the show's relatively remote location, the event will also benefit from its continued promotion to visitors on a long break in the south west.

While the findings make a contribution to knowledge, the study should be considered in light of certain limitations. First, it represents a first step in identifying the motivation and experience dimensions of agricultural show visitation and as such, there is no previous research with which to compare the findings. Second, both the large overall sample size for the study and the comparison of four shows notwithstanding, the use of a non-probability sample means that the results cannot be viewed as representative of agricultural shows more generally. Additionally, the sub-sample sizes for two of the agricultural shows were relatively small and although a cautious approach to the data analysis was taken, larger, randomised sub-samples are needed in future studies to support the generalisability of the findings. Third, the study has taken a cross sectional approach to the analysis of visitor motivation and experience and therefore needs to be extended beyond the four royal shows included in this

research. Further research should therefore establish the external validity of the motivation and experience dimensions of agricultural show visitation by extending the range of shows in the sample and obtaining stratified random samples in each case. Moreover, building on this study, future research could also take a longitudinal approach to data collection at particular shows to examine changes in visitor motivation and experience over time.

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