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Title: “A voice in the Dark”: Innovation in Rural and Agricultural Shows

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During 2020, many rural Shows developed online events to maintain a presence among their supporters. This paper develops a model of an e-eventscape to assess the most effective means of translating the essence of an agriculture show into a virtual space. This is developed through a single case study where both the innovation process and the final online event are analysed.

A mixed methods approach was taken including an interview with the Show organiser, participating in the “live” online Show, web-analytics and feedback provided by the organisers and written qualitative questionnaire feedback, from a sample of individuals viewing the online Show content.

The traditional elements of e-servicescapes and e-eventscapes were applicable to this new domain of online Shows. In addition to core features of aesthetics, layout and ease of navigation, the website needed to provide opportunities for visitors to interact with exhibitors and other visitors. This was the most challenging aspect of creating a modified e-eventscape.

The e-eventscape in our case study successfully represented the County and the rural economy, highlighting the scope for online space to represent physical place identities. It also reached new audiences beyond the traditional geography of Show attendees, thus creating more extensive marketing opportunities for the region and for sponsors and exhibitors at the Show.

The innovation journey required local connections, even though the innovation itself occurred online.

The e-eventscape model has potential for future adaption into online events that supplement the offer of virtual Shows. The model can be refined through wider research with other rural Shows and Festivals.

Creating the e-eventscape model, based on a rural case study, identifies that rural events can be at the forefront of innovation. The case also confirmed the important role of Shows as part of their wider rural economy.