Understanding the Behavioral Intention of European Tourists

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims at exploring the behavioral intention of European tourists to choose Mauritius as their holiday destination. The Theory of Planned Behavior, and the Push and Pull theories have been chosen as the theoretical basis of the study.

Design / Methodology / Approach: Prior to conducting a questionnaire survey, a pilot survey was conducted to test the questionnaire’s reliability. The final survey was conducted with 200 tourists during their stay in Mauritius.

Findings: Results obtained from the respondents allowed to test the hypotheses proposed in the study. A multiple regression analysis was carried out in order to test the hypotheses and the study findings reveal the relationship among the variables. Results indicated that the push and pull motives of travelers influenced their attitude toward Mauritius. Furthermore, attitude and subjective norm were found to be determinants of behavioral intention. On the other hand, perceived behavioral control was not found to significantly influence behavioral intention. The implications of the study findings are discussed.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior, Push and Pull, Motivation, Europe, Mauritius
INTRODUCTION

Various studies have dealt with tourist motivation for travel. Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioral intention in choosing a holiday destination are fundamental for tourism planners and marketers. These studies have found out that there are two factors that motivate people to travel: “push” and “pull” factors (Awaritefe, 2004; Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Fodness, 1994; Uysal and Hagan, 1993; Uysal and Jurowski, 1994; Yoon and Uysal, 2001). The “push” factors are those elements that push an individual from home and make him/her want to travel somewhere else. The “pull” factors attract the individual toward a destination due to its situation/region and the perceived attractiveness of the destination. As the Theory of Planned Behavior (Azjen 1991) postulates, factors such as attitudes toward a destination, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control might also influence tourist choice of destination as well as their future behavioral intentions. Understanding the future behavior of travelers seems to be crucial for destination managers and destination marketing organizations (Lam and Hsu, 2005). This study develops a model based on the combined use of the push and pull framework and the TPB (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

The above model considers the behavioral intention as the ultimate dependent variable of the study. Three independent constructs are proposed to influence BI. These include Attitude, Perceived
Behavioral Control and Subjective Norm. Furthermore, overall attitude is considered to be determined by the push and pull motives of travelers.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Importance of understanding tourist motivation

“Motivation is the need that drives an individual to act in a certain way to achieve the desired satisfaction” (Beerli et al, 2004: 626). One of the most complex issues facing researchers attempting to study tourists’ behaviors is to understand the traveling motives of travelers (Crompton, 1979). Tourist motivation is believed to be the foundation of influencing the way tourist behaves (Crompton, 1979) as well as where they travel to, when they travel, what activities they participate in the destination (Hudson, 1999) and their satisfaction (Prebensen, 2006; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). From the destinations’ point of view, it is very important to know why tourists choose (or not choose) a destination and how the tourists feel about the place they visited. According to Sharma (1995) it is significant to understand tourist motivation and decision-making processes not only for its impacts on destination areas (Crompton, 1979), but also for economic reasons related to promotion of tourism and tourism planning which rely on understanding tourist decision-making. It also enables the identification of market segmentation and target marketing.

Push factors

Socio-psychological motives are the intrinsic motivations that push one to travel. Different researchers have different hypotheses as to what these motives could be. Kotler (1982), for instance, states that motivations can be the result of internal and external stimuli. Internal stimuli arise from personal needs that can be physiological, social, egocentric, safety and self-actualization. This theory joins Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which implies that there are five levels of human motivation, namely Physiological needs, Safety, Belonging, Esteem or Respect and Self-actualization. Crompton (1979) identified nine motives for travel: seven of which were socio-psychological or push motives and two cultural pull motives being novelty and education. Awaritefe (2004) classified the push motives as Foreign and has also found that the elements that push people to travel are, categorized as Cultural/Education needs, Education, Need for environment change, Self-actualization and Belonging/love. In addition to the above Awaritefe also showed that what motivate people in their choice of a destination are Self-improvement in an appreciative cultural or educational context and
Leisure/recreational pursuits. Thus, push factors are factors that can make one want to travel in order to satisfy one’s needs.

**Hypothesis 1: There is a direct positive relationship between push motives and overall attitude**

**Pull factors**

In this context, so as to attract tourists to a destination, marketers need to determine why tourists decide to travel and why they choose a particular destination as motivation driver behavior (Gnoth, 1997). Together with the push factors, the pull factors need a particular attention. Pull factors are the destination attributes that serve as attraction for the tourist and this plays an important role in destination choice (Crompton, 1979; Awaritefe, 2004). In the push-pull framework the pull factors refer to the external forces that influence a person’s choice of destination. Pull factors refer to Man-made attractions (e.g., infrastructure and superstructure), Natural attractions, Historical sites, Beaches, Climate (Sirakaya, 1992). Awaritefe (2004) classified pull motives as the Domestic with emphasis on favorable Location, Facilities/Amenities, Access to centres, Cost satisfaction, Quality services and good Accommodation. However Awaritefe’s framework does not include certain factors such as Climate, Historical sites, among others, contrary to Baloglu and Uysal (1996). In addition to the above, You et al (2000) proposed that marketers should recognize the differences among countries as a basis for designing effective marketing programs.

**Hypothesis 2: There is a direct positive relationship between pull motives and overall attitude**

**Theory of planned behavior**

Travel behavior of tourists and their destination choice have attracted many scholars for the past few decades but how travelers’ behavioral intention in choosing a travel destination is developed has rarely been investigated. This study therefore attempts to test the applicability of the theory of planned behavior model (Ajzen, 1985), using its core construct (attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control) so as to predict behaviors of European tourists and understand their behavioral intention of choosing Mauritius as a holiday destination.

Since it is in our interest to understand people’s behavior, we must also identify the determinants of intentions. People are expected to act in accordance with their intentions (Kuhl et al, 1985). The determinants of intentions can be both personal and impregnate with social influence and this joins the push theory. Both push and pull frameworks are being used to analyze the individual’s intention to spend his/her holidays in Mauritius. Furthermore, the theory also suggests that the subjective norm implying that if the individual believes that others would encourage the behavior, the individual would be more
likely to engage in the behavior. In addition to the above, the TPB claims that if the individual perceives that he/she has control over the behavior, he/she will definitely adopt the behavior. Perceived control beliefs are the opportunities and/or obstacles the individual may face when deciding to behave in a certain manner. Hence, the behavioral intention, the subjective norms and the perceived behavioral control are components of the TPB that influence decision-making. When applied to this study, the TPB suggests that if an individual has positive attitudes about a destination, he/she will choose the destination for his/her holidays. For the purpose of the study, the Push & Pull Framework has been taken from Awaritefe (1991) and the Behavioral Intention is adapted from Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1988).

Hypothesis 3: There is a direct positive relationship between overall attitude and Behavioral Intention

Hypothesis 4: There is a direct positive relationship between Subjective Norm and Behavioral Intention

Hypothesis 5: There is a direct positive relationship between Perceived Behavioral Control and Behavioral Intention

Tourist motivation and Behavioral Intention

In tourism research motivation has been a common area of study (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Awaritefe, 2004; Park and Yoon, 2009). One of the most borrowed framework to study tourist motivation is the “Push” and “Pull” model which postulates that tourists’ choice of a destination is influenced by the above forces: push factors are those which push individuals from home while pull factors are those factors which pull the individual to a destination. As Lam and Hsu (2005) suggest, people travel because they are pushed by internal motives and also because they are pulled by external forces of a destination. The “push” motivations have been used to explain the desire for travel, as they are the starting point of understanding tourists’ behavior (Crompton, 1979; Kim et al., 2008).

Behavioral intention has been defined by Swan (1981) as an individual’s planned future behavior. It has been associated with observed behavior (Baloglu, 2000). Fishbein and Ajzen’s model (1975) is based on three constructs, namely Attitude, Subjective Norm and perceived Behavioral Control and has been used by Lam and Hsu (2005) to examine social behavior with strong predictive utility.
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Design

To measure behavioral intention of European tourists, this study utilizes the push and pull constructs as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior. The Push variable consists of 10 items whereas the Pull variable includes 8 constructs. In addition to that, the Perceived Behavioral Control consists of 2 items while the Attitude has 4 constructs, Subjective Norm includes 3 items and the Behavioral Intention variable has 4 items. The statements were taken from Pearce and Lee (2005), Jiang et al (2000), Awaritefe (2004), Gibson and Yannakis (2002) and Lam and Hsu (2005). A few changes were however brought to some statements to fit in the area of the study.

The questionnaire included close-ended questions. A close-ended question is one where the respondent is offered a range of answers to choose from and the Likert-type scale was specifically given to respondents in order for them to rate between 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree for each of the statements included in the questionnaire. A mid-point of 3 is used to give the tourists the opportunity to answer by Neither Agree nor Disagree.

A pilot survey was conducted among 40 tourists in two hotels situated on the Western coast of Mauritius. This exercise was carried out to test the reliability and content validity of the questionnaire which originally contained 9 parts, namely Section A to Section I. After collecting the questionnaires, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for descriptive analyses. A factor analysis was run to elicit the different items loading on the factors and from there a reliability test was done. To test the correctness of the factor analysis the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used. Then the varimax rotation method was used to extract factors for analyzes. A Cronbach’s Alpha test was then conducted. Results are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Reliability and validity results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Push</td>
<td>0.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of air tickets</td>
<td>0.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for Money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels offer good services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International hotel chains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local attractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities not available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived behavioral control</td>
<td>0.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control over finance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Le Meridien Hotel, Mauritius, 24-27 August 2010
A few changes, namely length of questionnaire and age were brought to the final questionnaire as a result of the respondents’ comments.

Survey method and sample
A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed among tourists residing in different hotels, but only 200 questionnaires were duly filled. The respondents comprised mainly of female, 109 respondents and 91 males. The country of origin of the respondents is France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, Estonia, Austria, Holland, Czech Republic and Sweden. This data has been obtained through questionnaires in English.

STUDY FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS
The purpose of the study was to develop a model which incorporated factors drawn from the Theory of Planned Behavior and the push and pull framework to understand the behavioral intention of travelers visiting the island of Mauritius. Accordingly, the model proposed the push and pull motives are determinants of travelers’ overall attitudes toward tourism. The latter, together with the subjective norms of the travelers, and the perceived behavioral control were proposed to be determinants of the behavioral intentions of tourists, the ultimate dependent variable of the study.

Based on the model, five hypotheses were developed and tested using multiple regression analysis. Overall findings indicated support for the push (Awaritefe, 2004) and pull (Crompton, 1979; Awaritefe, 2004) framework, while the Theory of Planned Behavior was partially supported, where Perceived Behavioral Control was not found to be a significant determinant of Behavioral Intention.

Hypothesis 1 which proposed that There is a direct positive relationship between push motives and overall attitude was supported. This indicates that the push motives of travelers is a good determinant
of their attitudes toward Mauritius. Push motives such as learning of cultures and history, relationship building or improvement in the relationship with companions, family or friends, discovering new things as well as the need to escape from daily routine, people’s need for self-actualization, prestige amongst other internal desires and emotional factors (Crompton, 1979; Baloglu and Uysal, 1996; Yoon and Uysal, 2005) have been found to play an important role in shaping the attitudes of tourists and their decision to travel.

Hypothesis 2 which proposed that There is a direct positive relationship between pull motives and overall attitude was supported. This indicates that the pull motives of travelers is a good determinant of their attitudes toward Mauritius. At the same time this confirms the findings of several scholars in the field. Research has shown that pull factors, e.g. tourism infrastructure and hotels (Lam and Hsu, 2006), local attractions, price (Awaritefe, 2004) and activities available in the destination are bound to affect tourists’ attitude towards a destination (Crompton, 1979; Awaritefe, 2004; Jiang et al., 2000, Lam and Hsu, 2006). As Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggested in their studies, an individual’s attitude is believed to be the first antecedent of behavioral intention.

Hypothesis 3 which proposed that There is a direct positive relationship between overall Attitude and Behavioral Intention was also supported. This indicates that the attitude of travelers is a good determinant of their intention to choose Mauritius as their holiday destination. At the same time this confirms the findings of several researchers in the field (Um and Crompton, 1990). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) describe attitude as the first antecedent of behavioral intention. Attitude towards behavior (AtB) can be either positive or negative (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980).

Hypothesis 4 proposed that There is a direct positive relationship between Subjective Norm and Behavioral Intention and was supported. This indicates that subjective norm of travelers is a good determinant of their intention to choose Mauritius for their holidays. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) subjective norms are those who approve or disapprove the behavior of an individual. Lam and Hsu (2005) also suggested that social behavior had strong predictive utility.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that There is a direct positive relationship between Perceived Behavioral Control and Behavioral Intention. This hypothesis has however been rejected. The results showed that perceived behavioral control does not play a significant role in predicting the tourists’ intention to choose Mauritius as a holiday destination, contrary to what numerous researchers have found. Although Ajzen (1991) proposed that intention can be predicted by perceived behavioral control, the results of this study have showed that this is not the case for people’s intention to travel to Mauritius.

Table 2 summarizes the findings of the study. As indicated, four of the five proposed hypotheses were supported. Figure 2 shows the tested model, with the path coefficients.
Table 2. Summary of the findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Accepted / Rejected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a direct positive relationship between push motives and overall</td>
<td>H1 (b = 0.294; t = 4.486; P &lt; 0.01)</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a direct positive relationship between pull motives and overall</td>
<td>H2 (b = 0.331; t = 5.044; P &lt; 0.01)</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a direct positive relationship between overall attitude and</td>
<td>H3 (b = 0.375; t = 4.633; P &lt; 0.01)</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavioral intention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a direct positive relationship between subjective norm and</td>
<td>H4 (b = 0.138; t = 1.956; P &lt; 0.05)</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavioral intention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a direct positive relationship between perceived behavioral</td>
<td>H5 (b = -0.079; t = -1.054; P &gt; 0.05)</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control and behavioral intention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Model of the study
CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

After review of a large variety of literature on tourists’ motivation, tourists’ typologies, push and pull factors, theory of planned behavior, the relationship between tourist motivation and behavioral intention, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, it is clear that understanding tourist motivation to choose and travel to a destination is important for destinations to further attract tourists. Based on the review, a model together with five hypotheses have been proposed to test the relationship between push factors and attitude, pull factors and attitude, attitude and behavioral intention, subjective norm and behavioral intention and perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention. The results have shown that push and pull factors influence tourists’ attitude in choosing and travelling to a destination. Subjective norm as well as attitude also play an important role in people’s intention to travel to a particular destination. However, perceived behavioral control did not influence tourists’ intention.

Destination Marketing Organisations, tourism marketers and tourist offices can use the proposed model to attract potential visitors and to retain existing ones. Firstly, it has been understood that due to the intangible nature of travel, tourism depends on positive images. Since the strongest variable to predict behavioral intention in this study was attitude compared to subjective norm and perceived behavioral control, it would be advisable that DMOs and related tourism offices concentrate their effort on building a positive attitude in potential tourists’ mind so as to attract them and influence their decision in choosing Mauritius as their holiday destination. This research was based on people’s motivation to travel and the different factors which influence destination choice. This study showed that as the number of tourists visiting Mauritius increases, Europeans’ intention to visit Mauritius becomes stronger. It provides some information that could be of value to Destination Marketing Organizations, tourist offices and government and private bodies. More promotional effort could be done to attract and retain European tourists. Tourists should be able to differentiate between the long-haul destinations and finally decide on choosing Mauritius as their holiday destination.
REFERENCES


Kim et Lee (2002)


Le Meridien Hotel, Mauritius, 24-27 August 2010


