Senior citizen tourists’ push and pull motivations: an approach–avoidance perspective

Arun Aggarwal and Vandita Hajra

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to pioneer the exploration of approach and avoidance intentions of senior tourists by analyzing push and pull factors. It innovatively categorizes these factors into dual-impact, resilient and facilitative types, surpassing previous research by understanding complex motivations shaping senior travel decisions.

Design/methodology/approach – Cross-sectional research surveyed 641 elderly individuals in Odisha and West Bengal, India, analyzing data using structural equation modeling.

Findings – Notably, certain push factors such as health improvement, novelty and socialization exert a positive influence on approach intentions while discouraging avoidance intentions. The push factors of status and self-fulfillment solely have a negative impact on avoidance intentions. The factors of escape and relaxation have been found to positively contribute to approach intentions. In the realm of pull factors, destination familiarity/friendliness quotient and ease of consumption of tourist experiences exert a positive influence on approach intentions, whereas the health safety and security quotient of a destination reduces avoidance intentions.

Originality/value – This study uniquely categorizes push and pull factors impacting senior tourists’ intentions. The identification of dual-impact, resilient and facilitative factors opens new avenues for creating a supportive and accessible environment for senior tourists, thereby improving their travel experiences.

Keywords Structural equation modeling, Senior tourists, Destination familiarity, Approach-avoidance intentions, Push and pull travel motivations

Paper type Research paper

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**Motivaciones de empuje y atracción de los turistas de la tercera edad: Una perspectiva de aproximación-evitación**

### Resumen

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque:** Se realizó una investigación transversal con encuestas a 641 personas mayores de Odisha y Bengala Occidental (India) y se analizaron los datos mediante un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales.

**Objetivo:** Este estudio es pionero en la exploración de las intenciones de acercamiento y evitación de los turistas de la tercera edad mediante el análisis de los factores de atracción y empuje. Clasifica de forma innovadora estos factores en dos tipos: de doble impacto, de resistencia y de facilitación, avanzando investigaciones anteriores al comprender las complejas motivaciones que determinan las decisiones de viaje de las personas mayores.

**Resultados:** En particular, ciertos factores de empuje, como la mejora de la salud, la novedad y la socialización, ejercen una influencia positiva en las intenciones de acercamiento, mientras que desalientan las intenciones de evitación. Los factores de empuje de estatus y autorrealización sólo tienen un impacto negativo en las intenciones de evitación. Los factores de evasión y relajación contribuyen positivamente a las intenciones de acercamiento. En el ámbito de los factores de atracción, la relación familiaridad/amabilidad del destino y la facilidad de consumo de las experiencias turísticas ejercen una influencia positiva en las intenciones de acercamiento, mientras que la relación seguridad y protección sanitaria de un destino reduce las intenciones de evitación.

**Originalidad/valor:** Este estudio clasifica de forma única los factores de empuje y atracción que influyen en las intenciones de los turistas de la tercera edad. La identificación de factores de doble impacto, resilientes y facilitadores abre nuevas vías para crear un entorno favorable y accesible para los turistas de la tercera edad, mejorando sus experiencias de viaje.

**Palabras clave** Turistas sénior, Intenciones de aproximación-evitación, Motivaciones de viaje push y pull, Familiaridad con el destino, Modelización de ecuaciones estructurales

### Tipo de papel Trabajo de investigación

### 1. Introduction

As global populations age, the tourism industry grapples with meeting the needs of a growing senior demographic. The potential of senior tourism is extensive, not only as a segment for business growth but also as a catalyst for societal progress and inclusion (Buhalis et al., 2023). However, this potential comes with specific considerations, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has heightened concerns about health and safety during travel (Wang et al., 2022). Previous studies have revealed a complex array of “push” and “pull” factors influencing seniors’ travel decisions. Push factors often relate to internal motivations such as health improvement or a sense of adventure, whereas pull factors pertain to external attractions like destination characteristics (Hajra and Aggarwal, 2022). Existing literature has provided insightful categorizations of these factors (Alén et al., 2017; Lewis and D’Alessandro, 2019; Sien Leong et al., 2023) but often overlooks the dualistic nature of travel intentions: both approach and avoidance behaviors (Hajra and Aggarwal, 2022). This study delves into the approach and avoidance intentions of senior tourists in Odisha and West Bengal, states leading in population aging in India. Using structural equation modeling, it examines how push and pull factors affect senior tourists’ intentions post-COVID-19. The research has two main objectives: to assess the impact of these factors on travel intentions and to classify them into dual-impact, resilient and facilitative types. The findings aim to deepen the understanding of senior tourism, offering insights for creating better travel environments for the elderly.

### 2. Theoretical background and review of literature

Understanding senior tourists’ travel intentions, especially post-COVID-19, requires a comprehensive approach drawing from diverse theoretical frameworks. These include Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Pearce’s travel career ladder and Lawler’s expectancy theory (Wu, 2003). This study incorporates the “push” and “pull” factors concept, where push factors denote internal motivations and pull factors relate to external destination attributes (Dann, 1977). Furthermore, this study augments Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior...
with Mehrabian and Russell’s (1974) approach-avoidance theory addressing both positive and negative behavioral intentions for senior citizens. However, recognizing the limitations of Mehrabian and Russell’s bipolar emotional scale, this study adopts a unipolar approach (Babin et al., 1998) (refer Figure 1). Although extensive literature exists on positive behavioral intentions of senior tourists (Lu, 2021), this research addresses the gap in understanding negative behavioral intentions, exploring both sides for senior tourists.

Sociodemographic factors significantly shape senior tourists’ preferences. Zhou et al. (2017) observed health as a motivator, with seniors prioritizing wellness-focused destinations, whereas Lepp (2008) linked education to adventure preferences. In this study, these factors, along with age and education, act as controlling variables shaping post-COVID-19 travel intentions for seniors. The study tests the following hypotheses:

\[ H1. \text{Push and pull factors have positive impact on tourist's approach behavioral intentions to travel.} \]

\[ H2. \text{Push and pull factors have negative impact on tourist's avoidance behavioral intentions to travel.} \]

3. Methods

In this cross-sectional study, a sample of 641 elderly individuals from two prominent Eastern Indian states experiencing significant population aging (NSO, 2021), namely, Odisha and
West Bengal, was collected using a purposive sampling technique in the year 2022 from June to August including several weekends. The study used a scale developed by Hajra and Aggarwal (2022) to assess the approach and avoidance travel behavioral intentions of senior tourists, encompassing both push and pull factors. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the collected data. To ensure the data’s reliability, skewness and kurtosis indices were applied to verify its normality, in accordance with Garson’s (2012) acceptable range of ±2, which confirmed the data’s adherence to a normal distribution. To address potential common method bias (CMB) stemming from self-reported data, Harman’s single-factor test was conducted. In this study, the variance explained by a single factor was only 27.542%, well below the cutoff value of 50%, effectively mitigating significant concerns about CMB influencing the research results.

4. Results

This study emphasizes the significant impact of push and pull factors on senior tourists’ travel intentions. Structural equation modeling results (see Table 1) reveal that push factors like Improving Health and Wellness (IHW), Novelty and Knowledge-Seeking (NKS) and Socialization and Spending Time with Family (SOC) positively influence approach intentions (APP) while discouraging avoidance intentions (AVO). Status and Pride (SNP) and Self-Fulfilment and Spirituality (SFS) negatively affect avoidance intentions, whereas Escape and Relaxation (ER) positively influences approach intentions. Among pull factors, Familiarity and Friendliness of a destination (FNF) and Ease of Consumption of Tourism Experiences (EC) positively impact approach intentions. Health Safety and Security Quotient of a Destination (HSS) reduces avoidance intentions. No dual-impact or synergistic pull factors were found.

5. Discussion and implications

Destination marketing entities and tourism promoters face the challenge of meeting the evolving needs of an aging global population (Patterson and Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). This pioneering research reveals dual-impact push factors like IHW, NKS and SOC, aligning with observations on seniors’ proclivity for health, novelty and social interactions (Lewis and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Hypothesis testing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>APP ← IHW</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVO ← IHW</td>
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<tr>
<td>APP ← NKS</td>
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<tr>
<td>APP ← HSS</td>
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<td>AVO ← HSS</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
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Notes: SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio
Source: Author’s compilation
D’Alessandro, 2019). Resilient push factors like SNP and SFS deter travel avoidance, echoing emphasis on self-fulfilment among seniors (Urbonavicius et al., 2017). ER facilitates approach intentions, endorsed by Alén et al. (2017). Pull factors FNF and EC enhance approach motivations, in line with findings from Alén et al. (2017), whereas HSS mitigates avoidance as highlighted by Sien Leong et al. (2023). This research classifies push and pull factors into dual-impact, resilient and facilitative categories, enhancing existing life cycle and continuity theories. Tourism stakeholders can leverage these insights to develop targeted marketing strategies. For instance, emphasizing health and wellness benefits, socialization opportunities and destination familiarity can attract more senior tourists. On the flip side, addressing concerns related to health safety could be key in reducing avoidance behaviors, particularly in the post-COVID-19 context. Embracing these insights would empower the tourism industry to create an enriching, inclusive playground for seniors, fostering a thriving senior tourism market.

5.1 Limitations and future research directions

The study has limitations, including data collection only from Eastern India, limiting generalizability. Future research can be conducted in other countries, considering cultural differences. The study found no dual-impact or synergistic pull factors. Future research could also explore interactions between push and pull factors and conduct longitudinal studies for insights into senior tourists’ travel intentions.

6. Conclusion

By identifying and understanding the dual-impact, resilient and facilitative push and pull factors, this research offers innovative insights for marketers and policymakers to develop effective strategies, that would enhance the travel experiences of senior individuals.

References


Further reading


About the authors

Dr Arun Aggarwal is working as faculty at Chitkara Business School, Chitkara University, Punjab, India. His area of research is human resources management, organizational psychology, hospitality and tourism. He has various national and international publications to his credit.

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