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## **Motivation, Attitude, and Participation in Agricultural Fairs**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the relationship between agricultural fair visitor's motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty using online survey data. The structural equation model results show that both push and pull motivations play a crucial role in determining customer satisfaction. Consumer's motives also affect loyalty indirectly through their influence on fair visitor's perceived satisfaction.

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## **Introduction**

Agricultural fairs have historically played critical role in economic development by providing a marketplace for trading agricultural products, procuring farm supplies, learning new and innovative farming techniques, and offering a range of recreational services (Kniffen, 1951; Lin, 1992; Schwartz, 1994; Kelly, 1997; Brunt, 2003; Longley *et al.*, 2005; Mitchell, 2007; Chang, 2009; Laflin and Anderson, 2010; Detre *et al.*, 2011). However, recent advancements in agricultural production and distribution system, rapid urbanization, innovations in information technology, and declining share of agricultural sector in the U.S. economy have significantly diminished the traditional role of agricultural fairs (Kelly, 1997; Dimitri *et al.*, 2005; Mitchell, 2007; Tao and Jinchuan, 2008; Roberts, 2015). In particular, these changes have transformed fairs' customer base from primarily rural farming communities to urban and suburban populace who is mostly unfamiliar with the modern agricultural operations (Blackburn, 1999; Lauzon, 2010). As a result, the role of fairs as a marketplace for trading farm products, sourcing farm supplies, and acquiring innovative farming knowledge has been significantly reduced (Borish, 1997; Avery, 2000; Mitchell, 2007; Chang, 2009; Roberts, 2015).

However, despite these structural and demographic changes, agricultural fairs continue to attract a wide range of visitors and provide a central venue for promoting agriculture (Lauzon, 2010). For instance, recent estimates indicate that about 3500 state and county level agricultural fairs are serving more than 125 million visitors annually. As such, fairs provide a common place to meet, interact, and inform the general public about the domestic agriculture in general and its direct impact on U.S. food supply chain in particular (Mitchell, 2007; Adams and Salois, 2010; Roberts, 2015). However, the ever-changing consumer base and the intense competition from other special event organizers is challenging the long-term viability of agricultural fairs (Kniffen,

1951; Mitchell, 2007). To survive in this increasingly competitive business environment, fair managers need to find ways to develop a better understanding of their customer needs and offer a mix of activities that meets or exceeds customer expectations.

Realizing this urgent need for realigning fair offering with visitor expectation, few large organizers have started to conduct their internal studies. However, there is a general paucity of information on visitor expectation from and motivations for attending agricultural fairs. In this respect, this study attempts to identify and measure 'push' and 'pull' factors that motivate people to participate in outdoor recreational activities such as agricultural fairs and evaluates whether these motives influence customer satisfaction and bring repeat business.

The fair visitors' motivation involves two components – push and pull motivations. Push motivation "... is a state of need, a condition that exerts a 'push' on the individual towards certain types of action that are seen as likely to bring satisfaction" (Moutinho, 1987). Thus, the push motivation measures an individual's internal desire or emotional need for a vacation or break from daily routine. On the other hand, pull motivation reflects the level of attractiveness of a special event or vacation. Both push and pull factors play a critical role in motivating consumers to seek and participate in leisure activities. In consumption decision process, motivation precedes satisfaction and is expected to influence consumer behavior (loyalty) through its causal impact on satisfaction.

Crompton and Mackay (1997) identify three reasons for developing a better understanding of consumer motives for purchasing goods and services such as trips to agricultural fairs. First, a better understanding of consumer motives provides a sound basis for redesigning fair offerings that are in sync with consumer expectations. Second, since motives are closely associated with satisfaction, fairs that are capable of matching product offerings with

visitor expectation are likely to optimize consumer satisfaction and increase customer loyalty. As a result, these fairs are likely to receive a large number of repeat customers, gain competitive advantage, and enhance long-term viability. Third, a thorough understanding of customer motives provides better grasps on consumer decision-making process, which is essential for identifying the target customers and designing effective product marketing program.

### **Methodology**

Psychographic attributes such as motivation and satisfaction are critical determinants of consumer behavior particularly for experiential activities such as trips to recreational sites, festivals, exhibitions, or fairs. Most behavioral models of experiential services postulate that push and pull motivations affect consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Since motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty are an abstract concept, they are unobservable and cannot be measured directly. To address this variable latency issue, a number of empirical approaches have been proposed in the literature (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Iso-Ahola, 1989; Nicholson and Pearce, 2001; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Hsu *et al.*, 2009).

The most recent leisure behavior models cited in the literature include: needs hierarchy (Maslow, 1943), push-pull factors (Dann, 1977; Crompton and McKay, 1997), escape-seeking behavior (Iso-Ahola, 1980), and travel career ladder (Pearce and Caltabiano, 1983; Pearce and Lee, 2005; Hsu *et al.*, 2009). However, because of its conceptual clarity and ease of application, modified versions of push-pull factor or escape-seeking behavior models is more common in recent empirical applications (Baloglu and Uysal, 1996; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Devesa *et al.*, 2010; Mohammad and Som, 2010; Prebensen *et al.*, 2012; Lee and Hsu, 2013; Leong *et al.*, 2015).

In push-pull factor model, customer motivation towards leisure activities is influenced by both visitor's biological or psychographic characteristics such as internal desire or need for a break or vacation (push factors) as well as external factors primarily related to the attributes of leisure activity (pull factors). Moreover, the push motivation measures an individual's internal desire or emotional need for a vacation or break from daily routine, and the pull motivation reflects the level of attraction of a vacation destination or a special event such as agricultural fair as perceived by visitors. In general, push motives stimulate the desire for recreational activities and pull motives help in selecting a vacation destination. Both push and pull motivations are often hypothesized to affect consumer leisure behavior through their impact on satisfaction obtained from personal involvement in recreational activities.

In general, consumers with strong internal desire (push motivation) for a break from daily routine, who find agricultural fairs more educational and enticing than a trip to a nearby wilderness area (pull motivation) are most likely to attain a higher level of satisfaction by attending a county or state fair (satisfaction) and choose it over wilderness area as their next recreational activity (loyalty). Based on this conceptual framework, this study evaluates the relationship between motivation (push and pull factors), trip satisfaction, and visitor participation in recreational activities (loyalty) using an exploratory factor analysis approach.

## **Data**

The data used in this study was generated through a web-based panel survey conducted in August 2010. The survey includes information on fair visitors' attendance, previous experience with, and perceptions surrounding agricultural fairs. The survey questionnaire was pretested using a sample of residents in Las Cruces, New Mexico to improve its clarity. The online respondents were randomly drawn from a 2 million-member online panel managed by

Zoomerang, an independent market research company. Approximately 10,200 panelists were invited to participate in the survey via email to fill a target of 500 survey participants. A total of 681 responses were received, of which 161 self-selected not to participate, resulting in 520 usable responses (76% of received responses).

## **Empirical Results**

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between push motivations, pull motivations, satisfaction, and the level of visitor's participation (loyalty) in recreational activities and the estimated results are reported in Table 1. The Cronbach coefficient alpha, which measures the overall reliability of latent variables, is very high (greater than 0.7 for all four latent variables analyzed in the study) implying a high reliability of estimated latent constructs. Moreover, the squared multiple correlation coefficients, which measure the proportion of variation in latent construct explained by the observed variables, are greater than 0.3 for all variables indicating a reasonably good fit of the empirical models estimated in the study.

Consumer desire for family togetherness, escape from busy life, and entertainment are used to measure *push motivation*. On the other hand, agricultural fair attributes such as educational programs, agricultural related activities, dining options, and safe environment are used to measure *pull motivation*. Similarly, the latent construct *satisfaction* is measured using three variables measuring visitors feeling about visiting an agricultural fair – i.e., how pleasant, enjoyable, and exciting would be a visit to a state or county fair as compared to other potential alternatives? The *participation* or consumer *loyalty* construct is measured using information on consumer's last visit to a state or county fair and its frequency.

The structural equation model results are reported in Table 2. As expected both push and pull motivations have significantly positive impact on consumer satisfaction implying that consumer's internal desires, as well as the activities offered by agricultural fairs, play a crucial role in determining visitor's satisfaction. Moreover, trip satisfaction has significantly positive impact on the frequency of visit to a state or county fair (loyalty). These results are consistent with the previous studies on tourism motivation (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Hsu *et al.*, 2009; Chen and Mo, 2014).



## **Conclusions**

This study examined the relationship between four latent constructs used in the literature to evaluate the impact of visitor's motivations on trip satisfaction and participation using twelve observed indicators. The results show that both push and pull motivations play an important role in determining the level of satisfaction derived from a visit to an agricultural fair as compared to other alternatives.

The structural equation model results show that visit motivations affect consumer loyalty through its impact on visit satisfaction. Therefore, fair managers should make an effort to understand both push and pull motivations to enhance visitor's satisfaction and improve customer loyalty to earn future business.

Table 1. Overall Measurement Model Parameters and Construct Reliability (Cronbach Alpha)

Description	Factor Loading	Completely Standardized Factor Loading	R <sup>2</sup>	Composite Reliability ( $\alpha$ )
<u>Push Factors</u> (Desire for Attending Fairs)				0.746
Family (time with family and friends)	1.000	0.742	0.55	
Escape (from busy life)	0.846** (12.73)	0.638	0.41	
Entertainment (watch shows)	0.961** (14.21)	0.730	0.53	
<u>Pull Factors</u> (Fair Attraction)				0.700
Education (Educational Programs)	1.000	0.659	0.43	
Agriculture (Agriculture related activities)	0.818** (9.50)	0.583	0.34	
Dining (enough options)	0.845** (9.12)	0.547	0.30	
Security (safe environment)	0.939** (9.95)	0.638	0.41	
<u>Satisfaction</u> (from Visiting Fairs)				0.944
Pleasant	1.000	0.941	0.89	
Enjoyable	0.993** (39.92)	0.936	0.88	
Exciting	0.888** (34.28)	0.889	0.79	
<u>Participation</u> (loyalty)				0.840
Last Visit	1.000	0.800	0.64	
Visit Frequency	0.989** (15.23)	0.905	0.82	

Note: t-Values are reported in parenthesis. The table also includes squared multiple correlation coefficients (R<sup>2</sup>) and composite factor reliability (Cronbach coefficient alpha:  $\alpha$ ).

\*\* denote statistical significance at one percent level.

Table 2. Structural Model Parameter

Variable	Satisfaction		Participation (Loyalty)	
	Coefficient	Completely Standardized Coefficient	Coefficient	Completely Standardized Coefficient
Push Motivation	1.607** (12.75)	0.718		
Pull Motivation	0.203* (2.02)	0.095		
Satisfaction			0.361** (9.63)	0.453
R <sup>2</sup>	0.57		0.36	

Note: t-Values are reported in parenthesis.

\*\*, \* denote statistical significance at one and five percent level, respectively.

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