

Exploring Agritourism Entrepreneurship Strategies: Antecedents and Consequences

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Abstract

In response to declining farm incomes and economic restructuring, farm-based agritourism entrepreneurial ventures are increasingly seen as one of the most popular nontraditional strategies to protect farming incomes against market fluctuation. Thus, farmers have increasingly realized the importance of entrepreneurial skills and capabilities to remain competitive. However, limited studies have been taken to explore the applicability of specific entrepreneurship strategies in agritourism context. The purpose of the present study was to establish and test a theoretical model that illustrates the relationship between entrepreneurship strategies (defenders and analyzers), and their antecedents (locus of control, firm profitability, market driven propensity, need for achievement, and innovation) and consequences (economic impact, joint marketing, environmental sustainability, and public awareness). A total of 527 usable responses were collected for statistical analysis with a two-step structural equation modeling (SEM). The results showed that all the five antecedents have significant impacts on both defender and analyzer strategies. Analyzer strategies show more competitiveness advantages than defender strategies. The study provides a theoretical foundation for future studies on agritourism businesses and also gives guidance for the entrepreneurial-oriented behavior of agritourism business owners.

Keywords: Agritourism, Entrepreneurship, Business strategies, Defenders, Analyzers.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, economic restructuring and the farming crisis have reduced opportunities for agricultural farmers. These changes have limited the economic development options of rural communities, forcing many to look for nontraditional ways of economic sustainability (Flora & Flora, 2014). One of the most popular nontraditional rural development strategies has been tourism and its associated entrepreneurship opportunities. Examples of agritourism entrepreneurial ventures include outdoor recreation (e.g., hunting), educational experiences (e.g., wine tastings), entertainment (e.g., corn mazes), hospitality services (e.g., farm/ranch stays), on-farm direct sales (e.g., roadside stands), and off-the-farm direct sales (e.g., farmer markets) (Meert et al., 2005). Although it has been widely accepted that agritourism entrepreneurial venues show significant economic development potential, many farmers are unsuccessful in running agritourism businesses due to a lack of understanding of entrepreneurship concepts and strategies (Colton & Bissix, 2005; McGehee & Kim, 2004).

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As suggested by Mcelwee (2006, p. 187), farms and other agricultural businesses “have recognized the need for a more entrepreneurial culture in the farming business...” Although some previous studies have investigated entrepreneurship strategies in general (e.g., Ireland, Covin, & Kuratko, 2009), limited attempts have been made to explore the applicability of specific entrepreneurship strategies in the agritourism context. Furthermore, the effectiveness and efficiency of entrepreneurship strategies should also be evaluated by considering their influential factors and resulting benefits to individual entrepreneurs, communities, and society as a whole. However, to the knowledge of the authors, only sporadic previous studies have investigated entrepreneurship strategies in agritourism businesses via a holistic approach. The purpose of the present study was to fill this research gap.

The present research established and tested a theoretical model that illustrates the relationships between entrepreneurship strategies and their antecedents and consequences. The results are anticipated to provide guidance for farmers and other rural residents in improving the long-term profitability of agritourism businesses. The present study also offers a theoretical foundation for future research on entrepreneurship in the tourism industry. The specific objectives of this research were to: 1) understand two entrepreneurship strategies (defenders and analyzers); 2) discuss the impacts of five entrepreneurship characteristics (locus of control, firm profitability, market-driven propensity, need for achievement, and innovation) as antecedents of entrepreneurship strategies; and 3) assess the influence of the two entrepreneurship strategies on four consequential factors (economic impact, joint marketing, environmental sustainability, and public awareness).

Literature review

Entrepreneurship Strategy Typologies in the Tourism Industry

Entrepreneurship is defined as a holistic procedure of creating and building an independent enterprise by utilizing resources (Gilad, 1982; McClelland & Koestner, 1992). Entrepreneurship reflects a firm's propensity to engage in innovative, proactive, risk-seeking, autonomous, and aggressive activities to achieve its strategic objectives (Hoy, 1997). Entrepreneurship significantly influences business strategies (Jayasinghe, Thomas, & Wickramasinghe, 2008), marketing approaches (De Kok & Uhlaner, 2001), and marketplace competitiveness (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Sorensen & Sorenson, 2003). A cornerstone entrepreneurship framework is Miles' and Snow's (1986) typology in which they identified four types of entrepreneurship strategies: prospectors, defenders, analyzers, and reactors. Prospectors are defined as organizations that tend to strive for new capacities and critical niches in the marketplace to prevail over competitors (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Defenders focus on efficiency through standardized practices in operations by utilizing their expertise in their own domain, rather than on effectiveness stemming from creativity and new opportunities outside of their domain (Noble et al., 2002; Rumelt, 2005). Analyzer strategies are a state between prospectors and defenders that combine prospectors' strengths in introducing innovative, higher-quality, or lower-priced products to the marketplace with defenders' potencies in maximizing resource utility for their entrepreneurial activities (Dees, 2002). Reactors describe organizations in which decision-makers imminently react to changes or risks in the marketplace but do not adjust their tactics to them (Meert et al., 2005; Gilmore et al., 2002).

Several researchers have argued that not all four strategies can be applied to the tourism industry due to its unique business characteristics (e.g., variability, perishability) (Dev, 1988; Schaffer, 1986). Among the four types, analyzers and defenders have been proven to be applicable to the tourism industry as shown in several studies (Varadarajan, 2010; Colton & Bissix, 2005; Lise, 2001).

Influential Factors of Entrepreneurship Strategies

Previous studies in business management have investigated the diverse factors that impact the choice of entrepreneurship strategies (e.g., Ireland, Covin, & Kuratko, 2009). Five studies have evaluated the context of the tourism industry specifically, investigating the factors of locus of control (Shaver & Scott, 1991), firm profitability (Clarke, 1999), market-driven propensity (Morrison et al., 2003), need for achievement (Pearlin, 1989), and innovation (McKercher, 1999). These five influential components are discussed in the subsequent subsections.

Locus of Control

Locus of control describes a general belief that an individual holds a degree of control over his or her own destiny (Rotter, 1966). Locus of control determines perceptual alertness and the ability to see opportunities in the

environment (Gilad, 1982). Morris et al. (2002) suggested that an individual with an internal locus of control is inclined to confront rather than passively accept a negative external environment. As such, locus of control is viewed as a characteristic of entrepreneurs (Schjoedt & Shaver, 2012).

Profitability

Profitability is the status of yielding a financial gain (Soininen, Martikainen, Puumalainen, & Kyläheiko, 2012). Profitability and growth is the goal of entrepreneurial firms (Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984). Moreover, in a complicated business environment in which various stakeholders exert influence on firm performance, profit maximization enhances shareholder value and promotes entrepreneurship success (Gilmore, Carson, & Cummins, 2002).

Market-driven Propensity

Market-driven propensity is customer-oriented and shows a firm's tendency to adapt their marketing strategies as needed (Hult, Ketchen, & Slater, 2005; O'Cass & Ngo, 2007). Marketing strategies may include investigating consumer needs and wants; strengthening consumer satisfaction and loyalty; and analyzing competition and consumer trends (O'Cass & Ngo, 2007). These market-driven strategies contribute to the sustainability and long-term growth of a business (Chang & Chen, 1998; Hult, Ketchen, & Slater, 2005).

Need for Achievement

Need for achievement is the impetus that motivates individuals to strive for success and outstanding performance (Sagie & Elizur, 1999). Individuals with the need for achievement show a strong drive to solve problems, demonstrate high performance in challenging tasks, and seek efficient ways to improve performance (Littunen, 2000; Utsch & Rauch, 2000). Miller and Toulouse (1986) indicated that need for achievement is central in determining entrepreneurship and decision-making strategies.

Innovation

Innovation describes a series of actions to invent and commercialize new products or ideas (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Successful innovations guide businesses toward industry evolutions. Innovations aim to achieve lower costs and higher-quality outputs as a strategically competitive advantage (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005). Roehrich (2004) suggested that innovativeness is one of the most significant components of the entrepreneurial personality.

Consequences of Entrepreneurship Strategies

Entrepreneurship strategies aim to achieve a variety of unique benefits and competitive advantages for businesses (Antonicic, 2006; Ireland, Covin, & Kuratko, 2009). Among the consequential factors, four important elements most relevant to the tourism industry are incorporated in the present study, including economic impact (Clarke, 1999), joint marketing (Rothaermel & Deeds, 2006), environmental sustainability (Powell & Ham, 2008), and public awareness (Colton & Bissix, 2005; McGehee & Kim, 2004). Each of the four components is discussed in the following subsections.

Economic Impact

Brüderl and Preisendrfer (1998, p. 219) suggested that "farm-based tourism is typically viewed as one way of boosting family incomes". Income derived from the provision of agritourism services is supplemental for many farm families and helps level income flow by producing a combination of profitable income in both the agriculture and tourism industry sectors during market fluctuations (Greenbank, 1999; Sorensen & Sorenson, 2003).

Marketing Alliances

A marketing alliance is a joint agreement among enterprises to work together to achieve strategic objectives (Rao, Qu, & Ruekert, 1999; Rothaermel & Deeds, 2006). Sivadas and Dwyer (2000) indicated that a marketing alliance is structured in one of two approaches. The first approach is as a distinct corporate entity in which alliance partners hold equity positions. The second is as a distinct inter-organizational entity to which the organizational partners commit resources and skills without sharing equity in the relationship (Varadarajan & Cunningham, 1995).

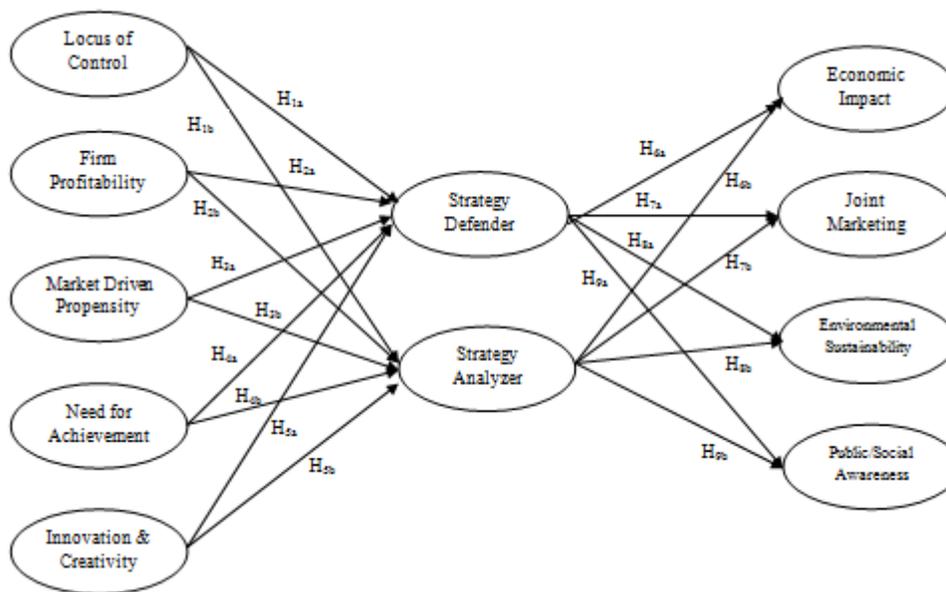
Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability aims to ensure that tourism development remains a positive influence on local communities, tourists, agritourism enterprises, and other tourism entities, while avoiding damage to the environmental systems of farms and rural areas (Nickerson et al., 2001). Environmental safeguards against potential problems in agritourism include conserving natural resources, saving energy, protecting local environments, precluding engaging in livelihoods that are a threat to the ecosystem, and avoiding capacity overload during peak production periods (Lee & Moscardo, 2005; Powell & Ham, 2008).

Public Awareness

Agritourism helps educate the public about the importance of agriculture to the economy of the local community and to quality of life (Colton & Bissix, 2005; McGehee & Kim, 2004). When tourists participate in agritourism activities, they are likely to show increasing political and social support for the agricultural economy (Marques, 2006). Moreover, such awareness can reduce conflicts over agriculture practices and strengthen public support for rural communities (Hegarty & Przezbórska, 2005). Based on the literature above, eighteen hypotheses regarding influential factors of entrepreneurship strategies and their consequences were proposed. The conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual Model



Methods

Survey Instrument

The final questionnaire used in the present study included four sections: (1) influential factors of entrepreneurship; (2) entrepreneurship strategies; (3) consequences of entrepreneurship strategies; and (4) demographic and other respondent information. The first section of the questionnaire was comprised of five influential factors of entrepreneurship in agritourism businesses (locus of control, profitability, market-driven propensity, need for achievement, and innovation).

Locus of control (three items), profitability (three items), market-driven propensity (three items), need for achievement (three items), and innovation (four items) were adapted from Schjoedt and Shaver (2012); Menguc and Auh (2008); Hult, Ketchen, and Slater (2005); Zeffane (2013); and Morone and Testa (2008), respectively. The second section of the survey included two entrepreneurship strategies: defenders and analyzers. The measurement items of the two constructs were adopted from Miles and Snow (1986) and Colton and Bissix (2005), respectively.

The third section investigated four consequential factors of entrepreneurship: economic impact, environment sustainability, joint marketing, and public awareness. The items of the first two constructs were adapted from Sorensen and Sorenson (2003), while the third and fourth constructs were evaluated with items from Rothaermel and Deeds (2006). All of the items in sections 1-3 were measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The last part of the survey elicited demographic and other information from respondents regarding education, gender, age, and size/type of businesses operated by the respondents.

Data Collection

The preliminary questionnaire was pilot tested with a convenience sample of 30 farmers at the Young Farmer Conference in the state of Iowa from December 21- 23, 2012. Minor modifications in the wording of the questionnaire were made based on the feedback provided by respondents in the pre-test. With the assistance of the Iowa Farm Bureau, the final survey questionnaire was distributed to the participants of four farming and agricultural conferences in January 2013 in Iowa; namely, the Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference from January 3 - 6; the Iowa Women in Agriculture Annual Women's Conference from January 18 - 20; the Iowa Organic Conference from January 3 - 6; and the Annual Beginning Farmers Conference from January 24 - 26. Four researchers were trained to distribute the survey via a one-on-one interview approach at each of the conferences. The respondents were required to be at least 18 years of age. Prior to starting the first part of the survey, participants were asked to answer a screening question: Have you had ever operated an agritourism business? Only those who responded that they had been or were operators of agritourism businesses at the time of the study were eligible to complete the questionnaire. A total of 584 questionnaires were collected. After deleting invalid surveys, 527 responses were retained for further analysis.

Data Analysis

A two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis process was conducted. In step one, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test whether the measured variables adequately represented the number of constructs. Step two involved SEM to analyze and evaluate causal relationships by combining statistical data and qualitative causal assumptions (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Results

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the respondent profile. Respondents were predominantly males (89%) with female representing 11% of the sample. The majority of the respondents were in the range of 35-49 years of age (80.65%), followed by the second largest age group of 30-34 years of age (9.68%). The majority of the respondents indicated that they possessed agriculture-related education (23%) or business-related education (30.2%). The majority of the respondents reported that the numbers of employees hired in the agritourism businesses were 3-4 (59.6%), followed by 1-2 (26.9%), 5-6 (12.9%), and more than 7 (0.6%). In terms of the types of agritourism businesses, the majority of respondents (63.5%) were family businesses, followed by self-employed/independent contractors (28.4%), and partnerships (8.1%).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic Characteristics	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender (<i>n</i> =527)			
	Male	469	89
	Female	58	11
Age (<i>n</i> =527)			
	18-29	32	6.1
	30-34	51	9.7
	35-39	178	33.7
	40-44	155	29.4
	45-49	92	17.5
	50-54	12	2.3
	55-59	5	0.9
	60+	2	0.4
Education Field (<i>n</i> =527)			
	Agriculture related	356	67.6
	Business related	159	30.2
	Other	12	2.2
Agriourism Business (<i>n</i> =527)			
	Family business	334	63.5
	Self-employed/Independent contractor	151	28.4
	Partnership	42	8.1
	Management team	0	0.0
# of employees (<i>n</i> =527)			
	1-2	142	26.9
	3-4	314	59.6
	5-6	68	12.9
	7-8	3	0.6
	9+	0	0.0

Validity and Reliability

Construct validity was investigated with convergent validity and discriminate validity. All of the confirmatory factor loadings were significant at the 0.001 level (Table 2), which shows satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) values with the squared correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results showed that the squared correlations between pairs of constructs were all less than the AVEs, which indicated acceptable discriminant validity. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test individual item reliability (Table 2). The Cronbach's alpha of the 13 constructs in the present study ranged from 0.87 to 0.92, all above the 0.7 cutoff. The composite reliability of the 13 constructs ranged from 0.82 to 0.97 and were all above the 0.7 cutoff. The AVE of the 13 constructs ranged from 0.68 to 0.85 and were all above the minimum point of 0.5 (Table 3).

Table 2 Scale/Item Measurement Properties

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	CFA Item Loading
Locus of control	LC1	0.88	0.94	0.79	0.921***
	LC2				0.947***
	LC3				0.803***
Firm Profitability	FP1	0.87	0.95	0.83	0.894***
	FP2				0.897***
	FP3				0.945***
Market Driven	MD1	0.92	0.94	0.81	0.828***
	MD2				0.912***
	MD3				0.952***
Need for Achievement	NA1	0.87	0.92	0.82	0.895***
	NA2				0.947***
	NA3				0.884***
Innovation/Creativity	IC1	0.88	0.93	0.77	0.854***
	IC2				0.871***
	IC3				0.915***
	IC4				0.884***
Strategy Defender	SD1	0.89	0.92	0.72	0.831***
	SD2				0.901***
	SD3				0.802***
	SD4				0.838***
	SD5				0.880***
Strategy Analyzer	SA1	0.91	0.95	0.85	0.931***
	SA2				0.898***
	SA3				0.913***
	SA4				0.957***
	SA5				0.925***
Economic Impact	E11	0.88	0.94	0.78	0.964***
	E12				0.795***
Joint Marketing	JM1	0.92	0.93	0.81	0.828***
	JM2				0.942***
	JM3				0.952***
	JM4				0.878***
Environmental Sustainability	EM1	0.87	0.90	0.68	0.846***
	EM2				0.807***
Social (public) Awareness	SA1	0.92	0.94	0.79	0.894***
	SA2				0.881***

Note: *** Significant at the .001 level.

Table 3 Latent Variable Squared Correlation Matrix

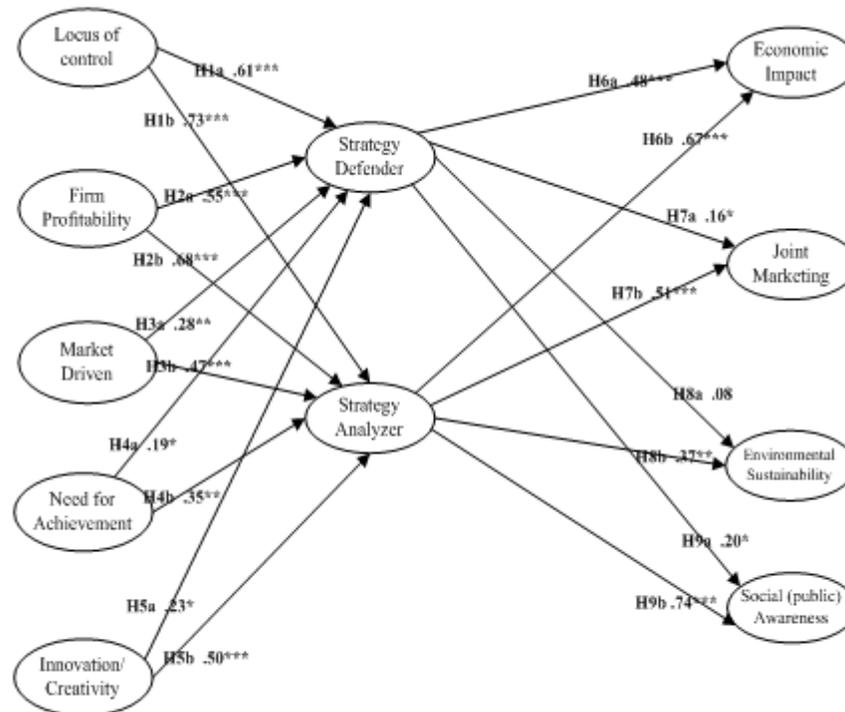
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Locus of Control	0.79										
2. Firm Profitability	0.20	0.83									
3. Market Driven	0.25	0.27	0.81								
4. Need for Achievement	0.26	0.28	0.36	0.82							
5. Innovation/Creativity	0.41	0.22	0.40	0.34	0.77						
6. Strategy Defender	0.51	0.52	0.54	0.60	0.61	0.72					
7. Strategy Analyzer	0.78	0.65	0.61	0.72	0.45	0.63	0.85				
8. Economic Impact	0.69	0.58	0.56	0.59	0.72	0.50	0.54	0.78			
9. Joint marketing	0.71	0.54	0.44	0.63	0.69	0.66	0.48	0.87	0.81		
10. Environmental sustainability	0.54	0.60	0.61	0.52	0.41	0.51	0.65	0.22	0.36	0.68	
11. Social (public) Awareness	0.37	0.49	0.50	0.27	0.35	0.24	0.29	0.15	0.61	0.65	0.79

Entries under the diagonals are the latent construct correlations. Entries on the diagonal are AVE.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The results of the CFA model ($\chi^2 (391) = 1127.644$, $p=0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.884$, $GFI=0.929$, $AGFI=0.921$, $NFI= 0.913$, $CFI=0.919$, $RMSEA=0.041$) indicated an acceptable fit between the model and data (Figure 2). The standardized coefficients of all of the paths were found to be significant at the 0.001 level. The correlations among the eleven latent constructs in the CFA ranged from 0.337 to 0.737.

Figure 2 Standardized Coefficients for Paths in the Conceptual Model



Nota. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The results of the SEM are illustrated in Figure 3 and indicated satisfactory model fit ($\chi^2(391) = 1217.965$, $p = 0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 3.115$, $GFI = 0.916$, $AGFI = 0.908$, $NFI = 0.912$, $CFI = 0.904$, $RMSEA = 0.047$). The standardized path coefficients (β) for all of the path coefficients were significantly positive at the 0.001 or 0.05 level. All of the hypotheses were supported except H8a (defender strategy \rightarrow environmental sustainability) ($\beta = 0.08$).

Conclusion and implications

Based on the empirical results of the structural equation modeling (SEM), the present study confirms that all of the hypothesized relationships except H8a (defender strategies \rightarrow environmental sustainability) were supported. First, all of the five factors (locus of control, firm profitability, market-driven propensity, need for achievement, and innovation) were found to significantly influence the entrepreneurship strategies of defenders and analyzers. Generally, the five factors have more significant impacts on analyzer strategies than on defender strategies. Second, this study demonstrated positively significant relationships between the two entrepreneurship strategies and agritourism business competitiveness. Specifically, defender strategies show the most significant impact on economic impact and do not significantly influence environmental sustainability (acceptance of H6a and rejection of H8a), while analyzer strategies showed the most significant impact on public awareness and the least significant impact on environmental sustainability (acceptance of H9b and H8b). The present study offers significant theoretical contributions.

It integrated the primary influential factors of entrepreneurship from general management studies into a research model designed for agritourism businesses and extended the research body in the hospitality and tourism industries, in which only sporadic previous studies have examined business owners' entrepreneurship strategies using social psychology concepts (e.g., locus of control and personal pursuits). Moreover, this study employed dual routes of business strategies (defenders and analyzers) which are especially applicable to agritourism businesses. Local government agencies (e.g., the Farm Bureau), not-for-profit organizations (e.g., the National Farmer Union), and higher education institutions (e.g., extension departments of land-grant universities) should initiate educational/training programs to help farmers achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations in agritourism businesses.

Such programs should provide entrepreneurs with an emphasis on the five intrinsic factors identified in the present study. The curriculum of educational programs should focus on teaching participants to attain new entrepreneurial skill sets (e.g., market-driven propensity and innovation), strengthen their control of the business environment (locus of control), and pursue business success (firm profitability). Moreover, social networks, online communities, conferences/symposiums, and panel discussions could be incorporated into the programs in order to share information and opportunities; provide social support; and bolster personal empowerment and growth (need for achievement).

Support from local or federal government offices could not only assist in the sustainable development of agritourism businesses, but also stimulate innovations in products and services. For example, government offices could provide financial assistance to promote innovation in agritourism start-up businesses. Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), initiated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is a good example of government support for innovative projects in rural community-building programs. Compared with defender strategies, analyzer strategies show more significant impacts on all four competitive advantages. Therefore, agritourism entrepreneurs are particularly encouraged to adopt analyzer strategies. Specifically, entrepreneurs should focus on efficiency and productivity when the market is stable, and move into new domains by evaluating their competitors' activities and strategies when the market is dynamic. However, defender strategies show no significant effect on environmental sustainability, one of the four competitive advantages, while in contrast, analyzer-oriented businesses are willing to incorporate environmental issues into their strategic decisions. Increasing environmental concerns from the public make businesses aware of the importance of being socially responsible regarding the environment, which is especially true for businesses in rural areas (Esty & Winston, 2006). Businesses' commitment to environmental protection can strengthen relationships between customers, employees, and the local community, as well as contribute to the sustainable development of their specific industry sector.

Limitations and future research

Several primary limitations of the present study should be taken into account. First, the study investigated only agritourism businesses. Therefore, diverse types of businesses in the hospitality and tourism industries should be examined in future research. Second, the sample investigated was comprised of only agritourism business owners in the state of Iowa. Future studies could draw a broader sample in other U.S. states. Third, socio-demographic variables (e.g., farm household income, household farm attachment, and farm household composition) should be included in future studies in order to obtain a more thorough analysis of entrepreneurship strategies. Last but not least important, future research may be extended to investigate additional consequences of entrepreneurship strategies, such as brand commitment, brand equity, place attachment, and other consequences.

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