THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION ON INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' DESTINATION CHOICE IN THE MEKONG DELTA

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Abstract - This study explores the relationships among destination information, travel motivation, attitude, and destination choice of international tourists in the Mekong Delta. Based on the Push-Pull Theory and quantitative methods with 348 international tourists in Tien Giang and Can Tho, the research reveals that destination information plays a pivotal role with the strongest impact on destination choice ($\beta=0.717$), attitude ($\beta=0.634$), and travel motivation ($\beta=0.506$). Travel motivation significantly influences destination choice ($\beta=0.410$) but has a weaker effect on attitude ($\beta=0.170$), while attitude also positively affects destination choice ($\beta=0.236$). The model explains 67.1% of the variance in destination choice decisions. Based on the research results, policy implications are proposed to enhance communication effectiveness and tourism development in the Mekong Delta. The application of digital technology and creative communication is essential to create unique experiences, build trust, and attract international tourists.

Key words - Destination information; travel motivation; attitude toward destination; destination choice; Mekong Delta

1. Introduction

The Mekong Delta, with its unique riverine ecosystem, diverse cultures, and rich culinary heritage, is gradually emerging as an attractive destination on the international tourism map. However, the number of international tourists visiting the region remains modest compared to its inherent potential. In the context of increasingly fierce competition among destinations, identifying the factors that influence tourists' destination choice decisions has become more important than ever [1]. The Push-Pull Theory has been widely applied to explain tourist behavior, distinguishing between intrinsic motivations that drive individuals to travel and the attractive attributes of destinations [2]. Nevertheless, in the digital era, the role of destination information and its impact on attitudes, motivations, and destination choice decisions require further investigation [3], especially given the existing gap in integrating the role of destination information with regard to travel motivation, attitude, and destination choice in developing countries [4]. This study aims to address this gap by developing and testing an integrated model of the relationships among destination information, travel motivation, attitude, and the destination choice of international tourists in the Mekong Delta. The research focuses on three main issues: assessing the influence of destination information on travel motivation, attitude, and destination choice; determining the role of travel motivation in shaping attitude and destination choice; and examining the impact of attitude on destination choice. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical foundations for tourism managers and policymakers in the Mekong Delta to enhance communication effectiveness and attract more international tourists to this riverine region.

2. Theoretical background and research methods

2.1. Push-Pull-Mooring theory and destination choice

The Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) model, originally developed in migration studies [5], comprises three main components: push factors-negative conditions at the origin that drive migration; pull factors-positive attributes at the destination that attract migrants [6]; and mooring factors-individual and social elements that may anchor or facilitate migration [7]. Notably, while push and pull factors are often external and directly contrasted, mooring factors can be partially controlled and play a moderating role in the relationship between push-pull factors and the final decision.

From its migration origins, the PPM model has been widely applied across various fields. Bansal et al. [8] were among the first to extend this model to study consumer switching behavior in services. In tourism, the PPM framework is used to analyze tourists' destination choice decisions, wherein travel motivation acts as a push factor driving travel decisions, destination information and attractive features represent pull factors, and tourists' attitudes and personal characteristics serve as mooring factors influencing the final decision-making process [9-11]. This flexible application demonstrates the universality and effectiveness of the PPM model in explaining switching behaviors in diverse contexts. In this study, the PPM model is employed to analyze the relationships among three independent variables (attitude, motivation, and destination information) and the dependent variable (destination choice). Specifically, travel motivation functions as a push factor promoting travel decisions; destination information serves as a pull factor by conveying the attractive attributes of the Mekong Delta; and tourists' attitudes act as mooring factors influencing the final decision-making process.

Destination choice (DC) is a complex decision-making process, dependent on the multidimensional interaction of

influencing factors [12, 13]. This study proposes to examine the choice of the Mekong Delta as a tourist destination through three key factors: (1) tourists' attitudes-reflecting personal evaluations and perceptions, (2) travel motivation-expressing tourists' needs and desires, and (3) destination information-providing the basis for evaluation and decision-making. This approach aligns with the PPM theoretical framework and can help clarify the roles of influencing factors in international tourists' destination choice in the Mekong Delta, thereby informing suitable tourism development strategies based on insights into tourist behavior.

2.2. Relationships among research concepts

Attitude toward destination (ATT) refers to the overall evaluation or perception that potential tourists have of a destination. This concept encompasses three main components: affective (emotional), cognitive (beliefs and knowledge), and behavioral (intention to act) [14, 15]. Attitude toward a destination is shaped by various factors, including destination image, brand personality, social influence, and product associations [16, 17]. A positive destination image can enhance tourists' attitudes toward a destination, while a negative image can deter potential visitors [18]. Similarly, destination personality-such as sincerity, excitement, and sophistication-plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes, often mediated by factors like self-congruence and brand trust [19].

Based on the PPM theory, attitude toward the destination is considered an important pull factor affecting tourists' destination choice. A positive attitude can generate a strong attraction, whereas a negative attitude can reduce the destination's appeal. In the tourism context, a positive attitude toward a destination increases the likelihood of choosing that destination, as a favorable attitude enhances both visit intention and the likelihood of recommending the destination to others [15, 18]. Empirical studies have shown that attitude toward a destination has a direct and significant impact on destination choice, through specific destination attributes such as cultural attractions, natural beauty, and service infrastructure, which can influence overall attitude and, consequently, destination choice [20-22]. Within the PPM model, the interaction between attitude (pull factor) and mooring factors such as personal characteristics, switching costs, and social influences can amplify or diminish the effect of attitude on destination choice. Based on this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Attitude toward the destination has a significant impact on destination choice.

Travel motivation (MOT) refers to the underlying reasons and drivers that prompt individuals to travel, analyzed through the Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) theory. Push factors are intrinsic motivations that drive individuals to leave their current environment, such as the desire for relaxation, adventure, novelty, learning, and escape from daily life [23-25]. Pull factors are the external attractions of a destination, such as natural beauty, cultural experiences, safety, and perceived image [23, 26, 27]. Mooring factors are barriers that may hinder destination

choice, including cost, time, geographical distance, language, and cultural differences. Travel motivation plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward the destination and influencing destination choice, with factors such as destination image, novelty, nature, social relationships, academic motivation, economic factors, and perceptions of safety and security all significantly impacting this process [16, 28, 29].

Studies have shown that travel motivation directly influences attitude toward the destination, where push and pull factors foster positive attitudes, while mooring factors can create negative attitudes or reduce the positivity of attitudes toward the destination [16, 26]. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2a: Travel motivation has a significant impact on attitude toward the destination.

Additionally, travel motivation directly affects destination choice, with complex interactions among push-pull-mooring factors influencing tourists' final decisions [1, 27, 30], leading to the following hypothesis:

H2b: Travel motivation has a significant impact on destination choice.

Destination information (IS) in tourism encompasses all data and information that potential tourists seek about a destination, including details on attractions, accommodation, transportation, activities, cultural experiences, and more [31, 32]. These information sources are diverse, ranging from official tourism websites, travel agencies, and guidebooks to user-generated content on social media and travel blogs [3].

According to the PPM theory, destination information can play a multidimensional role in tourists' decision-making processes. Positive information about a destination-such as beautiful landscapes, unique cultural heritage, and high-quality services-acts as a pull factor, attracting tourists. Conversely, negative information-such as political instability, social issues, natural disasters, or epidemics-can serve as mooring factors, creating psychological barriers and deterring tourists from choosing the destination. In cases where tourists do not make decisions independently (e.g., joining tours organized by others), the role of destination information may be diminished but can still exert indirect influence through the main decision-maker.

This study focuses on information relevant to tourists' destination choice decisions, specifically including: information on prices and quality of accommodation, attractions and entertainment activities, transportation and accessibility, as well as reviews of actual experiences from previous tourists [31, 32]. Potential tourists gather this information through social media searches [33], online reviews [34], consulting friends and relatives, and comparing information from official promotional materials [35]. Collecting and evaluating such specific information helps tourists form a clear perception of the destination, thereby making travel decisions that match their needs and expectations.

Within the PPM framework, destination information can have multidimensional impacts on tourists' decision-making

processes. Positive information functions as a pull factor, while negative information can serve as a mooring factor, creating psychological barriers to destination choice [36].

Based on the PPM theory and previous empirical studies, the following hypotheses regarding the relationships between destination information and other factors are proposed. Different information sources, especially user-generated content and official channels, significantly influence travel motivation, with social media and web platforms shaping motivation by emphasizing specific aspects of the destination [3, 4]. Thus:

H3a: Destination information has a significant impact on travel motivation.

Cognitive (knowledge-based) and affective (emotion-based) images of a destination, formed from information sources, play crucial roles in shaping tourists' attitudes, with positive images from reliable sources enhancing tourists' attitudes toward the destination [36, 37]. Therefore:

H3b: Destination information has a significant impact on attitude toward the destination.

Tourists use various information sources before and during their trips; pre-trip information often comes from travel agencies, guidebooks, and online sources, while on-site information is frequently sought via the internet for real-time updates and best offers [38, 39]. Hence:

H3c: Destination information has a significant impact on destination choice.

2.3. Research methods

Research design and data collection: This study adopts a multi-faceted mixed-methods approach: a review of academic literature to identify factors influencing destination choice, expert consultations to refine the theoretical framework and research instruments, pilot surveys to assess the reliability of measurement scales, and a main survey conducted in Tien Giang and Can Tho, yielding 348 valid questionnaires-meeting the requirements for structural model analysis as per [40]. Sample analysis reveals that 69.9% of tourists were first-time visitors to the Mekong Delta, while 30.1% had visited at least once before. Regarding travel mode, 47.1% chose package tours, 37.5% organized trips independently, and 15.4% combined both forms. The sample consisted of 59.3% female and 40.7% male participants. Age distribution showed the largest group was 21–30 years old (40.0%), followed by 31–40 (21.0%), 41–50 (23.1%), over 50 (5.9%), 18–20 (7.0%), and under 18 (3.0%). In terms of education, most participants held a college/university degree (54.9%), followed by postgraduate (28.0%), vocational/high school (15.0%), and below high school (2.1%). Geographically, tourists from Asia accounted for 52.9%, followed by Europe (18.9%), the Americas (22.9%), and Oceania (5.3%).

Measurement scales: The destination information (IS) scale includes four observed variables: searching for information on social media [33], collecting online reviews [34], consulting friends and relatives, and comparing services via official promotional materials [35]; the travel motivation (MOT) scale measures the desire to explore new destinations, experience different cultures [35], enhance knowledge [41], and relax or relieve stress; the attitude toward destination (ATT) scale assesses overall perception, experiential value [34], and awareness of positive impacts [42]; and the destination choice (DC) scale includes confidence in making the right decision [43, 44], identifying the final destination [44], and absolute trust without needing further information.

3. Research results and discussion

3.1. Research results

The analysis demonstrates that the measurement model (Table 1) meets reliability and validity standards. All scales exhibit high internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding 0.8-well above the 0.7 threshold recommended by Nunnally (1994). Convergent validity is confirmed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.6, surpassing the 0.5 requirement of Fornell and Larcker (1981). Discriminant validity is also established, with all HTMT indices below the 0.85 threshold set by Henseler et al. [45].

Table 1. Results of measurement model assessment

	CA	CR	AVE	HTMT			
				ATT	DC	IS	MOT
ATT	0.876	0.877	0.704				
DC	0.901	0.902	0.754	0.642			
IS	0.886	0.886	0.662	0.633	0.717		
MOT	0.908	0.907	0.717	0.447	0.667	0.505	

Confirmatory factor analysis validates the measurement model with all factor loadings exceeding 0.7 (see Figure 1). The Attitude toward Destination (ATT) scale has loadings from 0.797 to 0.884; Destination Choice (DC) from 0.834 to 0.893; Destination Information (IS) from 0.754 to 0.863; and Travel Motivation (MOT) from 0.759 to 0.892. These high loadings demonstrate that each observed variable makes a strong contribution to its respective latent construct [46].
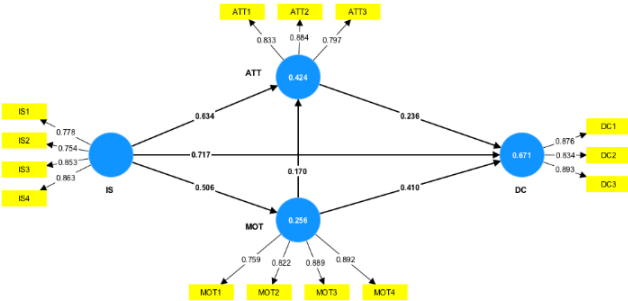

Figure 1. Results of PLS-SEM Analysis

Table 2 confirms the structural model's fit, with key indices meeting established standards. The R^2 for Destination Choice (DC) is 0.671, indicating that 67.1% of the variance is explained by the independent variables. The positive Q^2 (0.474 for DC) confirms the model's predictive relevance. All VIF values are below 5 (maximum 1.866), indicating no multicollinearity concerns. The f^2 effect size shows Travel Motivation (MOT) and Destination Information (IS) have the strongest impact on DC (0.270 and 0.220, respectively), while IS also significantly affects

Attitude (ATT) with f² = 0.389.

***Table 2.** Results of structural model assessment*

	f²				R²	Q²
	DC	**ATT**	**MOT**	**IS**		
DC					0.671	0.474
ATT	0.097				0.424	0.269
MOT	0.297	0.037			0.256	0.160
IS	0.235	0.387	0.347			

Hypothesis testing (Table 3) confirms all six relationships in the model are statistically significant (p < 0.001). Destination Information (IS) demonstrates the strongest effect on Destination Choice (DC) (β = 0.717) and Attitude (ATT) (β = 0.634). Travel Motivation (MOT) significantly influences DC (β = 0.410) but shows a weaker effect on ATT (β = 0.170). Attitude (ATT) also positively impacts DC (β = 0.236). These results underscore the critical role of destination information in tourists' decision-making processes.

***Table 3.** Results of Hypothesis Testing*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Total Effect	P-value	Result
H1	ATT → DC	0.236	0.000	Supported
H3b	IS → ATT	0.634	0.000	Supported
H3c	IS → DC	0.717	0.000	Supported
H3a	IS → MOT	0.506	0.000	Supported
H2a	MOT → ATT	0.170	0.003	Supported
H2b	MOT → DC	0.410	0.000	Supported

3.2. Discussion

The research confirms all six proposed hypotheses, demonstrating the effectiveness of the theoretical model. Destination information (IS) plays the most crucial role, exerting the strongest impact on both destination choice (β = 0.717) and attitude (β = 0.634), and significantly influencing travel motivation (β = 0.506). This aligns with findings from Llodrá-Riera et al. [3], Pereira et al. [36], and Jalilvand [4], affirming IS as a key "pull" factor in Push-Pull theory-especially in the Mekong Delta, where information from social media, online reviews, and promotional materials is decisive in shaping international tourists' perceptions and decisions. Travel motivation (MOT) significantly affects destination choice (β = 0.410) but has a smaller effect on attitude (β = 0.170), reflecting the tendency of international tourists to visit the Mekong Delta primarily for specific motivations, such as exploring unique cultures. This supports research by Karl & Schmude [1], Tojib et al. [27] regarding the direct linkage between motivation and destination choice. Attitude (ATT) positively influences destination choice (β = 0.236), albeit to a lesser extent than IS and MOT, consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and studies by Nicolau & Más [20] and Zhang et al. [22]. The model explains 67.1% of the variance in destination choice (R² = 0.671), confirming the central role of destination information in travel decision-making-not only through direct effects but also indirectly via attitude and motivation.

In summary, the study validates all six hypotheses and demonstrates the effectiveness of the PPM theoretical framework in the context of Mekong Delta tourism. Destination information (IS) exhibits multidimensional influence, with the strongest impact on both destination choice and attitude, as well as a significant effect on motivation. This result supports the "pull" role of IS as found by Llodrá-Riera et al. [3], and adds to the perspective of Karl & Schmude [1] regarding IS's potential role as a "mooring" factor when negative information is present. The effect of travel motivation (MOT) on destination choice is significant but less so on attitude, which is consistent with Karl & Schmude [1] but contrasts with Hsu et al. [47], who found a stronger effect on attitude in Asian tourism contexts. The effect of attitude (ATT) on destination choice is positive but smaller compared to IS and MOT, supporting Zhang et al. [48], but differing from Um & Crompton [49] in more developed destinations where attitude is more decisive. The model's ability to explain 67.1% of the variance in destination choice further confirms the appropriateness of the PPM framework in explaining the multidimensional role of destination information.

4. Conclusion and policy implications

This study has expanded the understanding of the PPM theory in the tourism context through three important contributions. First, the research results have demonstrated the suitability of the PPM model in explaining destination choice behavior in emerging markets like the Mekong Delta, with a significant ability to explain the variance in destination choice (R² = 0.671). Second, the study clarifies the multidimensional role of destination information (IS)-not only as a "pull" factor as in the research of Llodrá-Riera et al. [3], but also as a factor influencing both attitude (β = 0.634) and travel motivation (β = 0.506); this finding supplements Crompton's traditional PPM theory [50]. Third, the finding regarding the differing levels of impact among the factors (IS > MOT > ATT) compared to the results of Um & Crompton [49] and Hsu et al. [47] in developed markets has enriched the theory of tourist behavior in different cultural contexts. These contributions not only affirm the flexibility of the PPM theory but also open up new research directions on the role of context in shaping the relationships among the model's components.

Based on the research results, several policy implications are proposed to enhance communication effectiveness and attract international tourists to the Mekong Delta. First, it is necessary to effectively utilize social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This can be achieved through the production of engaging content, including videos, high-quality images, and real stories from travelers. At the same time, encouraging online reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor and Google Reviews also plays an important role. Furthermore, if combined with a rapid response system to handle negative reviews, these platforms will help build stronger trust among tourists. In addition, referral programs and group incentives for friends and families are also an effective way to spread information

through personal networks.

Next, the development of the "Mekong Delta Metaverse" with the support of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology is a highly promising strategy. This project not only allows tourists to preview prominent destinations such as Cai Rang Floating Market, Tra Su Cajuput Forest, or traditional craft villages, but also brings a realistic and vivid experience. In addition, artificial intelligence (AI) can provide virtual assistants to personalize itineraries, while blockchain ensures transparency and security for tourism transactions. Moreover, virtual social platforms combined with gamification elements will provide an attractive interactive experience, encouraging tourists to participate in activities such as fruit picking, making traditional cakes, or exploring historical sites.

For effective implementation, close cooperation between technology developers and tourism organizations is needed to build a solid digital infrastructure. At the same time, training programs to raise awareness and skills in technology use for staff and tourists are essential. These solutions not only help optimize the tourism experience but also contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism industry in the digital age.

The current study is limited by the use of convenience sampling, which only accessed a portion of international tourists and did not fully consider all pull factors and cultural barriers. Future research should expand to compare tourists from different markets and domestic tourists, and at the same time integrate additional travel motivations and cultural barriers into the model to provide a more comprehensive picture of tourist behavior in the Mekong Delta.

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