



Push–pull factors in international birders' travel



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We surveyed 257 international birders online or with a paper-based questionnaire.
- We identified the motivations and destination attributes with push–pull framework.
- Factor analysis identified six push factor constructs with 19 items.
- Factor analysis identified four pull factor constructs with 26 items.
- Nationality, demography, and specialization level differentiated push–pull factors.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify international birders' motivations and preferred destination attributes using the push–pull framework, and to explore their travel behaviors. Through snowball and purposive sampling, 257 international birders completed a self-administered online or pencil-and-paper questionnaire. The results of a factor analysis identified six push factor constructs consisting of 19 items and four pull factor constructs consisting of 26 items. In order of importance, the push factors are bird-related, novelty seeking, contribution and sharing, spiritual refreshment, relationship building, and competition. The pull factors, in order of importance, are avian resources, professional guides, facilities and infrastructure, and local culture and traditions. The study provides valuable information for governments, travel operators, and birding clubs in designing international birdwatching tour packages.

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1. Introduction

Among all types of eco-tourists, birdwatchers have been one of the largest and fastest growing groups over the past few decades (Kerlinger & Brett, 1995; Sekercioglu, 2002). Sekercioglu (2002) defined birdwatching as “the act of observing and identifying birds in their native habitats.” Serious birdwatchers or birders, as they are also known, are even willing to travel abroad to fulfill their quest to list birds (Scott, 2010). Birdwatching is a nature-based tourism and wildlife-viewing recreation that provides incentives for community-based conservation while educating people about biodiversity (Booth, Gaston, Evans, & Armsworth, 2011;

Sekercioglu, 2002). According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, there were about 47 million birdwatchers over the age of 16 in 2011, about 20% of the population (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2013). Birdwatchers spent \$41 billion on trips and equipment, generating \$107 billion in total industry output including direct, indirect, and induced effects from these expenditures. Researchers are attracted to this group because of their potential economic and conservation contributions.

Initially, researchers focused on the characteristics of birdwatchers in the U.S. and Canada, investigating their specializations, motivations, satisfaction, commitment, and involvement (Applegate & Clark, 1987; Kellert, 1985; McFarlane & Boxall, 1996; SeongSeop, Scott, & Crompton, 1997). Research interests later expanded to include the impacts of birdwatching tourism (Hvenegaard, 2002; Zhao, Cheng, & Ming, 2007), wildlife operators (Curtin & Wilkes, 2005), and birders in other regions (Lee, Lee, Kim, & Mjelde, 2010 in Korea; Kim, Keuning, Robertson, & Kleindorfer,

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2010 in Australia). Most previous literature focused on domestic birdwatchers in Western countries (Curtin & Wilkes, 2005 in the UK; Scott, Ditton, Stoll & Eubanks Jr., 2005 in Nebraska, U.S.; Conradie, Van Zyl, & Strasheim, 2013 in the UK and Germany). Interest in the birding market began to shift with the rapid growth of international tourism in the Asia–Pacific region (Hvenegaard, 2002, in Thailand; Lee et al., 2010, in Korea; Kim et al., 2010 in Australia; UNWTO, 2014). However, very little is known about the characteristics and travel behaviors of international birders.

A small island, Taiwan lies on the western edge of the Pacific “ring of fire,” with a land area of 36,000 square kilometers. The diverse climate zones and terrain make Taiwan host to an abundant diversity of fauna and flora, especially birds. In addition, Taiwan is located on a bird migration route. In spring and autumn, large numbers of migratory birds stopover along the coast (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2014). The black-faced spoonbill, a well-known East-Asian endangered species, is one such example. The worldwide population was only 288 individuals in 1988, and has since recovered to 2725 individuals in 2014 (BirdLife International, 2014; Black-faced Spoonbill Conservation Association, 2014). Taiwan attracts 60% of the flock, which migrates to the Qigu wetland in Tainan every winter.

According to the Forest Bureau of Taiwan, 533 species have been recorded in Taiwan, including 18 endemic species and 60 endemic subspecies (Forest Bureau of Taiwan, 2012). In 2001, BirdLife International identified 53 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) in Taiwan, covering 652,677 ha, about 18.17% of Taiwan's total land area (Forest Bureau of Taiwan, 2012). Taiwan has one of the highest bird densities worldwide, as measured by species per unit area, providing an opportunity to develop international birding tourism (Chinese Wild Bird Federation, 2014). From the host destination point of view, there is an urgent need to investigate birders' motivations to join international birding trips, and what destination attributes attract them.

Thus, this study aims to understand the travel behaviors of international birders. Drawing on Dann's (1977) push–pull motivation framework, the study examines the reasons birders take international birding trips (push factors) and the destination attributes (pull factors) that attract them. This study therefore has three objectives: first, to identify the important push and pull factors for international birders in their travel decision making process; second, to investigate the differences in these push and pull factors for different socio-demographic groups; and finally, to examine the differences in these push and pull factors by level of specialization.

2. The push–pull framework

Motivation is both a key variable in understanding travel behaviors and a critical element in the destination decision-making process. In addition, it is an important predictor in assessing tourists' satisfaction (Gnoth, 1997; Snepenger, King, Marshall, & Uysal, 2006). Murray's (1964) widely accepted definition of a motive is “an internal factor that arouses, directs, and integrates a person's behavior” (p. 7). Different disciplines provide various theories to understand tourists' motivations. For example, Gray (1970) simply divided tourists into those with “sunlust” (seeking specific facilities) and “wanderlust” (desire to explore). Plog (1974, 2001) introduced an allocentric/psychocentric model to explain why different people tend to travel to different destinations. Pearce and Caltabiano (1983), Pearce (2005), and Pearce and Lee (2005) developed a travel career pattern approach based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to explain travel motives. Iso-Ahola (1982) and Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) proposed a social psychological model of tourism motivation with two forces: escaping

from daily routine (avoidance) and seeking intrinsic rewards (e.g., mastery and competence), weighted by importance along the personal and interpersonal dimensions.

Among motivation theories in tourism studies, Dann's (1977) push–pull framework represents an effective and user-friendly approach to examine travel behaviors (Kim & Lee, 2002; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003, 2002; Prayag & Hosany, 2014). It is widely accepted that push factors include psychological forces such as social interaction, the desire for escape, adventure, relaxation, and self-exploration. The pull factors include the environmental features that attract people to specific destinations, such as sunshine, historic monuments, sports facilities, and cheap airfare (Dann, 1977; Klenosky, 2002). Thus, in this framework, the push factors drive people to travel while the pull factors influence their choice of one destination over another. Klenosky (2002) further summarized the framework, referring to the push factors as “whether to go,” and the pull factors as “where to go.” Kim and Lee (2002) viewed push and pull factors as demand and supply dimensions in the decision making process.

This study applies the push–pull framework to explore the travel behaviors of birders who travel abroad for birding. This group is assumed to have characteristics of both birders and international tourists, with push factors defined as motivations and pull factors defined as destination attributes.

2.1. Push factors: motivations

In the early literature on wildlife recreation activities, Decker, Brown, Driver, and Brown (1987) proposed affiliation, achievement, and appreciation as participants' three major goals. The affiliation-oriented motive relates to enhancing interpersonal relationships; the achievement-oriented motive relates to meeting some standard of performance (i.e., to spot a given species or add a life achievement); and the appreciation-oriented motive relates to seeking relaxation, a sense of peace, familiarity, and belonging. Kellert (1985) proposed a set of important motives for birdwatchers in the United States, including social interaction, competitiveness, aesthetic interest, scientific curiosity, interest in conservation, solitude, fascination with specialized equipment, and escaping from normal social responsibilities. A survey of 2455 birdwatchers revealed five important reasons for birding: the bird's aesthetics, to identify as many birds as one can, to be close to nature, to be with family/friends, and a personal fascination with birds (Kellert, 1985).

Later, McFarlane (1994) examined birdwatchers in Alberta, Canada and identified four factors including affiliation, achievement, conservation, and appreciation from 25 motivational items developed from the previous literature. Further, Scott, Baker, and Kim (1999) investigated birders' motivations to join birding competitions in the U.S. The study equated the birders' listing behavior as collection behavior and applied Baker's (1996) types of collection motives, and found that enjoyment and conservation, sociability, and self-expression were more important motives than competition (Scott et al., 1999).

Hvenegaard's (2002) Thailand study revealed that the most important motivations relate to the birds themselves, including seeing birds, seeing bird species not seen before, and seeing as many bird species as possible among others, followed by an attraction to natural history and social and cultural motivations. Conradie et al. (2013) studied 439 bird fair visitors in the UK and Germany and suggested their motives include wellbeing, intellectual activity, social interaction, and photography. Sali, Kuehn, and Zhang (2008) surveyed 1000 visiting birdwatchers in New York State and identified differences by gender. For male birders, their motivations included appreciating birds, sharing knowledge, exploration, companionship, and spirituality, while female birders

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