

Original Research Article

Understanding travel motivations of Iranian tourists visiting the United Arab Emirates

Jamal Kheiri

Abstract

M.A student in Tourism Management,
University of Tehran, Faculty of
Management

E-mail:
Jamalkheiri.1989@gmail.com
Tel.: +98(911)222-6945

The current research aims at examining the difference between the trip-related motivations held by those tourists who choose recreational destinations. To do so, in 2016, 432 questionnaires were handed to Iranian tourists planning to take a trip to the United Arab Emirates. The results of the t-tests demonstrated that those tourists considering escape to be their major motivation for the trip tended to travel to tourist resorts more, and the recreational goal of the destination played the most significant role for them. On the other hand, those who travel for ego-enhancement try to practice more cultural destinations and place great value on tourist attractions.

Keywords: Push factors, Pull factors, Destination choice, Dubai, Emirates

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is the starting point for all the trip-related events. The point why tourists choose to leave their homes and travel to other places can contribute to a better understanding of tourism. It can also be of great help for trip planners. After Crompton (1979) proposed push and pull factors in order to examine the tourists' motivations for travelling to a particular destination, numerous studies (Devesa et al., 2010; Hanqin and Lam, 1999; Kozak, 2002; Lo and Lee, 2011; Phau et al., 2013; Prayag and Hosany, 2014; Yoon and Uysal, 2005) were conducted to test and to integrate this concept. In this model, the push factors are treated as the internal factors by which people feel motivated for the trip considering their own needs. Following that, pull factors of destinations attract people towards themselves with respect to their motivation.

One of the positive features of Crompton's model was its dynamism, which allowed its succeeding researches to add some factors to the model or remove some with regard to the tourists' nationality and their own destinations. Some push factors, including gaining knowledge, escape, and prestige as well as strengthening the relationships, have been the fundamentals of many studies. On the other hand, the accessibility of the destination, destination attractions,

entertainment centers, and infrastructures were among the most common factors of attraction. A more careful look at the previous research projects shows that the trip structure, e.g. the state of being cultural and being entertaining, probably represents the tourists' motivation for the trip to that place. In the majority of previous studies, the tourists' motivation for the trip has been merely considered with no attention paid to the concept of the destination. Nonetheless, in this study, Dubai was considered a recreational destination and Abu Dhabi a cultural one.

This study tries to find out whether recreational destinations (e.g. Dubai) and/or cultural destinations (e.g. Abu Dhabi) can be targeted by special groups of tourists with specific motivations. It also tries to show what needs to be done in order to attract more tourists to each of these destinations.

Literature review

For many years, the tourism statistics suggested what kind of tourists take the trip, when and where they start and finish their trip, and how much they spend on a trip. However, some researches (Crompton, 1979; Dann,

1977; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Pearce, 1993; Pearce and Caltabiano, 1983; Ryan and Glendon, 1998) were conducted in 1980s in order to address the following question: why do tourists travel? Dann (1977) argued that the motivations for a trip stem from two concepts called anomie and ego-enhancement. The first group consists of those individuals who prefer to travel to escape from their daily and routine life. The second group includes those people who take a trip in order to enhance their knowledge about their world. Dann believes that the real decision made by a tourist for travelling depends upon his/her own needs, which means an individual's internal motivations or the push factors play a more significant role in the destination chosen by a tourist compared to the destination attractions. Two years after that, in 1979, Crompton proposed his own model for the push and the pull factors and elaborated on the significance of the role played by the destination in attracting tourists. Crompton demonstrated that there are seven factors that motivate people to leave their own home to travel to another place. He named them push factors. Likewise, after people make a clear decision about the trip based on their own needs, the different features of the destination cause them to choose one destination among all the possible options for a trip. After Dann and Crompton, Iso-Ahola proposed his motivational theory in 1982 and regarded escape and exploration as two significant factors which motivate tourists. He examined the motivation for a trip in two aspects named intrapersonal and interpersonal. Making new friends can be fallen into the intrapersonal category while seeking new things can be fallen into the interpersonal one.

Following the consecutive researches, the approach to the procedures for trip-related motivations was made by Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) and Pearce (1993) according to the hierarchy of needs based by Maslow (1943). Despite the fact that Pearce found this approach to be a suitable base for evaluation, due to the lack of motivational theories in tourism, Ryan (2002) started to criticize this approach stating that it seeks to examine empirical concepts more than motivational ones. Later on, Pearce cooperating with Lee changed the concept "Travel Career Ladder" to "Travel Career Approach" (Pearce and Lee, 2005). Pearce considered three levels of motivation based on life stages and experience gained from a trip (travel experience). In the first level, the designed model of main motivations, which are common among most people, can be observed. These factors include seeking new things, escape, relaxation, relief, and relationship enhancement. The more someone travels, the more motivation he/she gains.

The examination of recent studies (Gilbert and Terrata, 2001; Hanqin and Lam, 1999; Kim, Jogaratnam, and Noh, 2006; Kozak, 2002; Mohsin and Alsawafi, 2011; Phau et al., 2013; Sangpikul, 2008; Sirakaya, Uysal, and Yoshioka, 2003) in the area of travel motivation demonstrates that among the proposed models,

Crompton's (1979) push and pull factors are more popular among researchers. Nonetheless, escape and knowledge (ego-enhancement) were considered to be the two ultimate travel motivations in the majority of previous studies. This fact shows a great similarity between Dann (1977) and Iso-Ahola (1982) travel motivations theory on one hand, and Crompton's (1979) Push and Pull factors on the other.

Hypothesis 1: Escape and ego-enhancement are the first two general travel motivations.

Investigation of previous studies on tourist motivation shows that there is a great difference between the motivations of travelling to a cultural destination and a recreational one. It seems that tourists who travel to a cultural destination seek new knowledge. Here are some studies which show this fact. Hanqin and Lam (1999) showed that gaining knowledge and the need for respect and development of human relationship were the most important push factors among the Chinese tourists who travelled to Hong Kong. Gilbert and Terrata (2001) examined the motivation in Japanese tourists during their visits to the UK. They found that the most significant internal push factors in Japanese tourists in general were visiting landscapes and natural attractions. Sangpikul (2008) investigated elderly Japanese tourists who travelled to Thailand. In his research, gaining knowledge was the most substantial push factors for this type of tourists. Following that, Hsu, Cai, and Mimi (2010) also showed that knowledge is the first reason for tourists travelling to Hong Kong. Hua and Yoo (2011) were the other group of researchers who found that tourists with cultural motivation try cultural destinations. They investigated Chinese tourists who selected the United States for their travel destination. As it is clear in these researches, all of these mentioned destinations, including Hong Kong, United Kingdom, Thailand, and the United States, have cultural merits and attractions.

On the other hand, tourists who travel to a recreational destination seem to escape from their routines. Kim et al. (2006), conducted some research on trip motivations amongst American students, who had selected American beaches for their holidays. Escape, relaxation, and entertainment were among their most important push factors. PH, et al. (2013) investigated the motivation for tourists in choosing private parks. Escape and health, respect for cultural and natural resources, and curiosity were the three important push factors for them in choosing those parks. Van der Merwe, Slabbert, and Saayman (2011) also showed that escape and relaxation were the most important motives for tourists who travel to five marine resorts of South Africa. Although Hua and Yoo (2011) found that knowledge is the first motivation for Chinese to travel to The United States; Johanson (2007) showed that escape is the first motivation for people with this nationality to travel to the US. However, there is a big difference between these two research projects. The first one is more general and has

paid attention to whole aspects of the US whereas the latter is more specific and has investigated Chinese tourists who had travelled to Hawaii as a recreational destination. Kau and Lim (2005) also conducted some research on push and pull factors of Chinese in travelling to another island-based country named Singapore. Just like other recreational destinations, their first motivation has been escape. As this paragraph suggests, people who took trips to parks, beaches, and tourism resorts have just one priority for their trip, escape.

Hypothesis 2: There are differences between travel motivations when travelling to cultural and recreational destinations.

Among all of the previous researches on pull and push factors, Kozak's (2002) research was more comprehensive. He demonstrated that there is a remarkable difference between the motivation of multinational people and that of people with the same nationality during their visits to other countries. In his research, he examined the way British and German people travel to Mallorca and Emirates. In that study, Germans were more interested in culture than British people whereas British people were much more motivated by entertainment compared to Germans. Regarding the destination, those tourists who chose to travel to Emirates, were more interested in culture. As the results of Hua and Yoo (2011) and Johanson (2007) showed different motivations for travelling to a huge country such as the United States, it seems that the same different motivation would be considered for other huge countries such as Emirates. In these multi-dimensional countries, which have both cultural and recreational destinations, it seems the concept of destination is more effective than the origin of tourists who are travelling there. Although Prayag and Ryan (2011) and Kozak (2002) have shown that nationality of tourists affect their motivation in travelling to other places to some extent, the current study has focused on the concept of destination which is cultural or recreational. In order to reach this goal, Dubai is considered a recreational destination and Abu Dhabi a cultural one.

METHODOLOGY

Because the current research aimed at investigating the gap between the motivation of those tourists who travelled to different kinds of destinations, Emirates was chosen as the tourist resort. To accomplish this goal, 472 questionnaires were distributed among the Iranian travelers at Imam Khomeini International Airport. A total of 432 reliable questionnaires were collected out of 472 distributed questionnaires. As Abu Dhabi is considered to be the main centre for shopping, business, and immigration for Iranian travelers, the questionnaires, designed for people who wished to travel to this country, were distributed merely among those who chose to travel

to Emirates for leisure. The questionnaires were distributed in Jun 2016. Jun is one of the most popular months of the year for Iranians to take a trip.

Final items of the questionnaire were selected using previous researches (Correia, Oom do Valle, and Moco, 2007; Hanqin and Lam, 1999; Hua and Yoo, 2011; Kau and Lim, 2005; Kim et al., 2006; Kozak, 2002; Sirakaya et al., 2003), interviews, and pilot tests. 26 items related to push factors and 21 items about pull factors, which were asked based upon a five point Likert-type importance scale, were reduced to five push factors and five pull factors, after factor analysis, to facilitate the process of analysis. Some items were removed because they were not suitable for the factor analysis.

The SPSS program was employed to analyse the data. Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation approach was performed to decrease 47 push and pull items to fewer factors. Because the items of the factors were not equal, the variance of the factors could not be considered a suitable criterion for selecting the priority of factors after factor analysis. Therefore, the score of the mean test was regarded as the importance criterion. In order to compare the means significance of the factors, an independent t-test was used to determine the difference between the motivations of those tourists who chose to travel to Emirates. In the end, push factors and pull factors were ranked by their means in each destination separately.

RESULTS

In total, 61% of the respondents were females while 39% were males. 35% of the samples were singles while 65% were married people. The respondents were categorized into three groups in terms of their age: 1- The young (18–35 years of age) 2- The middle-aged (36–55 years of age) 3- The elderly (more than 56 years of age).

The young group was the most frequent group of Iranian travelers visiting Emirates (63%). The middle-aged group constituted 31% of the sample while the group for the elderly constituted 6% of the sample. In terms of level of education, 20% of the sample held a diploma degree or lower than that, 52% of the sample held a Bachelor's degree, and 28% of the sample held a Master's or a PhD degree.

At the beginning, the research consisted of more items obtained from the existing interviews and from the previous studies; however, some of items were removed regarding factor analysis. This removal had two main reasons. First, some items lacked suitable reliability scores. Second, they were not suitable for the factor analysis of the current research, and, as a result, they were not included in any of the factors. For example, the item "cultural similarity to Iran" was removed due to the lack of suitable reliability. Furthermore, the item "Being with other tourists", which was initially supposed to be

Table 1. Factor analysis with varimax rotation for *push factors*.

Factor mean	Alpha	Variance explained	Eigen value	Factor loading	Factor
4.06	0.884	20.66	3.72	0.891	Factor 1: Escape
				0.847	Being released from work pressure
				0.799	Escaping from routine life and its demands
				0.759	Getting away from home
				0.754	Being in a different environment
					Being released of stress and tension
2.04	0.848	16.15	2.91	0.885	Factor 2: Prestige
				0.866	Visiting a destination that would impress others
					Visiting places that my friends/relatives have never seen
				0.840	Going on a trip that people appreciate
				0.743	Telling the account of the journey to others
3.96	0.790	14.52	2.61	0.819	Factor 3: Ego-enhancement
				0.816	Learning new things which broaden my view
				0.784	Experiencing new cultures and lifestyles
				0.728	Developing mentally and intellectually
					Promoting knowledge about a foreign destination
3.76	0.747	11.26	2.03	0.800	Factor 4: Fun
				0.735	Being free to do what I like
				0.660	Doing exciting things
					For fun and entertainment
3.64	0.876	10.06	1.81		Factor 5: Relationship
					Relationships with friends and family

Table 2. Factor analysis with varimax rotation for *pull factors*.

Factor mean	Alpha	Variance explained	Eigen value	Factor loading	Factor
4.03	0.842	15.95	2.55	0.830	Factor 1: Accessibility
				0.797	No requirement for getting visa for Iranians
					Comparably better expenses than other destination
				0.759	Ease of planning the travel
				0.622	Convenient access for Iranians
3.55	0.818	15.19	2.43	0.834	Factor 2: Infrastructures
				0.712	Convenient transportation
				0.683	Convenient accommodation
				0.638	various foods and beverages
					satisfactory sanitation
4.01	0.800	14.90	2.38	0.815	Factor 3: Entertainments
				0.804	Suitable freedom
				0.717	Amusing nightlife
					Nice beaches and water sports
3.77	0.811	14.09	2.25	0.872	Factor 4: Attractions
				0.791	Historical and cultural attractions
				0.766	Natural attractions and beautiful sceneries
					Modern attractions
3.73	0.810	12.79	2.05	0.868	Factor 5: Shopping
				0.811	Suitable price and quality of goods
					Shopping centers

included in the relationship factor, did not show any significant factor-based effect in any of these factors. Table 1 shows the push factors of Iranians who travel to Emirates.

The average of the above factors shows that escape, relaxation, and Ego-enhancement were the most

prominent factors and fun, relationship enhancement, and prestige are in the other levels. The results of these tables approved the first hypothesis of this research which claims Escape and Ego-enhancement to be the first two general travel motivations. Table 2 shows the pull factors of Emirates, attracting Iranians.

Table 3. *T*-test for comparison of push and pull factors by destination.

Relationship	Fun	Ego-enhancement	Prestige	Escape	Variable
3.39	3.55	4.06	1.94	3.77	Abu Dhabi
3.87	3.97	3.87	2.12	4.34	Dubai
0.000	0.107	0.307	0.002	0.000	Significance level
Shopping	Attraction	Entertainment	Infrastructure	Accessibility	Variable
3.86	3.87	3.69	3.47	3.99	Abu Dhabi
3.59	3.65	4.30	3.70	4.04	Dubai
0.699	0.855	0.000	0.054	0.085	Significance level

Table 4. Rank of *pull and push factors* by destination.

5	4	3	2	1	Push factors
Prestige	Relationship	Fun	Escape/Rest	knowledge	Abu Dhabi
Prestige	Knowledge	Relationship	Fun	Escape/Rest	Dubai
5	4	3	2	1	Pull factors
Infrastructure	Entertainment	Shopping	Attraction	Accessibility	Abu Dhabi
Shopping	Attraction	Infrastructure	Accessibility	Entertainment	Dubai

The table for the pull factors shows that accessibility and entertainment were the most significant tourism factors in Emirates for the Iranian travelers. Besides, shopping centres and infrastructures are in the other levels of significance. "No requirement for getting visa for Iranians", "comparably better expenses than other destinations", and "convenient access for Iranians" were the main options formulating the accessibility. The results of these two tables approved the first hypothesis of this research that was escape and ego-enhancement being the first two general travel motivations.

Although the main purpose of Iranian travelers for travelling to Emirates was shown to be their main motivation for escape, accessibility was the most important pull factor; the average comparison between the factors in those tourists who preferred to choose the cultural destination of Emirates and those who selected the recreational aspects of this country was different. Table 3 shows the means comparison among Iranians who travel to these two kinds of destinations.

The results of the above table show that at the significant level of 95%, among the push factors, three factors, including escape, prestige, and relationship enhancement, are significantly different from each other. This means that those travelers who prefer to choose tourist resorts need more relaxation, escape, prestige, and more relationship enhancement compared to those who travel to a cultural destination. Likewise, the entertainment of in a destination is more significance for those tourists who are interested in recreational

destinations. If we consider the level of significance to be 90%, accessibility and infrastructures of a destination play a more important role for travelers of tourist resorts. The ranking for the significance of the push factors and the attraction of these two kinds of destinations for Iranian tourists based upon the mean for both recreational and cultural destinations may hopefully provide a better understanding of the topic. This ranking is provided in Table 4.

As it can be observed, for the push factors, while Abu Dhabi is the most important priority for the trip and stands out as a cultural destination for ego-enhancement, for those tourist resorts, including Dubai, this is the fourth priority. Instead, escape, fun, and relationship enhancement are more significant factors in tourist resorts.

For the pull factors, a cultural destination, including Abu Dhabi, attracts tourists mainly because of its own attractions and shopping centres. For recreational destinations, entertainments and infrastructures of destination exert more influence over tourists. Therefore, regarding the results of the three latter tables, the second hypothesis of this study seems acceptable, which states that there are differences between travel motivations when travelling to cultural and recreational destinations.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The total results of the current research show that for

Iranian travelers, two personal needs or motivations, including escape and ego-enhancement, are the most important push factors for trips to Emirates. This finding is consistent with the findings of most of the studies after Crompton (1979), and these points are always treated as the most important motivational factors. When Crompton proposed his motivational model, Dann (1977) and Iso-Ahola (1982) proposed their motivational models, and both of them regarded escape and ego-enhancement as two fundamental push factors for a trip. Now, after many years of more investigations over Crompton's motivational theory, it has been found out that among the seven push factors proposed by him, escape and ego-enhancement provide the basis for decisions to be made for travelling.

The point that has been somehow embedded in this theory (push and pull Factors) in these past years is the role that motivation plays in choosing the destination of any trip. By examining the previous studies, we could convey this fact that those tourists whose main motivation for a trip is ego-enhancement tend to go to cultural destinations (Hanqin and Lam, 1999; Kozak, 2002), and those who take a trip to escape and to relax tend to experience tourist resorts more (Kim et al., 2006; Phau et al., 2013). In this research, those tourists who showed a great tendency towards ego-enhancement, preferred to choose the cultural aspect of Abu Dhabi while those whose most important motivation was escape, chose tourist resorts of Dubai. Earlier, Kozak (2002) had already pointed out this issue by considering Emirates and Mallorca. His findings suggested that tourists who choose Emirates for a visit are culturally much more motivated than those who travel to Mallorca Islands. With respect to the findings of the current research, it is completely justifiable that tourists who travel to the resorts of Mallorca have less cultural motivation than those who travel to Emirates. A point which was paid no attention to neither in Kozak's research nor in any of the previous studies is that the type of destination is much more influential than a particular country in terms of motivating the tourists with different motivations and attracting them. Therefore, those individuals who tend to escape from their homes prefer to travel to tourist resorts. This destination may be an island (Van der Merwe et al., 2011), a coastal town, a mountainous area, or a natural park (Phau et al., 2013). Conversely, those who seek to gain knowledge and experience ego-enhancement can have many different choices. They can travel to a city with many tourist attractions (Prayag and Hosany, 2014), or take a trip to a highly civilized country (Hanqin and Lam, 1999), or try an area with a new and different culture. One of the important points that cannot be neglected easily is travel limitations and travel companions, in which a tourist who intends to gain knowledge may be attracted to a tourist resort due to his/her family friends selection and vice versa.

For different types of pull factors, accessibility, both in

this research and in the other previous researches (Hanqin and Lam, 1999; Kim et al., 2006; Phau et al., 2013), is said to be a key topic, and it shows that accessibility can be the most important pull factor at least in the available destinations. According to Table 4, entertainment can be regarded as the main priority in the tourist resorts, which can attract the tourists, while for a cultural destination, the attractions of that destination is of great significance. It may be due to this reason that a tourist who travels to a tourist resort may wish to spend some time in a hotel and by the beach whereas a traveler who takes a trip to a cultural destination may prefer to stay in a hotel just for the sake of sleeping and daily relaxation. This is one of the topics which can draw the attention of many hotel owners as well as planners, and they can take them into consideration while making policies. These results show that high-grade and prestigious hotels are more required in recreational destination as well as centres for entertainment. One of the other differences between a tourist with the knowledge-based motivation and one with the escape-oriented motivation is that the latter pays more attention to the infrastructures of a destination. It may seem completely logical that a tourist who travels in order to get rid of work and daily life and mental concerns is less willing to encounter the weak infrastructures and prefers to choose a destination where he can feel more relieved and comfortable. In cultural tourism, the traveler may be ready to ignore some infrastructural problems in exchange for learning many new things. Travel agencies should also pay attention to their customers' travel motivations. If travelers are looking for knowledge, they should be suggested cultural destinations, and when they want to escape their routines, recreational destinations could be the best suggestion for them.

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