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An analysis of the push and pull motives for choosing Mauritius as “the” wedding destination

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Abstract

Wedding Tourism, as an authentic and looming part of the tourism industry, are sensations that have taken off universally in recent years and which is becoming prevalent, especially for small islands that highly depend on the tourism sector as a lucrative economic activity. Tourism motivations are important factors in understanding tourist behaviour in relation to destination's choice, especially for the wedding market. Extensive research work on tourism motivation factors has been documented in the tourism literature. However, it was found that very little research has been conducted regarding the travel behaviour of wedding tourism for island destinations. The purpose of the study was to delineate the various travel motivations of wedding tourism to Mauritius. A mixed method approach was used comprising questionnaires, that were distributed to tourist who visited Mauritius to tie the knot and interviews were conducted with different hotels in relation to assess their marketing strategies for the promotion of wedding tourism. The findings revealed that wedding tourists are primarily attracted by the destination's attributes such as the famous “sea, sun and sand” which forms part of the characteristics of small tropical islands, followed by other pull attributes. At the same time, push factors like destination marketing and promotion also encouraged tourists to marry in Mauritius. Thus, in order to encourage wedding tourism, increasing marketing efforts can prove to be a powerful tool. The study also confirms that destination managers should better understand travel motivations of tourists before developing and marketing product and services.

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1. Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as Mauritius have universally been highly dependent on tourism activities for economic development (Sharpley, 2003). Known and promoted using the Sun, Sand and Sea, (3 S) attributes, the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions/ Events (MICE) industry (Lau & Wong, 2010) have also been used by SIDS for economic development. Falling under the Events umbrella, Wedding Tourism, referred to as getting married overseas (Poon, 2009; Breg, 2013) is a new form of emerging tourism activity which is an indispensable product alternative for many small destinations and gaining popularity in Mauritius. According to the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), Mauritius has now become a new platform for holding wedding events but with much room for improvement (MTPA, 2012).

Wedding event is a means for Mauritius to keep abreast of fierce competition that prevails in the Indian Ocean region, as it has recently been surpassed, in terms of tourist arrivals, by other 3S destinations such as the Seychelles, Maldives and even Sri Lanka (AXYS Report, 2014). Hence, for Mauritius to regain in its competitive advantage and keep on relying on the tourism sector as a source of revenue, it must look at product diversification, hence moving towards responding to the changing trends of customers for more luxurious tailor made products (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2013), such as weddings.

Wedding Tourism is becoming a prevalent part of the tourism industry with “away wedding” growing rapidly (Travel Trends Today, 2013; Travel Daily UK, 2014). The best weddings are now about exoticism, an emerging phenomenon of customers changing trends (Breg, 2013; Smart Travel Asia, 2013).

This new trend of Wedding Tourism offers new opportunities for destinations such as Mauritius. What wedding tourist want apart from an idyllic wedding location (Carey, 2008; Cameron & Roberts, 2010), is a destination that can handle all of their wedding arrangements (Richards, Ellis & Schuurman, 2007) hence offering a personalized wedding (Travel Weekly, 2012).

What makes Mauritius an idyllic wedding location is undoubtedly the quality images of coastal resorts, safety and attractions. It is generally recognized that push and pull motivations (Crompton, 1979) are primarily utilized in the study of tourist behavior. Thus, it is important for Mauritius to recognize that both push and pull factors can help in meeting the desired needs of travelers from different markets and at the same time predict the future travel patterns in traveler’s choice of Mauritius as “the” wedding destination.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Wedding tourism

Weddings are special events that mark an important moment in people’s lives (Dwyer et. al, 2005) which gathers family members to celebrate this special occasion of the “to be married” couple. Traditional weddings are expensive in terms of costs (Schumann & Amando, 2010) driving people away from expensive weddings. Overseas wedding offer an alternative to expensive traditional weddings and is becoming popular for those not willing to spend large sums of money for their wedding day. The tendency for traditional weddings is to largely spend on the reception with added expenses for the honeymoon. Overseas wedding, is a two in one concept, where the couple spends in such a way that they end up getting the wedding and the honeymoon at almost the same price as the price of a honeymoon only.

Hence wedding travel is now considered as being an important part of the tourism industry due to socio-economic changes of the modern society with Bali, Seychelles, Maldives, Phuket, Mauritius and others as the most suggested exotic wedding destinations (Moir, Mylonopoulos & Parthenis, 2011). Exotic away wedding and the packages developed for such products, are now regarded as the most fashionable way of making the wedding experience a wondrous one.

Weddings require all types of services, but mainly from the tourism and hospitality sector. To make this special moment unique, every wedding should be different with specialized service, guests, timings, and locations (Shone &

Parry, 2004). Holiday firms use tangible cues so that they ease the uncertainty of clients by providing prospective wedding couple with information, assurance and proof of the services they offer; for example, brochures and website of wedding venues ([Kotler et al., 2006](#)).

2.2. *Tourist Travel Motivators*

Travel Motivations, are those intrinsic and extrinsic factors that create a desire in an individual to travel and choose a particular exotic destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Swanson & Horridge, 2006; Correia, Oom do Valle & Moço, 2007). People travel for the reason that they are pushed by psychological and pulled by external forces of the destination attributes ([Dann, 1977](#); [Crompton, 1979](#); [March & Woodside, 2005](#)). Travel motivational factors are multidimensional since tourists do not only seek to satisfy only one need but several distinct needs and wants simultaneously ([Mohammad & Som, 2010](#); [Mills & Morrison, 1992](#); [Pike, 2008](#)). Tangible factors such as marketing campaigns through brochures and tour operators also trigger the desire to travel (Pearce, 1982; Woodside & Lysonski, 1990). Hence personal motives or so-called push motives and the characteristics of the destination also referred to as the pull motives determine an individual choice of destination.

2.2.1 *Push Factors*

Push factors are referred to as the socio-psychological needs that prompt a person to travel to a particular destination ([Crompton, 1979](#); [March and Woodside, 2005](#)). Most of the push factors are those intrinsic and intangible elements that push people to travel. These socio-psychological motives would be linked to the desire to escape, rest and relaxations, adventure, prestige and social interaction which also joins Maslow's (1943) pyramid of needs where an individual has five elements of behaviors, which comprise namely the basic needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem and self-actualization (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). Indeed Mauritius is seen as one of the safest destinations to travel to due to its political and economic stability (MTPA, 2014). Other intrinsic needs that are satisfied by the fact of travelling are that of anomie and ego-enhancement ([Dann, 1977](#), [Fodness, 1994](#)). Novelty too plays a great part in travel decision as people are attracted to what is new and different and seek into travelling to new places or doing things differently as part of their desire to satisfy their socio-psychological needs (Yuann and McDonald, 1990). An element that push people to travel and that is very relevant to wedding tourism is the need to show and demonstrate Belongingness/love ([Awaritefe, 2004](#)). To demonstrate this sign of affection in the case of wedding couples, they would mostly choose destinations where they would feel safe and catered for, a destination where even they would find similarities in their own culture (Burton, 1995). Thus, push factors are factors that can make one want to travel in order to satisfy one's needs.

2.2.2 *Pull Factors*

Pull factors are known as extrinsic motivations that have emerged as a result of the attractiveness of the destination arising from mass publicity or promotion or any other means thereby giving an image to that destination (Kassean and Gassita, 2013). In the case of wedding tourism, the exoticism of the destination itself plays a major role as pull factor (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). This include both tangible and intangible elements like beaches, rivers, landscape, biodiversity, the 3'S and others (Philips & House, 2009; Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Seebaluck, Naidoo and Munhurrin, 2013). Combined with the push factors, pull factors such as destination location and its attributes will influence traveller's choice.

Distance decay and destination cost of living play a role in terms of relative cost of travel and the destination decision-making process of the traveller ([Weaver and Opperman, 2000](#); [Lee, Guillet, Law, and Leung, 2012](#)).

Wedding events are highly dependent on facilities provision ([Sirakaya et al., 1996](#)) and are man- made pull factors that will be determinant in the choice of Mauritius as "the" place to get married. These facilities range from wedding location, facilities/amenities, cost satisfaction, quality services and good accommodation ([Awaritefe, 2004](#)) and should comprise of all the necessary services and amenities required so as to satisfy the customers travel and wedding experience, leading to a competitive edge for the destination.

Consumers' are further pulled by factors such as destination marketing, branding and promotion which are powerful tools to competitive positioning as well as responding to consumer's needs and behaviors' (Baker & Cameron, 2008). As travelers have become more travel savvy, destination marketers need to not only look at the

extrinsic side of the destination but also understand the intrinsic factors that would lead tourist to travel to that destination (Youell, 1998).

Promoting wedding tourism is essential in increasing the demand for this type of tourism. It communicates to potential visitors about wedding tourism product and services offered by a destination along with its most attractive and innovative features (International Labour Office, 2012). The destination brand, a name, term, symbol, logo, word mark or other combination that both identifies and differentiates the destination (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998) can also be used in influencing travel demand. It also constitutes the image of combined services, experiences and goods which are available to tourists (Buhalis, 2000) and greatly influences a buyer's decision as destination branding aims at satisfying quite a few of the intrinsic and extrinsic needs.

Therefore, developing a marketing campaign that would meet all the interest of the different stakeholders involved in the process will easily help travelers to decide on the choice of vacation and influence their buying decisions.

While, push factors are identified as being inner forces or intrinsic desires that pushes one to travel, pull factors, on the other hand, are mostly about external attributes or other product alternatives that pull the individuals to certain destination.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed method approach for the collection of data. The survey involved hotels, tour operators and tourists residing in hotels respectively.

A purposive sample of 200 tourists was selected for this study out of which 166 questionnaires were retained. The questionnaires, available both in French and English, were distributed to tourists of different nationalities principally targeting tourists that were in Mauritius for the purpose of getting married and those that had already got married in Mauritius or elsewhere and were on honeymoon. The questionnaires consisted of 17 questions comprising of multiple-choice, dichotomous, open-ended and Likert scale questions set to identify in the first part of the questionnaire considers the demographics of the tourist, the second part addresses the characteristics of wedding and the third part the underlying dimensions of the push and pull travel motivation factors that attract tourists to come to Mauritius to tie the knot.

Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the marketing department and events department of 10 different hotels visited as well as people for the 3 biggest tour operating agencies of the island that dealt in creating and selling wedding packages. The unstructured interview was carried out through onsite visits at different hotels and tour operating agencies. The interviewee mainly explained the different procedures of how wedding are organized.

4. Findings and Discussion

Based on the aim of this research and the review of the literature on the various pull and push factors that influence travel decision, the following sections discusses the findings of the study as to what is prevailing in identifying Mauritius as “the” wedding destination.

Table 1, Mauritius Wedding Tourist Generating continents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Europe	42	25.3	25.3	25.3
	India	52	31.3	31.3	56.6
	Middle East	16	9.6	9.6	66.3
	Asia	45	27.1	27.1	93.4
	Others	11	6.6	6.6	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

4.1 Profile of the respondents

The demographics of the participants enables a better understanding of the type of tourists that are attracted or would have been attracted to Mauritius as a wedding destination. As seen in table 1 above, most of the respondents 31.3%, are from the Indian continent followed by Asia 27. 1% and in third position, Mauritius' biggest holiday

generating region, Europe, which here only represents 25.3% of the respondents. When it comes to distance, it is not surprising to find India and Asia in poll position as they are only around a maximum of 9 hours flight from Mauritius compared to Europe with a minimum of 11 hours flight. What comes out from this data is that contrary to the literature (Weaver & Opperman, 2000), here it is seen that regardless of the cost of living in the destination country and the related purchasing power that the tourist can have there, people especially from India who have less spending power in Mauritius are nevertheless drawn to Mauritius as “the” destination to hold their wedding. This has been well explained through the qualitative data gathered whereby it was found that the MTPA has been very aggressive on the Indian and Chinese markets through different road shows and fairs. Mauritius had to find other potential tourist generating countries to keep up the tourist arrival numbers since that of Europe has been in constant decline since the financial crisis of 2009, but is still favored among European travellers as their favorite wedding destination. Apart from aggressive marketing and promotion in India and Asia, Mauritius bears cultural links (Pearce & Morrison, 1998) with the old continents due to three facts, namely that Mauritius population largely consists of people from Indian origin, French being the mother tongue and lastly the residues of its colonization by the French and the English.

Table 2, Purpose of Visit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Wedding	26	15.7	15.7	15.7
	Honeymoon	140	84.3	84.3	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Honeymoon tourism is bearing up and continues to be a high-yield market for many tourism destinations especially for Mauritius. As seen in table 2 the majority of respondent (84.3%) came to Mauritius for honeymoon purpose. While there is fuelling demand for Mauritius as honeymoon destination, newlywed’s couples biggest demand still is for beach-based holiday destination, despite the distance travelled (Lee, Guillet, Law & Leung, 2012), to celebrate the wedding life amounting to 15.7% of the respondents that came to Mauritius for the purpose of getting married (Breg, 2013). The figures show that Mauritius is by far preferred by honeymooners, leaving room for improvement in terms of choosing Mauritius as “the” wedding destination.

4.3 Wedding Travel motivation

The majority of tourists (34.6%) chose Mauritius as the wedding as it is an exotic destination (Correia, Oom do Valle & Moço, 2007) which brings everlasting memories to the Wedding Experience (Table 3). In second position there is an equal percentage between special wedding offers/packages and affordability of the wedding venue (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). 15.4% tourist’s decision behind getting married is based on these two factors. Most respondent regards Mauritius as an affordable Wedding venue, thereby facilitating their decision to tie the knot in sun and sand style. 11.5% finds that weddings in Mauritius are well coordinated and that tailor-made wedding matches with what the guest expects from wedding coordinators (Sirakaya et al., 1996).

Table 3, Factors behind travel decision to tie the knot in Mauritius

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ease of Paper Work from Civil Status Office	3	1.8	11.5	11.5
	Special Wedding Offers/Packages	4	2.4	15.4	26.9
	Good Wedding Coordination	3	1.8	11.5	38.5
	Personalized and tailor-made Wedding	3	1.8	11.5	50.0
	Affordability of Wedding Venues	4	2.4	15.4	65.4
	Exoticism, Tropical Heat and Everlasting memories	9	5.4	34.6	100.0
	Total	26	15.7	100.0	
Missing	System	140	84.3		

Total 166 100.0

4.4 Push Factors

Data gathered from the open ended questions as to why respondents chose Mauritius as the wedding venue to say “I do” is definitely revealed by this study as being the 3’ S factor, namely Sea Sun and Sand. Sunshine, splendid beaches, wonderful services and a combination of all these elements evidently attract tourists to tying the knot. The “tropical setting together with the exotic variants” which undoubtedly are impossible in the tourist’s host country is a major determinant that encourages wedding tourism in Mauritius as seen in table 4 below. Nevertheless, Sea, Sand and Sun still remains the very important components of the wedding setting to promote the stereotypical images of Mauritius (Cameron & Roberts, 2010).

Table 4. The Push Factors of Choosing Mauritius as the Wedding Venue

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Geographical location of the wedding destination.	166	4.3133	.78513
Appeal of the Wedding Location- (exotic and tropical)	166	4.5904	.57284
Valid N (listwise)	166		

Peculiar features of the destination that also forms part of the destination attributes also accord to the overall satisfaction of the wedding trip experience (Correia, Kozak & Ferradeira, 2013) as seen in table 4 where appeal of the location generated a mean score of 4.5904. The second major pull factor is the geographical location of Mauritius which scored a mean value of 4.3133. Mauritius’ topography can also be influential to locating facilities for wedding purposes (Lew & McKercker, 2006).

4.5 Pull Factors

The major pull factors that were identified for this particular study were based on the following attributes; the reasonable cost associated with the wedding venue, the availability of services that Mauritius can offer as wedding destination, ease of formalities for wedding and the marketing, promotion and brand of Mauritius as a wedding destination.

Table 5. Pull Factors for Choosing Mauritius as the Wedding Venue

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The reasonable cost associated with the wedding venue.	166	4.2470	.89738
Availability of services such as catering services, equipment for decorations, professional photography of wedding and others.	166	4.2952	.69864
Ease of wedding formalities from Civil Status Officers during wedding.	166	4.1807	.71596
Valid N (listwise)	166		

It is clear that Mauritius as a wedding destination is an affordable destination for most travelers who wish to tie the knot. This is congruent to the study of Weaver & Oppermann (2006) who found that travelers are mostly attracted to countries whereby their purchasing power is high through low cost of goods and services. Nevertheless Mauritius as wedding destination also offers wide range of services that particularly attracts tourists to satisfying their wedding or honeymoon experience.

Hence it can be deduced that, marketers have been successful in selling the images of Mauritius as “a romantic place” and has helped in promoting Mauritius as the wedding venue. Amalgam of elements like “exoticism,” “tropical décor,” adds to the exotic appeal of the wedding set up thereby making the wedding setting purely unique.

The study reveals that most of the respondents found out about Mauritius and choose the island as their wedding destination through the internet, 39.8% as shown in table 6 below. As a matter of fact, the world-wide web and the internet is nowadays the first source of information making tourists more knowledgeable about destinations thus saving both time and money. Destination marketing through the use of internet may thus help in the distribution of

products to high potential markets (Baker & Cameron 2008). The second best source of information to communicate about Mauritius is Publicity in Newspapers/Magazines which is represented by a frequency of 25.3%. The remaining respondent that is 22.3% came to know about Mauritius from Tour Operators and Travel Agencies. This study reveals how the World Wide Web is increasingly being used by travellers to obtain information about a destination, hence moving away from the traditional tour operator and travel agency. However this study does not look into how much booking was done directly on line or via the tour operators.

Table 6, Sources of information on Wedding Packages to Mauritius

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Internet	66	39.8	39.8	39.8
Publicity in Newspapers/ Magazines	42	25.3	25.3	65.1
Valid Friends/Word of Mouth	21	12.7	12.7	77.7
Travel Agencies/ Tour Operators	37	22.3	22.3	100.0
Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Destination marketing is important for tourists with a mean score of 4.2952, followed by promotional factors with a mean score of 4.2892 as seen in table 7 below. The first attribute best support the work of Youell (1998). Destination marketing has been a successful tool in competitive positioning and marketing of Mauritius as “the” wedding destination. Destination branding is represented by a mean score of 4.1325 which is also among the major push factors influencing tourists to get married in Mauritius as Mauritius brand name is “Mauritius, it’s a pleasure” (Buhalis, 2000). The lowest mean (3.9337) obtained was the role of tour operators and travel agents who are not the main factors motivating tourists. Hence in the case of Mauritius, as it has been revealed above information about Mauritius available on the internet is becoming a factor that is playing a significant role on buyer decision and could in the future contradict the importance given to tour operators as playing a major role in influencing travel demand.

Table 7, Marketing and promoting Mauritius as the Wedding Venue

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Destination Marketing has made you more knowledgeable about detailed products and services offered by the Mauritius as wedding destination and influenced your choice to tie the knot.	166	4.2952	.61564
The role of the Tour Operators or Travel Agents has facilitated your travel decision for your choice of wedding venue.	166	3.9337	.83945
Mauritius ‘the leading wedding and honeymoon destination in the Indian Ocean’ as destination brand has/will highly pull you towards tying the knot in the island.	166	4.1325	.74298
Promotional Factors like special wedding offers and packages has matched with your wedding budget preferences in order to make your wedding in Mauritius possible.	166	4.2892	.70548
Valid N (listwise)	166		

The majority of respondents suggest that for Mauritius to promote itself as a Wedding Destination, marketers should introduce more wedding packages and good promotional offers on weddings (International Labor Office, 2012). Heavy advertising of Mauritius as the wedding venue will therefore encourage more markets to come and tie the knot beneath the tropical sky. As per the data gathered from the questionnaires, most statement suggests that Mauritius should develop more in terms of “wedding packages,” “promotions,” and heavy “advertising”. Thus promotional offers along with the destination image can certainly influence tourist purchasing behavior (Pearce, 1982; Woodside & Lysonski, 1990).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been noted that the first goal of the study was to analyze the push and pull factors that encourages wedding tourism in Mauritius. Using a mixed method approach to research, the results revealed that exotic island characteristics have been the major motivations to come to tie the knot in Mauritius. Looking into the

factors identified as pull attributes, the study concurs with other studies that have demonstrated that destination marketing and promotional factors are among the important motives which trigger the need to travel. Thus evidence is consistent with Baker & Cameron (2008) argument that destination marketing can be a powerful tool to competitive positioning as well as responding consumer needs and behaviours. The study demonstrates that Mauritius has a variety of pull motives of which could potentially attract more wedding segment to the destination. Wedding travel choice are based on push and pull factors. Thus destination attributes contribute to the perceive image of the destination. Pull attributes like appeal of the wedding location together with “facilities and services” and “affordable cost”, are the core motivations to getting married in Mauritius.

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