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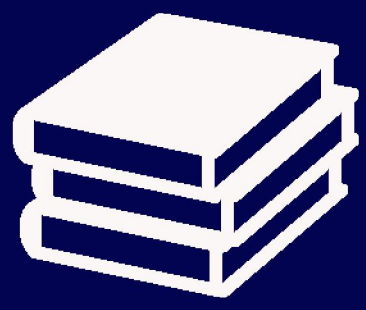

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IMPACT OF TRAVEL MOTIVES ON DESTINATION CHOICE OF MICE TRAVELERS IN SOUTHERN PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The number of international tourists is worldwide growing. MICE tourism is an industry that is growing significantly throughout the year. Meeting, Incentive, Convention and Exhibition has emerged as a critical component of the tourism industry. Also, the MICE industry has impacted the global economy by delivering higher income, employment, and government revenue. MICE travellers are identified as people who attend or have attended Meeting, Incentive, Convention and Exhibitions. Travel motives can identify as the factors that influence travellers towards their preferences and also it can refer as a set of needs and wants that influence people to engage with tourism activities. Travel motives are important in understanding and predicting factors that influence travel destinations of MICE travellers and it is one of the internal states that influence travel decision making. It is essential to understand the impact of travel motives when selecting the destinations of MICE travellers. The purpose of this study was examining the relationship between travel motives (push and pull) and destination choice of MICE travellers in Southern Province and identify the impact of travel motives (push and pull) on destination choice of MICE travellers in Southern province. Information about MICE travellers was collected through questionnaires at Southern province in Sri Lanka. A conceptual framework has been developed based on previous researches. The purposive sampling method used to collect data from 100 MICE travellers. The quantitative data analysis method was used in analysing the data using Pearson correlation coefficient and Multiple Leaner Regression. The study results indicated that travel motives (push and pull) are play a positive significant association

on destination choice of MICE travellers. Further it reveals that, travel motives (push and pull) significantly impact destination choice of MICE travellers and pull motives are mostly influence on destination choice. The best way is to plan appropriately, improve the quality of the destinations and practice of effective marketing strategies. Future researches can be conducted though examine the domestic tourists and other tourist segments select in Southern province.

***Keywords*:** destination choice *MICE tourism, MICE travellers and travel motives*

INTRODUCTION

According to the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), the tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing industry in Sri Lanka. Tourism is travelling for business, recreation or leisure purposes. The word Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. Sri Lanka has attracted visitors from abroad for many centuries. They visit to Sri Lanka for various reasons: business, leisure, culture, visit friends & relatives and other purposes (SLTDA report 2018).

Over the past decade, incentive, convention and exhibitions (MICE) have been the fastest growing sector in the domestic and international tourism industry. Cities located within the dynamic Asia-Pacific region are more popular as destinations for international meetings and conferences (Weber, 2003). The term MICE in travel is meaning for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions and the industry refers to the vital niche of group tourism. Travel motives can identify as the factors that are influencing travellers towards their preferences. Travel motives can refer to a set of needs and wants that influence people to engage with

tourism activities. According to (Novelli, 2005), travel motives are one of the most important ways to take competitive advantages. Travel motives are essential in understand and predicting factors that influence to travel destinations.

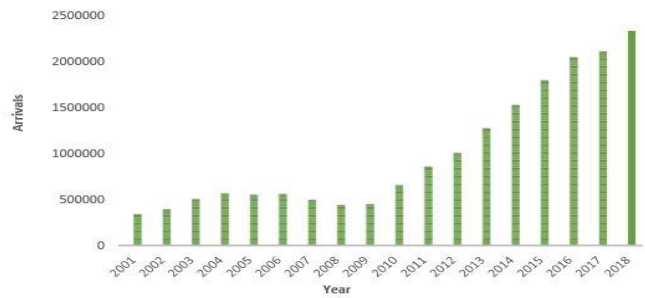
Fodness (1994) stated that motivations are vital for developing marketing strategies because of the opportunity that they give to identify why various types of travellers travel to different destinations based on their travel preferences. In the event, motivation is one of the critical factors that can impact an event's success. In the MICE industry, the participants are motivated based on some observable parameters that permit inferences indicating the participants' evaluation. Knowledge about destination choice is important to understand tourist's destination choice and to understand its implications for a destination. Therefore, it is vital to identifying MICE travellers' perception of destination choice. As MICE tourism is an emerging market globally, tourists have to make decisions for selecting the best destination among competitive destinations. It is important to the Sri Lankan economy's tourist sector and its contribution to earning foreign exchange, generating employment, and comparison with other tourist destinations.

Ngamsom (2000) has suggested that MICE-related events often allow delegates to visit a destination for the different purposes of educational learning, networking, and individual career enhancement. According to the Tourism Promotion Bureau official website,, most beaches are located in southern province and it is a central attractive area among tourists. Also, many chain hotels and international hotels are located in

the Southern Province. Not only facilities and accommodations but also their leisure purposes, Southern Province, is a vital destination for travellers. It is essential to identify travel segments and understand travel motives to attract more tourists to destinations in Southern province. There is a lack of MICE tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka and it can be due to the lack of knowledge and lack of awareness of destination planners and venue planners about travel motives on destination choice of different tourists' segments. Therefore, this research will study the impact of travel motives on destination choice of MICE travellers in the southern province.

Problem Statement

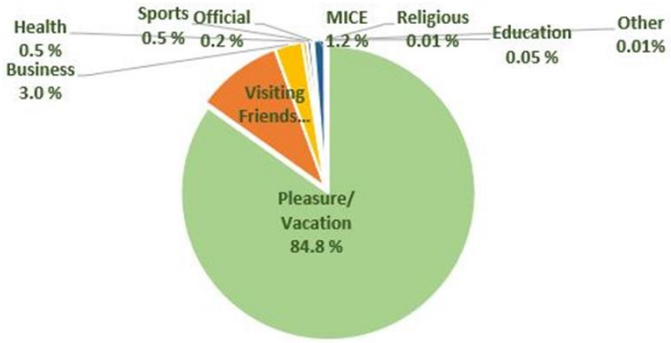
The MICE tourism sector has become an increasingly valuable sector of the tourism industry. During the last few years, the Sri Lankan Tourist's arrival is rapidly increased.



Source: SLTDA report (2018)

Figure 1: Tourists arrivals

Even though the tourist arrival is increased, Distribution by the purpose of visit (as a percentage) MICE travellers has a lower percentage.



Source: SLTDA Annual Report (2018)

Figure 2: Distribution by the purpose of visit (percentage) - 2018

The above figure shows that 81.72% of the tourists who visited the island in 2018 had come for pleasure/ vacation purposes as a holiday, recreation, touring, etc. 10.84% of tourists had come to visit friends and relatives followed by business-related travel (4%) and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) (1.7%) purposes. The largest proportion of business travelers were from South Asia (53.3%) followed by North-East Asia (12.3%) and South-East Asia (10.2%). The highest proportion of MICE tourists came from South Asia (41.4%) - (SLTDA report – 2018).

According to (SLTDA report – 2017) the figure shows that 82.4% of the tourists who visited the island in 2017 had come for pleasure/ vacation purposes as a holiday, recreation, touring, etc. 11.3% of tourists had come to visit friends and relatives followed by business-related travel (3.3%) and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) (1.3%) purposes. The largest proportion of business travelers were from South Asia (59.9%), East Asia 20.8%) and Western Europe (11.75%).

Even though the tourism arrival has been increased based on the purpose of visit MICE travelers has been increasing in a lower percentage.

Successful international tourist's marketers, venue planners, destination planners, owners, or suppliers need to clearly identify how travel motives influence travel segments to choose destinations. There are limited researches regarding the MICE travel segment in Sri Lankan context. Therefore, there is an empirical gap that needs to be full fill. There are many types of research were conducted about the motives in the Sri Lankan context. However, they were not covered up deeply considering about of travel segment. Therefore, this research seeks to fill some knowledge gaps identified and contributed to the Sri Lankan tourism industry.

Research questions

1. What is the relationship between travel motives (Push and Pull) and MICE travellers' destination choice in Southern province?
2. What is the impact of travel motives (Push and Pull) on MICE travellers' destination choice in Southern province?

Research Objectives

1. to examine the relationship between travel motives (Push and Pull) and MICE travellers' destination choice in Southern province.
2. to identify the impact of travel motives (Push and Pull) on Mice travellers' destination choice in Southern province.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MICE Tourism

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry have joined into a vital business tourism sector, following significant growth in the past decades (Jin, 2013). The term MICE in travel context is meaning for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions. The industry refers to a specialized niche of group tourism dedicated to planning, booking, and facilitating conferences, seminars, and other events, and it is the highest revenue generator to the travel industry (Allied Market Research, 2019). Davidson (1994, cited in Swarbrooke and Homer, 2001, p. 5). Meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) are a type of business tourism. It is a major driving factor of the global economy as it can contribute more revenue to the countries and cities that host such activities both direct and indirect ways, for example, event organizers, venues, lodging businesses, catering businesses, shopping destinations, tourist destinations, logistics and so on.

MICE Travelers

MICE travelers are referred as ‘people who undertake personal or employer-funded trips to engage with meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions, both at home and overseas and researchers have indicated that business travel benefits many regions and countries by contributing higher levels of income, employment and government revenue (Crouch GI, 1998). Business visitors are also a significant source of demand for the hotel industry, with hotels going on business travel to fill beds during the week. MICE travelers spend more than leisure

tourists and spending by business tourists has increased faster than for tourism as a whole (Glyn and Terry, 1995).

Travel motives of MICE Travelers

Travel motives cover a wide range of travel experiences. There were many factors identified that motivations the travellers to travel. (Crompton, 1997) informed that travel motivations are critical components in understanding traveler conduct in connection to destination choice and motivation related to the visitors' wants, objectives, and preference. According to S. (Jang, 2009), strong linkages between travel motivation and destination choices have been well documented in tourism literature. Kim, Oh, & Jogaratnam (2007) found a relationship between push factors and pull factors using the correlation analysis. Results indicated that the pull factors essential tourists resources and information and convenience of facilities have significant positive correlations with pull and push factors. This model suggested that push factors such as novelty experiences, escape (having a change from a busy job), knowledge-seeking (going to a place that one has not visited before), fun and excitement (finding thrill and excitement), relaxation and family and friend togetherness. Pull factors that include building and places, cleanliness and safety, easy access and economical and different motivations were identified as crucial factors for association attendees to participate with MICE events (Ngamsom, 2000). They also noted that attendance at conferences, conventions and exhibitions gives a valuable opportunity for MICE travelers to explore work-places, travel to overseas destinations, and participate in various

outdoor recreations, business-related activities, change of pace, networking and educational enhancement.

Furthermore, (Rittichainuw<:tt, 2003)) examined the influence of motivation, inhibitors and facilitators on participation in international conferences by MICE delegates. More recently (Chen, 2012) identified five distinct motivations: activities and opportunities, networking, the convenience of the conference, education benefits and products and deals factors. On these previous studies, a clear understanding of motivational factors impact of traveler decision-making should help marketers to provide a better tourism experience in this highly competitive marketplace.

Destination choice

Buhalis (2000) identified that destination is targeted on facilities and services designed to meet the travellers' needs. These factors indicate psychological factors and social factors (Pike, 2004). From the studies noted above, it may be concluded that the destination selection of MICE traveler may be predicted based on various travel motivations. These studies suggest that potential opportunities to travel overseas and attend indoor and outdoor recreation were primary motivations for attending various types of conferences, conventions and exhibitions (Ngamsom, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

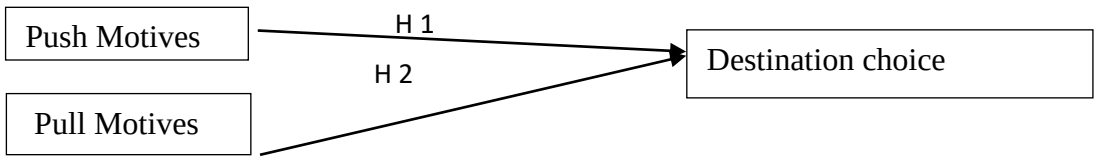
The quantitative method selected. Most beaches and chain hotels are located in southern provinces, which is a central attractive area among tourists. The study's target population was MICE travelers who visit destinations in Sri Lanka and this study selected 100 MICE travelers who select destinations in Southern Province. Sample size seems to be very small. Because of the data was collected during the covid-19 period. So, due to covid-19 period collected the data from a small sample size.

The purposive sampling method has selected. Purposive sampling can be used to select people, groups, or organizations that are specifically experienced or knowledgeable in a particular field (Patton, 1990). Also, it relies when choosing respondents of the population to participate in the study. The researcher has collected data by distributing questionnaires to achieve the research objectives of the study and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software used to analyse data.

Conceptual framework

Independent variables **Dependent variable**

Travel Motives of MICE travelers



Source: Develop by the researcher based on previous literature

Figure 3: Conceptual framework

Hypotheses of the study

H_1: There is a relationship between push travel motives and destination choice.

H_2: There is a relationship between pull travel motives and destination choice.

Table 1: Data analysis methods

Objectives	Method
To examine the relationship between travel motives (Push and Pull) and MICE travellers' destination choice in Southern province.	Correlation coefficient
To identify the impact of travel motives (push and pull) on MICE travellers' destination choice in Southern province.	Multiple leaner regression

DATA ANALYSIS

Karl Pearson Coefficient Analysis

Correlation between Travel motives (push and pull) and Destination choice

Table 2: Correlation between Travel motives and Destination choice

Travel motives	Pearson correlation	P-value
Push motives	0.585	0.000
Pull motives	0.607	0.000

Source: Authors estimation of field survey by using SPSS

The table correlation between push motives and destination choice is 0.585, which implies an average positive relationship between push motives and destination choice. The reason is value lays $0.5 < r < 0.7$. Which indicates an average positive relationship between push motives destination choice. The probability of association between push motives and destination choice is 0.000. It is less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05) and the alternative hypothesis is accepted at 95% confidence level and the null hypothesis is rejected.

The table correlation between pull motives and destination choice is 0.607, which implies an average positive relationship between pull motives and destination choice. The reason is value lays $0.5 < r < 0.7$. Which indicates an average positive relationship between pull motives and destination choice. The probability of association between pull motives and destination choice is 0.000. It is less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05) and the alternative hypothesis is accepted at 95% confidence level and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3: The correlation between travel motives (push and pull) and destination choice

Travel motives	P-value	< r >	Significant level	Null hypothesis	Alternative hypothesis
Push motives	0.000	<	0.05	Rejected	Accepted
Pull motives	0.000	<	0.05	Rejected	Accepted

Source: Authors estimation of field survey by using SPSS

Travel motive factors are significant at the confidence level of 95% as the P- value of all the factors is below 0.05. Therefore, travel motives factors are significant and null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Push travel motives and pull travel motives have an average positive relationship with MICE travelers' destination choice in Southern province.

Multiple Leaner Regression

In multiple leaner regression, there are assumptions to prove before the test the sample in regression. Required assumptions can test as a diagnostic test to improve the validity of the results. According to the scatterplot, the standard residual has tested against standard predicted value. According to the result, residuals have scattered randomly and variance of residual is constant. It indicates that result gets by running a regression analysis is free from Heteroscedasticity as the model is highly valid. Durbin Watson test is used to measure the e of residuals and the Durbin Watson value between 1.5 and 2.5. It is 2.236. It means that residuals are normally distributed. Therefore, the regression model is highly valid and all the tolerance values are greater than 0.1 and all VIF values are less than 10. This indicates that the regression result is free from multicollinearity problem. Hence, this regression model is highly valid.

Table 4: Model summary

Figure	Values
R	0.695
R square	0.483

Adjusted R square	0.477
Standard Error of Estimation	0.32463

Source: Author's estimation of field survey by using SPSS

According to the model summary, multiple correlations is 0695. Since the coefficient is closer to 0.7, there is a strong association between independent variables (travel motives) and dependent variable (destination choice).

Analysis of Variance

Significance value is used to measure the overall significance of the model. The appropriate model can be identified, when the regression ANOVA result is significant. It helps to ensure that model is jointly significant.

Table 5: ANOVA table

Model	Mean square	DF	F	Sig.
Regression	7.742	2	73.463	0.000
Residual	0.105	157		

Source: Author's estimation of field survey by using SPSS

The F - value in the ANOVA table indicates whether the overall regression is a good fit for the data or not. To test statistics, the ratio mean square of the model divide by the mean square of the error or residual. The yielding F (2,157) = 73.463 (F - degree of freedom and value) which explains that overall statistical significance of the regression model. It indicates that the applied model can statistically

significantly address the dependent variable and P – Value of the model 0.000 (P < 0.05), representing that the overall model is statistically significant. According to the statistics, it implies that all the travel motives have jointly impact on MICE travelers' destination choice.

Table 6: Estimating the Regression Model

Travel motives	B coefficient	Std. error	T-value	P-value
Constant	1.186	0.271	4.385	0.000
Push	0.314	0.053	5.912	0.000
Pull	0.415	0.063	6.556	0.000

Source: Author's estimation of field survey by using SPSS

DC- Destination Choice PSM- Push Motives PLM- Pull Motives

Regression analysis equation

$DC = \beta 0 + \beta 1 (PSM) + \beta 2 (PLM) + \alpha$

$DC = 1.186 + 0.314 (PSM) + 0.415 (PLM) + \alpha$

According to the table, constant (β0) is 1.186 which indicates that while travel motives remain zero, MICE travellers' destination choice was 1.186. It implies that without travel motives, MICE Travelers' destination choice at a 1.186 level. P - Value of constant is 0.000 and which states that it is statistically significant at 0.05 level of significant (0.000 > 0.05).

When the push motives are increased by one unit, while all the other independent variables remain constant, results show that MICE travellers'

destination choice is increased by 0.314 units. When the pull motives are increased by one unit, while all the other independent variables remain constant, results show that MICE travellers' destination choice is increased by 0.415 units. It can be seen that push and pull motives have contributed significantly to the model as P - Value is 0.000. Since it is less than 0.05 (0.000 <0.05) level of significant. According to the above information, push motives (novelty, having a change from job, knowledge-seeking, networking and relaxation) and pull motives (building and places, safety and clean, economic motives and educational enhancement) highly impacted MICE travelers to select destinations in Southern province. Then the push motives pull motives highly impacted 0f MICE travelers to select destinations in Southern province.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve the first objective, Karl Pearson coefficient of correlation analysis used and multiple leaner regression analysis used to achieve the study's second objective. Travel motives are the strong point of the holiday destination choice of MICE travelers. The study has investigated the push (novelty, knowledge seeking, networking and relaxation of the job) and pull (building and places, safety and clean, economical and educational enhancement) travel motives that affect their destination choice.

According to the study Push and Pull travel motive factors have 95% confidence level since p-value of the motives is less than 0.05. Correlation values of all the two motives have been recorded greater than 0.000. Hence there is a positive relationship between travel motives and

destination choice of MICE travelers who travel destinations in Southern province. According to the study, there was the average positive relationship between push travel motives and destination choice. Tourism marketers should try to develop the product and services and plan the venues to satisfy the needs of MICE travelers. They should provide productsto motivate and develop their internal characters such as relation enhancement, seeking relaxation, social interaction, ando should considertravellers's exploration and, evaluations.

According to the study, there was the average positive relationship between pull travel motives and destination choice. They should set programs and strategies to motivate their external characters and consider travelers' safety, economic, and educational factors. According to travel motives, push and pull motives are influenced and, then push motives pull motives are influenced and it was 0.415.

Southern province carried a vast natural and biodiversity rich attractions with facilities and accommodations. Also, many travelers who have visited destinations in Southern province are highly satisfied with the travel motives of different travel segments.

Most of the Southern provinces' destinations are very close or same characteristics in their operations, and the operation should be a proper and friendly manner. Also, they should use properly to deliver better services for the visitors. Introduce fabulous locations are more important to attract MICE travelers based on indoor and outdoor facilities. Also, cultural atmosphere, potential experiences, site excursions and

outstanding dining facilities should fulfil their needs. , it should promote venue demand and design quality venues for attract. They should also promote venue demand and design quality venues for attracting more MICE travelers to destinations based on indoor and outdoor facilities. Other than that, venues that offer aesthetic possibilities and flexibility in terms of space and should plan venues with advanced equipment and highly advanced internet access.

The promotion will be more effective if destination marketers can position Southern province as a natural attraction, which can persuade them to travel to destinations to experience the diversity of attractions. The tour program relating to different activities (ex: natural and adventure-based activities) should be included tour package.

Expenditure of MICE travelers is much higher than leisure travelers and most of the business trips made are MICE trips. So, venue planners should define their market correctly and get a clear understanding about the push motives (novelty, relaxation, knowledge seeking and networking) and pull motives (safety and clean, economical and education enhancement) and understanding of what value have to offer and what clients can appreciate this value. Also aware of accommodating facilities, location of the venue, technical equipment, catering, security and policies should consider before planning the destinations. The best way is to plan properly, improve the quality of the effective marketing's destination management and practice. Destination planners should consider and pay more attention to tourists' travel motivation to improve the travel experience. Push and pull motives are essential for a

destinations marketing strategy and the internal motives can be used in various marketing acts like segmental market and design and promotion program within the destinations. The tourism authorities in Southern province can develop a variety of policy, strategies, and programs based on specific travel motives of MICE travelers to satisfy their needs. Destination planners must consider the pull motives like novelty, knowledge seeking, and networking to develop the destinations with positive travel experienceince destination offers a similar travel component, consider the push motives like safety, educational, and building places. Therefore, destination planners should pay much attention to travel motives and need to appeal to tourists' internal and external motives.

In most cases, MICE travelers appeared to view their trips as an opportunity to experience new things or various cultures at a comfortable location and may need to be incorporated within related marketing campaigns. Also should plan a safe destination for travel, quality restaurants and hotels, desirable quality of tourist facilities, a convenient and effective transportation system, accessible tourism information, friendly local people, and beautiful natural settings, accommodation-related facilities, the events' environment, good opening hours of quality shops, and superiority of food and beverage, as necessary in the destination selection amongst travelers. The results have identified different benefits based motivation of MICE travelers.

It may be suggested that more extensive plans and strategies for unexpected situations like the present scenario in the world like covid-19

and maintained programs and set alternative strategies towards unexpected situations for safety and attracting the travellers. Tourism information regarding various tourism activities and cultural attractions in the host city by these marketing campaigns. It is suggested that destination marketers provide them with more exciting opportunities to meet with professionals over the course. Marketers are encouraged to design more exciting destination-based events which provide participants with future educational, professional and travel-related opportunities.

Directions for the future research

This research was limited for MICE travellers' category, where the future research can be conducted though examine the domestic tourists and other tourist segments selected in Southern province. Also, the future researches can be conducted through qualitative and mix basics to reveal more advantages.

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