Inbound international tourists' demographics and travel motives: views from Uzbekistan

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the association between international tourists' demographics with travel motives to Uzbekistan through the utilization of push and pull theory.

Design/methodology/approach – This study utilized a convenience sampling technique to collect data from 563 international tourists visiting Uzbekistan. Chi-square test of independence (χ^2) was employed to test the association between visitors' demographics and travel motives.

Findings – The results illustrated that nationality and frequency of visitations of the international tourists to Uzbekistan were statistically associated with their travel motives. In terms of gender, age, marital status and religion, no significant association with travel motives was established.

Research limitations/implications – The statistical test and instrument for data collection might limit the generalization of this study to represent the whole population of international tourists in Uzbekistan.

Practical implications – The findings of this study show that in order to develop tourism in Uzbekistan, businesses and practitioners should consider segmenting tourists based on their national background to serve their needs and preferences. As tourist's visitation frequency plays a role in their travel motives, the product and service quality of tour packages must be improved and monitored.

Originality/value – The findings of this study provide valuable insights for businesses, managers, practitioners and policymakers to understand international tourists' motives to Uzbekistan to formulate better policies and tour packages.

Keywords Uzbekistan, Motives, Demographics, International tourists, Push and pull

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Uzbekistan is possessed with the greatest potential for tourism development in the region of Central Asia, and the country has been modernizing its infrastructure to meet the growing needs of tourism demand such as airport reconstruction, road and railroad upgrading to meet the transportation needs and construction of high-class hotels, theme parks and attraction facilities along the Great Silk Road and Chimgan mountains for leisure activities (Kantarci, 2007a, c). Although all of these infrastructures are in place, what motivates international tourists is not empirically documented. Earlier studies within context (Airey and Shackley, 1997; Batsaikhan and Dabrowski, 2017; Kantarci, 2007a, b, c; Kantarci *et al.*, 2014) have discussed the general development of tourism in Uzbekistan and its potential. However, specific factors that motivate the international arrival of tourists have been overlooked, creating a knowledge gap in the tourism literature in context.

Exploring the motives of international arrival would aid Uzbek hospitality businesses, policymakers, managers and tourism practitioners in the industry to establish programs and policies that can enhance and market Uzbekistan as one of the attractive tourism destinations in the world. According to March and Woodside (2005), tourist motivation is regarded as the main determining factor for tourists to travel the world. These studies (Cheng and Cheng, 2012; Kim and Lee, 2008; Potter and Ware, 1987; McDonough, 2007) have established that

motivation is the power that pushes a person to act or to do something. In international travel, tourists are motivated to travel due to several reasons ranging from building relationships, knowledge-seeking and reputation (Sung *et al.*, 2016) to visiting unique, unknown places (Sirisack *et al.*, 2014) and leisure activities on the beach (Abodeeb *et al.*, 2015). Interestingly, motivation to travel is not homogeneous and varies depending on the demographic profile of the tourists (Kozak, 2002; Jönsson and Devonish, 2008; Jensen, 2015; Suttikun *et al.*, 2016; Alshammari *et al.*, 2019), which makes it an important factor in tourism study (Kara and Mkwizu, 2020). Subsequently, through the utilization of quantitative methodology, the aim of this study is to examine what motivates international tourists' arrival and their demographic responses to Uzbekistan. Thus, the specific objective of this study is first to examine international tourists' main motives to travel to Uzbekistan through the utilization of push and pull theory and second, to establish whether there are significant associations between tourists' demographics (gender, age, religion, nationality, marital status, frequency of visitation) and motives to travel.

Studying international tourists' travel motives in Uzbekistan is important for the following reasons. First, Uzbekistan's economy is in transition (UN, 2019) and has ranked as fourth among the 20 fast-growing tourist destinations (Uzdaily, 2020), and the tourism sector was able to create 98,500 jobs in 2017 while contributing $275m to the GDP. Second, Uzbekistan is taking active measures to develop the tourism industry to reap its benefits, for instance, the implementation of electronic visas (e-visas) (Embassy, 2018), the construction of more facilities and placing additional staff to be employed in the tourism sectors and cabinets (MFA, 2018). To fulfill the knowledge gap in the existing literature, this research will utilize push and pull theory to determine the travel motives of international tourists and their demographic responses in Uzbekistan. The paper begins with a literature review on the theoretical underpinning of this study followed by tourism in Uzbekistan and demographic literature. Next, the methodology is presented with data analysis and a discussion with the conclusion is provided. The study is finalized with implications, limitations, and opportunities for future research areas on tourism motivation in Uzbekistan.

Literature review
Theoretical background
This study is theoretically grounded on the pull and push theory (PPT) to examine country-specific motives of international arrival in Uzbekistan. A plethora of previous studies (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Kim and Lee, 2002; Baniya and Paudel, 2016; Preko *et al.*, 2020) have utilized the PPT and have promoted that it is applicable in understanding tourists' travel motives and destination choice. Push motives are tourists' internal desires and motivations that act as the main driver to travel the world (Iso-Ahola, 1982). These internal desires can range from anomie and ego-enhancement (Dann, 1977), social interaction as well as an escape from the mundane environment (Crompton, 1979) and family bonding (Sung *et al.*, 2016). Pull factors on the other hand represent external factors that attract the tourists to a particular destination (Crompton, 1979). These external factors are the attributes and qualities of the destination, such as history and culture (Yuan and McDonald, 1990), environment (You *et al.*, 2000), wildlife (Sung *et al.*, 2016), scenic beauty (Hahm and Tasci, 2019) and attachment given by travelers to a specific location (Sousa and Alves, 2019). Push motives represent "why" to travel part of motivation, whereas pull motives stand for "where" to travel.

Range of various push and pull motives, depending on tourism form, have been identified and discussed in the literature. For instance, in the cultural tourism and sightseeing context, tourists visiting national parks of Zimbabwe were motivated to travel in order to acquire knowledge about the location as well as being closer to nature and the destination's ability to offer a variety of natural environment and landscapes (Mutanga *et al.*, 2017). Knowledge

seeking and novelty were also mentioned by foreign tourists in Malaysia as their main push travel motives in addition to cultural and historical attractions of the destination as pull factors (Yousefi and Marzuki, 2015). However, Iranian tourists traveling to Turkey have identified ego-enhancement as the main push motive to choose the location as a tourism destination, and they were mostly pulled by Turkey's accessibility (Nikjoo and Ketabi, 2015). Similarly, youth tourists have also identified their main push motive as ego-enhancement and ecological heritage of the country as their major pull motive in Ghana (Preko *et al.*, 2019).

In the recreational and sports-related context of tourism, however, different motivational push and pull factors were identified in the literature. In the Phuket island of Thailand, tourists were motivated by having fun and relaxation as their main push factor and hospitality with natural scenes as the main attributes of the destination (Sastre and Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017). Similarly, tourists visiting South Luogu Alley of China were also motivated to relax and release tensions (Shi *et al.*, 2019). Finnish hunters were also motivated by relaxation during their hunting journeys as well as being away from their daily routines to enjoy nature. Besides relaxing, hunters were also interested in improving their skills and enjoying challenges in their trips (Suni and Pesonen, 2019). Challenge was also an important push factor for rock climbers traveling to Turkey in addition to recognition by others, whereas climbing infrastructure of the travel destination played a major role for their main pull motives (Caber and Albayrak, 2016). Thus, based on the literature, push and pull theory (PPT) was chosen as a theoretical guide for this study. Historical attractions, service delivery, natural heritage and good value were selected to represent the pull factors and heritage motivation, ego-enhancement, escape and adventure as push factors.

Tourism in Uzbekistan
Uzbekistan is a landlocked country located in the middle of Central Asia. The country is well known for its diverse range of tourism-related attractions ranging from traditional bazaars where visitors can purchase souvenirs to mountain-related activities such as trekking and camping (MFA, 2018). With the main UNESCO-recognized historical tourist hub of Samarqand, Bukhara, Khiva and Shakhrisabz (Airey and Shackley, 1997; Kantarci, 2007b), foreign visitor inflow into Uzbekistan has grown from 300,000 in 2000 to more than 2m in 2016, a sevenfold increase, of that amount 2.4% being for the purpose of traveling in Uzbekistan as an international tourist (Uzstat, 2017; WB, 2019). In 2018, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that Uzbekistan is ranked in 146th place in tourism and expected to grow to 118th with the long-term growth at 13th out of 185 countries in the world (WTTC, 2018).

International tourism is one of the main concentrations of the Uzbek tourism industry, and in 2018 alone, approximately 5.3m visitors have entered Uzbekistan with various purposes from visiting relatives to sightseeing (UzbekTourism, 2018). Thus, this study is relevant due to the following factors. First and foremost, to ensure the development and enhancement of international tourism in Uzbekistan, a decree has been put into effect by the Uzbek government to facilitate visitor travel by issuing electronic visas (e-visas) so that visitors are able to travel conveniently (Embassy, 2018). Through the e-visa system, now the international tourists do not have to fill out paper documents and wait in line to apply, but rather it is easily obtained through a simple Internet connection (E-visa, 2019). Second, in addition to promoting the e-visa system by the government, more staff are placed in the tourism development cabinet, facilities in the regions will be constructed to enhance tourism and third, a post of deputy minister on international tourism matters is implemented (MFA, 2018).

Tourists' motives to travel can be influenced by their demographic characteristics (Adam *et al.*, 2019) and play a crucial role in uncovering what activities they are searching for and

places they would like to visit. Understanding these differences in demographic characteristics can impact their satisfaction and play an important role in management decision-making (Ozdemir *et al.*, 2012; Biswas *et al.*, 2020). As different regions and types of tourists have various motivations to travel, it becomes essential to expand the study into other destinations of tourism. Uzbekistan remains one of the fastest-growing and the least studied tourism destinations in the Central Asian region due to the county's recent independence in 1991, and the tourism industry has been recently promoted. In this study, PPT was utilized where the internal factors such as heritage, knowledge, ego-enhancement, interpersonal seeking, escape and relaxation as push motives and external attributes of the destination such as cultural and historical attractions, service, accessibility and service as pull motives will be applied to better comprehend the travel motivations of tourists traveling to Uzbekistan.

Hypotheses development

The relationship between tourists' nationality and motivation

Tourists' country of origin has a relationship with visit intentions (Prayag and Ryan, 2011; Suttikun *et al.*, 2016; Sag and Zengul, 2019). It is essential that the nationalities of various tourists' demographics must be analyzed and studied to explain travel motivations (Kozak, 2002; Jönsson and Devonish, 2008). For instance, Assiouras *et al.* (2015) studied the relationship between demographic factors and motivation among East Asian tourists visiting Greece mainly Japanese, Chinese and Korean and discovered that PPT varied among different nationalities. In the African context, Kara and Mkwizu (2020) discussed that although leisure tourists visiting Tanzania were mainly motivated by discovering something new, some distinctions were noticed. Primarily, British and American tourists were also motivated to socialize with others and build relationships, whereas Kenyans and South Africans were interested in being good at leisure activities. Stemming from the previous literature, it can be noted that tourist national background has a relationship to their travel motivations. Following this, it is hypothesized:

H1. There is a significant association between tourists' nationality and travel motivations

The relationship between tourists' age and motivation

Motivation to travel is not homogeneous and can vary between the tourists based on their age differences, which requires specific promotions (Jensen, 2015). Mutanga *et al.* (2017) discovered in their study that international tourists visiting wildlife location in Zimbabwe had differences in their travel motivations based on age. This difference was also identified in a study on Danish travelers, for instance, older travelers emphasized motivation to witness nature in comparison to younger tourists who were motivated to spend time with their friends and family (Jensen, 2015). In the Asian context, age was correlated with tourists' relaxation and exploration of nature (Ma *et al.*, 2018). However, no relationship was discovered between international tourists' age and their travel motivations in Bangkok (Suttikun *et al.*, 2016). Thus, this study formulated the following hypothesis:

H2. There is a significant association between tourists' age and travel motivations

The relationship between tourists' gender and motivation

Another demographic factor that requires further investigation is the gender of the tourists and its relationship to travel motivations (Jönsson and Devonish, 2008). Male and female consumers vary in their decision-making process due to their differences in traits and attitude

toward a product that affects their buying behavior (Hoyer and Maclnnis, 2010). Various results and discussions have been put forth by authors regarding gender and their behavior in the tourism context. For instance, in a study by Alshammari *et al.* (2019), a gender difference was discovered between male and female visitors in the nontraditional festival in Saudi Arabia. Particularly, men saw nontraditional festivals as a way to enjoy themselves and escape from daily routines, whereas women wanted to spend more time with family and friends as well as socialize with others. In contrast, in the context of National park visitations in Africa (Mutanga *et al.*, 2017) and in Asia (Suttikun *et al.*, 2016) by international tourists, no relationship between motivation and gender was established, which supports the earlier findings of (Jönsson and Devonish, 2008). Stemming from the previous studies in the literature on gender and travel motivations, it can be concluded that depending on the type of destination, the gender of the tourists can have an association with their travel motivations. Therefore, this study hypothesized:

H3. There is a significant association between tourists' gender and travel motivations

The relationship between tourists' marital status and motivation
It is important to understand the marital status of the tourists since it helps to predict their travel behavior (Kara and Mkwizu, 2020) and affects their decision-making (Kattiyapornpong and Miller, 2008). In a study on the elderly tourists in South Korea, differences between married and unmarried travelers were discovered. Married elderly with children were motivated by historical and natural attributes of the destination and put more emphasis on quality over price, whereas unmarried seniors were looking for the more social aspects of their travel (Kim and Kim, 2020). In cruise travel in China, singles were seen to be more motivated to try and discover new things compared to married couples who had more concern for their families (Fan *et al.*, 2015). It is clear from the previous studies that travel motivations can vary based on tourists' marital status, thus this study formulates the following hypothesis:

H4. There is a significant association between tourists' marital status and travel motivations

The relationship between tourists' religion and motivation
Religion has played a significant role in motivating people to travel for centuries (Butler and Suntikul, 2018), and destinations with religious sites can attract tourists who are religious and nonreligious (Bideci and Albayrak, 2016). The religious background of tourists should be given special attention in the tourism industry due to its influence on consumers' buying habits, choice of destination and satisfaction (Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008). In Malaysia, for example, religion has been found to moderate tourists' pull factors such as destination attributes but failed to moderate push factors, which is more internal motivation (Battour *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the degree of religious belief had an influence on tourists' motivation to travel to the Buddhist mountains of China, and the authors recommended that atmosphere plays a significant role to raise tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions (Wang *et al.*, 2016). Based on the literature, this study hypothesizes:

H5. There is a significant association between tourists' religion and travel motivations

The relationship between tourists' frequency of visit and motivation
Tourists' travel motivations have an association with the number of times they visit a specific location. This was confirmed by (Carvache-franco *et al.*, 2019) in a coastal tourism study in Ecuador, where the more frequently tourists traveled, the more they were motivated to travel

for specific reasons. In a developing and Asian country context, Suttikun *et al.* (2016) studied international tourists' past travel experience and reasons to travel to Bangkok, Thailand. In the study, the authors have confirmed that tourists' past travel experience to Bangkok had an effect on their revisit intentions. In nature-based tourism, for example, visitors' interests in nature exploration and interactions with the environment were the predictors of tourists' revisit intentions (Lee *et al.*, 2014; Ma *et al.*, 2018). Thus, tourists' visit frequency has an association with their travel motives, and therefore, this study formulates the following hypothesis:

H6. There is a significant association between tourists' frequency of visits and travel motivations

Methodology

Data collection and sampling

This study utilized quantitative methods, and the data was collected approximately one year between January of 2019 and January of 2020. The convenience sampling method was utilized in order to obtain information from international tourists who were willing and ready to take part in the survey. This sampling method allows the researcher to obtain data from tourists that are available and willing to participate in the study (Creswell, 2014). The main reason for applying the convenience sampling method in this study is its easy accessibility to the target population (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). The main sites for data collection were historical sites, bazaars, hotels in the city of Tashkent. Screening questions such as "Are you tourists visiting Uzbekistan?" and "Have you already completed this survey?" were asked in order to gather data from the target population and also avoid double sampling. The study was carried out by six (6) volunteer research assistants, organized in two (2) small groups with experienced leaders. Each team consisted of two (2) volunteers and one (1) experienced leader. Each experienced leader had prior knowledge and training on the proper data collection process. Prior to the data collection process, both teams were briefed and provided instructions on the research instruments and ethics. They were there to explain questions and provide assistance if there is a need for question clarification. The questionnaire was self-administered, which was available on hard copy form. Furthermore, each data collector attended to the tourists on one-to-one basis to avoid discussions of their answers. Each team approached the international tourists and explained the purpose of this study. All the participants who agreed to take part in the study were asked to complete the survey in person. Overall 658 questionnaires were gathered and 563 were found to be valid with a response rate of 85.6%.

Prior to initial data collection, a pilot test was collected from a sample of 30 international tourists in order to confirm whether the questions were clear, understandable and the length of time it took for the participants to complete the survey. The questionnaire was written in the English language due to the assumption that this language is internationally spoken and tourists visiting Uzbekistan can understand it and no translations were utilized. The sample size of 563 was adequate using a 5% confidence level, a minimum of 385 sample size is needed following the latest statistics of 6.7m tourist arrivals in Uzbekistan in 2019 (Uzbekistan, 2020).

Instrumentation and data analysis

To measure the travel motives of international tourists visiting Uzbekistan, this study adopted the existing scale from previous literature. The survey instrument was divided into two sections. The first sections collected data on the demographic information of the respondents, whereas the second section was divided into 29 push and 20 pull factors. Furthermore, 20 pull factors were divided into nine historical/cultural attractions items operationalized as visiting historical places in Uzbekistan, four service delivery items

operationalized as previous experience with cleanliness of the site and quality of the services provided, three natural/ecological heritage items operationalized as site environment, parks, museums and forest and four accessibility/good value items operationalized as the destination was easy to access and offered good prices. Next, 29 push factors were organized into five heritage motivation items operationalized as tourists' interest in their historical background, four ego-enhancement operationalized as tourists' feeling of going places to improve their ego, 12 escape relaxation items operationalized as escaping daily routine and meeting new people and eight adventure-seeking items operationalized as going to new places and discovering something new. All the 20 pull items were adapted (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Al-Haj and Mat Som, 2010) and 29 push items were adapted (Yousefi and Marzuki, 2015; Preko *et al.*, 2019). Finally, all the questions were constructed using the five-point scale of 1–5, 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Next, the factor analysis was employed in this study, which simplifies the number of items used and examines the factor structure of the constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2010). First, 20 pull items revealed Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) (0.737) and Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 = 336.628$, which were found to be adequate enough to perform factor analysis. The findings further illustrate that four factors were identified in the pull category, which accounted for 62.09% of the total variances explained. Factor 1 was "Historical Attractions," which explained 23.37% of the total variances explained with composite reliability (CR) of 0.84. The second pull factor was identified as "Service Delivery" with 7.11% of the total variances explained with CR of 0.69. The third factor was "Natural Heritage," which explained 9.27% of the total variances explained with CR of 0.82. The last and fourth factor was identified as "Good Value" with 22.34% of the total variances explained with CR of 0.86. Furthermore, 29 push items revealed KMO (0.850) and Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 = 345.878$. Four (4) push factors were identified with 63.79% of the total variances explained. The first push factor was identified as "Heritage Motivation," which accounted for 11.57% of the total variances explained with CR of 0.83. "Ego-enhancement" was the second push factor with 10.44% of the total variance explained with CR of 0.86. The third factor in the push category was "Escape" with 29.19% of the total variances explained with CR of 0.94. Lastly, "Adventure" accounted for 12.59% of the total variances explained with CR of 0.89.

This study employed a Chi-square test of independence (χ^2) to test the association between tourists' demographics (nationality, age, gender, marital status, religion and frequency of visitation) and travel motivations. The Chi-square test is useful in determining whether one categorical variable has an association with another categorical variable. Since some variables are on a five-point scale, the study followed the recommendation of Sharpe (2015), to transform the scale into categorical "yes" or "no" to qualify the data for the Chi-square test. First, responses that had values of ≤3.0, that is, disagree with certain motivation, were transformed into No = 0, and the responses that had values of >3.0, agreed to certain motivation, were recorded as Yes. A similar approach was used in the study of Preko (2020), in assessing migrant views within the beach tourism context.

Results
Demographic background
The demographic outcome from Table 1 indicates that the majority of the surveyed participants were males (55.4%), single (54.4) and less than 40 years old (58.8%). As for the nationality, tourists were mainly from Europe (55.2%) followed by Asia (29.3%) and visited Uzbekistan for the first time (86.7%). Most of the participants indicated "Other" (50.4%) as their faith followed by Christianity (34.8%) and Islam (14.7%). Table 2 contains the mean score of the constructs of the present study. The overall mean score for the pull factor was (4.0) and push factor (3.5), which means that the tourists are both pulled and pushed to the

Items	Demographics	Frequency	Percentage	χ^2	df	ρ
Gender	Male	312	55.4	3.42	1	0.064
	Female	251	44.6			
Age	≤40	331	58.8	0.45	1	0.501
	Above 40 years	232	41.2			
Nationality	Europe	311	55.2	9.54	3	0.023
	Asia	165	29.3			
	America	44	7.8			
	Oceania	43	7.6			
Marital status	Married	257	45.6	0.68	1	0.41
	Single	306	54.4			
Visitation	First time	488	86.7	9.37	2	0.009
	Second time	45	8.0			
	More than two times	30	5.3			
Religion	Islam	83	14.7	1.57	2	0.457
	Christianity	196	34.8			
	Other	284	50.4			

Table 1.
Chi Square analysis of tourists' demographics and travel motives

country, but they are mostly pulled depending on the mean score of (4.0). Furthermore, according to Table 2, historical motivation has a mean score of (4.2), service delivery (3.7), natural heritage (3.9), good value (4.1), heritage motivation (2.9), ego-enhancement (3.8), escape (3.2), adventure (4.1), respectively. Among the pull factors, the highest motivations were historical motivation and good value followed by adventure for the push factors. This implies that international tourists were motivated to travel to Uzbekistan due to ease of access and good value for cost, to witness historical sites and have some adventure.

Reliability and validity
Alpha coefficient of the push and pull items studied ranged from 0.79 to 0.91 in Table 2, which is above the suggested threshold of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, all the items, (20) for pull and (29) push were tested for validity. According to the results, overall average variances extracted (AVE) and CR for PPT were above 0.50 and 0.70, which is above the recommended threshold (Yap and Khong, 2006). In Table 3 convergent validity for the studied items was above 0.50 and the square root of AVE for each construct was above the interconstruct correlation to satisfy the discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Hypothesis testing
The x^2 analysis carried out in this study is presented in Table 1 with interesting results. It was discovered that the gender of the international tourists traveling to Uzbekistan showed no association with travel motivations ($\rho = 0.064$) rejecting Hypothesis 3. That is, gender differences between the tourists did not play a role in choosing Uzbekistan as a tourist destination. Next, the age of the travelers did not present an association with travel motivations ($\rho = 0.501$) rejecting Hypothesis 2, which indicates that age difference between tourists both above and below the age of 40 years was not an indicator to travel to Uzbekistan. Furthermore, there is no association between marital status and travel motivation ($\rho = 0.41$) rejecting Hypothesis 4 as well as no association was discovered between tourists' religion and travel motivation ($\rho = 0.457$) rejecting Hypothesis 5. However, it was discovered in the study that there is a significant association between international tourists' nationality and motivation ($\rho = 0.023$) accepting Hypothesis 1 and tourists' frequency of visitation to Uzbekistan and motivation ($\rho = 0.009$) accepting Hypothesis 6. In other words, tourists'

Items	Factor loading	AVE	Reliability	CR	Mean	SD
Pull					4.0	
Historical attractions		0.52		0.84	4.2	0.6
I am motivated by the scenery atmosphere	0.72		0.81		4.5	0.6
I am motivated by the arts and craft at destination	0.73		0.80		4.1	1.0
I am interested in different ethnic groups	0.69		0.81		4.2	0.9
Authentic or trustworthy exhibits or tour	0.75		0.80		3.9	1.0
It helped me to see and experience a new heritage attraction	0.72		0.79		4.3	0.8
Service delivery		0.53		0.69	3.7	1.1
We were received by a trained tour guide to take us through	0.75		0.81		3.6	1.4
There was a prompt service delivery at destination	0.70		0.79		3.9	1.1
Natural heritage		0.60		0.82	3.9	0.9
Motivated by the nature (e.g. wildlife, animals, fall, forest)	0.74		0.80		3.5	1.2
I was inspired in the beauty of the site (park, museum etc.)	0.88		0.80		4.2	1.1
I was motivated by the site environment	0.71		0.79		4.1	1.0
Good value		0.61		0.86	4.1	0.8
Easy accessibility	0.79		0.79		4.0	1.0
Good value for cost	0.76		0.80		4.3	0.9
Convenient travel time to the site	0.84		0.79		4.1	1.0
Perfect weather	0.72		0.80		4.2	1.0
Push					3.5	
Heritage motivation		0.62		0.83	2.9	1.3
I was interested in tracing my route	0.56		0.91		3.2	1.3
I wanted to learn about my heritage	0.89		0.90		2.9	1.5
I wanted to find out my historical background	0.87		0.90		2.8	1.5
Ego-enhancement		0.62		0.86	3.8	0.8
Visiting a place I can talk about when I get home	0.79		0.90		4.0	1.2
Going places I have not visited before	0.83		0.91		4.6	0.8
Going places my friends have not visited before	0.74		0.91		3.8	1.3
A special person in my life wanted to go there	0.78		0.90		3.0	1.5
Escape		0.63		0.94	3.2	1.1
I wanted to get away from school/home	0.72		0.91		3.0	1.5
I was interested in relaxing myself	0.79		0.90		3.3	1.4
I wanted to distress myself/reduce stress	0.82		0.89		3.2	1.4
I wanted to get a little break from what I was doing	0.90		0.89		3.5	1.4
I needed a break	0.81		0.90		3.3	1.5
I wanted to escape from ordinary responsibilities	0.86		0.91		3.2	1.5
I wanted to do nothing/just relaxing	0.72		0.90		2.7	1.5
I wanted to have some entertainment	0.78		0.90		3.1	1.4
Just to have fun	0.70		0.91		3.5	1.4
Adventure		0.52		0.89	4.1	0.6
I have the desire to learn about site's history	0.71		0.90		4.5	0.8
I have the desire about the site in general	0.73		0.91		4.4	0.7
It is important for me to visit the site	0.66		0.89		4.1	1.0
I wanted to experience unfamiliar destination	0.79		0.89		4.4	0.8
I wanted to discover something new	0.65		0.91		4.5	0.7
I was interested in doing something challenging	0.69		0.91		4.0	1.1
I wanted to get closer to nature	0.78		0.90		3.5	1.3
I was not influenced by anything to go on tour	0.72		0.91		3.1	1.4

Note(s): Italics are the mean scores for push and pull factors

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Historical attractions	*0.72*							
2	Service delivery	0.26**	*0.72*						
3	Natural heritage	0.28**	0.10*	*0.78*					
4	Good value	0.14**	0.18**	0.25**	*0.78*				
5	Heritage motivation	0.22**	0.10*	0.37**	0.23**	*0.79*			
6	Ego-enhancement	0.24**	0.09*	0.32**	0.26**	0.39**	*0.78*		
7	Escape	0.03	−0.11**	0.34**	0.11**	0.36**	0.34**	*0.79*	
8	Adventure	0.47**	0.18**	0.34**	0.15**	0.37**	0.42**	0.29**	*0.72*

Note(s): **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)
Italics are the the square root of the AVE

Table 3.
Interfactor correlations

geographic background and how many times they have visited Uzbekistan played role in their travel motivations.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate and analyze what motivates international tourists in a developing country such as Uzbekistan through the application of the push and pull motivation theory and whether there are any associations between the demographics of the travelers and their travel motivations. It is confirmed that international tourists traveling overseas are motivated internally and externally. That is, they have an internal desire to travel and attracted by the attributes of the destination. The findings of this study indicated that international tourists were mainly pulled by (historical attractions) to visit Uzbekistan as a tourist destination. Thus, it can be said that international tourists were interested to see historical and heritage sites of Uzbekistan such as UNESCO recognized cities of Samarqand, Bukhara and Khiva (Kantarci, 2007b). As for the push factors, international tourists were pushed by (Adventure) to travel to Uzbekistan. This indicated that international tourists had an internal desire to learn a new culture and history by visiting Uzbekistan. This confirms previous findings (Huang, 2010; Dayour and Adongo, 2015) that exploring and learning new cultures is the core of all travels. Thus, it can be said that international tourists were motivated to travel to Uzbekistan to see historical sites and learn something new, which is consistent with previous findings (Yousefi and Marzuki, 2015).

The empirical findings of this study also revealed that there is some association between the demographic profile of international tourists and their travel motivations. Specifically, it was discovered that tourists' nationality indicated a significant association with their travel motivations to visit Uzbekistan, which is consistent with the previous findings (Kozak, 2002; Prayag and Ryan, 2011; Assiouras *et al.*, 2015; Suttikun *et al.*, 2016; Kara and Mkwizu, 2020). This implies that tourists' desire to travel the world is not homogeneous, but rather they have various motives to visit certain places, which is in line with the original suggestions of Crompton (1979). For instance, nationalities of similar cultures might seek familiar destinations, whereas unfamiliar cultures might be interested in discovering new ones (Prayag and Ryan, 2011). Thus, the nationality of tourists could be used for marketing purposes of destinations.

Furthermore, the number of times the international tourists visited Uzbekistan demonstrated a significant association with their travel motivations confirmed by Suttikun *et al.* (2016). In other words, there is a relationship between how many times tourists have been to a location and their motivation. It can indicate that although tourists might be influenced by promotions and word of mouth, their previous travel experience to a

particular destination can be a pivotal factor for revisit intentions. Song *et al.* (2014) mentioned that tourists revisit the same destination to avoid being disappointed with new places, gaining more experience, or they were satisfied with their initial travel. Thus, it could imply that international tourists visiting Uzbekistan were satisfied with their initial experience and wanted to learn more about the local place and people.

The hypotheses regarding gender and age were not significantly associated with the travel motives of international tourists. Our findings are in line with previous studies (Suttikun *et al.*, 2016), who have also discovered that age and gender were not significantly different from the travel motives of tourists visiting Bangkok. This contradicts (Mutanga *et al.*, 2017; Jensen, 2015) for age and (Alshammari *et al.*, 2019) for gender. Next, the association concerning marital status and religion with travel motives of international tourists was also not supported in this study. This finding contradicts (Kim and Kim, 2020) for marital status and (Battour *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2016) for religion. There are two explanations for this result. First, the tourism sites of Uzbekistan mostly consist of historical sites such as Samarqand, Bukhara and Khiva. These historic locations offer unique experiences and tours to witness the cultural and historic heritage of Uzbekistan and do not offer products and services that are differentiated on the demographic background of tourists, but rather these locations are equally attractive for both males and females without consideration of their age, status and religion. Second, one of the current reforms of tourism development in Uzbekistan is to form and implement the country's tourism potential at a holistic level to increase tourism dramatically (Uzbekembassy, 2017). Thus, it implies that Uzbekistan is at the initial stage of tourism development, and practitioners and businesses are employing a more unsophisticated marketing approach at promoting and developing tourism products and services to attract foreign tourists to Uzbekistan.

Conclusion
In conclusion, this study is unique in a way that it examines and presents international tourists' travel motivations in Uzbekistan, which is relatively one of the understudied countries in tourism literature through push and pull theory and serves as a first step in promoting and studying the tourism industry in Uzbekistan. One of the contributions of this study is that it identified that international tourists are pulled to Uzbekistan. Second, the study also contributed by identifying that nationality and frequency of visitation were the most significant factors that were associated with tourists' motives to Uzbekistan, which goes beyond previous studies (Kantarci, 2007b, c; Airey and Shackley, 1997; Kantarci *et al.*, 2014) to enrich tourism literature. Particularly, Kantarci (2007a) has studied the travel behavior from the perspective of tourists from Turkey traveling to Central Asian countries overall and concluded that their main motives for traveling were novelty and uniqueness associated with these locations. This study, however, goes beyond this and examines tourists' travel behavior to Uzbekistan from the global perspective and discovered that travelers are motivated to learn something new and see historical sites. Ultimately, the findings and discussions of this study allow the business practitioners and policymakers to successfully understand the travel behavior of tourists in order to prepare better travel programs and packages to encourage and promote Uzbekistan as a tourism destination. In addition, this study also makes an attempt to extend the usefulness of the push and pull theory in the context of international arrival in Central Asia.

Theoretical implications
From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study empirically establish the significance of PPF motivation to explain tourists' travel behavior, which is important to

current international tourism travel literature (see: Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Kim and Lee, 2002; Baniya and Paudel, 2016; Preko *et al.*, 2020). However, despite the fact that PPF was used in previous tourism literature, international tourists' travel behavior in the Uzbekistan context was largely overlooked. Therefore, the main theoretical contributions of this study are as follows. First, the results of this study confirm that PPF is a useful tool in discovering and understanding international tourists' travel motivations in a non-Western tourism context (e.g. Shi *et al.*, 2019; Sastre and Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017). Second, PPF has extended destination tourism literature specifically in Uzbekistan with a focus on international tourists' arrival, making a significant contribution to knowledge. Furthermore, through the utilization of this theory, this study was able to identify and explain the main motivational factors such as historical attractions, service delivery, natural heritage, good value, heritage motivation, ego-enhancement, escape and adventure among international tourists in terms of their demographic backgrounds such as age, gender, marital status, nationality, frequency of visits and religion. Interestingly, the findings of this study cannot be overlooked and provide an original contribution to the understanding of the demographics of tourists and their motives to travel to Uzbekistan, which can guide the businesses and practitioners in the tourism industry in order to diversify and further improve travel packages and services.

Practical implications

The findings of this study also offer practical implications for businesses, managers and practitioners of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan, and current marketing practices need to be refined in accordance with our findings as having information regarding consumers can assist to formulate better targeting activities (Shi *et al.*, 2019). First, the study indicated that international tourists are mainly pulled by the country's historical/heritage sites. Again these tourists are interested (pushed) to learn and discover these unique places such as Samarqand, Bukhara and Khiva. Thus, in order to attract more tourists, promotional tools have to be designed to match it (Woyo and Slabbert, 2019), for instance, practitioners and businesses should develop promotional messages to promote historical destinations in context. Second, as nationality has a significant association with travel motivations, it implies that segmentation could be further studied and employed for potential tourists (Sag and Zengul, 2019). Marketing activities to attract international tourists must be in line with the geographic background of visitors since it has an association with their travel motives. Provided that proper marketing activities and segmentation are employed, the needs and preferences of tourists with various demographic backgrounds can be served well. Furthermore, since there is a significant association between travel frequency and motivation, it implies that tourists visit Uzbekistan again for certain reasons. The tourists' revisit intentions are derived from their past experience visiting the same destination (Song *et al.*, 2014). Thus, to increase tourists' frequency of visitations, local businesses and practitioners are encouraged to offer a unique experience such as improving service delivery and tour package quality that satisfies their visitors. All of these recommendations are achievable through the successful collaboration of the stakeholders that are involved in the tourism industry of Uzbekistan.

Limitations and future research

One of the main limitations of this study is the application of the convenience sampling method and nonparametric analysis of the Chi-square test of independence. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to represent the whole population of international tourists. The next limitation of this study is that the study did not investigate the country-specific background of the international tourists, but rather on a continent basis, so further studies can examine the country-specific motives of the international tourists to Uzbekistan.

In addition, this is study did also not exhaust all the demographics, future studies can also look at income level, educational level, among others. It is important to mention that other motivational theories can be applied in a similar study context. Lastly, the data was collected purely on travel motives of international tourists excluding other variables. Thus, future studies could also utilize other variables such as destination image, brand image, safety and security of international tourists. Furthermore, more robust statistical tests are recommended, and travel motives of domestic tourists could be also explored to gain deeper insight into the tourism industry of Uzbekistan.

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