

Why do Indians Select Sri Lanka for Vacations? Motives and Consumption Values

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Abstract

In recent years, India has become the primary market of inbound tourism in Sri Lanka. However, there are few studies conducted on Indian visitors to Sri Lanka. This paper investigates the travel motives and selection factors that lead Indian tourists to choose Sri Lanka as their vacation travel destination with a value-based approach. Both numerical and textual data were collected using an online questionnaire with two open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the importance of main travel motivations and destination selection factors in the destination decision-making process. Leximancer maps were developed with textual data to identify the related themes in destination selection. Notably, both qualitative and quantitative data identified the functional, social, emotional, and conditional values as critical factors in destination selection. Further, the application of a value-based approach to investigate destination selection behaviour was found to be viable. The tourism practitioners in Sri Lanka should look into the promotional strategies with attributable features of Sri Lanka and social, emotional, and conditional factors.

Keywords: Consumption values, destination decision-making, Indian Travellers, travel motives, Sri Lanka

Introduction

India is a consumption-driven market with an expanding economy, and it has been moving from a street market to a luxury market during the last few decades (Lysonski & Durvasula, 2013; Mathur, 2015; Siddiqui, 2020). India is expected to become a significant economy shortly, owing to its tremendous economic and population rise, and as a result, Indians are expected to travel more (Joppe & Yun, 2013; Singh & Srivastava, 2019). Moreover, some of the most significant motives for Indians to travel abroad include spending time with family and loved ones, physical and emotional well-being, a break and a change from routine, and increasing one's knowledge (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2015). Given that, India is one of the leading emerging outbound travel markets in the world.

In addition, the recent tourist statistics demonstrate the increasing popularity of Sri Lanka among Indian visitors (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2019). Sri Lanka is a country destination with a 2500 years old culture with diversified tourist attractions. The uniqueness of Sri Lanka tourism is classified under three main features; culture, diversity, and compactness (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). In addition to India as a potential market to Sri Lanka tourism, it was also found that the empirical studies to study the destination selection behaviour of Indians also have been overlooked in the literature. To address the empirical research gap and to study the potential of attracting Indian visitors to Sri Lanka, this study expects to uncover why Indians select Sri Lanka and the underlying motives for Indians to Visit Sri Lanka as the main objective of the research.

Amongst many of the possible approaches to study the destination selection behaviour, the current study adopted a value-based approach as it can wholly and precisely explain the selection behaviour of people. Moreover, the central concepts of the destination decision-making process and destination image were also applied in the research process to examine how and why the Indian visitors select Sri Lanka for their vacations. The integration of three unique concepts: destination decision-making, consumption values, and destination image is conceptualized in this study. Since the interaction of these dimensions has rarely been investigated in the literature, the current research extends the methodological and theoretical body of knowledge in travel destination decision-making. Given all the above positive implications, this research is conducted to answer why leisure Indian travellers visit Sri Lanka?

Literature Review

Vacation decision-making and consumer values

Destination decision-making has long been a popular topic of research in the tourism literature, and several approaches to describe the vacation destination selection process have been developed (Hanlan, Fuller, & Wilde, 2006; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Microeconomic models, process approaches, and choice-set approaches are some of the prominent models developed to explain the process of vacation decision-making (Morley, 1992; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Smallman & Moore, 2010; Um & Crompton, 1990). In common, all these approaches and models have discussed possible factors that affect the process of destination decision-making. Value-based factors are considered a viable explanation for destination selection (Dassanayake, 2017; Dassanayake, Zahra, & Cave, 2015; Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2012).

Human values and consumer values are used to explain the customers' selection behaviour (Diep & Sweeney, 2008; Oliver, 1996; Woodruff, 1997). Consumer values are defined as "an interactive relativistic preference" (Holbrook, 1999, p. 5). According to this definition, the consumer makes a specific choice among the various product options available to him based on the customer-product relationship and the comparative judgments between the product options. Among the multiple models available to explain the choice-value relationship (Gallarza et al., 2012; Holbrook, 1999; Kamakura & Novak, 1992), the five value dimensions explained in the consumption value theory is highly applicable and comparatively simple to explain the choice behaviours (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991b).

Consumption Value Theory

The consumption value theory claims that any selection behaviour is a function of the five consumer values, namely functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. Further, the theory proposes three propositions concerning the choice behaviour of consumers; the choice is a function of five consumption values, consumption value makes different contributions in a given choice situation, and the consumer values are independent (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991a; Sheth et al., 1991b). Given that, the consumption value theory is a suitable conceptual basis to study the destination selection behaviour of travellers (Dassanayake & Zahra, 2013; Phau, Quintal, & Shanka, 2014).

Firstly, the functional value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance" (Sheth et al., 1991b, p. 160). The utilitarian benefits, such as economic considerations, durability, reliability, and features, are

considered the primary factors in evaluating alternative products (Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, & Moliner, 2006; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Secondly, social value means "the perceived utility acquired by an alternative due to its association with one or more specific social groups" (Sheth et al., 1991b, p. 161). The considerations of what can be shown and visible in the product and the reputation gained by having and using a product are notable under the social value (Dawson, 1995). Thirdly, emotional value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired by an alternative as a result of its ability to arouse feelings or affective states" (Sheth et al., 1991b, p. 161). Consumers are human beings, and their emotions influence their purchasing and selection behaviours and, most of the time, led to impulsive choosing behaviours (Honkanen, Verplanken, & Olsen, 2006; Wigfield, Tonks, & Klauda, 2009). Fourthly, the epistemic value is "the perceived utility acquired by an alternative as a result of its ability to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, or satisfies a desire for knowledge" (Sheth et al., 1991b, p. 162). The epistemic value arises when choosing between a few options; the customer expects novelty to satisfy their curiosity and avoid boredom (Lin & Huang, 2012). Fifthly, the conditional value is "the perceived utility acquired by an alternative as a result of the specific situation or the context faced by the choice maker" (Sheth et al., 1991b, p. 162). These values work as situational factors in choice behaviour and perhaps can override the other four values described above depending on the situations like marketing promotions and weather conditions (Khan & Mohsin, 2017; Wang, Liao, & Yang, 2013).

Destination Image and Consumption Values

The focus of this paper is to evaluate the destination choice behaviour of Indian visitors. After recognizing the explanatory power of consumption value theory in explaining choice behaviour, it is essential to assess how a prospective visitor evaluates a vacation destination. Destination image is a well-researched concept in the tourism literature, and it is frequently applied in destination selection research studies as the primary independent variable to destination selection (Baloglu, 2000; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2015; Pike, Kotsi, & Tossan, 2018; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). Crompton (1979, p. 18) define destination image as "...sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination". In contrast, Echtner and Ritchie (1991, p. 8) defined it as "destination image is defined as not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination". Given that, the destination image is the picture someone has created in his/her mind concerning a given destination and, in turn, it can be a decisive factor in selecting the destination for a vacation. Notably, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) claimed that destination image could be placed on three continua, namely functional-psychological, attributes-holistic, and common-unique propositioning that destination image is a multi-dimensional concept.

The literature review for this paper has depicted two propositions; on the one hand, consumption values play a significant role in selection behaviour. On the other hand, destination image plays a substantial role in destination choice. Given that, it would be essential to look at any possible relationship between values and destination image. According to the literature shreds of evidence, the five value dimensions in the consumption value theory described above are attributable to the concept of the destination image. "Destination image is an outcome of the psychological assessment of various external factors" (Dassanayake, 2017, pp. 49-50) and, in other words, evaluation of a destination about internal expectations and requirements, that can be viewed as values, is referred to as destination image. Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) presented a concept of beneficial image in which the five values of the consumption value theory have been used to measure the concept of beneficial image derived from the original concept of the destination image. Moreover, Ramkissoon, Nunkoo, and Gursoy (2009) argued that destination image is a function of five consumption values;

functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. Also, Shanka and Phau (2008) argued the applicability of different dimensions of consumption value theory as a tool in tourism behavioural research in connection with the concept of the destination image. Moreover, the concept of selective image proposed by Dassanayake (2017) has also operationalized the destination image with five value dimensions to evaluate the effect of destination image in destination selection.

Travel motives as antecedents of consumption values

After looking at the destination image's conceptual structure and its relationship to consumer values, it's essential to move at how those values are formed or developed. Vinson, Scott, and Lamont (1977) presented a model to explain the link between human, domain-specific, and evaluative beliefs (Figure 1).

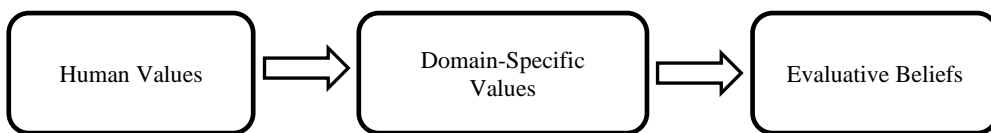


Figure 1: Value Hierarchy

Source: Adapted from (Vinson et al., 1977)

Literature provides pieces of evidence that the domain-specific values and the evaluative beliefs described in Vinson's model are attributable to motivations and consumption values, respectively (Dassanayake, 2017; Holbrook, 1994; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Therefore, travel motivations can be identified as one of the antecedents of the factors affecting destination selection. Literature provides shreds of evidence that travel motivations affect the destination selection and travel behaviour (Hu, Wu, Bai, & Jang, 2009; Wang & Walker, 2010)

Travel motivations provide the answer for the question; why people travel? (Hu et al., 2009), and motives are triggered when people consider what they could, should, or might do in the future (Iso-Ahola, 1982). According to some of the scholars in the particular field of study, travel motivations are formed by human values, cultural influences, and demographics of the person (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Li & Cai, 2012; Plangmarn & Mujtaba, 2012). The push-pull approach of travel motivation definition also provides an excellent explanation to the question of why people travel? Push factors explain why a person really wants to take a vacation, and the pull factors explain what factors at the destination attract the traveller to a particular destination (Villamediana-Pedrosa, Vila-López, & Küster-Boluda, 2020).

Given the proposition that destination image can be viewed as five value dimensions as described above, the destination selection behaviour of Indian visitors was examined with relation to the prescribed value dimensions. In brief, it was evaluated how prospective Indian visitors see Sri Lanka as a potential destination to visit in terms of functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value. Moreover, the travel motives were also considered the main factor was triggering the consumption values in selecting a travel destination. Moreover, the consumption values and motivations approach collectively can study the attitudinal aspects and underlying motives in selecting or considering Sri Lanka as the vacation destination of Indians.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Grounding pragmatism research philosophy, this study takes the form of concurrent mixed methods research. The mixed-methods approach was selected to fully study the research issue by discussing insights derived from open-ended questions data with the outputs of statistical data analysis in a manner of triangulation. As the research strategy, online data collection methods were employed with a structured questionnaire containing two open-ended questions. The quantitative and qualitative data analysis results were integrated with the discussion section to answer the central research issue; why do Indians select Sri Lanka for their vacation?

Research Instrument and Data Collection

As discussed in the literature review section, the destination selection behaviour of Indian visitors was examined under five variables. Different questionnaire items were developed to measure each value dimension depending on the past studies (Dassanayake, 2017; Dassanayake et al., 2015; Ramkissoon et al., 2009; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000). In addition to the five value dimensions, travel motives were included with some questionnaire items to examine how Indian visitors rate different travel motivations in their destination selection process. The questionnaire items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The variable functional value is mainly measured through a list of 18 destination attributes. Social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value were measured by 7, 5, 4, and 7 questionnaire statements, respectively.

Moreover, for travel motivations, 11 questionnaire items were used in the same 7-point Likert scale. Importantly, two open-ended questions were used for travel motivations and destination selection factors. In addition, the demographics variables were also included.

Data collection was conducted entirely online on the Qualtrics platform. The respondents were reached through the email databases of Sri Lankan travel agencies, with permissions, who promote Indian outbound visitors to Sri Lanka. A purposive sampling technique was adopted in which some filtering questions were used at the very beginning to filter the right respondent to the study. The right respondent was defined as an Indian nationalist residing in India at the movement and had already selected Sri Lanka for their next vacation. Data collection was carried out in December 2019, and a total of 200 usable responses were used for the data collection at the end.

Data analysis

Since this study aimed to find out the most prominent factors for Indians to visit Sri Lanka, the analysis mainly took the form of descriptive analysis. Particularly mean values and the standard deviations (Marsden, Yu, & Flynn) of each questionnaire item were calculated to identify the prominent reasons Indians select Sri Lanka and to identify underlying main motives as the reasons Indians visit Sri Lanka. The qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions were analyzed using a sort of thematic analysis with Leximancer software, in which the pieces of qualitative data were grouped into themes/groups.

Results of Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative results are presented below. The five consumption values are analyzed separately with the individual questionnaire items. Mean and SD values were calculated as

the main indicators of each questionnaire item's importance in selecting Sri Lanka as the vacation destination. Since the questionnaire items were set on a 7-point Likert scale, the maximum possible mean value is 7, and, based on that, the calculated mean values were evaluated comparable to 7 to understand the importance of the items to Indians to select Sri Lanka as a vacation destination. Moreover, items with a mean value of 4.7 were selected to present in this paper.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF FUNCTIONAL VALUE

| Item | N | Mean | SD |
|----------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| Culture | 200 | 5.12 | 0.501 |
| Cities | 199 | 5.10 | 0.465 |
| Heritage | 187 | 5.04 | 0.568 |
| Food | 200 | 5.01 | 0.785 |
| Safety | 199 | 4.06 | 0.231 |
| Weather/Climate | 198 | 4.94 | 0.458 |
| Wildlife | 185 | 4.77 | 0.569 |
| Cleanliness | 190 | 4.77 | 0.469 |
| Shopping | 198 | 4.76 | 0.367 |
| Accommodation | 188 | 4.75 | 0.489 |
| Buildings and Architecture | 185 | 4.74 | 0.871 |

According to Table 1, the most prominent functional value items are Sri Lankan culture and cities, followed by heritage, food, and safety. Weather/climate, wildlife, cleanliness, and shopping were also essential factors for Indians to select Sri Lanka for their vacation.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Social Value

| Item | N | Mean | SD |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------|
| A destination where I can meet friendly people | 199 | 5.12 | 0.851 |
| Preferred by travel companions | 192 | 4.94 | 0.651 |
| Destination talked about by most people | 187 | 4.92 | 0.548 |
| Destination visited by most people | 193 | 4.72 | 0.657 |

As table 2 depicts, Indian visitors admire the friendliness of the Sri Lankan people. Moreover, the travel companions' preferences are also important factors for Indians to select Sri Lanka as their vacation destination. The popularity of Sri Lanka as a vacation destination also seems essential.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Value

| Item | N | Mean | SD |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| A calm and quiet destination | 196 | 5.25 | 0.359 |
| A must-see place | 189 | 5.22 | 0.480 |
| That destination fascinates me. | 189 | 5.14 | 0.851 |
| Fun and enjoyable destination | 195 | 4.99 | 0.781 |
| That destination makes me relax. | 192 | 4.94 | 0.652 |

As depicted in Table 3, Indians perceive Sri Lanka as a calm and quiet destination and consider it a must-see place in their travel plans. Moreover, the fascinating and enjoyable nature of Sri

Lanka is found as a subsequent important factor under the emotional value in selecting Sri Lanka as the travel destination. With regards to the epistemic value, only three items were used in the questionnaire. Out of those three, only the item I have not been there was found to be reported with a considerable mean value of 4.90 (SD, 0.654).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Conditional Value

| Item | N | Mean | SD |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------|
| It gives good value for money | 198 | 5.23 | 0.459 |
| Convenient travel time | 179 | 5.12 | 0.398 |
| Travel agent/airline gave me good package | 181 | 5.01 | 0.785 |
| A trip can be planned within the time available. | 192 | 4.95 | 0.721 |

According to Table 4, conditional value has been one of the leading value categories for Indians to select Sri Lanka for vacation. Good value for money and convenient travel time have been found most important in selecting the travel destination under the value category of conditional value. Moreover, travel agents' promotions and being able to plan within a short time are also some of the important factors under the category.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Travel Motivations

| Item | N | Mean | SD |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------|
| To see a must-see place to my travel companions and me | 190 | 5.51 | 0.456 |
| To fulfil the travel needs of loved ones | 189 | 5.48 | 0.425 |
| To experience new and different places | 195 | 5.41 | 0.862 |
| To visit friends | 184 | 5.30 | 0.743 |
| To visit relatives | 180 | 5.21 | 0.801 |
| To be socially recognized as a traveller | 191 | 5.20 | 0.651 |
| To get away from everyday life | 193 | 5.01 | 0.891 |
| To increase social ties | 184 | 4.09 | 0.451 |

According to Table 5, the underlying reasons for Indians to travel are mainly social and emotional oriented. Further, to see new and different things also are vital for them to make a visit. Visiting friends and relatives, to be socially recognized, and get away from everyday life are also being highlighted as the main reasons for Indians to make vacations.

Results of Textual Data Analysis

Leximancer maps were developed based on the textual data generated through the open-ended questions. Two maps were developed for reasons to select Sri Lanka as a vacation destination precisely and reasons to take a vacation in general.

The main reasons why Indian tourists choose Sri Lanka are depicted in Figure 2. The key concept emerging from the data has been identified as the theme of 'place,' which is related to 'destination.' The central cluster of visitor expectations is the enjoy, beautiful nature, culture, and pilgrimage. In addition, cheap, love, foreign, fun, experience, and life are other vital reasons for Indians to Travel to Sri Lanka.

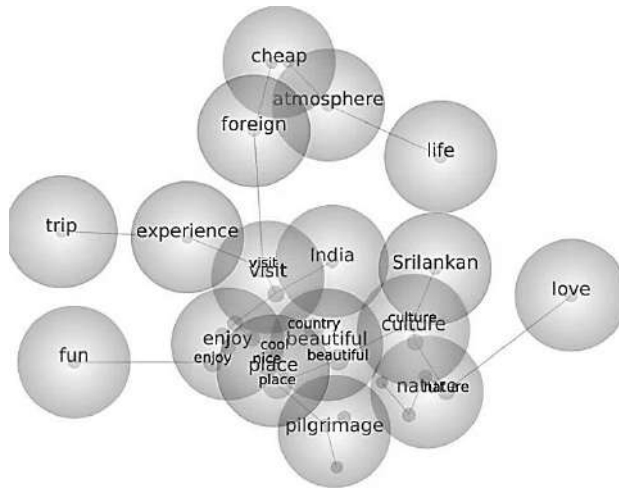


Figure 1: Leximancer map on Destination Selection Factors

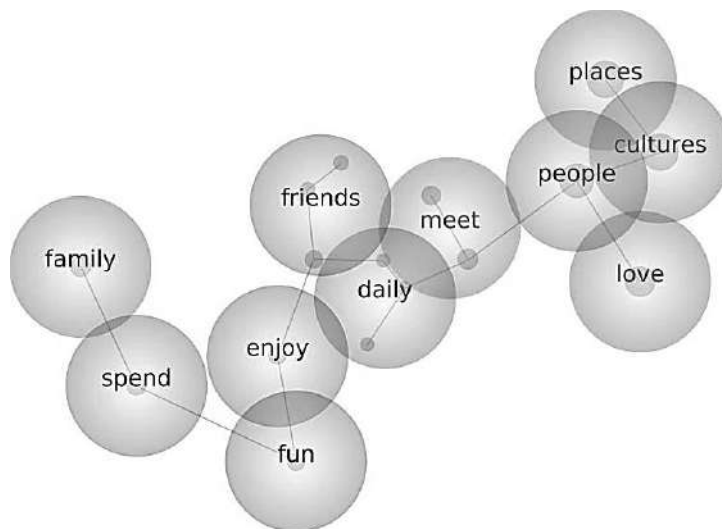


Figure 2: Leximancer Map on Reasons to Have a Vacation

The travel motivations of Indian outbound visitors to Sri Lanka are depicted in Figure 3. The main motive has been the theme of 'daily,' which reflects a 'get away from typical life schedules. Further, enjoy, love, people, cultures, friends, family, spend, and places are also some of the main motives of the Indian visitors plan to visit Sri Lanka.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of quantitative data confirmed that the destination selection behaviour could be explained through consumption values which is consistent with similar research in literature (Dassanayake et al., 2015; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Zins, 2010). Both quantitative and

qualitative findings confirmed the importance of culture and heritage/pilgrimage in destination selection. The raw textual data also provides clues such as Avukana, Sigiriya, Sri Pada, Ramayana, pilgrimage, languages, and hospitality to support the culture as the main factor to visit Sri Lanka. The destination attributes like nature, sea, shopping, wildlife, and accommodation were also identified as destination selection factors. Moreover, both the quantitative and qualitative analysis findings have highlighted the matter of proximity as the destination selection factor for Indians to select Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, both the quantitative and qualitative analysis findings have highlighted the importance of proximity as a factor in Indians' decision to visit Sri Lanka. The social and emotional values-related factors are also evident in the data analysis results. Both quantitative and qualitative data findings revealed factors such as friendly people, travel companions, calm and quiet destinations, and must-see places. Words like fun, relaxed, cool, calm and quiet, as well as relatives who desire to visit Sri Lanka, are included in the raw textual data to support the aforementioned claim. Interestingly, the conditional value-related factors such as value for money, proximity, travel time, travel promotions are also among the main factors to destination selection.

When it comes to travel motivations, the motives such as seeing a must-see place, loved ones' travel needs fulfilments, visiting friends and relatives, experience new things, get away from normal hectic life schedule were found to be the key motives based on both the quantitative and qualitative data findings.

This study combined various concepts and methodologies to investigate Indian travellers' travel motives and destination selection factors when considering a vacation to Sri Lanka. It was proposed, in particular, that human actions are guided by their value system, which is hierarchical (Vinson et al., 1977). The investigation used consumption values and motives as the two central values, with consumption values explaining why Sri Lanka was chosen for vacation and travel motives to uncover the underpinning reasons for taking a vacation. The findings of this research are unique in a few ways. The conceptual and methodological approach is notable in this instance. The destination selection behaviour was examined based on a value-based approach, and both the qualitative and quantitative data were used in the investigation.

Sri Lanka tourism sector can mainly use the findings for their strategy formulation and implementation in their overall business strategy. Notably, the destination attributes mealy is less effective in promoting Sri Lanka to Indians. Social, emotional, and conditional factors are also to be considered as the current research has proven that all the five value dimensions collaboratively influence the destination selection decision (Dassanayake, 2017). Moreover, the Ramayana places in Sri Lanka have excellent tourism potentials for Indian tourists and other religious and heritage places like Sri Pada and Sigiriya.

Limitations and Future Research

The research has a few limitations. First, the online data collection can lead to some sampling bias. Moreover, the qualitative data was very brief as it was developed through open-ended questions of the online questionnaire. Future research can do the same study by employing face-face data collection both for quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, the destination selection behaviour of Indians representing different parts of India must also be considered to identify the relevant geographic market share to Sri Lanka.

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