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Determinants of Intention to Visit Phuket, Thailand

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impacts of the determinants, such as external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth and perceived risks on intention to visit. The hypotheses were tested using quantitative research methodology. The sample of randomly drawn 400 respondents from the international tourists landing at the international airports, Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang over a period of three months in early 2016 was used for data collection. The main finding was that there is a significant impact of all the four independent variables on the intention to visit, individually and jointly. In terms of impact, the research provides a clear guidance for the marketing of a tourist destination based on the results from Phuket. This paper clearly shows importance of word of mouth and perceived risk of travel apart from the push and pull factors coming from motivation theory.

Keywords: *Intention to visit, External motivation, Internal motivation, Word of mouth, Perceived risk of travel*

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1. Introduction

There are quite a large number of studies that relate economic growth to tourism sector on the theoretical and empirical grounds with different methodologies, data used, time periods and cases. One important study on the impact of tourism and economic development has been conducted for Portugal (Proenca & Soukiazis, 2005). In this study about the correlation between the bed capacity of Portuguese regions and the regional economic growth measured by GDP per capita growth, the researchers found that that 1% increase in accommodation capacity in tourism sector induces 0.01% increase in per capita income. Malaysia presents another example. A recent study in Malaysia has tried to calculate the impact of tourism on the economy (Mohammad et al., 2009). As per this study, the extra revenue generated by tourism helped the country's economy during the economic crisis of 2008. Today, tourism has become a major contributor to the Malaysian economy in terms of GDP, investment and employment. It has become Malaysia's third largest source of income from foreign exchange. This study revealed that Malaysian tourism industry is playing an important role in the Malaysian economy. The conclusion is that an increase in international tourist inflow is a very important for any country and helps in the following:

1. Earning foreign exchange
2. Attracting foreign investment in a region
3. Generate employment in a region

All these have further multiplier effects in boosting the income levels in a country. In fact, "With its promise of foreign exchange and employment, tourism is seen as an attractive development strategy." (Telfer, 2009, p.146). Even earlier researchers had argued that, throughout the world, the most compelling reason for pursuing tourism as a development strategy is its alleged positive contribution to the local or national economy (Sharpley, 2002). It was suggested that "potential contribution to the national balance of payments is the principal reason why governments support tourism development" (Oppermann & Chon, 1997, p109). In conclusion, the tourism development is a good vehicle of growth.

Thailand is a beautiful destination with UNESCO heritage sites and caters to the visitors ranging from the shoppers to the adventurers. Oxford Business Group had suggested in its report (Oxford Business Group, 2013) that Thailand could increase its tourism earnings by improving service and infrastructure. The report suggested that service and infrastructure was more important compared to just focusing on the number of tourist arrivals. However, it could be a chicken and egg problem for the decision makers. The service and infrastructure development has tremendous costs and it needs to be studied whether this is what the tourists are looking for. The point can be illustrated by examining the tourism in an island destination like Phuket, located in Southern Thailand. The island destinations are critical for Thai Tourism, whereas Thai tourism contributes substantially to Thai GDP. If the direct as well as indirect contribution of travel and tourism is considered to include supply chain, investment impact and induced income impacts, the total contribution in Thai economy was THB 1,896.7 billion in 2012 (16.7% of GDP) and is expected to grow by 7.4% to THB 2,038.0 billion (17.0% of GDP) in 2013 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2013). World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has forecasted it to rise by 6.5% pa to THB 3,833.0 billion by 2023 (19.6% of GDP). Unfortunately, not many studies are available on island destinations of Thailand especially with regard to finding the causes of changes in the international tourist arrivals. There is a gap in research about why Thai tourist arrivals dropped in 2014 and then why increased in 2015. This study tries to bridge this research gap to find out the determinants of intentions to visit Phuket.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Choice of Location

Phuket is the most popular tourist destination accounting for 1/3rd of all tourists arrivals in Thailand destination in 2015. The number of arrivals crossed 3 million in 2010 and crossed 7 million in 2015. The tourist arrivals in Phuket have seen a continuous growth as shown in the figure below (Figure 1).

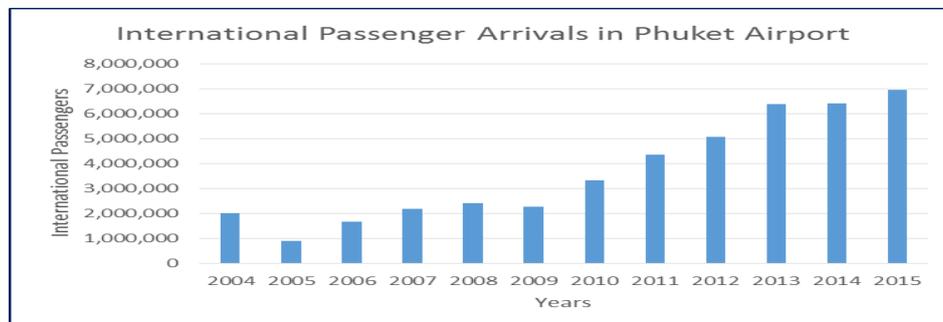


Figure 1: International Passenger Arrivals at Phuket International Airport (2004-2015)

Source: (Wikipedia, 2016)

But Phuket has lack of infrastructure, attraction, image and political problem and many risk. So, these facts show clearly that the tourists may not be looking for service and infrastructure only. The important question is what determines the intention to visit a destination. Island have become a popular attractive destination for traveler (Stylidis et al., 2008). Phuket and neighboring islands are well known throughout the world for their beautiful beaches and party atmosphere. And also, these islands offer numerous opportunities for shopping, recreation, cultural exploration, and relaxation. Therefore, an intelligent guess is that tourists visit Phuket for recreation, relaxation and host of other reasons apart from service and infrastructure. But it needs to be researched and proven.

2.2 Destination Image and Intentions to Visit a Destination

A few determinants of the intention to visit a destination were identified based on the literature review. One conclusion from the literature review is that there is no clear theory which explains all the determinants of intentions to visit. Initially, destination image was considered to be the only determinant of intention to visit.

The importance of destination image in intention to visit was earlier highlighted by many (Buhalis, 2000; Chon, 1991; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Hunt, 1975; Kapferer, 1997; Laws et al., 2002; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). The Earlier studies suggested that destination image has an impact on travelers in the process of destination selection, evaluation of the trip and their future intentions to visit (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) which means that the destination image strongly influences the intention to visit (Chen and Tsai, 2007).

Even recently, it was believed that due to the rising competition among destinations, the need to create a distinctive image for the destinations is more critical than ever before (Phau et al., 2014; Remoaldo et al., 2014) because it affects the choice of tourists. It was argued that the main objective of consumer behavior research is the choice of a product or service. Therefore, image of a product or service is an important factor in the selection choices related to a product, service, place or a person. In the same way it has been argued that the intentions to visit a destination should depend upon the image of that destination and therefore it is logical that the image of a destination plays the most crucial role (Kim et al., 2012). Therefore from the theoretical angle, it is widely accepted that a positive destination image can increase the likelihood of visit or the intention to visit (Assaker & Hallak, 2013). A

positive image derived from positive travel experiences results in a positive evaluation of a destination, which in turn affects behavioral intentions (Carlos et al., 2014).

2.3 Roots of Destination Image- Push and Pull Motivation

On the other hand, there are several studies which rely on motivation theory to explain the intention to visit. Several motivation theories have been proposed to describe how tourists' motivation affects their tourism behavior and actions, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Plog's (1974) tourism motivation model, Dann's (1977) push and pull motivation theory, and Crompton's (1979) nine motives. According to Van der Merwe et al. (2011) and Chen et al. (2014) travel motivation is a set of needs that cause a person to participate in a tourist activity. The internal needs create a tension or discomfort level in the mind and body of an individual, who tries to act to satisfy these needs to reduce the tension (Chen et al., 2014). Yoon & Uysal (2005) explained that "push" motivations refer to the intangible or intrinsic desires of the individual tourist, e.g., the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, health or prestige; whereas "pull" motivations relate to the attractiveness of a given destination and its tangible characteristics, such as natural features, accommodation and recreation facilities, and cultural and historical resources. Following their terminology, the internal and external motivation are the strong determinants of intentions to visit.

There is reasonable evidence that the destination image gets determined by the push factors and the pull factors. According to Chon (1991) the construction of primary images is based on push and pull factors associated with the destination relates Maslow's hierarchy of needs with push factors while pull factors are described as the attractiveness of a region and its various elements. The same conclusion was reached in later studies (Chen et al., 2014; Goosens, 2000; Lopes, 2011; Kluin & Lehto, 2012; Kim, 2014).

2.4 Theory of Planned Behavior

Researchers often use the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to investigate the travel decision making (Phau et al., 2014). The central idea of this theory is that individuals can behave in a particular manner if they believe that their behavior will result in desirable outcomes (Aizen, 1991). Intentions to behave can be termed as planned or likely future behavior (Swan, 1981). It represents behavior in a given circumstance and likelihood to act (Fishbein & Aizen, 1975). Intentions result in behavior when there is an opportunity to act and, therefore, it can be the best predictor of the behavior (Fishbein & Aizen, 1975). According to TPB, the most important determinant of behavior is the intention to behave. In the context of tourism, the most important determinant of visit to a destination is the intention to visit. Since, the concern of this study is intention to visit only, TPB assumes that intentions to visit originates from attitude to visit, the subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. But, TPB is not always able to predict intentions (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Moreover, it can be argued that external and internal motivation determine the attitude which is the main anchor of TPB.

In the light of discussion in the previous few sections of literature review, it can be argued that external motivation and internal motivation are the primary determinants of the intentions to visit. It is also confirmed by other studies e.g. internal motivation and external motivation affect intentions to visit along with destination image (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011).

Therefore, the choice of external motivation and internal motivation as determinants of intention to visit seems to be a reasonable one. This gave the first two null hypotheses and alternative hypotheses;

Hypothesis 1₀: *The external motivation has no association with intentions to visit.*

Hypothesis 1_a: *The external motivation is positively associated with intentions to visit.*

Hypothesis 2₀: *The internal motivation has no association with intention to visit.*

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Hypothesis 2_a: *The internal motivation is positively associated with intentions to visit.*

The external motivation represents the pull factor whereas internal motivation represents the push factor.

2.5 Word of Mouth and Intentions to Visit

Another important variable is word of mouth. Word-of-mouth refers to the idea of person-to-person conversation between consumers about a product (Sen & Lerman, 2007). In recent times, a recommendation from others or word-of-mouth is the most powerful source of pre-purchase information (Kim & Hardin, 2010). Moreover, pre-purchase word-of-mouth can increase the level of perceived trust and reduce perceived risk (Yun Lu et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). The word-of-mouth acts as an endorsement to the intrinsic beliefs of the tourist. This provided the third null and alternative hypotheses;

Hypothesis 3₀: *Word-of-mouth has no relation with the intention to visit.*

Hypothesis 3_a: *A positive word-of-mouth is positively related with the intentions to visit whereas a negative word of mouth is negatively related with the intention to visit.*

2.6 Perceived Risk of Travel and Intentions to Visit

The literature suggests some more independent variables such as perceived risk of travel. Some researchers have studied perceived risks of travel along with internal motivation and destination image to explain intentions to visit (Lepp & Gibson, 2003). It has also been concluded that the low perception of risk will improve the effect of destination image on the intentions to visit (Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013). Another few studies have confirmed the negative impact of perceived risk of travel on the intentions to visit (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Chen et al., 2013). Therefore, perceived risk of travel is another strong contender as the determinant of intention to visit. The hypotheses to test the relationship with the intention to visit.

Hypothesis 4₀: *The perceived risk of travel has no relation with intentions to visit.*

Hypothesis 4_a: *The perceived risk of travel is negatively related with intentions to visit.*

In conclusion, it seems that all these four variables external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth, perceived risk of travel are the primary determinants of the intention to visit. If that is the case then it is important to assess the combined impact of all these variables. Therefore, another set of hypotheses are required to test the joint or combined impact of the four variables.

Hypothesis 5₀: *There is no combined impact of the determinant variables such as external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth and perceived risks of travel on the intentions to visit.*

Hypothesis 5_a: *The combined impact of the determinant variables such as external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth and perceived risks of travel is positive on the intentions to visit.*

All these hypotheses are combined in the research framework as shown in the Figure 2 below:

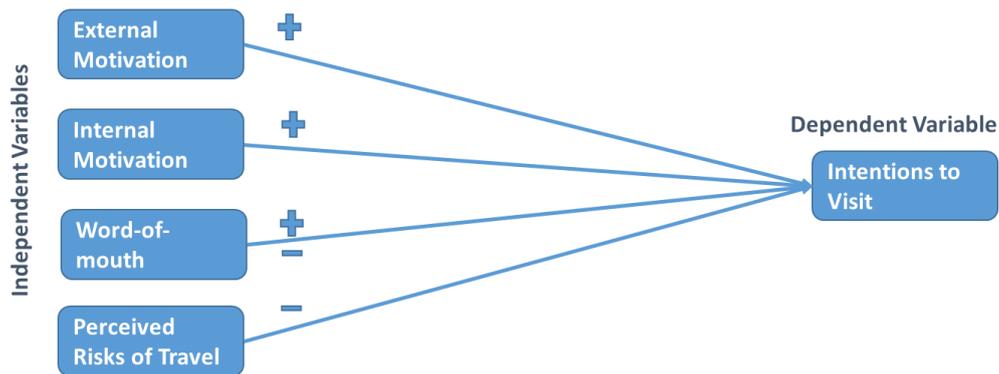


Figure 2: Research Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

A sampling design is as crucial as the research design and the research instrument. The most important element of sampling design is the population and the population frame from where the sample is to be collected. In this research population considered was the international tourists who intended to visit Phuket for any purpose including leisure, sightseeing, business, education, health or study. Therefore, the international tourists at the Thai international airports and border immigration points and heading for Phuket were the respondents and constituted the sampling frame. The sampling methodology adopted was simple random sampling (SRS) because non-probabilistic sampling is not useful for generalizations with respect to a theory or for a theoretical testing (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). The sample size depends upon the confidence and the precision required because higher the confidence less will be the precision and vice versa. The problem of sample size is solved by Cohen (1969) who have simplified this problem by providing a table of sample sizes. Since, the number of international guests at hotels was found to be 7,716,787 in Phuket in 2013, the latest year for which data is available, a sample size of 384 is the optimum at 95% confidence interval according to their table. To compensate some errors, a sample size of 400 respondents was randomly drawn from the international tourists arriving at Bangkok airports – Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang airports. Being a voluntary response, it was not possible to get more than 15-20 responses per day. The total sample size was achieved over a period of four months from March, 2016 until June, 2016.

3.2 Measures

For the responses, the scales for the variables of interest was derived from many sources. The responses were in the form of Likert type 5 point rating scale, where rating or response 3 represented neutral stance, 5 being very high and 1 being very low. The questionnaire used items to measure intention to visit were sourced from the work of Lam and Hsu (2006). The items to measure external motivation scale were sourced from the work of Styliadis, Terzidou and Terzidis(2008), and then the items to measure internal motivation scale were sourced from Beerli and Martin (2004) and the items to measure word-of-mouth were derived from Zhang et al. (2014) and finally the items to measure perceived risk of travel were borrowed from Chen et al. (2013).

4. Results

4.1 Basic Analysis

The data collected showed some interesting characteristics of the sample. For example, 80% respondents had heard well about Phuket but only 55% knew about Phuket well, which is not surprising because the respondents had not visited Phuket yet. In terms of origin, roughly 40% were from Europe and about 50% from Asia. From the remaining 10%, about 5% were Americans. There were more young tourists compared to the older ones. Only 16% were older than 40 years. About 60% had good educational background as they had had at least college or university education and 27% had professional education. This may be because the complexity of international travel is facilitated by educational background. The tourists had no income bias. About 30% earned a yearly income of less than 5000 USD but there were 30% whose yearly income was more than 20,000 USD. The remaining 40% had income between these two extremes. The results of reliability analysis are given in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Analysis.

| Scale | No of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Components Extracted |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Intentions to visit | 3 | 0.93 | 1 |
| External motivation | 4 | 0.60 | 1 |
| Internal motivation | 4 | 0.67 | 1 |
| Word of mouth | 4 | 0.70 | 1 |
| Perceived risk of travel | 4 | 0.84 | 1 |

A factor analysis was done to reduce the dimensions. Only a single component was extracted using principle component analysis as seen in Table 1.

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

To test the hypotheses, correlation and regression was used. The hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 cover the individual relationship of the identified determinants, such as external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth and perceived risk of travel with the dependent variable intention to visit. The summarized results of individual correlation and regression analysis are presented in Table 2. The hypothesis H5 covers the combined impact of all the four independent variables on the dependent variable intention to visit. The result of joint correlation and regression analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Correlation and Regression Analysis: Individual IV with DV-Intention to visit.

| Hypothesis | H1 | H2 | H3 | H4 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Independent Variables | External Motivation | Internal Motivation | Word of Mouth | Perceived Risk of Travel |
| Correlation Coefficient | 0.245 | 0.256 | 0.174 | 0.040 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.058 | 0.063 | 0.028 | -0.001 |
| F-Statistic (Significance with p-value) | 25.347 (0.000) | 27.952 (0.000) | 12.416 (0.000) | 0.622 (0.431) |
| Standardized Coefficient (Beta) | 0.245 | 0.256 | 0.174 | 0.040 |

| | | | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| t-Statistic (Significance with p-value) | 5.035 (0.000) | 5.288 (0.000) | 3.524 (0.000) | 0.789 (0.431) |
| VIF (Multicollinearity) | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Result | Validated | Validated | Validated | Not Validated |

It can be seen from the Table 2 that the individual correlation coefficients of external motivation, internal motivation and word of mouth are weak with values less than 0.3. However, the overall adjusted R square value is very low. However, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) as part of regression shows significant F-statistic and t-statistic (with p-value at 0.000) even at 100% level of confidence. The collinearity indicated by variance inflation factor (VIF) value is 1.000 which is very much within acceptable level (Pan & Jackson, 2008). All this means that However, the correlation of perceived risk of travel is so low at 0.040 that both F-statistic and t-statistic are insignificant. Therefore, while H1, H2 and H3 are validated but H4 is not validated. The result for H5 which is related to the combined impact of all the four variables external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth and perceived risk of travel on the dependent variable intention to visit is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation and Regression Analysis: Combined Impact of IV on DV.

| Hypothesis | H5 | | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Independent Variables | External Motivation | Internal Motivation | Word of Mouth | Perceived Risk of Travel |
| Correlation Coefficient | 0.245 | 0.256 | 0.174 | 0.040 |
| Inter-Correlation | 1.000 | 0.45 | 0.518 | 0.331 |
| | | 1.000 | 0.374 | 0.228 |
| | | | 1.000 | 0.368 |
| | | | | 1.000 |
| Standardized Coefficient (Beta) | 0.162 | 0.182 | 0.049 | -0.073 |
| t-Statistic (Significance with p-value) | 2.698 (0.007) | 3.324 (0.001) | 0.839 (0.402) | -1.400 (0.162) |
| VIF (multicollinearity) | 1.562 | 1.301 | 1.495 | 1.196 |
| Correlation R | 0.303 | | | |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.083 | | | |
| F-Statistic (Significance with p-value) | 9.981 (0.000) | | | |
| Result | Validated | | | |

Table 3 shows that correlations of external motivation, internal motivation, word of mouth and perceived risk of travel with intention to visit are not so strong but there are significant correlation between external motivation, internal motivation and word of mouth which means

they affect each other. All correlations are significant. The R-value is 0.303 and the adjusted R square is 0.083 which is low. The F statistic, which measures the ratio of mean square of all the independent variables and the residual, is 9.981 and is significant with p-value at 0.000. The Beta or standardized coefficient values show all the correct signs (meaning influence of independent variables on the dependent variable) of the coefficients but the significance level differs. While the t-statistics of the coefficients of external motivation and internal motivation are significant at 99.3% and 99.9% level respectively, the significance level of t-statistics of word of mouth is 59.8% only. In other words, it is not significant. The t-statistics of perceived risk of travel is -1.4 with p-value at 0.162 which means confidence interval is 83.8% only. In other words, it is not significant. The sign of perceived risk of travel coefficient is negative which is in accordance with the hypothesis. The collinearity is within bounds with VIF value not higher than 2 (Pan & Jackson, 2008). All this analysis means that the combined impact of all the four identified determinants on intention to visit is significant but not so strong. It appears that the hypothesis H5 is validated but marginally.

5. Conclusion

It is strange that all the four determinants have weak correlation with intention to visit but together they become predictor of intention to visit. There is a stronger correlation among each other but the multicollinearity is absent. It is possible because it is advised that the inter-item correlation above 0.7 can cause multicollinearity (O'Brien, 2007; Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Hence, the inter-item correlation exist but did not affect the collinearity. In all, all the four independent variables show correct signs.

Having said that, this research could not refute the results of earlier research which stated that the intentions to visit can be explained by push and pull motivation or internal and external motivation (Chen et al., 2014; Chon, 1990; Goosens, 2000; Kluin & Lehto, 2012; Lopes, 2011) associated with the hierarchy of needs (internal motivation) and the attractiveness of a region and its marketing (external motivation). It seems surprising but it could be true also. Phuket has so many risk associated. It has been in news for wrong reasons but still the tourist inflow keeps increasing. The word of mouth also is not a strong determinant. Basically, the tourists have some internal needs and when it matches with the external motivation, the intention to visit becomes very strong. Another surprising result has been that significance of external and internal motivation has increased when joined together with word of mouth and the perceived risk of travel.

The practical implications of this research is crystal clear. A very recent publication (Stapleton, 2014) labels Thailand especially Phuket as a "Deadly destination". The author mentions that in 2014, and in the decade preceding it, "there were train, bus, ferry, speedboat, motorbike and car accidents, murders, knifings, unexplained deaths, numerous suicides, diving accidents, robberies gone wrong, anonymous bodies washing up on the shores and a string of alcohol and drug related incidents." The worsening conditions of tourist attractions, pollution, jams and increasing crime have been mentioned in literature even earlier (Fineman, 1990; Jariyasombat, 1998). But, this research has proved that none of this affects the intention to visit. The perceived risks of travel, if any, have just temporary impact. What has long term impact on the intention to visit comes from external and internal motivation and not even from celebrity endorsement or word of mouth. Since, internal motivation can't be controlled by the destination managers but what can be controlled is external motivation through marketing. A continuous marketing effort is a must to attract tourists towards Phuket and other destinations of Thailand. Therefore, Thai tourist authority must ignore these reports and should focus on marketing campaigns such as "Amazing Thailand". Possibly, this has been realized and the new marketing policy focuses on "Discover Amazing Stories". The Chairman of Board of Tourist Authority of Thailand Mr Kalin Sarasin has kickstarted this policy in

FITUR, 2017 a spanish trade fair during 18-22 January, 2017 (Tourist Authority of Thailand, 2017).

Even from the theoretical implication perspective, the objective of this research was to find the determinants of the intention to visit. The objectives have met successfully. The external and internal motivation are the main determinants, which will in long run also initiate recommendations and word of mouth which in turn enhance their impact on the intention to visit. The only limitation was that impact of demographic and geographic variables could not be assessed which, actually, indicates the future path for this kind of research. The future research could focus on moderating impacts of demographic variables such as age, gender, religion, income, etc., which was not covered by this research. Also, the impact of geographical biases could be eliminated in future research. It would be interesting if the same results could be obtained for other tourist destinations. However, till such time, it can be safely be said that the external and internal motivation are the most prominent and reliable determinants of intention to visit.

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