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Re-Examining the Push-Pull Model in Tourists' Destination Selection: COVID-19 in the Context of Kerala, India

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This paper discusses a new conceptual model that can better describe the destination selection decision of tourists during and possibly after COVID-19. The utility theory proposed by Lancaster (1966, 1971) is the basis of the proposed model. This research paper revises the existing push-pull literature by redefining 'pull' factors as the 'pull back factors' or constraints in destination selection. The external destination-related pull factors have become risky and unknown to travellers on account of the distress created by COVID-19. This model identifies primary push-pull constructs: environment, ethnicity, entertainment, expenses, and endurance. Responses from 311 tourists who have either visited or booked to visit Kerala in 2021 were collated for empirically testing this concept. The classic co-variance-based structural equation modelling approach (CB-SEM) was used for statistical validation. From this study, it is observed that the tourists visiting a destination are willing to spend money to experience the climate and culture; but from the entertainment point of view, they are cost-conscious. A direct positive relationship between the safety and spending habits of the tourists were found. These results call for replacing the current leisure-oriented strategies by prioritizing health, culture, outdoor experiences, nature, and well-being.

Keywords: push-pull model, tourist motivation, destination selection, CB-SEM

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Introduction

Before COVID-19, tourism was considered one of the world's largest economic sectors that creates jobs, drives exports, and generates prosperity worldwide. The World Travel and Tourism Council's research (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018), in its annual analysis quantifying the global economic and employment impact of travel and tourism in 185 countries and 25

regions, reveals that the sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 319 million jobs, or 10% of total employment, in 2018. Tourism is a growing industry in developed and underdeveloped countries (Tasci & Knutson, 2004). The report by WTTC highlights that travel to emerging economies is expected to increase at twice the rate of travel to advanced economies from now until 2030. In these countries, tourism is a catalyst of change in household economies, leading to new opportunities for employment, new sources of cash income, and new information about technologies (Barkin, 1996; Eadington & Smith, 1992; Levy & Lerch, 1991).

As an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry is reported to be one of the most damaged industries, with a steep decline amounting to 2.86 trillion US dollars (Abbas et al., 2021). COVID-19 has drastically shifted travel patterns globally (Irwin, 2020). However, some literature has rightly pointed out that policymakers can consider this an opportunity as well-being and wellness can become a factor of destination choice (Wen et al., 2020; Buckley & Westway, 2020). According to De Vos (2020), active modes, i.e. walking and cycling, would aid in enhancing physical activities and maintaining the health and well-being of people during pandemics. Santos et al. (2020) pointed out that tourists may now look more for quieter places with outdoor experiences and in nature. This scenario can be used as an opportunity for smaller enterprises as they can promote health, well-being, safety, etc. as a factor of attraction (Sharma et al., 2021). These positive outlooks can add more value to this research.

Correia and Pimpao (2008) argue that selecting tourist destinations depends on developing theories about consumer behaviour and understanding tourists' choices. While it is commonly accepted that a clear understanding of travellers' images of a destination is crucial for developing successful marketing and positioning strategies, equally important is the area of behaviour, motivations, perceptions and images of places across sub-segments of a potential market (Sirakaya et al., 1996).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Lancaster's original work on the consumer analysis-product characteristics approach (1966, 1971). Lancaster's original work on consumer analysis was published in 1966 but has since been refined and extended to provide an interesting and innovative approach to consumer demand theory. The spark for formulating Lancaster's theory originated from the simple observation that traditional demand theory ignored highly pertinent and obvious information and the properties of goods themselves (Lancaster, 1971). Despite the contribution and prominence of the traditional demand theory for tourism research, it still suffers from serious drawbacks since it ignores the particularities of the product (Rugg, 1973; Morley, 1992; Papatheodorou, 2001). Lancaster views the relationship between people and products as at least a two-stage affair. This affair comprises the relationship between products and their characteristics (objective and technical), and the relationship between characteristics and people (personal, involving individual preferences). Rugg (1973) was the first to incorporate the Lancasterian characteristics approach to tourism. As was seen earlier in this section, the essence of Lancaster's approach is that goods are no longer utility objects by themselves. Goods are assumed to generate certain characteristics or attributes from which utility is ultimately derived. Maximizing utility requires choosing a bundle of goods that generates the optimum bundle of characteristics. In the Lancasterian approach to consumer analysis, the utility for each good is defined as a weighted sum of a set of characteristics. Characteristics demand theory by Lancaster states that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it. When applied to tourism, these characteristics can be defined as the set of attractions and facilities that can offer visitors a pleasant experience.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand the push and pull factors that would affect the tourism destination selection in the ambit of the five 'E's. The literature survey identified five major destination selection characteristics, viz., expenses, endurances, environment, ethnicity, and entertainment. Those aspects that can positively influence tourists in selecting a destination were classified as push items. The other factors that can also stand as an obstacle

in their decision were categorized as pull items. In the context of Lancasterian theory, the tourists should weigh utility for push characteristics rather than pull factors in selecting a destination. This research is very relevant in the COVID-19 scenario as it attempts to re-define the existing theoretical model. This may help policymakers to shape brand-new tourism strategies post COVID-19. The classic covariance-based structural equation modelling was employed for observing the relationship with push and pull variables.

Literature Review

According to the International Monetary fund, tourism receipts worldwide are expected to recover to 2019 levels in 2023 (Behsudi, 2020). COVID-19 and tourist typology and its influence on short or long-haul travel can become a major challenge for the travel and tourism industry across the world (Senbeto & Hon, 2020). During pandemics, people avoid places with medium or high risks (Hotle, 2020). One of the most adopted preventive behaviours during COVID-19 was the avoidance of public transportation (Yıldırım et al., 2020). Pandey et al. (2021) pointed out that the pandemic has considerably impacted the Indian tourism industry, and across the country those working in the tourism sector are confronting a decline in their income. They have suggested a sustainable recovery framework to overcome this trauma. According to Jafari et al. (2021), this pandemic invariably hits tourism-reliant sectors such as hotels, restaurants, travel agents, the transport sector, etc.; therefore, the strategies designed to address the pandemic must be holistic. This pandemic adversely affected our foreign exchange earnings and regional developments (Jaipuria, 2020).

There are many factors that act as major actors for tour attractions, the attractiveness of the spot, historical aspects and entertainment facilities being some of them. It is required to provide a basket of services in all those fields in order to satisfy customers (Neal, 2003). The performance of a tourist destination and satisfaction of visitors with the destination are of paramount importance to the destination competitiveness since the pleasantness of the experience is more likely to influence visitors' future behaviour. (Baloglu et al., 2003). A tourist destination consists of several independent interest groups that, in turn, have concrete and different goals and plans. Its residents act simultaneously as recipients and producers of the destination's brand image (Freire, 2011).

Consumers' choice processes are influenced by psychological variables such as motivations, attitudes, beliefs, and images, and non-psychological variables like time, destination attributes, perceived costs of tourism products, buyer characteristics, and benefits sought. The different research works in consumer decision theory suggest that images of tourism and travellers' perceptions of destinations play important roles in the destination choice decisions of potential travellers (Ahmed, 1991; Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). According to Fakeye and Crompton (1991), destinations with positive images can be expected to prosper, while those with less favourable images may never achieve their fullest tourism potential.

Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioural intention of choosing a travel destination is beneficial to tourism planning and marketing. Many researchers have investigated travel motivation within different fields, such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology (Cohen, 1972; Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997). One popular typology for understanding travel decisions is the 'push and pull' model (Crompton, 1979). A review of the past literature on tourist motivation indicates that the analysis of motivations based on the two dimensions of push and pull factors have been generally accepted (Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Hagan, 1993).

The examination of studies (Gilbert & Terrata, 2001; Hanqin & Lam, 1999; Kim et al., 2006; Kozak, 2002; Mohsin & Alsawafi, 2011; Phau et al., 2013; Sangpikul, 2008; Sirakaya et al., 2003) in the area of travel motivation demonstrates that among the proposed models, Crompton's (1979) push and pull factors are more popular among researchers. The push-pull theoretical framework is a popular theory to explain why tourists decide to visit the destination rather than other places, the kind of experience they want to get, and the type of activity they want to do (Prayag & Hosany, 2014). Crompton (1979) first sought to draw seven socio-psychological push motives: escape-

exploratory, relaxation, prestige, regression, kinship-enhancement, social interaction, and cultural, and for pull motives, novelty and education. The conceptual framework developed would influence the selection of a destination, and this approach implies that the destination can influence vacation behaviour in meeting an aroused need.

Numerous studies (Devesa et al., 2010; Hanqin & Lam, 1999; Kozak, 2002; Lo & Lee, 2011; Phau et al., 2013; Prayag & Hosany, 2014; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) were conducted to test and to integrate this concept, and in these studies, the push factors are treated as the internal factors by which people feel motivated for the trip, considering their own needs. One of the positive features of Crompton's model was its dynamism, which allowed later researchers to add some factors to the model or remove some with regard to the tourists' nationality and their own destinations. Travel motivation is a push factor that impels an individual to make a trip. Holiday motivations can be characterized as the need for relaxation, social contact, mastery, and intellectual stimulation (Ryan & Glendon, 1998). According to Leiper (1990), tourists are pushed by their own motivation toward the places where they expect their needs will be satisfied. Goffi and Cucculelli (2014) reported the core attractors or push factors in destination selection as natural and cultural resources, events, and gastronomy.

In this research, the authors judged the major demotivating variables in destination selection as pull variables. In some other literature, pull motivation is defined as the tangible resources and traveller's perception of the features or attributes of a specific destination; therefore, it plays an important role in the destination choice of tourists once the decision to travel has been made (Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Kim et al., 2006). The pull factor is the external forces related to food, people, recreation facilities, and the marketed image of the destination (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). Considering the above notions, we intend to redefine the pull motives as the major factors that pull back tourists from visiting a destination. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, some more factors can be added to this such as isolation costs during the quarantine period, COVID testing charges, and the cost involved in treating COVID-infected tourists, etc. (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

The pull motivation factors related to wellness tourist products were labelled as Basic wellness, Intangible wellness, and Extra wellness. Sometimes the tourists may give importance to intangible wellness aspects like atmosphere, relaxation, and surroundings, compared to tangible wellness aspects such as massage, sauna, mud baths/wraps, etc. (Damijanić, 2020).

According to Jackson (2000), time, cost, skills problems, and fears may become increasingly important constraints in selecting a destination. There are constraints related to cost, transportation, companionship, health, and available activities/programmes (McCarville & Smale, 1993; Scott & Munson, 1994; Searle & Jackson, 1985). The limitations, viz., time availability, transportation access, fear of crime, family responsibilities, lack of skill and ability, and a lack of self-confidence, can act as major pull aspects in visiting a destination (Horna, 1989; Searle & Jackson, 1985; Witt & Goodale, 1981; Jun et al., 2009; Das & Tiwari, 2020). The fear of travelling can induce coping strategies, increasing individuals' resilience, and embracing careful travel behaviours (Zheng et al., 2021).

While reviewing some studies on expenses, it is reported that destination selection depends on higher buying power resulting from a favourable currency exchange rate and lower living expenditures (Pokharel et al., 2018). The currency exchange rate between destination and outbound countries also has an impact on the number of international tourists; tourists were more likely to visit countries with higher exchange rates, and the international tourists were more attracted to countries where exchange rates were more favourable (Song et al., 2003). Food quality is reported as essential to destination choices (Bjork & Raisanen, 2016). The tourists will search for food-related information before their trips, and the uniqueness of local food impacts travel satisfaction.

The COVID-19 restriction has made tourists look for a new way to travel. COVID-19 has impacted economically, socially, and psychologically among potential tourists (Jaipuria et al., 2021). In this context, numerous enduring pull factors, such as lockdown, fear of social isolation, fear of infection, government

restriction, depression, boredom, etc., can be identified. (Di Renzo et al., 2020; Pradana et al., 2020; Golets et al., 2021). From the angle of expenses, the major pull factors are the cost of COVID testing, hotel isolation expenses, money spent on quarantine, additional expenses on avoidance of public transportation, etc. (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). This may pave new trends in travelling, such as one-day trips, home picnics, etc. (Roy & Sharma, 2021).

It is reported that responsible travellers post COVID-19 will be determined by three main factors, namely, travel preferences, health and hygiene considerations, and destination choices (Gamil, 2022). Hygiene should be projected as a niche market solution post COVID-19 (Hosta & Plevnik, 2021). In another research the cleanliness of accommodation products was reported to be the most important aspect post COVID-19. The hotels and restaurants in tourist destinations should adhere to public health strategies to limit the spread of disease and regain customers' trust (Chang & Kim, 2022). Post COVID-19, the tourism cities should project a safe and healthy image to attract more tourists. The tourism marketers should treat the image of the destination as the key parameter for pitching their marketing strategies (Sahebi et al., 2022).

The Proposed Conceptual Model

In the literature, push factors were defined as the motivation and intangible desires of individual travellers to visit a destination, whereas pull factors refer to the external forces of destination attributes in the country (Dann, 1977; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Hanqin & Lam, 1999). In the proposed conceptual model, some slight modifications were brought to the above definitions by redefining push factors as the implicit drive of a tourist to visit a destination and the pull factors as the explicit constraints. Here the push factors are described as the way of satisfying the psychological needs of the visitors. In this context, three major factors, viz., environmental image (Okoroafo, 1995), ethnicity parameters Hitchcock (1999) and entertainment amenities (Nallathiga, 2006) were listed. These factors internally motivate the tourists to opt for tourism for elusive rewards such as fun, assurance, and other emotional needs. In contrast, the pull factors are the major factors that can also become constraints in visiting a tourism destination. The restrictions attributed to the visitor also play an important role in selecting or rejecting a destination (Karl et al., 2015). Financial and operational restrictions are important (Saito & Strehlau, 2018). This includes travel and transportation expenses, currency exchange, the impossibility of finding a suitable travel partner, dangers, political situations at the destination, etc. Based on the above variables, two major constructs, viz., Expenses and Endurance, were developed.

Thus, three push factors (environment, ethnicity, and entertainment) and two pull factors (expenses and endurance) were identified. Further, a conceptual model was developed based on the identified constructs. We have made a solemn effort to fit our conceptual model in the context of Lancasterian (1966, 1971) utility theory. This work proposes five major factors for selecting a tourist destination. In other words, the utility for each destination is defined as a weighted sum of a set of characteristics. Characteristics demand theory by Lancaster (1971) states that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it. In our model, the central postulation is that the tourists visiting the destination will neglect the hurdles such as expenses and endurances to satisfy their emotional needs. And the internal drives of the tourists to experience environment, ethnicity, and entertainment have significant influence over other constraints. The primary objective of this research is to examine the statistical viability of this conceptual model based on real data. This model will add to the existing literature by redefining the push-pull model used by various practitioners and thinkers amidst COVID-19.

Table 1 explains the proposed redefined push-pull model for tourism destination selection. This model has used two key parameters in the context of COVID-19, viz., health and safety restrictions imposed in the tourism destinations by the government and the financial positions of the tourists. If the health and safety restriction is minimal and the personal financial position of the tourists is strong, then it is evident that they tend to explore the destination. This model argues that if the government restrictions are minimal,

Table 1 Redefined Push-Pull Destination Selection Model Amidst COVID-19

		Health & safety restrictions in destinations	
		Minimal	Maximal
Financial position of the tourist	Strong	Push Motives (Ethnicity, Entertainment & Environment)	Push Motives (Environment & Ethnicity)
	Weak	Push Motives (Ethnicity, Entertainment & Environment)	Pull Motives (Expenses & Endurance)

tourists prioritize exploration despite their individual financial condition.

Conversely, if the health and safety measures in the destination are stringent, only financially sound tourists prefer to visit the destination, and their primary motive will be to reconnoitre the environment. During the pandemic period, if the safety restriction is at its maximum, it is observed that tourists are less favourable to the entertainment opportunities offered in the destinations.

Finally, it is expected that tourists will give weightage to expense and endurance over other push motives if their financial position is weak and health and safety restriction are at its maximum. In such a situation, it is obvious that people will prioritize satisfying their physiological needs rather than exploring new tourist destinations. Here this theory is redefining pull motives as the major factor pulling back tourists from visiting a destination amidst the pandemic.

Data and Methodology

In this study, Kerala, the southwestern state of India, has been selected as a destination for the survey. This state's tourism is popularized with the 'God's Own Country' campaign. The exclusive geographical diversity of Kerala offers tourists a range of attractions and experiences, such as beaches, backwaters, wildlife sanctuaries, evergreen forests, and diverse flora and fauna of the State (Edward & George, 2008). A report released by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, reported that 340,755 foreign tourists visited Kerala in 2020. Based on the travel trend report that The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) released, Kerala is ranked eighth among the twelve destinations to watch (India Today, 2017). As per official statistics, Tourism contributes 10 percent of Kerala's GDP and 23.5 percent to the total employment in the state (Kavya Lekshmi & Mallick, 2020). However, COVID-19 has hit the tourism sector in Kerala at its worst. The statistics from authorities reported that the total loss the sector incurred between January and September 2020 was Rs.249.71 billion, while the loss in earnings from the decline in foreign tourist arrivals is estimated to be Rs.5.274 billion after witnessing 8.52% growth in the year 2019 (Times of India, 2021). This scenario calls for a revisit of the existing models and redefining the destination selection factors considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three major tourist destinations in Kerala state have been identified as the places for conducting this research. They are Thangassery in Kollam district, Kuttanad in Alappuzha district and Kumarakom in Kottayam district. The population for this research consists of the international tourists who have visited or booked to visit the above destinations prior to imposing the travel ban due to COVID-19. In the year 2019–2020 a total number of 340,755 international tourists have visited Kerala and out of this, 46,629 tourists have visited Alappuzha, 20,072 to Kottayam and 5,141 persons to Kollam respectively (Kerala Tourism, 2020). Considering the above information as a foundation, available data of international tourists who made reservations to visit these destinations before the imposition of travel restrictions were duly collected. One of the limitations in this method is that the survey was restricted to respondents whose emails/contacts were shared by the resorts or travel agents in these destinations. The electronic questionnaire was circulated among 1,400 prospective respondents who had either visited or booked to visit the

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Variable Selection

Factors	Categorization	Observed Variable	Mean	SD	Rank
Pull Factors	Expenses	Cost of Accommodation	3.11	1.34	1
		Cost of Food and Beverages	2.55	1.36	
		Shopping Expenses	2.87	1.36	
		Travel Cost	2.95	1.49	3
		Visa Charges	2.66	1.37	
		Currency Exchange	3.07	1.54	2
		Miscellaneous Expenses	2.51	1.48	
	Endurances	Safety and Security at Destination	6.35	1.57	1
		Security measures in Adventure Sports	5.29	1.46	
		Food and its quality	6.21	1.20	2
		Nightlife and Safety	5.32	1.00	
		Easy Transportation Access	6.11	1.20	3
		Security for Outdoor Activities	5.92	1.47	
		Communication Systems without breaks	6.09	1.52	
Push Factors	Environment	To appreciate natural resources	6.02	1.53	2
		To sightsee tourist spots	5.72	1.48	
		For exploration	5.99	1.26	3
		To experience the climate	6.10	1.13	1
		To expose to new surroundings	5.48	1.30	

Continued on the next page

above destinations before the spread of COVID-19. The questionnaire was written in English and was distributed to the respondents who could read and understand English. Later it was reported that, as an impact of pandemic, the number of international tourists visiting Kerala had dropped to 60,487 in the year 2020–2021. Out of this, 777 tourists have visited Alappuzha, 365 visited Kottayam and only 77 visited Kollam (Kerala Tourism, 2021). A simple random sampling technique was used for data collection. Finally, 311 valid responses were obtained from this survey.

The questionnaire design was adapted from previous researchers' work, such as Dann (1977, 1981), Uysal and Jurowski (1994) and Hanqin and Lam (1999). Push factors, origin-related and intangible desires of individual travellers, comprised 25 items. Likewise, 14 pull motive items, which were the external forces of destination attributes in the country, were put together. The push and pull items were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, from 7 indicating very important to 1 not important. This research devised five major constructs in the proposed theoretical model, viz., expenses, endurance, environment, ethnicity, and entertainment. For developing this framework, the authors have considered 39 push-pull variables determining the destination selection of tourists across the globe.

The G*Power 3.1 software package was used to test whether the number of observations are adequate for regression analysis. G*Power 3.1 provides power analysis procedures for both the conditional (and fixed-predictors) and the unconditional (or random-predictors) models of multiple regression (Gatsonis & Sampson, 1989). In this study, power analysis procedure suggested by Faul et al. (2009) was used to justify the sample size for the linear regression model. A minimum power level of 0.80 can be accepted at 5 percent level of significance (typically $\alpha = 0.05$). The software has generated a sample value of 225. This value statis-

Table 2 Continued from the previous page

Factors	Categorization	Observed Variable	Mean	SD	Rank
	Ethnicity	For social interaction	6.30	1.23	2
		For visiting heritage sites	5.92	1.32	3
		For relationship enhancement	3.70	1.09	
		For social relationship with family and friends	2.11	1.00	
		To explore different cultures	6.39	1.25	1
		To experience new and different lifestyles or traditions	5.20	1.17	
		To seek novelty	4.62	1.54	
		For prestige and impression	5.23	1.23	
		To exchange customs and traditions	4.79	1.68	
		To enhance communication with local community	5.15	1.74	
		To reconnect with spiritual roots	5.81	1.37	
	Entertainment	For relaxation and having fun	6.70	1.06	1
		To find a new or unusual experience	5.98	1.23	
		For shopping	5.32	1.55	
		To participate in new activities	4.99	1.25	
		To fulfil my dream of visiting a foreign land/country	5.63	1.24	
		For experiencing adventure	6.42	1.75	2
		Experience festivals and events	6.01	1.65	3
		To have enjoyable time with my travel companion(s)	5.69	1.37	
		To find thrills and excitement	5.96	1.05	

tically justifies the obtained sample size of 311. In this analysis, five constructs and 15 observations were retained. Moreover, the academic literature shows that a sample size of 200 is appropriate for path modelling (Hoyle, 1995; Boomsma, 1982; 1985). Thus, a sample of 311 can be considered sufficient for the regression modelling.

After gathering the final response, each variable's weighted average mean and standard deviation were calculated. At this stage, an effort has been taken to retain three variables per construct for further modelling, as many variables per construct may produce dubious outcomes in path analysis (Ropovik, 2015). The variables with the most favourable response from each category were identified based on the respective weighted mean score of the individual item. At most, care has been employed for ensuring three indicating variables, each per construct. This is because a single indicator per construct needs to pay attention to the unreliability of measurement. Therefore, using three items is the minimum threshold as a general rule for the number of items per construct (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The study was carried out with covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM), and the IBM-AMOS.21 package was employed for processing the data. It is reported that CB-SEM is useful for examining moderating effects, especially when a third variable changes the relationship between two related variables (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics of the variables selected for the study.

Simple weighted average mean criterion was employed for ranking the all variables mentioned in the questionnaire. This is because the highest rank preference will be given to the variables with maximum weighted mean scores. The variables such as accom-

Table 3 Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Count	%
Gender	Male	204	65.60
	Female	107	34.40
	Total	311	100.0
Age	<25	23	7.40
	26–35	127	40.83
	36–45	52	16.72
	46–55	66	21.22
	>55	43	13.83
	Total	311	100.0
Occupation	Employed	128	41.20
	Entrepreneur	74	23.80
	Retired	43	13.80
	Student	1	0.30
	Unemployed	65	20.90
	Total	311	100.0
Education	<12th Standard	4	1.30
	Bachelors	144	46.30
	Master's	52	16.70
	Professional	111	35.70
	Total	311	100.0
Marital Status	Single	156	50.16
	Married	155	49.84
	Total	311	100.0

Notes $N = 311$.

modation cost, currency exchange, and travelling expenses under the construct expenses (weighted mean scores are 3.11, 3.07, and 2.95) were retained. For measuring endurance, we have used safety and security, quality of food, and transportation access as the highest obtained mean values for these variables are 6.35, 6.21, and 6.11. The construct of environment is observed to be influenced by climate, natural resources, and exploration (the reported weighted means are 6.10, 6.02, and 5.99). From the ethnic angle, most respondents favoured culture, social interaction, and heritage (obtained mean values are 6.39, 6.30, and 5.92). And finally, from an entertainment angle, the variables such as fun, adventure, and festival were reported to be important, with respective weighted mean scores of 6.70, 6.42, and 6.01. Thus, from the push perspective, nine variables were retained, and from the pull viewpoint, six variables were preserved for further modelling. The demographic profile of the participants in this survey is exhibited in Table 3.

The sample is well-distributed and represents the right demographic mix. A majority of 65.6% of the respondents are male. A greater part, 40.83%, is aged between 26 and 35 years. In a broader perspective, 78.7% of the respondents are in the larger group of 26 to 55 years of age, with a lesser percentage of 13.8% respondents representing greater than 55 years of age and an even lesser 7.4 % representing the age group below 25 years. A high of 46.3% of the respondents are employed, while 23.8% of the respondents are entrepreneurs, 13.8% are retired, and only 20.9% are unemployed. The sample selected is well-educated, given that 98.7% of the respondents have earned a university degree or above. The sample is almost equally distributed with respect to marital status, with 50.16% being single and 49.84% being married.

Data Analysis

The classic Cronbach's alpha model (1951) was used to measure the constructs' reliability. The alpha values of the constructs were computed using the estimates of the residuals and their standard error. Sources indicate that an alpha value of 0.8 or above reports sound reliability of the constructs (Cortina, 1993).

From Table 4, it is clear that Cronbach's alpha values of the respective factors range from 0.94 to 0.81. The above range signals the strong reliability of the constructs as the threshold limit set in this direction is only 0.8 ($\alpha > 0.8$). The composite reliability (CR) of the constructs is also reported to be sound as the obtained values range from 0.68 to 0.86. It is obtained by combining all of the true score variances (λ^2) of the observed variables related to constructs and by dividing this sum by the total variance in the constructs. If the CR of the factor loadings is above the threshold of 0.7, it indicates internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014). Here, with respect to the factor 'endurance,' the composite reliability is reported to be 0.68, which can be further rounded off to 0.7. Other than this, all other

Table 4 Constructs' Reliability and Validity

Factor	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Expenses	0.84	0.76	0.51
Endurance	0.81	0.68	0.63
Environment	0.92	0.85	0.67
Ethnicity	0.94	0.86	0.69
Entertainment	0.90	0.81	0.61

Notes CR indicates composite reliability.

Table 5 Measurement of Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Factors	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Expenses	0.72				
(2) Endurance	1.01	0.80			
(3) Environment	−0.03	−0.11	0.82		
(4) Ethnicity	−0.06	−0.06	0.56	0.83	
(5) Entertainment	-0.26	−0.24	0.44	0.58	0.78

Notes Diagonal values are squared roots of AVE; off-diagonal values are the estimates of inter-correlation between the latent constructs.

constructs were reported to have sound internal consistency, scoring above the doorstep limit of 0.7.

The convergent validity and discriminant validity of the constructs were duly assessed. An AVE of 0.5 or more confirms the convergent validity of the factors (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). From Table 5, it is clear that the obtained AVE of the constructs is much above the stated limit of 0.5, with a range of 0.51 to 0.69. This result confirms the convergent validity of the scale. Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion was used for checking the discriminant validity. Based on this norm, if the square root of the AVE is higher than the correlation between the respective latent variables, it confirms discriminant validity.

From Table 6, it is clear that other than the correlation between the construct's endurance and expenses (0.72 < 1.01), the rest of the constructs satisfy the criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as the correlation between the square root of AVE is reported to be much higher than that of the inter-correlation between the factors. A majority of the construct satisfies the norms in connection with the discriminant validity; therefore the results can be substantiated.

Table 6 CB SEM Model

Observed variable ← Construct	*B*	SE	*T*	*p*	f^2
Accommodation Cost ← Expenses	1.00				0.52
Currency Exchange ← Expenses	1.50	0.15	10.08	0.00	1.85
Travelling Cost ← Expenses	1.44	0.15	9.64	0.00	1.22
Safety and Security ← Endurance	1.00				0.44
Food and its quality ← Endurance	1.44	0.16	9.03	0.00	1.14
Transportation Access ← Endurance	1.18	0.14	8.48	0.00	0.75
Climate ← Environment	1.00				11.19
Natural Resources ← Environment	0.67	0.08	8.76	0.00	0.28
Exploration ← Environment	0.96	0.04	23.32	0.00	6.25
Cultural Experience ← Ethnicity	1.00				9.53
Social Interaction ← Ethnicity	0.67	0.07	9.97	0.00	0.36
Heritage Sites Visit ← Ethnicity	0.94	0.04	26.74	0.00	8.01
Fun ← Entertainment	1.00				2.02
Adventure ← Entertainment	0.75	0.09	8.77	0.00	0.31
Festivals and Events ← Entertainment	1.12	0.07	16.10	0.00	10.76

Table 6 exhibits the result of the path analysis of the established model. This model intends to study the effect of the observed push-pull variables on the established constructs. Interestingly, all the observed variables were reported to have a positive and significant effect on the 5E factors, viz., expenses, endurance, environment, ethnicity, and entertainment. This is because the probability value of the test statistics is much below the critical point of 0.05. Moreover,

the *T*-test results are much above the reference point of 1.96. These results will force us to signify our hypotheses by accepting the fact that the push factors and pull factors have a positive influence on destination selection.

Each path's effect size was measured using f^2 values (Cohen, 1988). From Table 6, it can be realized that the f^2 values range from 11.19 to 0.28. Cohen (1988) defined effect sizes as small if the obtained f^2 score is below 0.2; an f^2 score above 0.8 indicates a large effect size. In this analysis, all the observed variables possess a medium or large effect on their respective constructs. Concerning the factor of expense, currency exchange is considered the primary factor with an effect size of 1.85 ($\beta = 1.50$, $p = 0.00$). It can be inferred that people are hesitant to visit Kerala because of the fluctuation of their home currency exchange rates with INR. The β is a coefficient that indicates the impact of change in the observed variables on the respective factor. For instance, in the above situation, β is 1.50; this indicates that every one percent change in the currency exchange rate would pull the tourists 1.5 times from visiting a destination because of the expense factor. This result agrees with Pokharel et al. (2018) and Song et al. (2003), as these studies emphasized that exchange rate was a major variable in destination choice. Another important pull factor from the endurance angle is the food quality ($f^2 = 1.14$, $\beta = 1.44$, $p = 0.00$), which indicates that foreigners visiting Kerala are greatly concerned about the food quality, and they are very anxious about their ability to survive with the cuisine in this state. It is perceived that this result was obtained on the ground that the traditional Kerala food is usually spicy, which is different from the taste of the westerners, and the visitors are concerned about whether they can access the western style of food while visiting remote areas. This strongly adds to the literature quoted by Bjork and Raisanen (2016).

From another dimension, the climatic conditions in the host place seem to be the major push factor from the environmental angle, with an effect size of 11.19 ($\beta = 1.00$, $p = 0.00$). This variable possesses the highest effect size among all other variables used in this study, signalling that tourists are prominently selecting Kerala as a destination to experience its climatic conditions. From an ethnic angle, the destination selection is mainly based on the motive of experiencing the culture in that place ($f^2 = 9.53$, $\beta = 1.00$, $p = 0.00$). In the literature, Crompton (1979) has also highlighted the importance of cultural aspects in the destination points and has quoted culture as one of the important variables among seven socio-psychological push motives. Another intention of visiting a place is to participate in and experience major festivals and events ($f^2 = 10.76$). This finding seems true for a destination like Kerala, a land of festivals. The literature review also identified the festivals and events as core attractors in destination selection (Goffi & Cucculelli, 2014).

Table 7 Covariance among Constructs

Constructs	β	SE	T	p
Expenses ↔ Endurance	0.60	0.09	6.64	0.00
Expenses ↔ Environment	−0.03	0.06	−0.46	0.65
Expenses ↔ Ethnicity	−0.06	0.06	−0.93	0.35
Entertainment ↔ Expenses	−0.23	0.06	−3.55	0.00
Endurance ↔ Environment	−0.09	0.06	−1.49	0.13
Endurance ↔ Ethnicity	−0.05	0.06	−0.83	0.41
Entertain. ↔ Endurance	−0.20	0.06	−3.17	0.01
Environment ↔ Ethnicity	0.79	0.09	8.13	0.00
Entertain. ↔ Environment	0.59	0.09	6.32	0.00
Entertainment ↔ Ethnicity	0.76	0.10	7.62	0.00

The covariance techniques measure the relationship between the constructs. The covariance among constructs is used to infer the relationships between the focal construct and its measures (Bollen, 1989). The co-variances among the constructs are presented in Table 7, which shows that in terms of direction, the push and pull factors possess a negative relationship. On the other hand, the similar natures of constructs have a positive relationship. For instance, the pull constructs of expense and endurance are reported to have a covariance estimate of 0.60, and the probability value of the test statistics also signifies the result (p-value $0.00 < 0.05$). This indicates that the tourists will spend more if the place ensures adequate safety. Likewise, the push constructs such as environment, ethnicity, and

Table 8 CB-SEM Model Fit Assessment

Criterion	Norms	References	Obtained value
RMSEA	Value less than 0.08 indicates good fit	MacCallum et al. (1996)	0.02
NFI	Value of more than 0.90 indicates fit to the model	Bentler and Bonett (1980)	0.95
CFI	Value of more than 0.90 indicates fit to the model	Bentler (1990)	0.91
PNFI	Value of more than 0.90 indicates fit to the model	Mulaik et al. (1989)	0.86

entertainment also accounted for the positive and significant relationship among them.

Some interesting results were obtained to prove the theoretical propositions statistically. Though the constructs of expenses and environment have a negative relationship with a covariance of –0.03, the test statistics' probability value does not signify the result (*p*-value 0.65 > 0.05). Similarly, expenses and ethnicity is reported to have a negative direction of –0.06, but this relation cannot be signified as the probability value of the test statistics is 0.35 (*p*-value > 0.05). On the other hand, the factors such as expenses and entertainment accounted for a negative and significant covariance of –0.23. This can be verbally written as the tourists visiting the destination are willing to spend money to experience the climate and culture, but from the entertainment point of view, they are cost conscious. These results support the utility theory of Lancaster (1966, 1971) by agreeing that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it. From another angle, the constructs such as ethnicity and environment hold a negative and insignificant relationship with endurance as the reported *p*-values 0.13 and 0.41 are much above the critical line of 0.05. This indicates that tourists are willing to suffer all sorts of difficulties attributed to a destination to satisfy their utility (Lancaster, 1966, 1971). The covariance between entertainment and endurance is –0.20, and the probability value of this relation is 0.01 (0.01 < 0.05). This shows that the tourist's value utility on the variable entertainment is less, as other powerful factors influence their destination selection.

The fitness of the CB-SEM model was assessed with numerous statistical techniques (Table 8). The root means square error approximation (RMSEA) reported a value of 0.02, which is much below the threshold limit of 0.08 suggested by MacCallum et al. (1996). The normed fit index (NFI) value of 0.95 and the comparative fit index (CFI) value of 0.91 are close to the critical mark of 0.90. The parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) reported with a value of 0.86 is much closer to the required level of 0.90 (Mulaik et al., 1989). The above results confirm the statistical fitness of the path analysis employed in this study.

Discussion and Policy Implications

In push and pull factors of destination selection, pull has been given a different connotation during the pandemic as those factors that discourage a tourist from making a favourable decision. The push factors are those which encourage tourists to make a favourable decision. Pull factors in this study are expenses and endurance, and push factors are environment, ethnicity and entertainment. In this study, it has been observed that the tourist's value utility on the variable entertainment is less, as other powerful factors influence their destination selection. The tourists visiting a destination are willing to spend money to experience the climate and culture, but from the entertainment point of view, they are cost conscious. The other attractive features are festivals and events happening in the destination. The pull factors affecting the decision-making are the ease of currency exchange and the food and its quality in the destination.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing style of branding tourist places should be reconsidered by introducing innovative strategies. It is reported that travelling culture has changed a lot as people tend to prefer one-day travel, home picnics, etc. (Roy & Sharma, 2021). This trend forces policymakers to give more priority to local tourists than foreigners,

at least during the pandemic period. However, this can be used as a supportive strategy and may need to be a more sustainable model in the long run. Many experts are of the opinion that the industry cannot flourish without foreign exchange earnings (Jaipuria et al., 2021). The destinations should plan unique selling propositions for the industry to attract foreign visitors. The destinations can be projected as a place of responsible tourism post COVID-19 (Sahebi et al., 2022; Gamil, 2022; Hosta & Plevnik, 2022).

Since the study results support the utility theory of Lancaster (1966, 1971) by agreeing that consumers derive utility not from the actual contents of the basket but from the characteristics of the goods in it, efforts should be made by various stakeholders, including tour operators, local tourism centres, hotels and resorts to have a holistic approach while marketing a destination. Since this study has been done in Kerala, i.e. the southernmost state of India known as 'God's own Country,' the findings have implications for other, similar, tourist destinations worldwide. It is reported that rather than leisure, other aspects, such as culture, tradition, climate, etc., play an important role in attracting travellers. COVID-19 has created an opportunity for a destination like Kerala to promote our traditional ayurvedic resorts, nature, festivals, etc. From this, we should design exclusive strategies for Ayurveda as our literature pointed out that health and well-being are likely to become the selling points post COVID-19 (Santos et al., 2020; Wen, 2020; Buckley & Westway, 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

In Kerala, festivals and events play a major role in attracting tourists, so the tourism department should make strategies to draw up a marketing communication campaign targeting the same. Efforts should be made to highlight the culture of Kerala, and since this southern state has a rich history, this can be showcased to international tourists. Since Kerala is known for its greenery and, during the monsoon season, the state's beauty grows manifold, monsoon tourism can also be highlighted to attract tourists. The above features must be marketed by highlighting how the destinations are prepared to ensure the health and safety of the visitors.

The hotels and resorts should focus on providing good quality food to the tourists, including catering to the host's preferences, in this case, the international tourists. Wayside eateries should also focus on this aspect. The currency exchange organizations can also play a major role in providing their services and acting as a reference point for the destinations. Overall, Kerala, other than focusing itself as 'God's Own Country,' should also offer itself as a tourist destination that is safe and relatively less costly. Better value propositions need to be offered at optimum cost. Kerala is known for beaches, backwaters and mountains, and efforts should be made to highlight the same, and offerings should be customized based on the requirements of the tourists. The physical contact points can be minimized by migrating to digital platforms like online ticket booking, electronic tickets, accepting digital payments, advanced slot booking, customized travel facilities, etc., which would help to enhance travellers' confidence during the pandemic period.

Conclusion

The idea of this paper is based on Lancaster's original work on the consumer analysis-product characteristics approach (1966, 1971). Lancaster has already articulated that consumers derive utility based on the characteristics of goods offered in a basket rather than the actual content. In this context, this work supports that the tourists weigh satisfying their emotional needs over the obstacles such as cost and safety. The proposed theoretical model points out that if the health and safety measures of the government are liberal; more tourists are expected to visit destinations for entertainment and to explore the culture and environment. However, if the health and safety measures are stringent, only financially sound visitors will attempt to explore the destinations. To tap this opportunity, the destinations should be prepared with unique packages exclusively designed for an elite group of customers. This quadrant of the theoretical model agrees with the suggestions proposed by Roy and Sharma (2021) and Zheng et al. (2021).

The last quadrant of the proposed model signifies how pull motives operate during the pandemic. If the financial position of the tourist is weak and the health and safety measures of the destination are at their maximum, then it is expected that the tourist

may turn down their travel plan. The expense of travel, stay, cost of COVID testing, hotel isolation expenses, money spent on quarantine, additional expenses on account of avoidance of public transportation, etc., may need to be more affordable to financially weak travellers (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Based on this notion, expenses and endurances act as the major pull-back factors in destination selection.

The suggested model's major limitation is that it can be used to frame strategies only in a crisis where the government or local authorities impose numerous restrictions on travel and stay. However, in an ordinary situation, the pull factors cannot act as a constraint for waning the travel decision by the tourist. Secondly, the data used for the study include tourists who have either visited or booked to visit three tourist destinations in Kerala, viz., Thangassery, Kuttanad, and Kumarakom before COVID-19 restrictions. Their post-travel plan should have been tracked based on this model. The above shortfalls point towards the scope of some future research on topics like:

- Devising a strategic business model for destination selection post COVID-19.
- How to create a USP (Unique Selling Proposition) model for the tourism business post COVID-19.

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