



# When Middle East meets West: Understanding the motives and perceptions of young tourists from United Arab Emirates

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Limited research exists on the tourism outbound market from the Middle East.
- Push/pull framework uncovers the motivations of young tourists from the UAE.
- Perceptions of Paris as a luxury destination are also investigated.
- Three segments are identified: enthusiasts, unconvinced, and convivals.
- Results have implications for marketing Western Europe in the UAE and Middle East.

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## ABSTRACT

Limited research exists on the tourism outbound market from the Middle East. To address the literature gap, this study investigates young UAE travel motivations and perceptions of Paris as a luxury tourist destination. Data were collected from residents living in Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. Cluster analysis uncovers three distinct clusters; enthusiasts, unconvinced, and convivals. Multiple discriminant analysis confirms the validity of the three-cluster solution. The three groups differ by their perceptions of Paris and overall attitude toward luxury consumption. Findings offer important implications for destination marketers in terms of advertising, segmentation and positioning strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

Motivations are the underlying forces that arouse and direct travel behavior (Iso-Ahola, 1982). Tourism research identifies several motivational domains such as socio-psychological, prestige, cultural, social, educational and utilitarian (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Fodness, 1994; Iso-Ahola, 1982). Prior studies mostly focus on core motivations of pleasure travelers from western countries (e.g., Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997; Goossens, 2000; Ryan & Glendon, 1998). Research on travel motives of tourists from emerging markets such as China (e.g., Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Yang, Reech, & Kreisel, 2011) and India (e.g., Prayag & Ryan, 2011) are recent.

Findings indicate tourists from emerging markets are driven by similar motives as western travelers but variation exists in terms of the importance attached to each motive (Kim & Prideaux, 2005). Likewise, destination perceptions of western tourists toward western destinations are well researched (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chi & Qu, 2008). In contrast, the literature on perceptions of tourists from emerging markets toward western destinations is fairly recent (Li & Stepchenkova, 2012; Ryan & Mo, 2002). Specifically, there is a lack of research on the outbound market from the Middle East, in particular, the travel motives and perceptions of Arab tourists toward western countries are poorly understood (Michael, Armstrong, Badran, & King, 2011; UNWTO, 2012b). For DMOs interested in developing emerging markets, it is crucial to estimate market size as well as understand tourists' behavior and preferences (Li, Harrill, Uysal, Burnett, & Zhan, 2010).

The Middle East is one of the smallest, yet fast growing, tourist regions in the world (UNWTO, 2012b). With world-class

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infrastructure and facilities, the Middle East is expected to emerge as one of the world's most competitive landscapes offering value tourism to a worldwide customer base (Deloitte, 2010). However, most destinations in the Middle East have suffered, directly or indirectly, from the impact of recent social and political changes in the region. Despite the turmoil, tourism outbound market from the Middle East grew by 4% in 2012 (UNWTO, 2012a) and accounted for US\$ 55 billion in international tourism expenditure in 2010. Over three quarters of outbound tourism is to destinations within the Middle East. Of all travel outside of the region, Europe is the largest market with 46% market share in 2010 (UNWTO, 2012b).

Existing reports (e.g., UNWTO, 2012b) on tourist profiles from the Middle East indicate that leisure travelers are predominantly 18–34 years old, married with children, well-educated, and usually belong to the upper socio-economic strata of society. Outbound travelers to Europe are better educated with higher incomes (UNWTO, 2012b). Sixty-percent of international tourists from the Gulf Countries Council (GCC), consisting of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, are local nationals and the remaining 40% expatriates (UNWTO, 2012b). Arab tourists, when traveling abroad, are known to purchase luxury items, stay longer on average, and spend more than other visitors (Michael et al., 2011). Tourists from the Middle East usually travel as extended families or in smaller groups of younger males. Trips typically last between 3 and 14 weeks and these travelers have a preference for personally prepared home cooked food (Ladki, Mikdashi, Fahed, & Abbas, 2002).

In the Middle East region, outbound travel has more than quadrupled from 8.2 million tourists in 1990 to 36.2 million in 2010 (UNWTO, 2012b). The GCC nations are important travel source markets. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) show impressive growth in outbound tourism (UNWTO, 2012b). In this study, the focus is on the UAE outbound market. The motivations and preferences of UAE tourists remain fairly unknown to most Western marketers (Michael et al., 2011). UAE is a relatively new country established 40 years ago and comprises seven Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ajman, Ras al Khaimah, and Umm al Quwain. The population, estimated at 5.06 million in 2009, consists of UAE Nationals, Western, Asian, and Arab expatriates (DCTM, 2012) with the majority residing in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. Outbound travel from UAE reported a significant increase from 906,000 in 2000, to 3.5 million in 2009 (Tourism Australia, 2010). As of 2011, the outbound market is estimated at 3.9 million visitors (Tourism Ireland, 2011). The UAE market is worth approximately \$6.6 billion with \$4 billion spent on leisure travel and \$2.6 billion on visiting family and friends (Market Vision, 2012).

Furthermore, potential visitors from UAE perceive Europe as a highly aspirational destination with UK, France, Germany and Italy as favorite travel countries (Visit Britain, 2012; UNWTO, 2012b). In fact, with its scenic beauty, history, culture, entertainment, quality tourist facilities, and infrastructure, Europe is seen as a top class holiday destination. The cool weather (in contrast to the Middle East), ease of accessibility, and the ability to visit multiple destinations on one trip are other important pull factors (UNWTO, 2012b). France remains a popular destination within Europe for the Middle East outbound tourist market. In 2010, around 891,000 tourists from the Middle East traveled to France (UNWTO, 2012b). After Saudi Arabia, France is the second most visited destination by UAE residents (Visit Britain, 2012). UAE tourists mainly travel to Paris and Cannes, indulging in luxury shopping (Dryef, 2008). Given the significance of this market to the city of Paris, various hoteliers such as the Ritz and Marriott have adapted their offerings while entertainment venues such as the Cinema Elysée Biarritz plays Arab movies in the original language (Dryef, 2008). Despite concerns over the French government new legislation in 2011 forbidding

women to wear the burka in public places, only a small drop was registered in actual visitation numbers (Arabian Business, 2011).

The objective of this study is to understand the motivations of potential tourists from the Middle East traveling to Western Europe and their perceptions of Paris as a luxury destination. More specifically, the research focuses on young potential travelers from the UAE. The study's contribution to the literature is fourfold. First, it adds to the limited research on Middle East outbound tourism. The Middle East represents an important outbound market for European tourist destinations. Within the Middle East, UAE is a key market (UNWTO, 2012b) and it is therefore important to understand UAE tourists' motives and perceptions. Second, while previous studies recognize the significance of young travelers as a tourist segment (e.g., Gardiner, King, & Grace, 2013), there is a lack of research on young tourists from the Middle East (Chen, Chen, & Okumus, 2013). Profile of tourists from the Middle East region indicate that half are aged between 18 and 34 years old and represents the best prospect for travel to Europe (UNWTO, 2012b). Prior studies identify that young and well-educated tourists are more likely to travel to destinations with different cultures (Desforges, 2000; Jang, Bai, Hong, & O'Leary, 2004). In addition, the WTO (2008) report emphasizes a need to understand the unique motivations of young travelers, given this market is key to the global tourism agenda. Third, it is common in prior tourist motivation studies (e.g., Frochot, 2005; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003; Park & Yoon, 2009) to collect data post-visit, asking respondents to recall retrospectively underlying travel motives. Retrospective evaluations of travel motives are problematic (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010). In this study, the focus is on potential tourists from UAE with no previous travel experience to Western Europe. Fourth, the study investigates the motivations and perceptions for luxury travel. In recent years, a number of studies in marketing have emerged to comprehend the various behavioral aspects of luxury consumption (e.g., Atwal & Williams, 2009; Han, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2010). However, to date empirical research in tourism, more specifically in the context of luxury holidays, remain sparse. Young people possess significant spending power (Martin & Turley, 2004) and demand luxury products and experiences including travel (Kim, Oh, & Jogaratnam, 2007; Matzler & Siller, 2003).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The push-pull framework

Motivation is an important impelling and compelling force behind tourist behavior (Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982). Motivation is a key component in behavioral models of tourist consumption (Gnoth, 1997). Various theories exist to understand tourist motivations. Examples include Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, Plog's (1974) allocentric-psychocentric typology, expectancy-value theories (Lewin, 1938), goal directed behavior (Bettman, 1979), travel career ladder (Pearce & Lee, 2005), and the push-pull framework (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Klenosky, 2002). The push and pull framework, however, is most popular to explain why tourists choose a place over another, the type of experiences they seek and the type of activities they want (Chen, Mak, & McKercher, 2011; Ryan, 1991). The framework assumes that tourists are motivated to fulfill their needs, including alleviating psychological disequilibrium and obtaining social recognition (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Fodness, 1994; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Kim et al., 2003).

Pull factors represent destination attributes influencing when, where and how people travel (Mill & Morrison, 1998). Destination image and perceptions tourists hold of various places are derived from organic (e.g., hearsay) and induced sources (e.g., marketing activities of tourism organizations) (Gartner, 1993; Prayag & Ryan,

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