

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS FOR SPRING BREAK VACATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Although it is a growing market, university students' travel motivations have received limited attention in tourism research. In response, this research was designed to explore university students' travel motivations for spring break vacations by applying the framework of push-pull factors. An online survey was designed and sent to students in one public mid-western university in 2011. Seven factors within the push and pull model were generated and examined. This research resulted in a more comprehensive picture of travel motivations, as well as the significant practical implications for developing effective strategies to target this important travel market of university students.

Key Words: travel motivation, university student market, and push-pull factors

INTRODUCTION

The growing youth and student travel market has the potential to generate billions of dollars in revenue (Bywater, 1993; Hsu & Sung, 1997; Mattila, Apostolopoulos, Sonmez, Yu & Sasidharan, 2001). Every year 140 million young people travel, and about 20% of them are between the age of 15 and 25 (Richard & Wilson, 2004). Undoubtedly, the growing number of university students is a leading factor in this continued growth of students travel market (Mattila, et al, 2001). Even though many studies stress the importance of college/university students' travel market and travel behaviors in both domestic and international travels (e.g. Babin & Kim, 2001; Bai, Hu, Elsworth & Countryman, 2005; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; Mattila, et al., 2001), a review of literature indicates that students' travel motivations that influence travel decisions and behaviors have received limited attentions in tourism research (Kim, Oh, & Jogaratnam, 2007).

Motivation is defined as "a state of need, a condition that serves as a driving force to display different kinds of behavior toward certain types of activities, developing preferences, arriving at some expected satisfactory outcomes" (Backman et al, 1995, p. 17). The theoretical frameworks of travel motivation studies originated from sociology and social psychology (Woodside & Martin, 2008). In psychology and sociology, the definition of motivation is related to emotional and cognitive motives (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), and internal and external motives (Gnoth, 1977). A widely accepted approach to understanding travel motivation is the concept of push and pull demand stimulation. Tourist motivation based on the concept of push and pull factors has been widely accepted (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Dann 1977; Jamrozy & Uysal, 1994; Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Pyo, Mihalik & Uysal, 1989; Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). The underlying assumption of push and pull factors is that people travel because

they are pushed by their internal forces like a desire to escape from the ordinary life, and pulled by external forces such as destination attributes (Mohammad & Som, 2010).

Crompton (1979) initially identified seven socio-psychological, or push motives and two cultural, or pull motives in the motivation for pleasure vacations. Subsequently, many other researchers attempted to apply pull and push motivational factors for different settings such as nationalities, destinations and events (Jang & Wu, 2006). According to Goossens (2000), pull and push factors are two sides of the same motivational coin. However, previous research on students' travel motivations was limited to applying either the push or pull motives, or generalizing results from small research samples. To overcome such limitations, this research explored university students' travel motivations for spring break vacations by incorporating both push and pull factors.

METHOD

An online survey was designed to collect information regarding university students' travel motivations for spring break vacations. Data was collected from April 11, 2011 to April 20, 2011 at Western Illinois University (WIU), in Macomb, IL, U.S. Every student enrolled during the 2010-2011 academic year received an email in their WIU email account with a website link to take the survey. The survey included three sections. The first part requested basic demographic and background information of the respondents. The second part included questions measuring students' expenditures, travel durations, and the type of transportation chosen for the spring break trip. The last part involved 26 items describing students' motivations for spring break travel. This was consisted of 14 push factors and 12 pull factors. A four-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" to "Strongly Disagree" was used to indicate how important each item was to respondents. A total of 482 students took this online survey, 43% (208) completed the last part of the survey. Responses from the last section of the survey were subjected to factor analysis.

RESULTS

Principal Component Factor Analysis using varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was employed to assess the underlying factors associated with the 14 push motivation items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score of 0.774 indicated that the 14-item sample was adequate for factor analysis. Four factors with Eigenvalues greater than one were derived, and they explained a total variance of 65.98%. Two items of "sharing information about the trip" and "going places that friends have not been to" were dropped because they both cross loaded on two factors. Factor analysis was recalculated with the remaining 12 push motivational items. With a KMO score of 0.738, four factors with Eigenvalues greater than one were generated by explaining a total variance of 70.59%. As the following table shows (Table 1), these four factors were named "Exploration", "Relaxation", "Activity Seeking" and "Socializing".

The 12 pull motivation items, with a KMO of 0.785, resulted in three factors. These three factors had Eigenvalues greater than one and explained 57.39% of the total variance. Two cross-loading items of "seeking a variety of activities" and "pleasant weather" were removed from further analysis. The remaining 10 items, with a KMO of 0.772, generated three factors explaining a total variance of 60.33%. The following table (Table 2) demonstrates that the three factors of the pull dimension were "Entertainment", "Facilities & Services", and "Environment".

Table 1
Push Factors of University Students' Travel Motivations for Spring Break

Factors	Loadings	Eigen value	Explained variance
Exploration		2.727	22.727
Learning new things or knowledge	0.775		
Experiencing new and different	0.781		
Visiting a foreign destination	0.703		
Experiencing different cultures	0.767		
Relaxation		2.554	21.281
Seeking thrill or excitement	0.703		
Being daring and adventuresome	0.667		

A break from study	0.858		
Escaping from the ordinary	0.864		
Activity Seeking		1.752	14.600
Participating in sports	0.883		
Desire for physical activities	0.863		
Socializing		1.438	11.983
Visiting family and friends	0.863		
Experiencing solitude	0.601		

Table 2
Pull Factors of University Students' Travel Motivations for Spring Break

Factors	Loadings	Eigen value	Explained variance
Entertainment		2.165	21.647
Experiencing life in modern cities	0.609		
Experiencing exotic atmosphere	0.816		
Visiting casinos and gambling	0.586		
Experiencing night life and	0.754		
Facilities & Services		2.124	21.242
Visiting in expensive restaurants	0.794		
Shopping	0.760		
Using convenient transportation to	0.727		
Environment		1.744	17.441
Traveling to historical and cultural places	0.726		
Seeing natural scenery	0.774		
Having personal safety	0.656		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Seven factors under the push and pull dimensions were generated from the quantitative surveys. Four factors generated under the push motives were "Exploration", "Relaxation", "Activity seeking", and "Socializing". Among them, "Exploration" and "Relaxation" were the strongest factors pushing students to travel during spring break, which indicated that university students traveled mainly for pursuing rest, excitement, thrill, and difference. Some of the students had stronger desires to observe and participate in different lifestyles and cultures. This allowed them an opportunity to learn and experience something different other than that in their ordinary school life. The factors of "Activity seeking" and "Socializing" also reflected students' desires for both physical and mental release. According to those students, a spring break trip was more likely to be viewed as a chance to refresh and experience freedom.

"Entertainment", "Facilities & Services", and "Environment" were the three factors generated under the pull dimension, with "Entertainment" being the most potent factor that pulled students travel to particular destinations. Due to the short period of one week for spring break, as well as the lack of particular travel purposes, students usually did not spend much time and effort looking for the destination information when they were planning the trips. Instead they mainly relied on the information from family and friends about the destinations that could provide various activities and entertainments, followed by favorable facilities and services, and good traveling environments.

Unlike previous studies, which either included only push motives or pull motives, this study resulted in a more comprehensive picture of travel motivations by measuring both push and pull factors. The findings of this study had significant practical implications for understanding university students' travel motivations, which was fundamental

in developing effective strategies to target this important and continually growing travel market of university students.

Understanding travelers' various motivations is crucial to effective tourism marketing strategies. Not only do different groups of people have different motivations, but motivations change depending on internal and external influences. Thus, researchers cannot simply determine a set of motivations and assume these will be the motivations of the future. Continual research into what drives and/or draws travelers must be undertaken to aid the diverse tourism sectors and providers develop effective marketing strategies. This study is yet another important step in the ongoing research into tourists' motivations.

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