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In search of optimum stimulation at sport events

Parmita Saha^a, Atanu Nath^a, Grzegorz Kwiatkowski^{a,b} and Ove Oklevik^a

^aWestern Norway University of Applied Sciences, Sogndal, Norway; ^bKoszalin University of Technology, Poland

ABSTRACT

Determining the reasons why people attend events, as well as characterizing visitors' attitudes and factors influencing their choices of particular events, are of key importance for event managers and destination management organizations. Accordingly, this study aimed to identify the factors influencing visitors' behavioural intention towards attending events. Theoretically, this study offers a reconceptualized model positing optimum stimulation and needs for variety as antecedents of motivation, going beyond the more classical approaches of focusing on attitude and behavioural intention. The proposed model was empirically tested in the context of a mountain sport event hosted in Norway, one in which participants were deemed to engage in both exploratory and non-exploratory behaviours. The results show a valid relationship between visitors' optimum stimulation level and their variety-seeking tendencies; these factors, in turn, influence motivation and have an indirect effect upon visitors' attitudes and behavioural intentions towards event participation.

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Optimum stimulation level; motivation; sport events; tourism; need for variety

Introduction

Sport events have become some of the fastest-growing attractions within the tourism sector in recent years, contributing to local communities' social and cultural lives and economic well-being (Kwiatkowski, 2016; Kwiatkowski, Diederich, & Oklevik, 2018). Communities organize various sport events to create recreational opportunities for their members and attract visitors/tourists. Such initiatives intend to promote local areas (Dragin-Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2019), generate business activities (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018), and support tourism development (Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009; Hall & Sharples, 2008) while also using these events as a tool for revitalization (Smith, 2012). Alongside these positive effects, sport events may also increase the civic pride of local communities (Atkinson, 2008; Duffy, 2005) while strengthening social cohesion among community members (Gibson, Connell, Waitt, & Walmsley, 2011). Finally, these events can link local structures with the global world and bring global innovation to local areas (Richards, 2017). Undoubtedly, the elevated status of sport events has encouraged

CONTACT Grzegorz Kwiatkowski  gregory.pl.kwiatkowski@gmail.com

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researchers to explore the motives behind visitors' decision to attend events to create a better fit between visitors' expectations and the event's content.

Motivation is crucial to understanding visitors' decision-making process, and it is considered to be an important element of this process in several sport- and tourism-related contexts (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Hsu, Cai, & Mimi, 2010; Lynch & Dibben, 2016). Motivation is also one of the crucial determinants of attitudinal and behavioural change (Kim & Brown, 2012), as well as consistent and long-lasting attitudes (Moorman & Matulich, 1993). Even though several well-executed studies have been conducted on event visitors' motivations, visitors' attitudes towards events have received less attention (Getz & Page, 2016; Gursoy, Spangenberg, & Rutherford, 2006). This lack of research is surprising, as studies focusing on interrelationships between several constructs related to visitors' experience have been indicated as particularly important for gaining a deeper understanding of visitors' behavioural intentions (Hussein, 2016). Indeed, previous research has explored the relationships between event motivation, attitude and behavioural intention (Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Zorzou et al., 2014). Attitude and motivation have been identified as important factors influencing individual decision-making within a sport experience context (Alexandris, Funk, & Pritchard, 2011). There are, however, limited studies on the relations between motivation and other behavioural factors, even though motivation is a vital part of consumer behaviour (Hsu et al., 2010). Consequently, a theoretical framework can illuminate factors leading to behaviour intention and account for how these factors interrelate with each other in behaviour formation. Since several factors lead to behaviour, it is not sufficient to consider only motivation and attitude in isolation to understand visitors' behavioural intentions (Huang & Hsu, 2009).

Against this background, the study aimed to identify factors influencing visitors' behavioural intention towards attending a (sporting) event. Drawing on *Theory of Planned Behavior* (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and the literature on tourist motivation and behaviour, this study offers a model positing optimum stimulation and need for variety as antecedents of motivation behind attitude and behavioural intention to attend sport events. Empirically, this study probed the presence and influence of optimum stimulation level (OSL) in the context of a mountain sports event, one in which participants were deemed to engage in both exploratory and non-exploratory behaviours.

Hence, the contributions of this study to the body of knowledge are twofold: First, this research allowed us to affirm any linkage between OSL and subsequent behaviour, thereby going beyond an exploratory approach. Second, incorporating a non-exploratory behavioural intention scale in the empirical study allowed us to investigate whether OSL also influences behaviour that is non-exploratory. To this end, this study adopted scale items related to hedonic consumption which, in turn, allowed us to strike a middle ground between pure exploratory non-utilitarian motives and utilitarian purchase-consumption motivations. Any presence or evidence of a relationship between OSL and behaviour thus measured could then set a stage for future investigations within the realm of non-exploratory behaviour. On the other hand, a relationship between OSL and other principal constructs, such as motivation, could provide the evidence that indeed a product-purchase-centric scale is robust enough for usage across application areas. A lack of such a relationship, by contrast, would underline the need for a rethinking and reformulation of the scale for non-product-purchase experience-based scenarios, since extant scales are product-purchase-oriented.

This article is structured as follows: First, the conceptual background of the study provides an overview of the relevant literature. Then, the research methodology that was employed in the study is discussed. The analysis and results are subsequently discussed together with practical and managerial implications. The paper concludes by outlining limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Tying together event motivation, attitude, and behavioural intention

Event motivation, attitude and behavioural intention constitute three complementary but distinct constructs frequently discussed separately in the event-management literature. This section aims to provide a conceptual integration of the abovementioned constructs in order to show a number of potential research gaps and unexplored research avenues.

Bearing in mind that motivation highlights and stimulates a person's behaviour related to needs and wants fulfilment, it is justifiable to assume that people engage in certain behaviours in order to fulfil a particular desire or need. In the case of events, motivation was identified as a vital element of selection in earlier research (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Dann, 1981). For example, Gibson (1998) distinguished between passive sport tourists and active sport tourist. The first group is driven by a need to watch the competition, whereas the second group is motivated by a need to participate in it.

Another classical approach refers to the push and pull factors as being part of the two motivational stages in travel decision-making (Dann, 1977), where push factors were identified as individuals' internal drivers, which create travel desires, and pull factors were identified as individuals' external drivers, by which actual destination choice is influenced. In the context of event attendance motivation, psychological benefits, such as the need to enjoy a day out, relaxation, having fun, and socializing, were identified as push factors, and attributes specific to an event, such as its setting, service, entertainment, and availability of parking facilities, were identified as pull motivational factors (Yuan, Cai, Morrison, & Linton, 2005). Push and pull motivation factors have been highlighted in most of the published literature dealing with motivation within the tourism and event sectors (Backman, Backman, Uysal, & Sunshine, 1995). Gyimóthy (2009) conducted a study at an extreme sports event in Norway, exploring visitors' profiles, motives and behaviour following a mixed-methods approach. Most common motivations identified in the study were entertainment, as well as looking for a new sport, trying something new, and looking for excitement. Different types of motives derived from the results of the factor analysis within the study were sport subculture sociability, exploration, partying and music, specialized shopping, symbolic consumption, thrill-seeking and family sociability.

Moreover, entertainment, escape, variety, novelty and uniqueness, family, and socialization are some of the motivational factors that have been identified in earlier research on attending events (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Formica & Uysal, 1995; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001). In addition, Backman et al. (1995) examined visitors' motives to participate in events, and identified dimensions of motivations that included excitement, family, socializing and relaxation.

If people think that an event will be a fun, thrilling, exciting and interesting experience for them, then their likelihood of attending it increases (Gursoy et al., 2006). To fulfil consumers' needs, motivation works as the driving factor. Consumers' need could be

classified as utilitarian or hedonic, and that could be related to a multisensory, fantasy and emotional consumption experience (Ng, Russell-Bennett, & Dagger, 2007). Instead of focusing on the completion of a task, hedonic motivations are instead linked with playfulness and fun activities (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). As such, a person's motivation to attend the event could stem from satisfying both hedonic and utilitarian needs, but hedonic attributes tend to have a stronger influence on attendance patterns (Gursoy et al., 2006; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001). Particularly in the event context, hedonic attributes provide more sport experience than utilitarian attributes (Yazıcı, Koçak, & Altunsöz, 2017).

Accordingly, this study looked at motivation while considering hedonic need-fulfilment aspects, including stimulation, adventure, the feeling of being in another world, gratification, which includes stress relief, and attendance as a special treat to oneself. Attitude can be described as a person's continuing or long-lasting cognitive evaluation, which could be favourable or unfavourable, and action tendencies towards an object or event (Ajzen, 1991; Decrop, Pizam, & Mansfeld, 2000). Theoretically, attitude consists of three components: cognitive, affective, and conative or behavioural. The cognitive component is related to a person's cognition, which is learnt from direct experiences or from various information sources that form an attitude and is expressed as belief. The affective component is a psychological response explaining preferences, emotions, and feelings. Conative represents how likely or unlikely it is for a person to undertake a specific action or to behave in a particular way, indicating future intention. An individual's attitude could be affected by personal experience, family, friends, Internet and media, and over a period of time, attitudes are formed and remain consistent (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004).

In the context of tourism, depending on different perceived attributes of the products, attitudes are taken as the tendency to behave or an evolved feeling towards tourism products or services (Moutinho, 1987). Past research has identified attitude as a basis of motivation and for predicting behaviour (Gnoth, 1997). Behavioural intentions indicate desirable behaviours that visitors expect to perform in the future. Studies conducted within the tourism research area have identified several antecedents of behavioural intention (Lam & Hsu, 2004; Lee, Petrick, & Crompton, 2007; Yuan & Jang, 2008), which define behavioural intention as a person's expected or intended future behaviour. Behaviour is the outcome of intended behaviour if there is an opportunity to perform. Thus, an accurate measurement of behavioural intention can help perfect the prediction of behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). In this study, behavioural intention is perceived as an event attendee's inclination or likelihood of attending the mountain sports event.

In search of optimum stimulation level and need for variety as determinants of motivation and behaviour

As mentioned earlier, this study considers stimulation as potentially a part of the need-fulfilment aspects of hedonic motivation. A premise of this paper is that, alongside external drivers, dimensions of individual motivation may be internal and latent. This paper builds upon the construct Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL) in this regard. McReynolds (1971) defined OSL as a personality trait that relates to the amount of stimulation individuals prefer in their lives. As a personality trait, this acknowledges the individual nature and variability of the construct. (Berlyne, 1963) stated that obtaining a satisfactory level of

stimulation in and of itself can be a motivation behind people's actions. McReynolds (1971) clarified this further, stating that an intermediate – rather than a high – level of stimulation tends to be the optimum for people. This level of intermediacy, however, varies individually.

OSL as a construct has emerged from sensation-seeking, which denotes the extent of people's engagement in exploratory behaviour (Zuckerman, 1971, 2007). Mittelstaedt, Grossbart, Curtis, and Devere (1976) further developed on Zuckerman's (1971) scale to link optimum stimulation levels to consumer product adoption decisions. Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1995) identified that individuals differ in their optimal levels of stimulation towards exploratory behaviour, and consumers with high OSLs are prone to engage in more exploratory behaviour, and vice versa (Mittelstaedt et al., 1976; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1992).

OSL has also been cited as a key personality-related construct affecting engagement in exploratory behaviour (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1995). Maddi (1961) identified exploratory behaviour as to be an end in and of itself, where the stimulus it provides is its own reward (Berlyne, 1963). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) reiterated this view, stating that not all behaviours are targeted towards achieving goals. In such cases, OSL, in our view, takes on a greater relevancy. Steenkamp and Burgess (2002) stated that the phenomenon of OSL is a universal one, transgressing the nature of such factors as economy (whether developed or developing), geography, or culture as a core human behaviour. Zuckerman (1994) concluded that the presence of biological factors, such as certain enzymes, are at least partially responsible for affecting OSL in humans. Thus, it stands to reason that OSL, as a biological and personality trait, is not dependent upon economic or cultural differences. This raises the question, will the optimum level of stimulation be effective and/or different in varied application scenarios? As has been discussed above, there is evidence of the influence of OSL when exploratory behaviour is concerned. As a core human biological trait, OSL could also conceivably have influence where non-exploratory behaviour is evidenced.

The question as to why one might engage in exploratory behaviour where a rational information processed goal is absent was answered by Zuckerman (1971), who identified sensation-seeking as the principal motive behind such behavioural engagement. Since previous studies have tended to identify OSL as an extant state unique to individuals, and sensation-seeking is an action, it follows that OSL can be treated as an antecedent to motivation as a construct. Furthermore, several empirical studies have been conducted, resulting in iterations and refinement of a sensation-seeking scale, which have validated the findings along different contexts and dimensions (Zuckerman, 2007; Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978).

Menon and Kahn (1995) have identified that customers can seek variety among the choices they have in order to meet a need for stimulation. The researchers also highlighted that there may be a balancing act in total stimulation between choice context and variety available and that situational characteristics are responsible for providing stimulation. Need for variety is cited as a construct leading to an increase in stimulation, especially when consumers would prefer a change from routinized behaviour (which itself is designed for reducing stimulation to lessen complexity in buying situations). Menon and Kahn (1995) have looked into variety-seeking as a motivator to change seeking-behaviour and highlighted the importance of context. Their important contribution is

that they identified an effect on stimulation through variety-seeking, not only within product classes but also through variation within choice contexts.

The discourse above in crystallizing the constructs optimum stimulation level and variety-seeking behaviour leads to revealing a gap in the literature, in both consumer behaviour and leisure studies. Despite having the presence of OSL proposed and empirically affirmed in several studies relating to consumer behaviour, interest in the construct seemed to have fallen off in the preceding couple of decades. Searches using Herzing's bibliographic software 'Publish or Perish' (v. 7.18) reveals around 60 papers published in total within the last 45 years, and only a handful of research works since the start of the millennia. It is only in the last couple of years, since 2018, we see a renewed interest in the construct, with studies having optimum stimulation level as the central tenet being conducted in the areas of tourism, hotels and leisure services, cultural attractions, adoption of innovative products, advertising, and of course, exploratory consumer behaviour. Other than Bouchet, Lebrun, and Auvergne (2004), who proposed OSL and variety seeking as part of the predictor variables of sport tourism consumption; and Park, Mahony, and Kim (2011) who inducted optimal level theory as offshoot of Berlyne's (1963) work and sensation seeking as predictors of sport fanship; we were unable to find any significant research that have been conducted using the said constructs in the study of sporting events. Wymer, Self, and Findley (2010) have empirically ascertained the role of sensation seeking and consumer innovativeness in the context of extreme sports events, however their focus has been more on identifying tourism segments that may be engaged for volunteering. Furthermore, both Bouchet et al. (2004) and Park et al. (2011) studies proposed conceptual models using the constructs, without having conducted empirical studies to ascertain their applicability in predicting behaviour. As such, to our knowledge, our study is the first empirical one in this regard proposing OSL and variety seeking as predictors of visitor participation behaviour in a non-retail environment.

It should be noted that, in Menon and Kahn (1995) and in subsequent works, the variation in such choice contexts were still tested within the realm of the retail product environment, and the efficacy of such a construct has not been explored in the non-retail environment. It was our intent to see whether variety-seeking and subsequent hypothesized increments in stimulation level can be observed as potently in a sport tourism context, where departure from routinized behaviour and hedonic exploratory motivations are posited to be effective determinants of visitation behaviour.

Research model and hypotheses

This study's dependent variable was *behavioural intentions*, which indicates whether visitors would like to attend the event in future. While previous consumer behavioural studies in tourism context have discussed the relationships among motivation, attitude, and behavioural intentions (Hsu et al., 2010; Huang & Hsu, 2009), as well as the relation between motivation and spending behaviour at events (Thrane, 2002), there remains a lack of understanding of the effects of tourist motivation on attitude and revisit intention in the event context. The current study therefore addresses this gap by investigating the interrelationships among motivation, attitude and behavioural intention in event visits, incorporating the need for variety and optimum stimulation as antecedents of motivation, using data collected from visitors of a mountain sports event in Norway. The

Table 1. Conceptualizations of the variables in the research model.

Constructs	Measurement criteria	References
Need for variety:	Visitors seeking variety among the choices they have in order to meet a need for stimulation.	Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1996); Grande (2008); Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1992)
Optimum stimulation Level:	OSL is a personality trait referring to the amount of stimulation individuals prefer in life.	Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1996); Grande (2008); Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1992)
Motivation	Pleasure-seeking, adventure, and gratification for oneself	Arnold and Reynolds (2003)
Attitude	Psychological tendencies expressed by the positive or negative evaluations of visitors	Lam and Hsu (2006); Song, Aguilar, Shifley, and Goerndt (2012)
Behavioural Intention	How likely it is that visitors will attend an event in the future	Song et al. (2014)

conceptualization of the constructs in the study and in the research model are represented in Table 1.

Desire for exploration in its various dimensions has been cited by many to be a factor in buying behaviour. Components have included risk-taking in making product choices (Li, Lu, Lan, & Jiang, 2019; Shanks et al., 2015; Taylor, 1974), innovativeness in adoption of new products (Branstad & Solem, 2020; Hasan, Lowe, & Petrovici, 2019; Hirunyawipada & Paswan, 2006; Venkatraman, 1991), variety-seeking in purchasing behaviour (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1996; Ellis & Mattison Thompson, 2018; Sharma, Sivakumaran, & Marshall, 2010), and curiosity-motivated information acquisition (Martenson, 2018; Wiggin, Reimann, & Jain, 2019). These components have been cited as leading to exciting purchase experiences, offering change and relief from boredom, and satisfying desire for knowledge and curiosity. The unifying element for activities that are classified under stimulation is that the context should lead to cognitive and sensory stimulation and that consumers engage in them primarily for pleasure.

Thus, we deemed OSL an appropriate construct in the context of event tourism, where engagement is for pleasure only, and cognitive and sensory stimulation are desired outcomes. Scale items were adopted from Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1996) and Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1995). The items relate to both EAP (exploratory acquisition of products) and EIS (exploratory information-seeking).

It is further suggested that low or less than optimal stimulation is often a product of its environment. Thus, any desired change towards higher stimulation requires exploration, novelty or variety-seeking.' Berlyne's (1963) original work in this respect comes to mind, in which he distinguished between two dimensions of exploratory behaviour, namely, free and forced exploratory behaviour. It may be safely assumed that, barring aberrations, event tourism participation is undertaken freely. In the context of sport events, need for variety and optimum stimulation level are taken as antecedents for motivation. We posit a visitor's latent level of optimal stimulation to be one of the antecedents for his or her variety-seeking needs. We follow Menon and Kahn's (1995) assertion that variety-seeking behaviour can lead to change-seeking behaviour (in our case, the visit to the event). In addition, optimal stimulation is taken as being a latent or pre-existing trait among the visitor, and, as such, we postulate a high level of OSL will require a higher level of variety-seeking to satiate itself, and conversely, a visitor with a low level of OSL will consequently have a lower need for variety-seeking behaviour (satiated at a lower activity level). This is taken as similar to the dimension of 'exploration acquisition

of product' of OSL, as identified by Baumgartner and Steenkamp. To fit our context of event/event tourism, we modified exploratory acquisition of product to 'exploratory acquisition of experience'. Scale items were taken accordingly. The following hypotheses were proposed to be tested within the event tourism context:

H₁ Visitors' higher variety-seeking needs will be influenced by their OSL.

H₂ Visitors' higher variety-seeking needs will influence their motivation to attend an event.

H₃ Visitors' OSL influences their motivation to attend an event.

Gnoth (1997) proposed a conceptual framework where relations between motivation and attitude were discussed, where tourist motivation influence their attitude. According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) a person's behaviour is influenced by his or her behavioural intention and behavioural intention in turn is determined by a person's attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. In this model, motivation is posited towards behavioural intention, since behavioural intention is explained by the efforts and actions an individual will take to perform the particular behaviour. Intention to perform a particular act will not happen until an individual is motivated enough and has a desire to perform a particular action (Bagozzi, 1992).

Lam and Hsu (2004, 2006) suggested that tourists' attitude towards destination selection is determined by both push and pull motivational factors. Alongside the theory of planned behaviour, several studies have also tested the relations between attitude and behavioural intention in various research areas. According to Baker and Crompton (2000), in order to understand visitors' future behavioural intention, it is important to include measures of their attitude. Visitors' attitudes towards events and their consistent attendance lay the foundation of future attendance intentions (Gursoy et al., 2006). Since the literature has shown stronger support for the notion that attitude towards an act is determined by a person's motivation to perform the act, and, since attitude also has an influence on behavioural intention, we propose the following hypotheses to be tested in the event context.

H₄ Motivation significantly affects visitors' attitude towards the event.

H₅ Visitors' attitudes towards events significantly affect their intention to revisit the event.

Following these hypotheses, the proposed relationships are depicted in the model (Figure 1).

Methodology

The study was conducted at a mountain sports event called Fjellsportfestivalen, held annually in the town of Sogndal in the Sognfjorden region in Norway. The event takes place every year for five days in February, with the stated aim of having fun in the powder snow on the mountains. The event attendees participate in different winter sport activities, such as loose snow skiing, downhill skiing, ice climbing, and mountain trips.

An initial list of items to measure the variables as identified in the research model was compiled after reviewing the marketing, consumer behaviour, and tourism literature. A few modifications were made, such as change of words to better fit the event context. The respondents' attitudes associated with the Fjellsportevent were measured along six

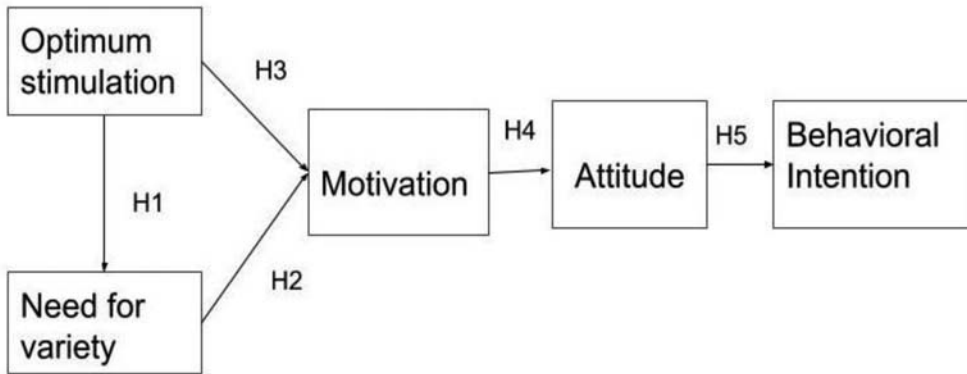


Figure 1. Proposed research model.

items: positive, good, favourable, valuable, beneficial, and necessary. The items were adopted from previous studies conducted in the travel destination and event contexts (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Song, You, Reisinger, Lee, & Lee, 2014). Behavioural intention to revisit the Fjellsporthevent was operationalized with four items adopted from Song et al. (2014). Motivation was measured with six hedonic motivation items, which included stimulation, adventure and need for gratification, and items were adopted from Arnold and Reynolds (2003).

Seven items were selected to measure need for variety, and eight items were used to measure optimum stimulation level. The items were adopted from Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1996); Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1992); and Grande (2008). Some wording was changed to fit the items to the event context. All constructs were measured with multiple items, as recommended by Churchill (1979). Upon development of the first draft of the questionnaire, three experienced researchers in marketing and tourism assessed the content validity of the measurement items. The questionnaire was developed first in English, then translated into Norwegian by a native speaker. Both versions of the questionnaire were pre-tested with five event visitors who had participated in the event in previous years and were experienced researchers themselves. Some items were re-worded and omitted following the suggestions received from pre-testing.

Data for the study were collected using online surveys. We were able to obtain 394 out of 600 participants' email addresses from this year's event from the event organizers. An email request with the survey link was sent to all of the addressees. Of those returned, altogether 177 usable responses among the attendees were obtained for analysis.

The collected data were analysed using SPSS and AMOS. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the proposed hypotheses in the research model. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted for each construct identified in the research model to refine the scales that determine the factor structure. Items were omitted in several cases based on the low path loadings (less than .5). The factor structure was gradually further refined upon looking at the standardized residual covariances and modification indices. Upon confirmation of the measurement model, a structural model was run to test the proposed hypotheses. Overall model fits were assessed based on the Goodness-of-fit index (GFI), Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker–Lewis index

(TLI), Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Incremental fit index (IFI), and Normed chi-square (CMIN/DF) (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Results

The descriptive statistics show basic demographic information about the respondents. Approximately 52% were female and 48% were male. Most visitors at the event had a high level of education. Approximately 49% had a university-level education or above, and 40% were either at university or had some university education. The highest number of visitors fell within the age group of 20-25. The descriptive analysis also showed the respondents' current job situation, with 31% of visitors having full-time jobs and 18% part-time jobs, 3% were unemployed, and 42% were not in the work force.

To establish the internal consistency of the measurement instruments, reliability analyses were conducted by calculating alpha coefficients. Scales were initially assessed in terms of reliability by calculating Cronbach's alpha. All of the scales underlying each variable were found to be reliable since the values are above the recommended level of 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998): need for variety, .740; Optimum stimulation, .830; Motivation, .806; Attitude, .940; visitors' behavioural Intention, .830 (Table 2).

Confirmatory factor analyses for individual constructs

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was individually performed for all of the constructs identified in the research model in order to refine the scales and assess whether the different items actually measure the variables identified in the research model. Items were omitted in several cases based on the variances explained and the path loadings, standardized residual covariances and modification indices.

Cronbach's alpha was .74, which indicated acceptable reliability for the variable need for variety. Based on previous research, an initial 7 items were selected to measure need for variety. Out of the seven items, four items were reverse coded. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted with the seven items to examine the factor structure. Three items were omitted based on low loadings, and the CFA was run a second time to finalize the factor structure. Good model fit was achieved (CMIN/DF=1.69, RMSEA = .062, GFI = .99, AGFI = .98, CFI = .99). Finally, four items were selected to measure need for variety.

Eight items were selected from previous studies to measure optimum stimulation level. During scale reliability analysis, two items were omitted to increase the reliability of the scales, and good reliability (.830) was achieved. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to check the factor structure and dimensionality. A four-factor structure was then finalized by CFA (see Table 2), which indicated an acceptable fit (CMIN/DF = 2.262, RMSEA = .085, GFI = .987, AGFI = .934, CFI = .989).

Initially, motivation was measured with six items taken from previous research. As we discussed earlier, in the present context, hedonic motivation was deemed more applicable in an event context. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .806, indicating very good reliability. CFA was conducted with all 6 items, but a good model fit was not achieved. Based on the standardized residual covariances and modification indices, two items were omitted to improve model fit, and a revised CFA was run to finalize the

Table 2. Item scales, reliabilities, and loadings.

Items in each variable in the research model	Cronbach's α	Loadings
Need for variety	.740	
When I see a new event, I'm reluctant to give it a try (Var 1; reverse coded item).		.47
If I like an event, I rarely switch from it just to try something new. (reverse coded, Var 2)		(Item taken out) .84
I am very cautious about participating in new and different events. (reverse coded, Var3)		
I am usually among the first among people I know to try new events.		(Item taken out) .65
I rarely go to events where I am uncertain about the experience (Var 5)		
I enjoy taking chances in participating in new events (Var 6)		(Item taken out) .62
I do not like to participate in new event before other people I know do. (reverse coded, Var 7)		
Optimum stimulation	.830	
In the case of events, I like to try the most unusual events, even if I am not sure I would like them (Stm 1).		
I like to read emails about events, even when I do not plan to participate in them (Stm 2).		(Item taken out)
I like to browse webpages about events, even when I do not plan to attend them (Stm 3).		(Item taken out)
When I see a brochures about a new or different event, I pick it up just to see what it is (Stm 4).		.65
I am the kind of person who would try participating in a new event once (Stm 5).		.75
I often read advertisements regarding events just out of curiosity (Stm 6).		(Item taken out) .85
When I see a new event that is somewhat different from the usual, I investigate it (Stm 7).		
I enjoy taking chances with unfamiliar events, just to get some variety in my behaviour (Stm 8).		.66
Investigating new events is generally a waste of time. (Stm 9; reverse coded)		(Item taken out)
Motivation	.806	
Participating in an event is an adventure to me. (mtv 1)		(Item taken out)
I find attending events stimulating (mtv 2).		.89
Attending events makes me feel like I am in my own universe (mtv 3).		.57
When I am in a down mood, going to an event makes me feel better (mtv 4).		.74
To me, attending events is a way to relieve stress (mtv 5).		.55
I go to events when I want to treat myself to something special (mtv 6).		(Item taken out)
Attitude	.940	
I like Fjellsportfestivalen (hld 1)		.96
For me, participating in Fjellsportfestivalen is good (hld 2).		.94
I have a favourable impression of Fjellsportfestivalen (hld 3).		.83
For me, participating in Fjellsportfestivalen is valuable (hld 4)		(Item taken out)
For me, participating in Fjellsportfestivalen is enjoyable(hld 5)		.82
For me, participating in Fjellsportfestivalen is beneficial (hld 6)		(Item taken out)
Intention	.830	
I wish to participate in future Fjellsportfestivalens (Intsjn 1)		(Item taken out)
I will try to participate in future Fjellsportfestivalens (Intsjn 2)		.94
I plan to participate in the next Fjellsportfestivalen (Intsjn 3)		.95
I will make an effort to participate in future Fjellsportfestivalens (Intsjn 4)		.89

factor structure. An acceptable model fit was achieved (CMIN/DF = 3.236, RMSEA = .113, GFI = .965, AGFI = .896, CFI = .962, TLI = .924). Four items were found to be significant for measuring motivation for attending the event (see Table 2).

Attitude was measured with 6 items, and Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .940, showing very good scale reliability. During confirmatory factor analysis, 2 items were omitted to improve model fit, leaving 4 items to measure event visitors’ attitude in the current context. Factors determining the attitude of the visitors received high loadings; however, the overall model fit was not found to be very good. Even so, since factor loadings for each item were high, the items were kept for further testing in the measurement model. Behavioural intention was measured with four items related to the likelihood of visitors’ willingness to attend the mountain sports event in the future. Item reliability was very good (.830), and CFA achieved an acceptable model fit (CMIN/DF = 6.721, RMSEA = .180, GFI = .967, AGFI = .837, CFI = .938, TLI = .949). Except for the RMSEA and CMIN/DF values, other indices showed a good fit.

CFA was conducted for all latent variables to purify the measurements for each construct. The purified measurements were integrated into the measurement model. A good model fit was achieved since all values were above the suggested thresholds (CMIN/df = 1.986; GFI = .862; AGFI = .812; CFI = .937; TLI = .922; RMSEA = .075). Once a good measurement model fit and acceptable path loadings were achieved, a structural model was analysed.

Measurement model, structural model and relationship testing

Since the overall measurement model fits were found to be acceptable, a structural model was run with all factors from the measurement models included in order to test the hypothesized relationships between the variables. Overall structural model fit was found to be good, with the minimum discrepancy (CMIN/DF), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative fit index (CFI), and RMSEA (Table 2) indicating acceptable fit and good predictive validity. The structural model is shown in Figure 2.

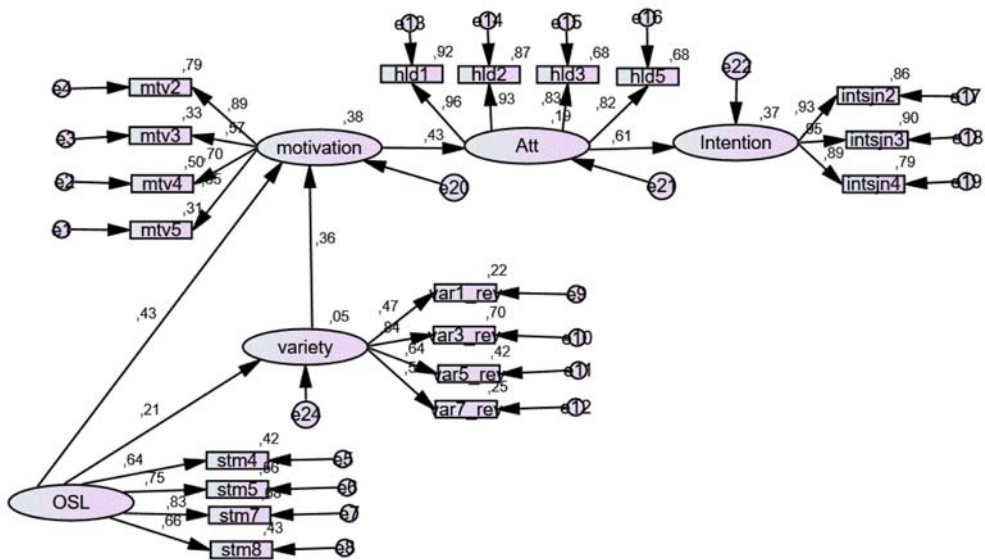


Figure 2. Structural model.

Table 3. Model fit indices.

Model	RMSEA	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	IFI
Default model	.071	1.894	.845	.811	.933	.923	.934

Table 3 shows the various model fit indices, all of which indicate a very good fit. As a rule of thumb, the goodness of fit index (GFI) ideally should be close to or greater than .90, and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) should preferably be greater than .80. The path model yielded a GFI of .895 and an AGFI of .855. Both values indicate acceptable model fit. Furthermore, two reliable indicators are the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which should preferably be greater than .90. In this case, TLI and CFI were .954 and .962 respectively, showing a more than acceptable level of fit. The RMSEA value was .062, which also indicates a good model fit. The minimum discrepancy (CMIN/DF) was 1.685, showing a good fit as well, as the recommended acceptable range is given as over 1.0 and below 3.0 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Table 4 shows the standardized path coefficients with associated critical ratios for all relationships in the structural model.

The objective of this study was to identify the factors influencing visitors' intention to participate in the Fjellsportfestivalen in Norway. Need for variety, optimal stimulation level, motivation, and attitude were identified from previous studies as possible determinants of behavioural intention. The analysis showed that 37% of the variance in the dependent variable, i.e. visitors' intention to participate in the event, was explained by the discussed factors. The hypotheses proposed in this research were tested by conducting structural equation modelling. According to Chin (1998), in order to be considered meaningful, standardized structural paths should at least be at .20 and ideally above .30. The rules of thumb used to assess the desired strength of a coefficient are outlined in Table 5. The strengths of the coefficients along with the variance explained for the endogenous constructs help to assess the validity of the structural model.

In H1, we hypothesized that visitors' higher variety-seeking needs would be influenced by their optimum stimulation level, which was supported by a path estimate of .21 (Low to moderate), critical ratio of 2.123 and significance level of .034. As per the findings, the variable 'need for variety' positively and substantially influenced motivation (H2), which was another proposition in this study. The relationship was significant, with a path estimate of .36. The critical ratio was 3.313, which is more than 1.96, and the path was significant at less than a $p < 0,001$ level. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported, and a relationship was substantiated between need for variety and motivation in the context of the mountain sports event. The findings also indicated that there was a moderate to substantial relationship between Optimum stimulation level and motivation, with a path estimate of .43, critical ratio of 4.123 and significance at less than a $p < 0,001$ level.

Table 4. Path loadings, critical ratios, probability level from the structural model.

Structural relation	Regression weight	Critical ratio	P value
Need for variety ← optimum stimulation level	.21	2123	.034
Motivation ← need for Variety	.36	3313	***
Motivation ← optimum stimulation level	.43	4123	***
Attitude ← Motivation	.43	4644	***
Intention ← Attitude	.61	9017	***

Table 5. Rules of thumb on the strength of correlation coefficients (de Vaus, 2002).

Coefficient Range	Strength of Association
.90–.99	Near perfect
.70–.89	Very strong
.50–.69	Substantial to very strong
.30–.49	Moderate to substantial
.10–.29	Low to moderate
.01–.09	Trivial

Therefore, the proposed relationship between optimum stimulation and motivation was supported in the event context, and hypothesis 3 was accepted.

The results also show that motivation was positively correlated with attitude. This relationship was significant, exhibiting a path estimate of .43. The critical ratio was 4.644, which is more than the cut-off value of 1.96, and significance lies at less than a $p < 0,001$ level, indicating a positive and significant relationship between motivation and attitude. Therefore, the relationship was supported, and hypotheses 4 was accepted. As per previous studies, tourists' attitudes are influenced by their motivation (Gnoth, 1997). According to Bagozzi (1992), the determination and action that an individual will take to accomplish a particular behaviour will not occur until the individual has had enough motivation to perform the particular action. The present results reflect a similar phenomenon, affirming that visitors' strong motivational factors formed their positive attitude towards the event, encouraging them to put forth enough effort to participate in the event in the future.

The relationship between attitude and intention was positive and significant with a path estimate of .61, critical ratio of 9.017 and significance level of less than 0.001. As such, the relationship was strongly supported in the chosen context, and hypothesis 5 was accepted. This finding tallies with previous studies. Attitude is said to exert a positive influence on the behavioural intention of an individual (Ajzen, 1991; Baker, Al-Gahtani, & Hubona, 2007; Cheng, Lai, & Yeung, 2008). According to Ajzen (1991), the degree to which an individual has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of performing a specific behaviour is defined as an attitude towards a behaviour, which means that, when an individual evaluates the results of a specific behaviour positively, he or she has a tendency to have a positive attitude towards it. Our study reaffirms this.

Discussion

This paper aimed to investigate and empirically substantiate the role of internalized psycho-social factors of optimum stimulation level (OSL) and need for variety in individuals' choice of attending at sports events. Earlier research recognized the two factors to be extant within individuals at varying degrees. This study offers a novel and more holistic approach to investigating both exploratory and non-exploratory sports event visitation behaviour. In our preliminary search, we found a dearth of scholarly work involving optimal stimulation level; while earlier works recognized the importance of the construct in motivating behaviour, the recent couple of decades have not, in our view, seen the warranted focus on it. The studies involving OSL have been conducted primarily in exploratory shopping behaviour, with only a few focusing on its role in sports events attendance

(Bouchet et al., 2004; Park et al., 2011; Wymer et al., 2010). With the exception of Wymer et al. (2010) whose work, while integrating OSL and variety-seeking dealt more prominently with motivation for volunteering at sports events, the others have proffered conceptualization involving OSL and need for variety at various levels of antecedence towards behaviour, but stopped short of empirically testing their conceptualizations. This paper is one of the very few to offer a conceptual model of visitation motivations driven by OSL and need for variety at sports events, and to test the conceptualized model through empirical study conducted at a Scandinavian mountain sports event.

Empirically, the paper aimed to probe five hypotheses, of which all were supported, albeit with varying levels of emphasis. As per the commonly interpreted benchmarks, we could say that the relationship between attitude and intention were found to be very strong, while the relationships between motivation and attitude and between need for variety, optimum stimulation level and motivation were moderate. That the link between attitude and intention was so strong is not a matter of surprise, and as we have observed it reflected in earlier studies (Gursoy et al., 2006; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Yazıcı et al., 2017). However, the moderate ties between the other relationships merit some discussion and reasoning. A rather surprising find was perhaps not finding a stronger relationship between motivation and attitude, since this has been suggested and repeatedly established in earlier research (Bagozzi, 1992; Gnoth, 1997). However, Bagozzi (1992) and Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) stressed what is in effect an accumulation of 'enough' motivation to culminate in attitude and subsequent action.

Based upon the findings, we may hazard that in a context such as attendance of an event, an accumulation of enough motivation may not be essential for partaking in it. This is not to say that motivation is not needed. As our study shows, it does influence attitude and intention. Instead, we propose that there may not be a 'threshold' for motivation that needs to occur before one decides to participate in an event. It should also be noted that we framed motivation in terms of hedonic factors, with dimensions of pleasure seeking, adventure, and gratification for oneself, whereas attitude is commonly evolved (Moutinho, 1987), thus distancing itself somewhat from hedonic factors from the outset. Hedonic consumption does not necessarily have to be a function of evolving. Thus, we may view our above proposition to be that there may need not be a threshold of motivation accrual for attitude and behaviour to occur in the case of hedonic motivation.

If this holds true, this interpretation may also facilitate explanation of the moderate relations found between need for variety, optimum stimulation level (OSL), and motivation in our model. Optimum stimulation level is taken as an extant personality trait, relating to amount of stimulation preferred. However, as Berlyne (1963) pointed out, it is an individual construct, meaning that it entails different thresholds for different people. OSL stems from sensation-seeking (Zuckerman, 1994), and herein we have confirmation of the presence of OSL behind motivation. At the same time, since the scope is set at hedonic motivation, the smaller portion of variance explained may be tied to the possibility that not all visitors to the event had hedonic motivations and resultant exploratory behaviour behind their decision to attend. A parsing of the demographic data provides further clues in support of this explanation. A significant portion of the visitors was found to be repeat visitors who attended because 'it's a chance for them to meet with some friends again'. These groups were not there solely to meet their required level of

stimulation nor to satiate their need for variety. For this demographic, attendance was not an exploratory behaviour, but rather more utilitarian – attendance being more a means to socialize than content enjoyment – leading to and skewing the moderate relationships found between these two constructs and hedonic motivation from among the dataset. A relatively small sample compounds this issue. However, even the relatively small sample confirmed the presence of the proposed constructs and the relationships of need for variety and optimum stimulation level with motivation. As such, a larger data set could likely provide a stronger path value between the proposed antecedents.

Conclusion

The analysis of the structural equation model showed that sports event visitors' intention to participate in the mountain sports event was determined by their motivation and attitude towards the event. The results also suggest that visitors' need for variety-seeking and optimum stimulation level substantially influenced their motivation to attend the event. We believe that the findings from this study make new contributions towards theory as follows. A motivation, attitude, and behavioural model was tested in the context of a mountain sports event in Scandinavia. Furthermore, the constructs 'Need for variety' and 'Optimum stimulation level' were proposed as possible antecedents of visitor motivation in this context and were subsequently empirically validated as antecedents of motivation as well as having an indirect influence upon visitors' attitude towards the event.

The results from the study have several important implications for the tourism industry, especially for the event and event organizers. Recommendations for event managers can emerge from the findings of these research results in several ways. Marketing strategies can be developed focusing on the constructs identified in the study, with a view to increase visitors' participation. Marketing strategy should focus on the creation of products or services by tourist organizations, accurately assessing visitors' needs or motives, in turn strengthening their attitude towards event participation. As such, by identifying visitors' needs or motivations, which influence their attitudes, managers can divide tourists into different groups based on their motives and plan separate marketing strategies for each segment. There is, however, a common denominator of the various segments, which is the desire for focused and specific activities and not merely the number of them. Thus, resources would be better utilized in improving the depth of activities offered rather than the breadth of them. Festival participants searching for stimulation need to participate slightly outside their level of confidence. Activities which are not sufficiently challenging, will not trigger any stimulation. Activities which are too difficult to join in will only make a feeling of discouragement. For example, participants in downhill skiing might have a very different level of skills. So, managers of ski festivals should facilitate downhill skiing activities at several levels, such that festival participants might have a chance to choose the variant of the activity that might give them the right optimum of stimuli. This is especially important regarding downhill skiing in new-fallen snow, as this might represent avalanche danger (Marengo, Monaci, & Miceli, 2017).

One way to achieve this goal could be by classifying the visitors based on their motivation to attend an event and provide customized packages. Appropriate promotional

campaigns towards the targeted group could be designed focusing on the segment-appropriate traits. According to the results of this study, optimum stimulation has an influence on visitor's motivations to attend events. Looking at the stimulation level or visitors' tendency to explore information regarding events, managers can choose appropriate marketing communication techniques that may prove more effective in raising their knowledge and interest regarding the event. Usage of proper advertising channels and developing their content effectively can help to communicate the event's benefits to the visitors. Need for variety was found to have an influence on visitor motivation. As such, event organizers could introduce more adventurous and multifarious activities that could fulfil visitors' variety-seeking needs, leading to their motivation to attend the event in the future.

There are some limitations of this study that should be kept in mind while interpreting the results. Due to a relatively small sample size, the findings may not be generalizable for other event contexts. To overcome this, the model should be tested with larger sample sizes. However, it should also be noted that the sample, while not large in number, still included a significant portion of the attendees and, as such, should be considered representative. Furthermore, for reasons that have been argued, only the hedonic motivation dimension was incorporated to measure visitor motivation in the current study. Hedonic motivation is also described as subjective well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Based upon the current findings, there are grounds to include other motivational dimensions in future studies, like psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008), or social well-being (Keyes, 1998), and have their relative presence and influence measured. In addition, visitors' perceptions regarding the quality of the event and their satisfaction were not included in measuring their re-visit intentions. Any links between extant OSL and variety needs with perceived quality may be a matter of keen research interest.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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