



Push and Pull Motivational Influencing Tourist Engagement in Tea Tourism with Special reference to Nuwara Eliya District

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of push and pull motivational factors on tourist engagement in tea tourism, specifically in the Nuwara Eliya district in Sri Lanka. A quantitative approach and convenience sampling method are employed to collect data from 384 tourists who visited tea tourism destinations in the district. A conceptual framework is used to test 12 hypotheses, and the data is analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with Smart PLS. The findings indicate that both push and pull factors positively affect tourist engagement, destination image, and familiarity, with destination image and familiarity positively associated with tourist engagement. The study also explores the mediating effects of destination image and familiarity on the relationship between push/pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism. The results suggest that destination image mediates the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement, while familiarity mediates the relationship between push factors and tourist engagement. Additionally, there are significant direct and indirect paths between push and pull factors and tourist engagement, with familiarity partially mediating the relationship between push factors and tourist engagement and destination image mediating the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement. These findings have practical implications for developing tea tourism in the Nuwara Eliya district and other similar destinations.

Keywords: Push and pull factors, tourist engagement, tea tourism, destination image, Familiarity

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has long been recognised as one of the best tourist destinations in the world. Natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage continue to enchant visitors to this island nation. The country's tourism industry has seen both good times and bad. The shifting political, social, and economic climate posed significant challenges for the tourism industry. A major decline in tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka has been observed since 2019 after the devastating effects of the Easter terrorist attack and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic (SLTDA, 2022). During 2020- 2021, the Sri Lankan tourism industry was further impacted by the Russian- Ukraine war and the economic crisis. This created a sudden shift in the nation's political regime, negatively impacting the tourism industry (SLTDA, 2022). Despite its potential as a market, the study of tea tourism has received comparatively little scholarly attention despite its rapid global expansion. In addition, there is a severe lack of published research on tea tourism, and comparatively little is known about the demographics of tea tourists. (Zhou et al., 2016). When we focus our attention on Sri Lanka, previous studies of Bandara (2003); Jolliffe and Aslam (2009); Fernando, et al (2016); Koththagoda and Dissanayake (2017); Fernando, et al (2017); Suhindan, et al. (2019) have highlighted the potential Sri Lanka has as a Tea Tourism destination. Sri Lanka has seven agro-climatic zones: Nuwara Eliya, Uva, Uda Pussellawa, Dimbula, Kandy, Sabaragamuwa, and Ruhuna, which is specialised in the cultivation and production of tea (Ceylon Tea Land, 2022). Out of those seven regions, the Nuwara Eliya region has promising features to be developed as a Tea tourist destination (Gunasekara & Momsen, 2004; Fernando, 2014; Fernando & Ranasinghe, 2015; Ariyawardana, 2021). However, due to the lack of literature currently available, researchers must examine Sri Lanka's potential as a tea tourism destination (Fernando & Kumari, 2016). However, due to the lack of literature currently available, researchers must examine Sri Lanka's potential as a tea tourism destination (Fernando &

Kumari, 2016).

Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions. The First one is "What is the relationship between Push and Pull motivation factors and Tourist Engagement in Tea Tourism?", the second one is "What is the relationship between Push and Pull motivation factors and Tourist Engagement in Tea Tourism with the mediating effect of familiarity?" and third one is "What is the relationship between Push and Pull motivation factors and Tourist Engagement in Tea Tourism with the mediating effect of destination image?".

Research studies on tea tourism can provide a theoretical foundation for developing tea tourism in Sri Lanka, which includes identifying key drivers and barriers to growth, assessing market demand, and analysing consumer behavior. This information can inform the development of policies and strategies for the growth of tea tourism, such as improving infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and developing new tourist products and experiences. In addition, this research study on tea tourism can also contribute to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between tea and tourism, including how tea can complement other forms of tourism, such as cultural and scenic tourism. This can help to provide a more holistic understanding of the tea tourism industry in Sri Lanka and the potential for interconnections between different forms of tourism. Furthermore, this research study can also pave the way to developing new theoretical frameworks for studying tourism, including examining the role of cultural heritage and traditional industries in tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tea Tourism in Sri Lanka

The tea tourism industry is becoming increasingly recognised as an important sector in terms of its trade value and integrated contributions to the

tourism industry's sustainable development. Currently, most tea-growing nations practice tea tourism as a diversified concept in addition to the principal sources of income from bulk tea and value-added tea. (Koththagoda & Dissanayake, 2017; Liyanage, 2024).

Since its introduction in the late nineteenth century, following the collapse of the coffee crop due to a fungus, tea has played a pivotal role in Sri Lanka's history and economy (Martin, 2007; Liyanage, 2024). The initial credit for introducing tea to Sri Lanka goes to James Taylor, but Thomas Lipton is responsible for the success of Ceylon Tea during the colonial era (Orana, 2018; Waugh, 1950). Since then, tea has become an indispensable aspect of Sri Lankan culture, embodying the country's welcoming spirit, as guests are promptly offered a cup upon arrival. It is a staple beverage served virtually every festival and social gathering, earning Sri Lanka the nickname "Isle of Tea" globally (Heiss & Heiss, 2007; Mondal & Samaddar, 2021).

Today, the plantation sector plays an important role in Sri Lanka's economy, accounting for nearly 30% of the country's foreign exchange. Approximately 230,000 hectares of land area is used for plantation purposes, of which about 190,000 hectares are used for cultivation. As a percentage, 45% of the above-mentioned hectares are used for tea production (The Plantation Human Development Trust, 2017). In 2019, Sri Lanka was ranked fourth globally for tea production, amounting to 300 thousand tons (The Science Agriculture, 2019). The climate and geographical conditions within the country have proven ideal for this crop to be grown and commercially cultivated even from the late 19th century (Fernando et al., 2017). Nuwara Eliya, located in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, is a prime destination for tea tourism due to its rich tea plantations, which produce 1.83 Mn/Kg of high-quality tea, accounting for 2.8% of Sri Lanka's total tea production and generating an income of Rs. 836 million for the area (Urban Development Authority, 2022).

Despite the world-renowned name that Sri Lanka has for its tea, the potential it has as a tourism product has not yet been explored (Galagoda et al., 2006). "Ceylon Tea" and "Tourism" go hand in hand since Sri Lanka's tea-growing regions are unquestionably the most picturesque and alluring travel destinations (Fernando et al., 2017; Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024). Over time, tea plantations have become increasingly important in Sri Lanka's tourism industry, even though the country has a variety of other attractions such as beaches, wildlife, cultural and archaeological sites, and other natural and artificial attractions. These tea plantations have helped to boost tourism activities and have become a staple feature of the country's tourism products (Bandara, 2003; Tiwari et al., 2022). These destinations not only have natural beauty but also have socio-demographic features blended with the culture of tea, which can bestow benefits to the tourism industry in Sri Lanka because tea is one of the country's international symbolic emblems (Weerasingha, 2015; Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024). Similar tactics in tea tourism (e.g., fair wages and skill development for plantation workers) may increase visitor engagement through culturally genuine and welcoming interactions. In agro-tourism, workforce satisfaction, mediated by income stability and experiential expertise, has been demonstrated to improve service quality and visitor experiences (Weerasinghe et al., 2023).

According to Cochrane (2008), nature walks through tea gardens, lovely accommodations in tea factories and planter bungalows, tea tasting and retail in cafés with views of tea plantations, and factory tours are all available in Sri Lanka.

Tea tourism has also been considered a potentially high-end and unique kind of tourism, as well as a community-based and pro-poor form. Ecotourism, historical tourism, wellness tourism, rural tourism, and agricultural tourism are also intertwined with it (Jayasooriya, 2017) and enhancing tour guides' work

engagement has been shown to foster pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., promoting sustainable practices) through environmental sensitivity training programs, such as those studied in Sri Lankan wildlife tourism contexts. This may extend to tea tourism settings to improve employee stewardship and tourist engagement with eco-friendly tea plantation experiences (Prabuddha et al., 2023). Furthermore, for these reasons, the tourism industry needs to give the necessary backing to strengthen further the tea tourism sector (Fernando et al., 2017). According to Koththagoda & Dissanayake (2017) and Herath & Munasighe (2014), the Sri Lankan tea tourism industry is still at an early stage despite having the needed natural and historical resources to implement a tea tourism model for both niche markets and differentiated market segments.

Even though there is the potential to promote tea tourism, research on tea-related tourism is somewhat limited, and only a little knowledge and information is there regarding the characteristics of tea tourists (Cheng et al., 2010; Akyürek & Özdemir, 2022). Not only that, but research and studies that investigate the impact of tea-related tourism are also limited, and it is an area that needs the attention of researchers (Fernando et al., 2017; Herath & Munasighe, 2014). Without a proper understanding of the market segments or a marketing strategy, any promotional plan will be hindered by obstacles. Hence, this knowledge gap should be addressed before promoting tea tourism in Sri Lanka.

Tourist Travel Motivation

Understanding tourist travel motivations is critical in many aspects. It is crucial to define travel motives specifically in connection to the intended goal of the journey. Purpose and motive are distinct concepts. In contrast to the aim of the journey, motives—the psychological factors that underlie why people travel—are frequently overlooked. Throughout history, many researchers have worked on finding the answers to the following question: "Why do people

travel?"

Tourist travel motives are time-sensitive and volatile. These psychological facts tend to change from time to time and in an instant. The globalised, technologised world around us plays a significant role in changing the behaviors and attitudes of tourists (Yeap, Ooi, Ara, & Said, 2021). These mend tourists' intentions, likes, and dislikes according to various marketing goals. Pearce and Lee (2005) suggest that generally, tourists are interested in seeking out the experiences that help fulfill their varied motivations. Based on their research and studies, several scholars have described tourist motivation in various ways (Liu & Jongwiriyaaroenchai, 2024). As stated by Wu (2015), a vacation for leisure is taken when a person wants to alleviate stress, enjoy the natural environment, experience beautiful landscapes, and learn something new. Similarly, Dann (1981), through his study, identified visitor motives through classification. According to this classification, he states that two main tourist motives motivate them to travel. They are yearning to escape and seeking a sense of adventure and exploration they seek (Liu & Jongwiriyaaroenchai, 2024). Tourist motivation may be described as the biological and cultural variables that shape travel choices, actions, and experiences (Pearce et al., 1998). Factors behind motivation are psychological. These needs are the causes of a person's disequilibrium, which may be influenced by the travel experience (Crompton, 1979; Kim, et al., 2000; Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024). These motivation elements are internal variables that emerge, direct, and integrate a person's conduct. (Murray, 1964; Liu & Jongwiriyaaroenchai, 2024). Chang et al. (2014) argue that the motivation to travel should be considered a stimulus force that encourages visitors to tour or repeat tourist destinations. According to Mayo and Jarvis (1981), people travel because of physiological and psychological needs. Furthermore, Krippendorff (1987) found out that tourist motivations are self-oriented. For example, routine activities and some people's hectic lifestyles will eventually impact their physical, mental and social health.

In order to avoid being in these stressful situations, people will eventually formulate a need which can only be fulfilled through traveling. This results in the emergence of travel motivations (Dagustani et al, 2018; Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024).

Understanding the reasons or factors behind what motivates a tourist to travel has been a vast study area. The reason is, that human nature tends to change based on various sociological, political, and economical changes that happen around them (Anastasiu, 2009; Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024). Understanding what motivates tourists leads to the increased ability to raise the quantity of pleasure or the feeling of satisfaction of tourists, which in turn will be better to retain tourists and boost their return intention (Pratminingsih et al., 2014; Yeap, Ooi, Ara, & Said, 2021).

Not only that, in a rapidly changing world, these motivation factors have a higher tendency to change within a very short period (Atkinson, 2016; Liang, Xia, Wu, & Li, 2024). Throughout the studies, various researchers have found factors that are sometimes similar and some entirely different. According to Kozak (2002), 'Culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, and physical exposure are the four tourist motives. There are several reasons to travel and many different reasons to visit a specific destination. They can also be called "Travel Motivator Types" (TMT). As stated by McIntosh & Goeldner (1984), there are four types of motivators: physical motivators, cultural motivators, interpersonal motivators, and status and prestige motivators (Liang, Xia, Wu, & Li, 2024). Furthermore, many travelers are also motivated by the gastronomical aspects of a particular destination. That is because food and beverages are a form of communicating with the authenticity of a particular destination and also these destinations use local cuisines as a segment to promote their tourism products and services (López-Guzmán et al, 2018; Testa et al, 2019; Liang, Xia, Wu, & Li, 2024) as a beverage experiencing the

celebrations, festivals related to tea can be utilised as a tourist motivator (Herath & Munasighe, 2014; Yeap, Ooi, Ara, & Said, 2021), especially in the context of gastronomy tourists. It is a pleasure for many tourists to try the local cuisine and drinks while on vacation. Drinking the local libations while on vacation is a great way to immerse in the culture of a place, learn interesting facts about its history, and generally have a wonderful experience (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mill & Morrison, 2012; Khokhar & Magnusdottir, 2002; Morrison, 2012; Yeap, Ooi, Ara, & Said, 2021). This shows that experiencing and exploring something novel has motivated tourists to visit, here in the form of gastronomy, or simply stating the stimuli to go and consume a new cuisine or a beverage while experiencing the culture and unique traditions endemic to that particular destination. The decision-making process of a tourist when visiting a particular destination includes the notion of push and pull motives.

Push and Pull Motivation Factors

The theory is worth paying attention to when considering tourists' push and pull motives. The push-pull theory is a mutual theory that defines general tourist behavior, according to Crompton (1979). Based on Crompton's Push and Pull Motivation, the inherent characteristics in consumers are referred to as the push factors. These elements emerge from a person's personality and are learned through exposure to society and culture. It depends on a person's natural behavior, including mood and attitude, whereas family and friends influence learned behavior. These elements may "Push" a person to make choices that are in their best interests and Pull factors refer to cognitive characteristics of destination choices (e.g., attractions, culture, climate, cheap cost, proximity, etc.) (Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024). Mutinda & Mayaka (2012) have defined the concept of push and pull in the following manner: natural factors push people away from their homes, and some external forces draw them toward specific destinations/destinations. The majority of push factors are deep rooted

human desires (Awaritefe, 2004) and pull factors are the factors that mostly appeal to tourists' desires (Hsu, et al., 2009; Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024).

Both push and pull factors are important in the tourism industry, as they influence travellers' decision-making process and engagement (Kim et al., 2003; Faraz, Alam, & Zahid, 2024). In order to attract tourists, destinations need to be aware of both types of factors and work to develop strategies that appeal to them. This can include highlighting the unique attractions and experiences that a destination has to offer, as well as making it easy and affordable for people to travel there and engage in available activities (Lee, et al., 2018; Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024).

Gnanapala (2008), through his research, revealed the push and pull motivating elements for European and Japanese tourists. Push factors include the urge to escape, achievement and curiosity, social relationships, prestige and status, and rest (Faraz, Alam, & Zahid, 2024). The safety of the destination, ease of access, entertainment and nightlife, cost of airfare, local process, the reputation of the destination, quality of the attractions, quality of the facilities and hygiene, ability to deal with nature, quality of the climate, rest were revealed as pull factors (Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024). This study further states that these factors have a significant impact on tourist engagement as well. These findings were further supported by the study conducted by Pektas (2022).

In the field of tourism, the push and pull factors have been essential in identifying the travel desires and also in explaining the reasons behind the choice of the destination (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Wang, Lai, Li, & Wong, 2024). As mentioned earlier, these push and pull factors change occasionally. Choosing the appropriate push and pull factors that best describe the tourist in the present time is essential. Researchers strive to find the push-pull elements in tourism, although their identification methods vary (Said & Maryono, 2018; Faraz, Alam, & Zahid, 2024).

The literature above highlights the relationship between push and pull factors and tourist engagement. Based on that, H1 and H2 hypotheses have been created.

H₁: There is a relationship between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

H₂: There is a relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

Destination Image

The concept of destination image was first brought forth into the field of tourism by Hunt Gunn and Mayo in the early 1970s. These pioneering findings paved the way for one of the vastly researched topics in this field, thus making it a topic of high interest in tourism (Tse & Tung, 2022; Ng et al., 2022). The amount of information, sentiments, and general opinions that travelers have regarding a place can be summed up under the term "destination image" (Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Ng et al., 2022). The role played by the destination image is vital. This factor lays the essential groundwork for marketing purposes of a particular tourist destination since it showcases its positive and negative features (Liang, Xia, Wu, & Li, 2024).

According to Goet (2021) and Kanagaraj & Bindu (2013), factors such as the desire to escape, unwind, and rejuvenate positively affect how a destination is perceived (Ng et al., 2022). Similarly, Enright and Newton (2004) and Baloglu and McCleary (1999) found that a destination's natural and built environment, as well as its cultural and entertainment offerings, play a significant role in shaping its image (Zhang, Liang, Ma, Chen, & He, 2022). The image of the destination affects tourists' decisions and actions after making them. Their results show that behavioural intentions, such as intent to revisit and willingness to suggest the location, are significantly influenced by

destination image (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Zhang, Liang, Ma, Chen, & He, 2022). Jamaludin et al. (2012) studies on how specific features of destination image, visitor happiness, and visitor behavior intentions interact are scarce despite increased interest in this topic (Liang, Xia, Wu, & Li, 2024).

In other studies by Silva and Weerakoon (2017) and Antara and Prameswari (2018), it was found that push and pull factors work together to influence destination image (Zhang, Liang, Ma, Chen, & He, 2022; Banerjee & Tyagi, 2025). Specifically, the desire for relaxation and escape substantially impacts destination image when combined with appealing pull factors like cultural attractions and scenic beauty. The literature shows a relationship between push motivation factors and destination image and pull motivation factors and destination image. Based on that, H3, H5, H9, and H10 hypotheses have been developed.

H₃: There is a relationship between push factors and destination image.

H₅: There is a relationship between pull factors and destination image.

H₉: Destination image mediates the relationship between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

H₁₀: Destination image mediates the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism

Familiarity

Regarding the tourism industry, being familiar with the destination a tourist travels to is an important motivator. According to Sharifpour et al. (2014), awareness, knowledge, experience, and expertise are key factors determining a tourist's familiarity with a destination (Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024). These factors or concepts, including previous knowledge, have been used as

umbrella terms with 'Familiarity' (Lee et al., 2002; Sharifpour et al., 2014). Traditionally, familiarity was described as a unidimensional construct (Ghosh, 2024). However, recent studies by Baloglu (2001) and Prentice (2004) show that familiarity is a multi-dimensional concept. For example, Baloglu (2001) states that familiarity comprises previous experiences, the amount of information individuals have or their knowledge and how familiar they are. Prentice (2004) further described familiarity through seven dimensions based on available information. These dimensions include experiential, informational, self-rated, proximate, educational, self-assured and expected familiarity (Ghosh, 2024).

Empirical evidence suggests that push travel motivations can impact the degree of familiarity with a destination. For instance, Kozak and Rimmington (2016) and Artigas et al. (2015) demonstrated a positive association between push motivations and tourist familiarity. They highlighted the importance of the mediating role played by familiarity (Liu & Jongwiriyaajaroenchai, 2024). Their research revealed that travelers motivated by the need for relaxation and escape tended to be more familiar with a destination (Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024). The authors propose that individuals may select destinations that match their internal motivations and, as a result, become more familiar with those destinations over time.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Prayag and Ryan (2011) indicates that the connection between push and pull factors and familiarity is significant and varies depending on the tourists' nationality. The study found that familiarity played a vital role in the tourists' decision-making process, particularly for Western tourists, who considered it a way to reduce risk and improve their travel experience (Liu & Jongwiriyaajaroenchai, 2024). Additionally, push factors like relaxation, escape, and self-fulfillment motivated Western tourists, while Eastern tourists were more drawn to pull

factors like unique cultural experiences and scenic beauty. This suggests that tourists' intrinsic motivations and preferences play a significant role in their destination selection, which may increase familiarity with specific destinations over time. Similarly, Milman and Pizam's (1995) study reported a positive relationship between push travel motivations and familiarity among travelers. Specifically, the authors found that travelers motivated by a desire for novelty and change tended to be more familiar with a destination (Liu & Jongwiriya-jaroenchai, 2024). These individuals were likelier to visit lesser familiar destinations in pursuit of new and different experiences. Thus, the study suggests that push motivations can influence familiarity by motivating individuals to explore new and unfamiliar destinations that align with their desire for novelty and change.

The literature shows a relationship between push factors and familiarity and pull factors and familiarity. Furthermore, familiarity acts as a mediator. The H4, H6, H11, and H12 hypotheses have been developed based on that.

H₄: There is a relationship between push factors and familiarity

H₆: There is a relationship between pull factors and familiarity

H₁₁: Familiarity mediates the relationship between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

H₁₂: Familiarity mediates the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

Tourist Engagement

Tourist engagement has been an area of interest in many studies (Bolton, 2011; Brodie et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek et al., 2012), yet it still is an underexplored concept. Patterson et al. (2006) were among the first few

researchers to investigate the concept of engagement in marketing and tourism aspects (Cai & Jiang, 2024). Their study stated that customer/tourist engagement has four major components: absorption, dedication, vigor, and interaction (Kumar & Kumar, 2024). Tourist engagement refers to the level of involvement, interest, and connection a tourist has with a destination. This can include their time in the destination, their activities, and how much they interact with the local culture and community (Shafiee et al., 2020).

Tourist engagement can be influenced by various factors, including the tourist's personal preferences, the destination's offerings and accessibility, and the marketing and communication strategies used by the destination (Loureiro & Sarmento, 2019; Vivek et al., 2012). Engagement, as highlighted by Brodie et al., (2013); Hollebeek, (2011) and Patterson et al., (2006), is an effective tool that improves the customer's experience and results in the creation of long-term customer loyalty, especially in the field of tourism. However, further studies on engagement in the tourism sector are needed to understand how tourists behave, feel and experience when engaging in the tourism destination (Ram et al., 2016; Huang, 2017; Cai & Jiang, 2024).

Similarly, the study by Su et al. (2020) suggests that destination image positively relates to visitor engagement, visitor experience, and satisfaction towards a heritage destination (Kumar & Kumar, 2024). Specifically, tourists who positively perceive a heritage destination's image are more likely to engage with the destination and have a more satisfying visitor experience. The authors suggest that destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' expectations and perceptions of a destination, influencing their engagement and satisfaction (Kumar & Kumar, 2024). Furthermore, the study by Sun et al. (2013) revealed that familiarity is positively related to destination loyalty and intention to engage in tourism activities. Specifically, tourists who are more familiar with a destination are more likely to develop loyalty towards it and

have a higher intention to engage in various tourism activities (Cai & Jiang, 2024). The authors suggest that destination managers should emphasise increasing tourists' familiarity with the destination through various promotional activities and effective communication strategies to enhance their loyalty and engagement.

The literature shows a relationship between destination image, tourist engagement, and familiarity. Based on that, the H7 and H8 hypotheses have been developed.

H7: There is a relationship between destination image and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

H8: There is a relationship between familiarity and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

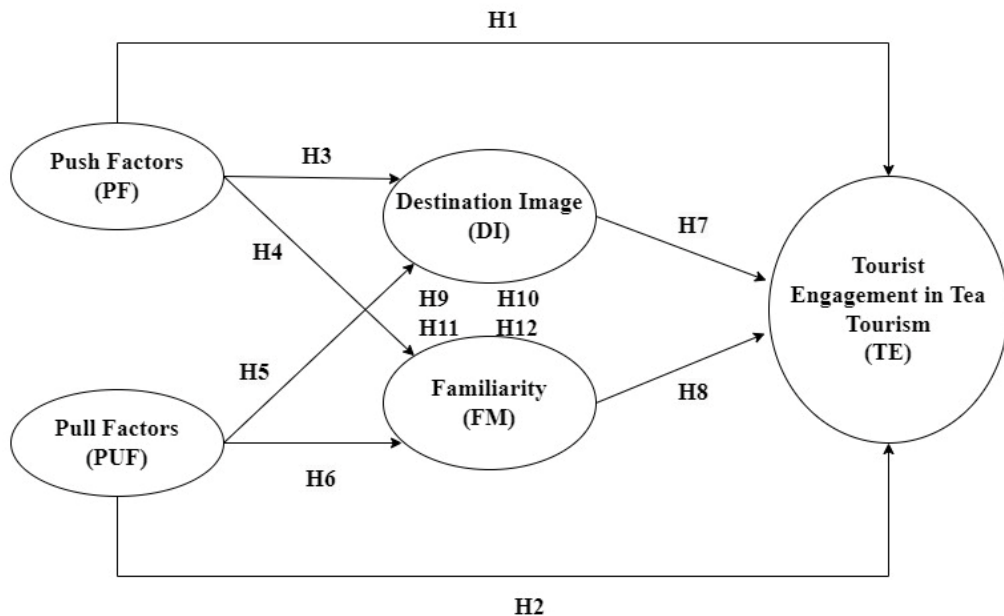


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors' own

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research methodology to investigate how push and pull motivational factors influence tourist engagement in tea tourism, with a special focus on the Nuwara Eliya district. A quantitative approach is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for collecting and analysing numerical data, enabling the evaluation of predefined hypotheses regarding the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). This method provides a structured framework for examining the correlations, ensuring objectivity and the ability to generalise findings within the scope of the study. A sample of 384 participants was selected using the Morgan table sampling technique (Uakarn, Chaokromthong, & Sintao, 2021). The convenience sampling method was applied, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in social science research when access to the entire population is challenging or when time and resources are limited (Golzar, Noor, & Tajik, 2022). The sample size was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table, ensuring sufficient data for statistical analysis at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, allowing for generalisable conclusions within the limits of the sampling method.

Convenience sampling was chosen based on the study's parameters. This technique involves selecting participants who are easily accessible, such as individuals in a specific geographic area (Bryman, 2016). It is beneficial in exploratory research or when studying populations that are difficult to reach, offering flexibility without compromising the research's exploratory nature (Singh, 2016). Despite its limitations in representing the entire population, this method was deemed suitable due to its practicality. The primary data for this study were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to foreign tourists via both physical and online platforms. The questionnaire was designed in English to accommodate the target audience, ensuring clarity and ease of understanding. Following Kothari's (1990) emphasis on the importance

of data collection, this method was selected to gather firsthand insights from the participants, ensuring that the data collected directly reflected the tourists' experiences and perceptions. The data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25, where descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated. These statistics provided an overview of the sample's characteristics and highlighted the central tendencies of the variables under study (George & Mallery, 2018). Subsequently, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was performed using SmartPLS 4 software. This advanced statistical technique allowed for testing complex relationships between the variables and assessing the structural model's validity and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic factors of respondents

The population consisted of 49.02% male and 50.98% female respondents, indicating that both genders are equally attracted to Tea Tourism. The majority of respondents were from Europe (44.6%) and the Asia Pacific region (35.78%), with a more miniature representation from the Middle East (10.8%), the Americas (7.8%), and Africa (1%). The study also found that Tea Tourism is more prevalent among younger tourists, with 71.1% of respondents aged 21-30. Additionally, Tea Tourism may be more attractive to tourists with higher levels of education, with 43.6% of respondents having a graduate-level education. Employed individuals are more likely to participate in tea tourism, which is popular among middle- to high-income tourists. Single individuals (65.7%) were the majority of respondents, indicating that Tea Tourism may be more prevalent among those with more flexibility to explore new experiences and travel to different destinations.

Descriptive Analysis for Variables

According to the pre-established criteria ($1 \leq X < 2.5$ for Almost Not Accepted, $1 \leq X < 3.5$ for Average, and $3.5 \leq X \leq 5$ for Almost Accepted), descriptive analyses showed that the average scores for all variables were within the "Almost Accepted" range (Allen & Seaman, 2007). There was only little participant response variability, as shown by standard deviations falling within acceptable bounds. Furthermore, the values for kurtosis and skewness were within the permissible range (± 2), indicating that the data distributions mainly were bell-shaped and symmetrical. These results provide an initial data summary, showing the participant answers' distribution and central tendency within the predetermined parameters (George & Mallery, 1999).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Table 1: Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Destination			
Image	0.816	0.872	0.577
Familiarity	0.716	0.813	0.466
Pull Factors	0.754	0.836	0.507
Push Factors	0.806	0.861	0.509
Tourist			
Engagement	0.846	0.884	0.521

Source: Authors' own

Table 1 demonstrates that for every construct, Cronbach's alpha values were higher than 0.7, suggesting strong internal consistency and reliability of the measuring items. The internal consistency and coherence of each construct were further confirmed by composite reliability (CR) values higher than 0.7. Additionally, all constructs had average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.5, indicating that a significant variation in the observed items could be attributed to the intended latent structures. These results prove that the study's measures sufficiently captured the desired constructs, increasing trust in the following analyses (Hamid et al., 2017; Siswaningsih et al., 2017).

Discriminant Validity

The findings of discriminant validity tests verified that the measures for Destination Image, Familiarity, Pull Factors, Push Factors and Tourist Engagement were unique and did not assess the same item. This demonstrates that the study's constructs are independent (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022).

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Destination Image	Familiarity	Pull Factors	Push Factors	Tourist Engagement
Destination Image					
Familiarity	0.564				
Pull Factors	0.826	0.64			
Push Factors	0.718	0.706	0.875		
Tourist Engagement	0.723	0.716	0.862	0.79	

Source: Authors' own

Table 2 shows that every HTMT value was less than 0.9, meaning that the variation common to any two constructs was much less than the variance unique to each construct. This demonstrates that the conceptions measure different underlying phenomena and are sufficiently separate (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Destination Image	Familiarity	Pull Factors	Push Factors	Tourist Engagement
Destination Image	0.76				
Familiarity	0.453	0.682			
Pull Factors	0.654	0.493	0.712		
Push Factors	0.587	0.548	0.684	0.713	
Tourist Engagement	0.604	0.573	0.687	0.655	0.722

Source: Authors' own

Table 3 shows the Fornell-Larcker criteria, where each construct's square root of AVE is more significant than its correlation with any other construct. This provides further evidence for the constructs' uniqueness since, according to Hamid et al. (2017), the bulk of the variation collected by each measure represents its idea rather than overlapping with others.

Hypothesis testing

Tests for multicollinearity and normality were conducted to ensure the robustness of the results. Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all values falling below the threshold of 5, indicating no significant multicollinearity among the independent variables. Tolerance values were also above 0.2, confirming the absence of multicollinearity issues.

Normality was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and the Shapiro-Wilk tests, with p-values greater than 0.05, suggesting the data followed a normal distribution. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges, and visual inspections through histograms and Q-Q plots further supported the assumption of normality. These diagnostic tests confirm the data's validity and the regression analysis's reliability.

Table 4 displays the important links that hypothesis testing uncovered between the model's significant elements.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-Value >2	P values	Decision
H1	Destination Image > Tourist Engagement	0.172	0.069	2.411	0.016	Accepted
H2	Familiarity > Tourist Engagement	0.219	0.062	3.548	0	Accepted
H3	Pull Factors > Destination Image	0.478	0.072	6.642	0	Accepted
H4	Pull Factors > Familiarity	0.227	0.092	2.413	0.016	Accepted
H5	Pull Factors > Tourist Engagement	0.317	0.083	3.869	0	Accepted
H6	Push Factors > Destination Image	0.266	0.074	3.547	0	Accepted
H7	Push Factors > Familiarity	0.401	0.093	4.255	0	Accepted
H8	Push Factors > Tourist Engagement	0.221	0.079	2.738	0.006	Accepted

Source: Authors' own

The initial three hypotheses received strong statistical support from the study's findings. The p-values in every instance are substantially less than the generally recognised cut-off of 0.05 (Kennedy-Shaffer, 2019), indicating this. Put another way, these p-values show that there is extremely little likelihood that the observed connections between the variables result from random variation. This statistical significance supports the claim that YouTube significantly impacts tourists' plans to visit Sri Lanka for heritage tourism. The outcomes are consistent with the basic hypothesis expectations of this study.

Mediation analysis

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effect

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Push Factors > Destination Image > Tourist Engagement	0.044	0.047	0.026	1.684	0.093
Pull Factors > Familiarity > Tourist Engagement	0.049	0.05	0.025	1.961	0.052
Push Factors > Familiarity > Tourist Engagement	0.087	0.087	0.031	2.793	0.005
Pull Factors > Destination Image > Tourist Engagement	0.079	0.082	0.037	2.175	0.03

Source: Authors' own

The mediation analysis used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. Specific indirect effects were examined to assess the mediating roles of destination image and familiarity in the relationship between push and pull factors and tourist engagement. As shown in Table 5, the indirect effects were evaluated using the original sample values, standard deviations, and T-statistics.

The results indicate significant mediation effects, showing statistically significant mediation, particularly for the pathways involving push factors through familiarity ($p = 0.005$) and pull factors through destination image ($p =$

0.030). The effects of push factors through destination image ($p = 0.093$) and pull factors through familiarity ($p = 0.052$) approached significance, suggesting partial mediation. These findings imply that destination image and familiarity partly mediate the relationship between motivational factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

Strong evidence for the mediating function of destination image in the link between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism, destination image in the link between pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism and strong evidence for the mediating function of familiarity in the link between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism, familiarity in the link between pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism and can be seen in Table 5's results. So, the table indicates that destination image and familiarity may operate as a partly mediating factor for this influence.

CONCLUSION

The primary focus of this study was to explore the impact of push and pull motivation factors on tourist engagement in Tea tourism within the Nuwara Eliya district. Based on previous literature, the study utilised familiarity and destination image as mediating factors, with push and pull factors as the independent variables and tourist engagement as the dependent variables. The study had three primary objectives, which were to investigate the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and tourist engagement in Tea tourism, to examine the impact of familiarity as a mediating factor on the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and tourist engagement in Tea tourism, and to assess the influence of destination image as a mediating factor on the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and tourist engagement in Tea tourism. The study aimed to answer three research questions: What is the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and tourist engagement in Tea tourism? What is the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and tourist engagement in Tea tourism when

familiarity is taken as a mediating factor? What is the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism when destination image is considered a mediating factor?

This study involved collecting data from 204 tourists through a self-administered questionnaire. The population consisted of 49.02% male and 50.98% female respondents, indicating that both genders are equally attracted to Tea Tourism. The majority of respondents were from Europe (44.6%) and the Asia Pacific region (35.78%), with a more miniature representation from the Middle East (10.8%), the Americas (7.8%), and Africa (1%). The study also found that Tea Tourism is more prevalent among younger tourists, with 71.1% of respondents aged 21-30. Additionally, Tea Tourism may be more attractive to tourists with higher levels of education, with 43.6% of respondents having a graduate-level education. Employed individuals are more likely to participate in tea tourism, which is popular among middle- to high-income tourists. Single individuals (65.7%) were the majority of respondents, indicating that Tea Tourism may be more prevalent among those with more flexibility to explore new experiences and travel to different destinations.

Twelve hypotheses were formulated and tested using a conceptual framework. Descriptive data were analysed using SPSS software, while other results were obtained using Smart PLS software.

Analysing the first eight hypotheses (H1 - H8), the data revealed statistically significant relationships between all variables. The results suggest that push and pull factors positively influence tourist engagement, destination image, and familiarity. Additionally, destination image and familiarity have a positive relationship with tourist engagement.

Hypotheses 9 to 12 were formulated to examine the mediation effects of destination image and familiarity on the relationship between tourist engagement and push/pull factors in tea tourism. The results showed that hypothesis 9 was rejected, which suggests that destination image mediates the

relationship between push factors and tourist engagement. However, hypothesis 10 was accepted, which suggests that destination image mediates the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement. Hypothesis 11, which states that familiarity mediates the relationship between push factors and tourist engagement, was also accepted. On the other hand, hypothesis 12, which proposes that familiarity mediates the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement, was rejected.

However, this study found significant direct and indirect paths between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism. The direct path, "Push Factors -> Tourist Engagement," had a P value of 0.006, while the indirect path, "Push Factors -> Familiarity -> Tourist Engagement," had a P value of 0.005. These results indicate partial mediation in the model, and familiarity partially mediates the relationship between push factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

Similarly, the direct path "Pull Factors -> Tourist Engagement" was significant with a P value of 0.000, and the indirect path "Pull Factors -> Destination Image -> Tourist Engagement" was also significant with a P value of 0.03. This suggests partial mediation, and destination image partially mediates the relationship between pull factors and tourist engagement in tea tourism.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers and tourism industry stakeholders in Sri Lanka. First, understanding the influence of push and pull motivational factors provides actionable insights for tourism marketers and destination managers aiming to enhance tourist engagement in tea tourism. By improving the destination image and familiarity with tea tourism experiences, businesses can create meaningful interactions that increase tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

These insights can guide policymakers' strategic planning to develop Nuwara Eliya as a premier tea tourism destination. Investments in infrastructure, marketing campaigns highlighting the region's unique tea heritage, and collaborations with local tea producers can enhance the tourist experience. Additionally, focusing on sustainable practices will help preserve the natural environment while promoting responsible tourism development.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study offers valuable insights, several areas remain for future exploration. First, expanding the study to include other tea-producing regions in Sri Lanka, such as Uva or Dimbula, could offer a broader understanding of regional differences in tea tourism engagement. Future studies could also employ qualitative methods to explore in-depth tourist experiences, providing richer emotional engagement and satisfaction data. Additionally, comparative studies between international tea tourism destinations, such as China or India, could help identify best practices and innovations that could be adapted to the Sri Lankan context. Further research could also investigate the long-term effects of tourist engagement on destination loyalty, focusing on repeat visitation and word-of-mouth recommendations. Finally, incorporating digital marketing and the role of social media influencers could provide a modern perspective on promoting tea tourism to global audiences.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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