

[Research]

An examination of the effects of push and pull factors on Iranian national parks: Boujagh National Park, Iran

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the push and pull factors that bring visitors to the Iranian national parks. The study used a structured questionnaire to collect data on these factors and the socio-demographic profile of the visitors. Survey conducted in Boujagh National Park, an area of 3177 hectares located in the north of the Iran, produced 400 questionnaires. The factor analysis identified four push and six pull factors underlying visitors' motives to visit the park. Difference in the push and pull factors in different socio-demographic groups were investigated. It was found that visitors are pushed to the park for relaxing, and pulled by nature as a product. It was also clear that gender, marital status and province of the residence had not a significant influence on the push and pull factors. With the current number of other type of tourism competing for nature based tourism, this kind of information can imply that the management of national parks should not only focus on the identified travel motives, but also focus on other push and pull factors, in order to contribute to the sustainability of parks' development.

Key words: Motivation, Satisfaction, Push and pull factors, Boujagh National Park, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Travelling and recreation activities are considered as vital activities to fill people leisure time in the most optimum way (Oladi *et al.*, 2012). Tourism development in natural protected areas has been a prominent part of tourism worldwide. According to Eagles *et al.*, (2002) some areas in Europe were protected as hunting grounds for the rich and powerful nearly 1,000 years ago. It can be argued that those activities were an early type of nature-based tourism, and thus the relationship between natural protected areas and tourism is a long one.

However, modern tourism in protected areas has its roots in the establishment of the first national parks in the second half of the 19th Century in the USA, Canada, Australia, and

New Zealand (Eagles *et al.*, 2002). In the US, approximately 270 million visits were reported annually (including 50 national parks) (Simon & Doerksen, 1996). The US National Parks provide visitors with scenic, archaeological, historical, or scientific value (Gunn, 1988). In Australia several national parks offer opportunities to experience Aboriginal culture as well as natural resources. More than 4 million people visit Australia's national parks each year (<http://www.gorp.com/horp/location/australi//park/parks.htm>).

Likewise, national parks and other protected areas in Iran are most important tourism destinations to domestic visitors. A total of 28 national parks are managed by Iranian

Department of Environment (DOE). The area covered 1988107 ha. Given a Iranian population of 77 million, most adult Iranians are probable to visit a national park once in a year.

In spite of the importance of Iranian national parks, reliable information about factors that influence park visitation behavior is generally absent due to a lack of accuracy in reporting and the wide extent of under-reporting. This paper aimed to fill up this gap by examining the push and pull factors that influence tourists' decisions to visit the national parks in Iran and their overall satisfaction. The research more specifically objectives were to: (I) identify the push and pull factors; (II) examine differences in the push and pull factors in different socio-demographic subgroups; (III) measure the variation of satisfaction by different attributes of experience for first-time and repeat visitors. Dann's (1977) push-pull theoretical framework is used as a useful approach for assessing the motivations underlying visitors' behavior. According to this framework, push factors are the factors that cause visitors to travel to a destination, while pull factors refer to the forces that attract a tourist to a particular destination (Dann, 1977). Push factors have been stated as factors that motivate or create a desire to travel (Dann, 1977, Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Iso-Ahola, 1982, 1989 b; Pearce & Calabiano, 1983; Pyo *et al.*, 1989; Yuan & McDonald, 1990 Uysal & Hagan, 1993). According to Murray (1964), "a motive is a central basis in tourism that arouses, directs, and integrates a person's behavior" (cited in Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 258). Gnoth (1997) suggested that internal motives explain the needs that all humans experience, whereas external motivators represent the existence of particular conditions within which these necessarily arise. Crompton and McKay (1997) gave three basic points for a better understanding of motivation, as follows: i) it is a key tool for designing tour activities for visitors; ii) it is a direct connection to visitor satisfaction; and iii) it is an important element in understanding a visitor's decision making process. Therefore, these motivational factors explain why tourists make a trip and what type

of experience or activities they desire (Ryan, 1991). Push motivations include relaxation, knowledge, family/friends gatherings, prestige, and/or socialization (Formica & Uysal, 1996) whereas pull motivations may be representative of culture (e.g. education and history). The majority of tourism motivation studies have been conducted within the broad context of a tourist region or at other times in one specific tourism destination (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Cha *et al.*, 1995; Oh *et al.*, 1995; Turnbull & Uysal, 1995; Botha *et al.*, 1999). These researchers examined the influences of both internal and external factors of motivations on satisfaction. The external sources were explained by destination attributes (pull), while internal sources were those psychological motivations or forces (push). Some studies have also focused on motivations of visitors to national parks (Grafe, 1977; Kim, & Kong, 1989; Snepenger *et al.*, 1989; Fielding & Pearce, 1992; Kim, 1993; Uysal *et al.*, 1994 Loker-Murphy, 1996; Jeong, 1997). Others - like Gray's Sunlust and wanderlust, Iso-Ahola's "escaping and seeking". Refer to Pearce, Douglas "Tourism Today: A Geographical Analysis". If I remember, there is a chapter on Tourist Motivation. Reviews of prior research on push and pull motivations imply that these factors are the driving strength behind tourism decision-making behavior. It reveals that people travel because they are "pushed" into making travel decisions by internal, psychological forces, and "pulled" by the external forces of the destination's attributes (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Accordingly, satisfaction with travel experiences, based on these push and pull forces, contributes to destination loyalty (Yoona & Uysal, 2003). Push and pull factors have normally been distinguished as relating to two separate choices made at two separate views in time - one focusing on whether to go, the other on where to go (Klenosky, 2002). According to Klenosky (2002) push and pull factors should not be viewed as being totally independent of each other but rather as being basically related to each other.

Specifically, it has been noted that while the internal forces push people to travel, the external forces of the destination itself concurrently pull them to select that specific destination (Cha *et al.*, 1995). Research examining the interrelationship between push and pull forces has only recently been reported in the travel and tourism literature (Pyo *et al.*, 1989; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Oh *et al.*, 1995; Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Klenosky, 2002). So far, researchers have indicated the relationship between these two factors, but it is necessary to examine how this link might be different between socio-demographic variables.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design included the development of an original instrument based on a review of literature and inputs from tourism experts. In data analysis push and pull factors were considered as independent variables, and visitors' overall satisfaction as the dependent variable. Boujagh National Park was selected because of its features and key natural resources such as its location in the northern part of Caspian Lowlands, and an existing Ramsar site of 500 ha. within the park has been identified as an 'Important Bird Area' by Bird Life International (Evans, 1994).

Study area

Caspian Sea as the largest lake of the earth has generated a large amount of marine and environmental interest for the countries around itself (Ramezani & Foroughe, 2010). BNP in the southern shore of Caspian Sea with very nice natural and environmental favorable condition is one of significant destinations for tourism perspective.

This National Park is located in the Province of Guilan, about 2 km north of Kiashahr city, 20 km from Amirkelayeh, 15 km from Lashtenesha, and 35 km northwest of the city of Rasht. It is 21m below sea level and has an area of 3177 ha. Its geographical coordinates include 49° 55' 20" E and 37° 26' 55" N. The Boojagh international wetland (37° 27' N, 49° 55' E), which is one of the oldest lagoons in Guilan province, is sited within this national park

(Kharazmi *et al.*, 2011). This lagoon (formerly Bandar Farahnaz) lies immediately to the east of the Sefid-Rūd mouth. Field studies show that one main tourist destination in BNP is Bandar Kiashahr Lagoon.

It is important as spawning and nursery grounds for fishes, and as breeding, staging, and wintering areas for a wide variety of waterfowls (Ramsar, 2005). BNP stands on category II in the United Nation list of national parks and protected areas (IUCN, 2008). As of 2002, the area was designated as a National Park in order to repel this area cover changes and protect its biodiversity. The park belongs to DOE and is physically patrolled by DOE rangers.

Survey

Based on the review of literature, a questionnaire comprising six sections, using a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), was designed to measure visitors' motivation, activities, perceptions and experiences, and their overall satisfaction (1 = completely dissatisfied to 7 = completely satisfied) during their trip in BNP. Questions were adopted from previous studies (Locker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Yuksel, 2001; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Yu & Goulden, 2006; McKercher *et al.*, 2008; Jalis *et al.*, 2009; Yang & Wall, 2009; Babolian Hendijani *et al.*, 2013). A pilot test was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire measured the motivation of visitors with the use of 12 attributes while the second section with 18 questions focused on their activities within the park. In the third section, the visitors' perceptions of 10 items were sought; and the fourth, with 9 questions, measured their experiences.

The fifth part had three attributes which measured the overall satisfaction of the visitors. Questions on the socio-demographic attributes of respondents were grouped into the last section. In order to capture a higher number of respondents, the questionnaires were distributed all across the national park. Respondents were approached at the visitor centers, hostel areas and restaurants as well.

Analysis

Data collection was conducted from June to September 2012. After removing incomplete responses, 400 (83.58%) valid questionnaires were used in the subsequent analysis to examine the visitors' perceptions and the effects on their overall satisfaction. Each set of 12 push and 18 pull factor items were factor analyzed in order to highlight the fundamental measurements. To measure the overall differences between socio-demographic factors with overall satisfaction, other statistical methods such as independent sample t-test, one way ANOVA and descriptive analysis were employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' profile

Table 1 summarizes the profile of the respondents. Concerning the frequency of visit, 58.8% (n = 237) of the respondents were visiting BNP for the first-time, while the rest of the respondents (41.2%) were repeat visitors. A total of 226 respondents were males, and the rest females (n = 174). There was no significant difference between first-time and repeat visitors in terms of gender and both segments were well represented. The results of marital status analysis revealed there is no significant differences ($\chi^2(2) = 2.78, p=0.094$). Single and married visitors were equal for both first-timers (57.9% single, 38.7% married, and 3.4% separated/widowed) and repeat visitors (59.3% single, 39.5% married, and 1.2% separated/widowed).

Approximately half of the first-time visitors were from areas outside of Guilan, (50.6%), while over three-quarters of the repeat visitors originated from Guilan itself (78.4%). Nearly more than half of respondents (58.3%) mentioned that they intend to visit BNP again in future.

Differences in tourists' motivation attributes between first-time and repeat visitors

Table 2 shows the mean of motivation attributes for first-time visitors in descending order: to add to personal experiences (M = 4.33), spending time with family (M = 4.39), unique experience (M = 4.04), and challenges (M = 4.47). On the other hand, the order for repeat visitors is: to add to personal experience (M = 4.15), spending time with family (M =

3.99), unique experience (M = 4.68), and challenges (M = 4.09)

Factor analyses of the push factor scales

First, exploratory factor analysis was performed to estimate the number of underlying push motivation factors (Table 3). There were 11 items measuring the various push travel motivations. A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was then undertaken. These factors were labeled: 'family togetherness'; 'enjoying natural resources'; 'challenges'; and 'escaping from routine'. All the 11 items had factor loadings of over 0.5.

The reliability alphas, which are designed to check the internal consistency of items within each dimension, were greater than 0.68. These coefficients were higher than or close to the standard of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Factor analyses of the pull factor scales

Principal component factor analysis for the 17 pull factor items produced six pull factors (Table 4). The 17 pull attributes measuring performance satisfaction were factor analyzed to reveal the underlying constructs. Exploratory factor analysis was performed first, to estimate the number of underlying motivation dimensions.

The factors were termed: 'attending festival/event'; 'recharging/refreshing'; 'accessibility/location'; 'key resources'; 'facilities'; and 'study and research'. A principle component factor analysis with varimax rotation was then used to delineate the underlying dimensions of pull motivations.

Impact of pull factors

Table 5 depicts that 'enjoying natural resources' was the only significant aspect positively contributing to the overall satisfaction ($\beta = 0.160, \text{Sig} = 0.001$). Results revealed significant differences $\{F(4, 396) = 4.445, p = 0.002\}$. By using unstandardized coefficients, it was ascertained that for every one unit increase in the item 'enjoying natural resources', there is a 0.116 unit increase in the satisfaction of visitors, when other variables are kept constant. However, when using Beta standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.160$) to interpret the results, enjoying 'natural resources' had the highest influence on visitor's satisfaction.

Table 1. Socio-demographic of respondents and comparison of first-time and repeat visitors (N = 400)

Socio-demographic attributes		First-time visitor (N= 238)	Repeat visitor (N= 162)	χ^2/F	P
Gender	Male	131 (57.2%)	98 (42.8%)	5.094	0.025
	Female	107 (65.6%)	67 (37.4%)		
Marital Status	Single	139 (58.6%)	96 (41.4%)	2.378	0.094
	Married	91 (59.5%)	64 (40.5%)		
	Divorced	8 (80.8%)	2 (20%)		
Nationality	Guilan	115 (47.3%)	129 (52.7%)	5.012	0.026
	Outside Guilan	123 (79.3%)	37 (22.7%)		
Revisit	Yes	68 (48.6%)	72 (51.4%)	3.346	0.036
	No	75 (58.3%)	55 (41.7%)		
	Not sure	95 (72.7%)	35 (27.3%)		

Table 2. Means of motivations for first-time and repeat visitors

Motivations attributes	First-time visitor	Repeat visitor	t-value	p
Family togetherness	4.04	3.99	0.301	.764
Enjoying natural resources	4.39	4.98	-2.174	0.03
Challenges	4.74	4.75	-0.067	0.947
Escaping from routine	4.33	4.15	1.350	0.178
Overall satisfaction	3.98	4.09	-1.11	0.267

Of the four motivation attributes, a series of two sample t-tests revealed that only one variable showed significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors, that is to spend time with family ($t(235) = -2.174, p=0.03$).

Table 3. Factor analysis of push factors with varimax rotation

Push factor	Factor loading				Communalities	Means
	1	2	3	4		
<i>Challenges and adventure</i>						
<i>Achievement</i>						
To seek adventurous	0.97				0.95	4.78
To discover new places/things (Novel experience).	0.96				0.92	4.72
To get away/escape from daily routine	0.90				0.83	4.89
Self-awareness	0.85				0.74	4.56
<i>Enjoying natural resources</i>						
To be close to the natural resources		0.94			0.9	4.25
Health treatment		0.92			0.86	4.49
To rest and relaxation		0.79			0.63	4.80
<i>Spending time with family/friends</i>						
To have enjoyable time with family/ friends			0.91		0.87	3.85
To observe rare birds			0.92		0.88	4.20
<i>Escaping from routine</i>						
For recreation				0.88	0.82	3.97
To have fun				0.89	0.81	4.55

Table 4. Factor analysis of pull factors with varimax rotation

Pull factor	Factor loading						Communalities	Means
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
<i>Attending festival/event</i>								
Visiting beautiful natural sites	0.89						0.81	4.71
Attending to open season	0.70						0.55	4.80
Trying different local foods	0.82						0.71	4.51
Attending sporting Events	0.92						0.85	4.30
<i>Recharging/refreshing</i>								
Picnic and tranquil rest area		0.81					0.69	5.28
Visiting religious sites		0.91					0.86	4.96
Visiting surrounded city/villages		0.92					0.88	5.07
<i>Accessibility/location</i>								
Easy accessibility			0.98				0.98	5.21
Geographic location			0.99				.099	4.88
<i>Key resources</i>								
Visiting wooden bridge				0.85			0.75	4.81
Visiting rare fauna/flora				0.55			0.32	4.78
Going to the beaches				0.84			0.75	4.82
<i>Facilities</i>								
Convenient accommodation					0.85		0.74	3.18
Convenient facilities (e.g., restaurants, coffee shops)					0.79		0.68	3.85
Participating in homestead					0.63		0.48	4.20
<i>Study and research</i>								
Doing research/education						0.80	0.93	3.93
Ornithology						0.73	0.58	3.38

CONCLUSION

Conclusion: The purpose of this study was to (I) identify the push and pull factors; (II) examine differences in the push and pull factors in different socio-demographic subgroups; (III) measure the variation of satisfaction by different attributes of experience for first-time and repeat visitors. A factor analysis of 11 push factor items produced 4 basic domains: 'family togetherness' 'enjoying natural resources' 'challenges' and 'escaping from routine'.

Visitors to the national park relatively highly rated on 'challenges' (mean = 4.73), and 'enjoying natural resources' (mean = 4.51), 'escaping from routine' (mean = 4.26), and 'family togetherness' (mean = 4.02) were followed. This analysis recommend that visitors to Boujagh national park are probably to consider the park to be valuable recreational resources that prepare main opportunities to appreciate natural resources, increase health and build friendship.

Table 5. Regression results of pull factors on overall satisfaction (n = 400)

<i>Model</i>	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1					
Regression	16.150	4	4.037	4.445	0.002 ^b
Residual	365.959	396	0.910		
Total	382.109	400			

	β standardized	S.E.	β unstandardized	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)	3.866	0.321		12.052	0.000
Family togetherness	0.066	0.035	0.096	1.895	0.059
Enjoying natural resources	0.116	0.036	0.160	3.213	0.001
Challenges	-0.083	0.049	-0.086	-1.699	0.090
Escaping from routine	-0.054	0.038	-0.071	-1.434	0.152

A factor analysis of the 17 pull factor items resulted in 6 underlying domains: 'attending festival/event', 'recharging/refreshing', 'accessibility/location', 'key resources', 'facilities' and 'study and research'. The most important push factors were 'recharging/refreshing' (mean = 5.10), 'attending festival/event' (mean = 5.04), and 'accessibility/location' (mean = 4.58). This result shows the fact that the park is relatively accessible. The analyses of these push and pull factors indicated that first time and repeat visitors exhibit some difference in their perceptions. It also revealed the relationship between motivation and overall satisfaction. Park managers need to see these differences in order to encourage repeat visitors and enhance their satisfaction. The result of this research suggests that there is a necessity to develop health enhancement facilities and inexpensive accommodation such as a camping site or hostel. Additionally, park administrators should consider developing a walking trail that helps visitors appreciate the natural resources in the park. It also suggests the need to provide a strategy that would promote a better understanding of environmental resources of the park by visitors.

While several studies have examined the relationship between push and pull factors in different countries, there is no any similar study in the context of travel in Iran. In the current research instead examined the correlation between push and pull factors for

domestic sample of park visitors. In this study, significant relationship were investigated among the majority of push and pull factor features.

The results of this study supported the reports by Usyal & Jurowski (1994) and Kim *et al.* (2003) who established a correlation between push and pull factors.

In addition, the findings shows that push or pull factors were not significantly different in socio-demographic variables unlike reported by other authors (Lee *et al.*, 1987; Kim, 1993; Loler-Murphy, 1996; Ahn & Kim, 1996; Jeong, 1998). Although, this study also examined difference in push and pull factors among first-time in contrast with repeat visitors.

This study as a sample will be supportive to provide tourism management of Iranian national parks with valuable information in understanding visitor's motivation to visit a national park. Moreover, it would be interesting to know what national parks mean to Iranians. Next research is needed to seek the role of other factors on push and pull relationships.

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بررسی اثرات عوامل کشش و جذب گردشگران بر پارکهای ملی ایران: پارک ملی بوجاق

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چکیده

این تحقیق به تجزیه و تحلیل عواملی که منجر به این می‌شود که گردشگران به پارکهای ملی بیابند، می‌پردازد. این مطالعه با استفاده از یک پرسشنامه جامع به جمع‌آوری اطلاعات در رابطه با فاکتورهای کشش و جذب و اطلاعاتی در رابطه با مشخصات فردی گردشگران پرداخته است. این تحقیق در پارک ملی بوجاق انجام شده که مساحتی بالغ بر ۳۱۷۷ هکتار در شمال ایران واقع شده است. حدود ۴۰۰ پرسشنامه تهیه شده است. فاکتورهای تجزیه و تحلیلی شامل ۴ فاکتور کشش و ۶ فاکتور جذب بوده است که منجر به ایجاد انگیزه در گردشگران جهت مراجعه به پارک می‌شده‌اند. تفاوت فاکتورهای کشش و جذب در تفاوت بین گروه‌های اجتماعی پرسش‌شوندگان است. یافته‌ها نشان داد که عامل بیرونی که منجر می‌شود گردشگران پارک‌های ملی را برای استراحت انتخاب کنند و عاملی که باعث جذب آنها می‌شود، طبیعت آنجاست. واضح است که عواملی نظیر جنسیت، وضعیت تاهل، شهر محل سکونت هیچ تأثیری بر عوامل کشش و جذب ندارد. با توجه به تعداد کل گردشگران و رقابت برای گردشگری طبیعی، یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که مدیریت پارک‌های ملی نه فقط بر روی انگیزه‌های شناسایی شده برای مسافرت به پارک‌های ملی کار می‌کنند بلکه باید بر روی عوامل جذب و کشش نیز کار کنند تا به توسعه پایدار در پارک‌ها دست یابند.

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