

Exploring the Determinants of Agritourism Business Owners' Expansion Intention

Lauren Collins

Nellie Hill-Sullins
Kansas State University

Jason Ellis Ph.D.
Kansas State University

See next page for additional authors

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Exploring the Determinants of Agritourism Business Owners' Expansion Intention

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the determinants informing Kansas agritourism owners' intention to expand their business guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior. Agritourism can bring economic, environmental, and social benefits to agricultural and community systems. To realize these benefits, agritourism business owners need related goals, community support, and a multi-modal communications effort. A quantitative, descriptive survey research design was used to gather data from businesses registered with the Kansas Agritourism Program. Results showed agritourism operators' attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms were positively and significantly correlated with, and predictive of, their intention to expand their business. Attitudes were measured by goals for the business, of which capturing new customers was the most important. Subjective norms were measured by community perception of the agritourism businesses' local contribution, of which contributing to the growth and success of the local economy was the most prominent. Perceived behavioral control was measured by barriers to expansion, of which deciding how to promote the business to target customers was the biggest problem. The importance and number of communication channels used were also positively and significantly correlated with agritourism business owners' intention to expand their business. The most important communication channels for agritourism promotion were word-of-mouth and Facebook. Future research needs include a richer understanding of these findings through qualitative analysis. Practitioners should address agritourism operators' goal of targeting new customers and barriers to effectively promoting to them by providing tailored trainings and resources for strategic communication.

Keywords

Theory of Planned Behavior, promotion, tourism, agribusiness development

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Authors

Lauren Collins, Nellie Hill-Sullins, Jason Ellis Ph.D., and Raluca Cozma

Introduction

Innovation, diversification, and expansion of agricultural operations are necessary to provide for the everyday consumer, operational viability, and community vitality (Ammirato et al., 2020; Battersby & Marshak, 2013; Frona et al., 2019). At the intersection of tourism and agriculture, agritourism connects the consumer and the agriculture industry physically and socially, “having the potential to positively affect the sustainable development of rural areas along all the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental, and social) in agricultural systems” (Ammirato et al., 2020, p. 2). By providing educational resources and activities, agritourism business owners diversify their operations as well as provide novel experiences to visitors (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). Agritourism also encourages young entrepreneurs to stay in their local community and contributes to the preservation of small family farms (Peroff et al., 2022). Agritourism benefits the community system made up of the operations, business owners, consumers, and the local economy, making the continuation and expansion of agritourism businesses essential (Ammirato et al., 2020; Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

The term agritourism describes an activity when an individual visits a farm or other agricultural setting to learn or participate in the agricultural process for recreation or leisure. Visiting tourists may experience a working farm, participate in agrifood activities such as harvesting, interact with animals and nature, and enjoy foods produced on the operation (Phillip et al., 2010). Chase et al. (2018) categorizes agritourism in terms of on-farm or ranch: direct sales (i.e. u-pick and farm stands), education (such as classes and tours), entertainment, and events (i.e. corn mazes and festivals), hospitality (i.e. farm stays and dinners on farms), and outdoor recreation (i.e. horseback riding, fishing, and hunting). A growing niche segment of tourism, U.S. agritourism and recreational services sales grew by 25% between 2017 and 2022, from \$949M to more than \$1.2B in annual on-farm receipts (USDA, 2024). Today, agritourism businesses receive more than 62 million visitors a year in the United States (National Tour Association, 2022).

Despite the growing popularity of agritourism, factors affecting business continuation have been relatively unexplored in the scholarly literature (Ammirato et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2023). More detailed data is needed regarding goals, barriers, and benefits to rural settings to inform support resources specific to agritourism businesses (Ammirato et al., 2020; Quella et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2023). Therefore, we conducted a study of Kansas agritourism businesses to examine the underlying benefits and barriers that inform the owners' intention to expand their business. In Kansas, there has not been a focused look at the belief systems or uses of communications agritourism business owners call on to promote their business (Rich et al., 2016). Currently, Kansas agritourism research is focused on the economic value the segment brings to the state and operators (Amanor-Boadu, 2013).

Though financial insights are valuable, the entrepreneurial nature of agritourism business owners means they may place greater emphasis on personal goals rather than profit (Quella, 2021; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Studies of other states have shown agritourism business operators are driven by monetary and non-monetary goals in four dimensions: (1) income security and financial success, (2) independence and autonomy, (3) community and social motivations, and (4) achievement, challenge, and learning (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Maksymov, 2017; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). The balance of economic, environmental, and social goals can help support the sustainability of agritourism businesses (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). Therefore, agritourism operator goals are nuanced, complex, and do not always align with

business decisions (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Nickerson et al., 2001; Ollenburger & Buckley, 2007; Quella, 2021). Goals are place-based, varying with the geographic and demographic characteristics of the agritourism operation and owner, as well as the stage in the business life cycle within the niche agritourism industry segment (McGehee et al., 2007; Nickerson et al., 2001; Ollenburger & Buckley, 2007).

Goals and business decisions may misalign due to the barriers agritourism businesses face in establishing and expanding their operations (Jensen et al., 2014). Barriers including training and managing employees (Jensen et al., 2014), liability, zoning and permitting rules (DeLay et al., 2019; Hollas et al. 2022), lack of financial resources, means of attracting customers (Maksymov, 2017), and promotion and marketing concerns (Miller et al., 2012) have been found to influence plans for business expansion. If present, these barriers inhibit agritourism business owners' ability to participate in the rapid expansion of the industry and need to be further explored (Ammirato et al., 2020).

Agritourism businesses can overcome such barriers to establishing and expanding their business with the help of community networks (Hardesty, 2018). Members of rural communities are eager to preserve the habitat and lifestyle agriculture provides to their community (Ciolac et al., 2020). Well-developed agritourism systems have the potential to reverse negative economic trends by bringing in visitors and creating new jobs and local business ventures (Ramsey, 2006). The rural network expands in size and resources when the community participates in and supports the endeavors, building community culture (Quella et al., 2021). When agritourism owners, county regulators, agricultural educators, and other business operators work together, they can create a unique community for tourists and residents to experience (Hardesty, 2018; Matos & Scherer, 2013). Community support is an essential component for agritourism businesses to thrive, increasing the benefit they bring to the community system (Hardesty, 2018; Hassan et al., 2022; Lorenzo, 2017).

Community networks also support effective, coordinated promotional efforts for agritourism activities (Hardesty, 2018). Such efforts are fundamental to successful agritourism businesses (Joyner et al., 2018). Benefits of a multi-modal communications effort include increases in ease for consumers to discover their business, awareness of upcoming events, education on the agricultural industry, familiarity with the business brand, and market share (Giray et al., 2019; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Tiago et al., 2021). Despite the importance of communication to agritourism, this area is among the least explored in the agricultural communications literature (Parrella et al., 2021). However, word-of-mouth marketing has been found to be the dominant communication channel for agritourism operators, overshadowing use of other channels (Miller et al., 2012). Social media use, especially Facebook, by operators is growing, but previous research found that implementation varies (Bowman et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2023). Operators have previously reported being confident in their current marketing practices (Miller et al., 2023). The greater the number of marketing tools an agritourism business owner uses to promote their business, the stronger and more driven they are by their business goals (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Agritourism businesses development is driven by owners' goals and their use of communications and marketing methods to promote their business (Joyner et al., 2018).

As these goals and communications practices differ by the owner, their barriers, and community setting, there is a need for research exploring how they contribute to supporting agritourism business continuation vital for agricultural operations and rural communities (Ammirato et al., 2020; Quella et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2023). Furthermore, improved

understanding of these factors can help agricultural communicators develop resources and recommendations specific to the spectrum of needs present across agritourism operations (Bowman et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), agritourism business owners' behavioral intentions are shaped by three determinants: their attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms regarding the behavior (Ajzen, 2005). Attitudes are the personal positive or negative evaluation of the behavior of interest. In our study, the importance of goals to the agritourism business owners conveyed their attitude toward the idea of expanding their business. Perceived behavioral control refers to the individuals' ability to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2005). We sought to determine how problematic barriers to expanding their business were to agritourism business owners. Subjective norms are what the individuals believe to be others' perception of whether they should engage in the behavior or not (Ajzen, 2005). For instance, we asked agritourism business owners about how the community perceives their business. Importantly, TPB is based on a causal process and does not account for unconscious motives, spontaneous choice, personal norms, and previous behavior (Ajzen, 2005; Chen & Scott, 2014; Yuzhanin & Fisher, 2016). Nevertheless, TPB has been especially useful in defining behaviours primarily controlled by personal will, as is the case of entrepreneurial agritourism business owners (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020).

TPB is one of the most widely used theories in tourism literature (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020) and common in agricultural communications scholarship (Baker & King, 2016), but it has not been applied in the niche of agritourism or, more broadly, to operators' intention to expand their business. However, Senger et al. (2017) used TPB to determine if relationships existed between small farmers' intention to diversify their agricultural production and their attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms regarding the behavior. All the TPB constructs had a positive and significant correlation with intention, with attitude having the strongest correlation (Senger et al., 2017). Senger et al. (2017) did not test the predictive ability of the TPB constructs on intention to diversify. The greater each of the three TPB constructs are, the greater the intention of an individual to engage in the behavior, but the strength of the association will vary between behaviors and situations (Ajzen, 2005).

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify the determinants that inform Kansas agritourism business owners' intention to expand their business. The following research questions guided this study:

- 1: What are the relationships between agritourism business owners' intention to expand their business and their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control?
- 2: What is the importance of communication channels to agritourism business owners to promote their business?

Methods

A quantitative, descriptive survey research design was used to address the purpose and research questions of the study. Institutional Review Board approval was granted prior to data collection.

Participants

The Kansas Agritourism Promotion Act was signed into law in 2004, establishing a free program where agritourism businesses can register and receive limited liability insurance, business management resources, and marketing assistance to promotion of their business (Kansas Agritourism, 2022). At the time of this study, February 2023, 444 businesses were registered with the Kansas Agritourism Program.

Of the agritourism business owners who participated in our study ($N = 165$), females accounted for 50.9% ($n = 84$) of the sample, with males representing 48.5% ($n = 80$) and 0.6% ($n = 1$) preferring not to say. Respondents who had earned a four-year degree represented 40% ($n = 66$) of the sample followed by 20% ($n = 33$) who earned a professional degree. The average age of the respondents was 52.6 years, with 33.9% ($n = 56$) of the sample being in the range of 44-56 years. The majority (62.4%, $n = 103$) of the sample had been operating an agritourism business for less than 10 years. The average ownership duration for an agritourism business was 12.4 years.

Of the 165 agritourism businesses responding, 40.7% ($n = 67$) were located in Northeast Kansas, 16.4% ($n = 27$) were located in Southeast Kansas, 15.2% ($n = 25$) were located in North Central Kansas, 13.3% ($n = 22$) were located in South Central Kansas, 10.3% ($n = 17$) were located in Northwest Kansas, and 4.2 % ($n = 7$) were located in Southwest Kansas. These results were similar to the geographical representation of registered Kansas agritourism businesses at the time of the study (Kansas Agritourism, 2022).

Participants were asked to indicate the primary type of agritourism business they operate, summarized in Table 1. Results cannot be compared to the population because registrants with the Kansas Agritourism Program may, and often do, select more than one category during registration.

Table 1
Types of Respondent Agritourism Businesses

Type	<i>n</i>	%
Accommodation Operations	31	18.7
Farms of all varieties	28	16.9
Livestock Operations	25	15.3
Seasonal Operations	20	12.1
Events Barns	18	10.9
Specialty Farms	18	10.9
Vineyards / Wineries	13	7.9
Historic Sites / Museums	12	7.3

Note. $N = 165$

Instrumentation

Built using Qualtrics, the instrument questions were adapted from previous studies of agritourism (Amoako, 2020; Hassan et al., 2022; Lorenzo, 2017; Maksymov, 2017; Miller et al., 2012). The demographics captured by the instrument were participant gender, age, education, and percentage of household income from agritourism. Operational characteristics collected were geographic region of business, years of operation, type of business, primary purpose of their business, busiest season, and number of annual customers (Miller et al., 2012). The independent variables in the study were motivations for engaging in agritourism, community perception of the agritourism business, barriers to business expansion, and importance of communication channels. The dependent variable in the study was the intention of the respondent to expand their agritourism business.

Goals for engaging in agritourism. Attitudes toward the agritourism business were examined using a scale adapted from Maksymov (2017). Fourteen items asked participants to rate their level of agreement with statements regarding their goals for having an agritourism business on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample statements were *Generate additional income* and *Educate consumers about agriculture*. A *post hoc* reliability analysis established Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$. The attitude toward the agritourism business was measured by calculating the mean score of the fourteen statements.

Barriers to agritourism business expansion. Perceived behavioral control was examined using a scale adapted from Maksymov (2017) and Miller et al. (2012). Sixteen items asked participants to rate the magnitude of challenges they may have faced in growing their business on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not a problem* to 5 = *a serious problem*). Sample statements were *Obtaining required permits or licenses* and *Identifying target customers*. A *post hoc* reliability analysis established Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$. Real limits were set for the interpretation of responses: 1.00 to 1.49 = *not a problem*; 1.50 to 2.49 = *a minor problem*; 2.50 to 3.49 = *somewhat of a problem*; 3.50 to 4.49 = *a moderate problem*; and 4.50 to 5.00 = *a serious problem*. The perceived behavioral control over the agritourism business was measured by calculating the mean score of the sixteen statements.

Community perception of the agritourism business. Subjective norms surrounding the agritourism business were assessed using a scale adapted from Hassan et al. (2022) and Lorenzo (2017). Five items asked participants to rate their level of agreement with statements regarding how the local community perceives the owner's agritourism business on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample statements were *My business increases recreation facilities for the local community* and *My business contributes to the growth and success of the local economy*. A *post hoc* reliability analysis established Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$. Real limits were set for the interpretation of responses: 1.00 to 1.49 = *strongly disagree*; 1.50 to 2.49 = *somewhat disagree*; 2.50 to 3.49 = *neither agree nor disagree*; 3.50 to 4.49 = *somewhat agree*; and 4.50 to 5.00 = *strongly agree*. Social norms surrounding the agritourism business were measured by calculating the mean score of the five statements.

Intention to expand agritourism business. Behavioral intent was measured using a scale adapted from Maksymov (2017). Five items asked participants to rate their level of agreement with statements regarding their intention to expand their agritourism business on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample statements include, *I plan to expand the number of products, attractions, or services offered at my business in the next 5 years* and *I expect my sales from agritourism to increase in the future*. A *post hoc* reliability analysis established Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$. Real limits were set for the interpretation of responses:

1.00 to 1.49 = *strongly disagree*; 1.50 to 2.49 = *somewhat disagree*; 2.50 to 3.49 = *neither agree nor disagree*; 3.50 to 4.49 = *somewhat agree*; and 4.50 to 5.00 = *strongly agree*. The intention to expand the agritourism business was measured by calculating the mean score of the five statements.

Importance of communication channels. Twenty-four Likert-type items were adapted from Amoako (2020) and Maksymov (2017). Participants were asked to indicate the importance of each print, digital, and in-person communication channel for promoting their agritourism business on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *extremely important* with the option to select *I do not use this channel*, which was represented by 0. Print channels listed included *Printed Handout Materials*, *Direct Mail*, and *Billboards*. Digital channels included *Email List* and *Blogs* as well as social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *TikTok* and their associated advertising platforms. In-person channels included *Word of Mouth*, *Special Events / Festivals*, and *Local Farmers Markets*. A *post hoc* reliability analysis established Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$. To determine the importance of each communication channel to the agritourism business owner, real limits were set for the interpretation of responses: 1.00 to 1.49 = *do not use*; 1.50 to 2.49 = *not at all important*; 2.50 to 3.49 = *slightly important*; 3.50 to 4.49 = *moderately important*; and 4.50 to 5.49 = *very important*; and 5.50 to 6.00 = *extremely important*. The overall importance of communication channels was measured by calculating the mean score of the 24 statements.

Reliability and validity. Dillman's (2007) pre-testing approach was used to enhance the reliability and validity of the instrument. First, the instrument was reviewed for face and content validity by two agricultural communications faculty members, one media and communications faculty member, and the Kansas Agritourism Program administrator. Based on the panel's feedback, wording and order of questions were adjusted. Next, a pilot test ($N = 15$) was conducted to establish reliabilities of the instrument's scales. Some scholars suggest a pilot sample size of 15 respondents is sufficient for calculating coefficients alphas (Bujang et al., 2018). Cronbach's alpha values of 0.8 or greater are desirable (Kline, 1999), but Nunnally (1978) argued values as low as 0.5 will suffice for reliability of pilot scales. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the goals scale was $\alpha = 0.84$, the barriers scale was $\alpha = 0.85$, the community perceptions scale was $\alpha = 0.60$, the intention to expand scale was $\alpha = 0.55$, and the importance of communication channels scale was $\alpha = 0.86$. Coefficients alphas were also calculated *post hoc* to further support reliability. Finally, five graduate students who had no previous experience with the study completed the instrument and were asked to provide feedback on the format, grammar, and appearance. The individuals were able to complete the survey without questions and expressed no need for revisions to be made.

Data Collection

A request to participate in a pilot test of the instrument was emailed to a sample of Oklahoma agritourism business owners. A total of 15 responses were collected January 23-30, 2023. The pilot test instrument included questions to solicit feedback about the instrument, such as *Were any of the questions unfamiliar/confusing to you*. Feedback from pilot test respondents resulted in minor changes to the wording of some questions to improve their clarity.

Using a census sampling approach, the instrument was distributed to all agritourism business owners registered with the program at the time of the study who had a valid email address on their file ($N = 388$). Using a contact list provided by the Kansas Agritourism

Program, we sent a recruitment email directly to each business owner on February 2, 2023. To maximize the response rate from study participants, four points of contact were made as recommended by Dillman et al. (2014). Reminder emails were sent to non-respondents at 8-, 15-, 19-day intervals. Data collection concluded on February 22, 2023.

In our study, a total of 165 complete responses were received for a 42.5% response rate, which is close to or higher than other studies of agritourism operators (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). This response rate is slightly lower than the 49% response rate expected by Dillman et al. (2014).

Data Analysis

SPSS v.28 was used for data analysis. No items were reverse coded. Alpha level of significance was set *a priori* at $p = .05$. Research question one was assessed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank-order correlations, and a multiple linear regression once the data were checked for assumptions following Field (2017) statistical procedures. Research question two was addressed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlations.

To begin to address research question one, Spearman's rank-order correlations were used to investigate the strength and direction of associations between the independent variables of motivation for having an agritourism business, community perception of the business, and barriers to business expansion with the dependent variable of intention to expand the agritourism business. The ordinal variables assumptions of measurement scale and paired observations were met, as was a monotonic relationship between each variable pairing as determined by a scatterplot (Field, 2017). The associations were interpreted for effect size using Davis' (1971) standards which states coefficient values of .01 to .09 indicates a negligible relationship, .10 to .29 indicates a low relationship, .30 to .49 indicates a moderate relationship, .50 to .69 indicates a substantial relationship, and greater than .70 indicates a very strong relationship.

Informed by research question one and TPB, multiple linear regression was used because we sought to understand the interrelationship between, and the predictive power of, the components of the theory within the real-life context of agritourism business expansion (Ajzen, 2005; Field, 2017). Included in the regression analysis were the independent variables of motivation for having an agritourism business, community perception of the business, and barriers to business expansion and the dependent variable of intention to expand the agritourism business. There is precedent for using 5-point Likert-type scales in multiple linear regressions, including those informed by TPB (Holt et al., 2022; Rampold et al., 2024), because ordinal variables have characteristics of being categorical as well as continuous, the latter being required for the statistical test (Fullerton & Anderson, 2023). However, the multiple linear regression still imposes the assumption of equal spacing between items on the Likert-type scale (Fullerton & Anderson, 2023). The assumptions of linearity, normality, and homoscedacity were not violated based on assessment of histograms, scatterplots, and residual scatterplots. Correlation coefficients between predictor variables did not exceed .70, indicating the assumption of multicollinearity had not been violated (Field, 2013).

Results

RQ1: What are the relationships between agritourism business owners' intention to expand their business and their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control?

Attitudes: Goals for Having an Agritourism Business

Respondent agritourism business owners indicated the most important goal driving their ownership of an agritourism business is capturing new customers ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .89$), followed closely by interacting with those customers ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .93$). Table 2 presents the respondents' goals for having an agritourism business.

Table 2

Respondent Owners' Goals for Having an Agritourism Business

Barriers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Capture new customers	4.09	.89	Very Important
Interact with customers	4.08	.93	Very Important
Generate additional income	4.04	1.12	Very Important
Continue the business	3.92	1.12	Very Important
Educate customers about agriculture	3.86	1.13	Very Important
Provide current customers with new services/products	3.85	1.05	Very Important
Meeting a need in the recreation/vacation market	3.77	1.27	Very Important
Keep you active	3.68	1.17	Very Important
Enhance personal/family quality of life	3.41	1.35	Moderately Important
Decrease business revenue fluctuations	3.30	1.24	Moderately Important
Observing successes of other businesses	3.23	1.25	Moderately Important
Better utilize the business in the family	2.97	1.48	Moderately Important
Keep the family business in the family	2.88	1.57	Moderately Important
Provide employment for family members	2.70	1.49	Moderately Important

Note. $N = 165$.

Perceived Behavioral Control: Barriers to Business Expansion

Respondents indicated the biggest barrier faced when starting up or operating their business was *deciding how to promote their business to the targeted audience* ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.21$), followed by *developing advertisement and promotional materials* ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.19$), then *having enough capital infrastructure* ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.43$). Table 3 presents the respondents' barriers faced in the start-up or operation of their agritourism business.

Table 3***Barriers Agritourism Business Owners Faced in the Start-Up or Operation of Business***

Barriers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Deciding how to promote the business to target customers	3.02	1.21	Somewhat a Problem
Developing advertisement and promotion materials	2.87	1.19	Somewhat a Problem
Having enough capital for infrastructure	2.83	1.43	Somewhat a Problem
Staying current with new promotion methods	2.79	1.31	Somewhat a Problem
Attracting customers	2.76	1.16	Somewhat a Problem
Identifying target customers	2.67	1.24	Somewhat a Problem
Having enough capital for operations	2.58	1.30	Somewhat a Problem
Having enough capital for marketing	2.58	1.33	Minor Problem
Dealing with increased competition	2.56	1.32	Minor Problem
Obtaining liability insurance	2.32	1.37	Minor Problem
Obtaining permission for roadside signage	2.24	1.40	Minor Problem
Maintaining visitor safety	2.24	1.08	Minor Problem
Obtaining required permits or licenses	2.14	1.14	Minor Problem
Providing excellent customer service	2.11	1.21	Minor Problem
Maintaining good relationships with neighbors	1.97	1.15	Minor Problem
Working with family members	1.67	0.97	Minor Problem

Note. *N* = 165.

Subjective Norms: Community Perception of the Business

Respondents indicated the most prevalent community perception was their business contributes to the growth and success of the local community ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.94$), followed by providing educational resources ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.20$). Table 4 presents the respondents' beliefs regarding how their community perceives their agritourism business.

Table 4***Agritourism Business Owners' Beliefs of Community Perceptions of Their Business***

Community Perceptions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Contributes Growth and Success	4.03	0.94	Somewhat Agree
Provides Educational Resources	3.98	1.20	Somewhat Agree
Increases Recreation Facilities	3.77	1.26	Somewhat Agree
Creates Job Opportunities	3.50	1.33	Somewhat Agree
Preserves Historic Buildings	3.03	1.47	Neither Agree nor Disagree

Note. *N* = 165.

Intention to Expand the Agritourism Business

Respondents indicated their highest level of agreement with the statement of being optimistic about the future of agritourism in Kansas ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.77$). Table 5 presents the respondents' intentions to expand their agritourism business.

Table 5***Agritourism Business Owners Intentions to Expand Their Agritourism Business***

Intentions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
I am optimistic about the future of the agritourism industry in Kansas	4.43	0.77	Somewhat Agree
My goals include attracting more customers to my enterprise	4.34	0.89	Somewhat Agree
I expect my sales from agritourism to increase in the future	4.28	0.92	Somewhat Agree
I plan to expand the number of products, attractions, or services offered at my business in the next 5 years	4.08	1.07	Somewhat Agree
I plan to exit the agritourism industry in the next 5 years	1.96	1.29	Somewhat Disagree

Note. *N* = 165.

Correlation between TPB Constructs and Intention to Expand the Business

Results of Spearman's rank-order correlation tests presented in Table 6 show measures of motivations for having an agritourism business, community perception of the business, and barriers to business expansion were positively and significantly correlated with intention to expand the agritourism business. The strength of the associations was moderate (attitude) to low (subjective norms and perceived behavioral control) (Davis, 1971).

Table 6***Correlations Between Intention and the Measures of Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control***

Measures of TPB Constructs	Intention to Expand Business (<i>r_s</i>)	<i>p</i>
Attitude: Goals for having an agritourism business	.310	<.001*
Subjective norms: Community perception of the business	.206	.008*
Perceived behavioral control: Barriers to business expansion	.162	.037*

Note. *N* = 165, *Statistical significance was set *a priori* at .05.

Predicting Intention to Expand the Business based on TPB Constructs

Multiple linear regression was used to determine how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control predict agritourism business owners' intention to expand. The statistically significant model ($F = 36.36$, $p = <.001$) revealed the combination of predictor variables explained 39.9% ($R^2 = .399$) of the variance of intention to expand the business with a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). Of the predictor variables, a significant and positive relationship was observed between attitude ($p = <.001$) and intention to expand as well as perceived behavioral control ($p = <.001$) and intention to expand as shown in Table 7.

Table 7*Regression Analysis for TPB Constructs on Agritourism Business Owners' Intention to Expand*

Variables	β	Std. Error	<i>t</i>	Std. β	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	1.68	.206	8.185		<.001*
Attitude	.351	.062	5.634	.432	<.001*
Subjective Norms	.068	.054	1.258	.095	.210
Perceived behavioral control	.246	.067	3.664	.244	<.001*

Note. *Statistical significance was set *a priori* at .05. $R^2 = .399$, $F(3, 164) = 36.26$, $p < .001$.

RQ2: What is the importance of communication channels to agritourism business owners to promote their business?

Importance of In-Person, Digital, and Print Communication Channels

Respondents indicated the most important communication channel to promoting their agritourism business was in-person, word of mouth ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 0.60$), followed by digital, Facebook ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.37$). Table 8 presents the respondents' perceived importance of communication channels used to promote their agritourism business.

Table 8*Agritourism Business Owners Perceived Importance of Communication Channels*

Communication Channels	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
In-person			
Word of Mouth	5.73	0.60	Extremely Important
Special Events / Festivals	4.19	1.80	Moderately Important
Kansas Agritourism Program	3.76	1.37	Moderately Important
Locals Farmers Market	3.21	2.12	Slightly Important
Digital			
Facebook	5.11	1.37	Very Important
Facebook Ads	3.67	2.07	Moderately Important
Email List	3.43	1.88	Slightly Important
Instagram	3.26	1.87	Slightly Important
Google Ads	2.19	1.71	Not At All Important
TikTok	2.04	1.53	Not At All Important
Instagram Ads	1.95	1.57	Not At All Important
Blogs	1.75	1.31	Not At All Important
Radio Ads	1.72	1.31	Not At All Important
Twitter	1.69	1.29	Not At All Important
TV Ads	1.61	1.33	Not At All Important
Online Deals	1.50	1.22	Not At All Important
Print			
Printed Handout Materials	4.13	1.46	Moderately Important
Tourism Attraction Road Signage	3.66	1.79	Moderately Important
Region / Local Tourism Guide	3.45	1.69	Slightly Important
Agricultural Publications	2.68	1.71	Slightly Important

Communication Channels	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Billboards	2.62	1.90	Slightly Important
Direct Mail	2.38	1.74	Not At All Important
Newspaper Ads	2.21	1.55	Not At All Important
Coupons	2.12	1.57	Not At All Important

Note. *N* = 165.

Correlation between Communicational Channel Importance and Intention to Expand

Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between agritourism business owners' perceived importance of communication channels to promote their business and their intention to expand their business. There was a significant, moderate, positive association between importance and intention ($r_s(164) = .322, p = <.001$) (Davis, 1971).

Correlation between Number of Communicational Channels Used and Intention to Expand

Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the number of communication channels agritourism business owners' use to promote their business and their intention to expand their business. There was a significant, low, positive association between importance and intention ($r_s(164) = .184, p = .018$) (Davis, 1971).

Discussion

This study assessed the determinants that inform Kansas agritourism business owners' intention to expand their business. There were positive, significant relationships between agritourism business owners' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control and their intention to expand their business. In agreement with TPB, the combination of the determinant constructs was also predictive of intention to expand the business. In particular, the results indicated attitudes and perceived behavioral control were significant predictors of intention to expand the business, with attitudes being the strongest predictor. There were also significant, positive relationships between the importance and use of communication channels related to intention to expand the business. Based on our findings, the firmest determinants of agritourism business owners' intention to expand their business are the importance of their goals for having a business and how problematic they perceive the barriers are to operating it.

The significant positive correlation and significant predictive capability between attitude and intention to expand the business indicates the more important business goals were to the owner, the greater their intention to expand their agritourism business, consistent with TPB (Ajzen, 2005). The most important goals for respondents were capturing new customers, interacting with them, and generating additional income. This finding indicates agritourism operators are driven to draw in more customers for social and economic gain. Previous literature has not explicitly found agritourism operators to be customer-focused, but rather identified financial, consumer interaction, and personal goals are intertwined and counter-weighted for agritourism operators (Quella et al., 2021). While operators need customers for their business to thrive financially, they also need them for personal satisfaction. Our findings further illuminate those interwoven goals found in the literature. Previous agritourism operator research has found expansion decisions are motivated by both extrinsic factors such as financial goals or intrinsic motivations related to maximizing a lifestyle and meeting new people (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Maksymov, 2017; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Quella et al., 2021; Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

There was a positive, significant correlation and significant predictive capability between perceived behavioral control and intention to expand the business. Informed by the TPB model, it seems the greater the operational challenges faced by agritourism operators, the higher their intention to expand the business (Azjen, 2005). While this may seem like a contradictory finding, it is consistent with those of DeLay et al. (2019). They found that regardless of barriers faced by agritourism business owners, they still had a positive intention to expand business development. Three of the four most prominent barriers to business establishment or expansion were related to communications and marketing efforts. Miller et al. (2023) found agritourism operators in Oklahoma were confident in their current marketing efforts, but perhaps this study's respondents were more aware of areas they want to improve in order to expand their business. The third most prominent barrier was *having enough capital for infrastructure*. Financial stability is crucial for agritourism business owners (Hollas et al., 2022) so perhaps adding infrastructure was perceived as desirable, but too expensive in light of the many other expenses operators have to manage. Generating more income was found to be one of the prominent motivations for being in business, so agritourism operators may not have the financial resources to expand (DeLay et al., 2019).

Our findings regarding barriers to business expansion are consistent with some previous literature (Maksymov, 2017), but contradict others who found liability, regulations, zoning laws to be the most prominent barriers (DeLay et al., 2019; Hollas et al. 2022). This difference may lie in the differing populations and state agritourism programs examined in these studies. Kansas Agritourism Program businesses receive limited liability coverage as a part of their registration.

A positive, significant correlation between subjective norm and intention suggests the greater the perceived community support, the higher the agritourism expansion intention of operators, which would be consistent with TPB (Azjen, 2005). However, the association was weak (Davis, 1971) and the relationship was not found to be significantly predictive, so a bi-directional nature of the relationship should be explored. It may also be as business owner's intention to expand grows, the more they perceive they have the community support to do so. The strongest community perception belief held by respondents was *my business contributes growth and success to the local economy*. This finding is consistent with the literature describing economic contributions as one of the most prominent benefits of agritourism to a community system (Hardesty, 2018; Hassan et al., 2022; Lorenzo, 2017; Ramsey, 2006).

The findings indicate Kansas agritourism business owners perceive, overall, in-person communication channels as the most important to their communications and marketing efforts, consistent with previous studies (Bernardo et al. 2004; Miller et al., 2012). Agritourism business owners have historically indicated the importance of word-of-mouth communication because the quality experience visitors receive is then relayed to friends and family via word-of-mouth (Hilchey & Kuehn, 1999). Consistent with the findings of Miller et al. (2023) and Wilson (2016), Facebook is the social media platform of choice for agritourism promotion by owners which broadens business' ability to appeal to billions of users. While newer social-media platforms are proliferating around the world, attracting younger demographics, Facebook remains a reliable communication channel for the dispersed populations in rural areas who often have limited or no access to local newspapers (Collier & Graham, 2022). Successful agritourism relies upon effective marketing that uses promotional channels and materials tailored to needs of diverse possible audiences (Joyner et al., 2018).

The positive, significant correlation between the importance of communication channels and the intention to expand the business indicates the greater the importance of communication channels to the operator, the higher their intention to expand the business. There was also a

positive, significant relationship between the number of communication channels used and intention to expand. The directional nature of these relationships are supported by literature (Tew & Barbieri, 2012), but not by theory, so the reverse of these relationships should also be considered. Business owners who intend to expand their business may place a greater importance on communication channels, and use a greater number of them to promote their business. Nevertheless, the findings suggest Kansas agritourism operators are positioned to realize the benefits of a multi-modal communications effort (Giray et al., 2019; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Tiago et al., 2021).

Though communication and marketing barriers were found to be the most prominent, paying for them was perceived as a lesser, minor problem. Miller et al. (2023) found that agritourism operators, “are quick to recognize marketing methods that are not producing the desired results relative to the costs of implementation” (p. 9). Some channels do not require a financial investment but rather an investment of time and effort. These types of channels, specifically word-of-mouth and Facebook, were found to be the most important to respondent agritourism operators. However, Rilla et al. (2011) found printed handout materials and websites were among the most effective modes of marketing for agritourism. Jensen et al., (2013) reported farms who participated in collaborative, regional branding efforts experienced increased sales. As a part of the Kansas Agritourism Program, our respondents may be receiving uncaptured benefits from state-led promotions of agritourism.

Conclusions

The findings of this research emphasize the importance and influence of business goals, community support, barriers to business, and communication channels perceived by Kansas agritourism operators related to their intention to expand their business. Their underlying beliefs in these areas impact their perceptions of the future of their business (Azjen, 2005). While respondent business owners want to serve more customers, they are uncertain about communication and marketing tactics best suited for this goal. Agritourism operators are currently trying a variety of communication strategies and find them important to their business. The business owners’ goals coupled with perceptions of community support point to a largely untapped potential to develop a coordinated, strategic, multi-modal communications plan that effectively targets agritourism businesses’ audiences (Hardesty, 2018).

Recommendations

The study illuminates opportunities for future research. This line of research should be extended to investigate if the TPB model constructs differ between groups within agritourism business owners, such as conventional and alternative farmers as well as ethnic groups (Peroff et al., 2022). In addition, because of the importance of financial stability for businesses, how these constructs and intention to expand differs based on agritourism owners’ access to financial resources should be explored. A qualitative study would allow agritourism business owners to give a rich description of the beliefs they hold, how they inform their intention to expand their business, and the needs they have to realize growth. It would be advantageous to identify ways in which agritourism business owners would most benefit from education and outreach efforts aimed at helping them harness communication channels to capture new customers. Research needs to be conducted to determine how the agritourism operators use communication channels

to promote their business, if they are participating in regional branding efforts, their level of understanding and investment in the costs of those channels, and if those methods are preferred by customers. While this study focused on established agritourism business owners, there should be an investigation of the goals, barriers, and perceived community support perceived by farmers and ranchers who want to establish an agritourism business so resources can be created and tailored to their needs.

Investigation of actual community perceptions as well as social and economic contributions of agritourism businesses is needed to assess the impact of agritourism within local systems. Such an exploration would help address one of the limitations of this study, which is that self-reported data was used for analysis and may have led to a social desirability bias. Although data collection was online and anonymous, respondents may still have over-expressed their perceptions due to social acceptability (Helmets et al., 2015). Future studies should include different sources of information (e.g., actual visitors, community members, agritourism employees).

For agricultural communication practitioners seeking to improve agritourism business operators' intent to expand their business and harness communication channels for promotion, a key finding is the two factors have a positive relationship. Agritourism business owners see the value of using a multi-modal communication approach to reaching their goals, but they are concerned about effectively using promotion and marketing efforts to reach target customers. Agricultural communicators have an opportunity to address this barrier through trainings and resources tailored to specific operations (Miller et al., 2023) as well as showing how other agritourism operators use communication channels effectively for marketing (Iffländer & Fretschner, 2019). By supporting and facilitating interaction among agritourism operators, they build networks that give their businesses a higher chance of success (Hardesty, 2018). Those interested in the entrepreneurial development of agritourism in Kansas should educational content emphasizing promotional strategies to attract and interact with customers. These topics harness the most important goals and barriers reported by respondents and maximizes the influence of attitudes and perceived behavioral control on the agritourism business owners' intention to expand.

One of the primary limitations of this study is the generalizability of results beyond registered Kansas Agritourism Program participants. Because of the many activities agritourism businesses offer, our sample may not accurately represent the types of businesses present in Kansas. Thus, we recommend Kansas tourism agencies and organizations partner to take a complete inventory of owners and their businesses engaged in agritourism. Such an endeavor could strengthen community- and state-level systems to support and develop the underlying beliefs informing agritourism business owners' intention to join in the growth of the industry.

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