Recognition and Prioritization of Pull Factors of Azerbaijan as a Destination for Iranian Tourists

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Abstract: Recognition of pull factors of a country for attracting tourist and their prioritization is of considerable importance for planners and politicians of the countries of origin and destination. In this research pull factors of Azerbaijan Republic as a destination for Iranian tourists are recognized. In the first phase, referring to literature review, pull factors were recognized . Then using the same method, five criteria were determined to analyze these factors by application of pair-wise comparison and then weight of these criteria was calculated. In the next step, TOPSIS method was used for ranking twenty pull factors of Azerbaijan. Library-based studies were used for preparing theoretical fundamentals and research background and questionnaires were used for collecting information to determine the importance and prioritization of the factors. The sample of the research is technical managers of travel agencies, located in different parts of the country. Sample Size of this study amounts to 278 persons.
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Introduction:

Nowadays tourism or the act of traveling with the aim of recreation is one of the big industries and economic sectors in the world and one of the sources of employment and foreign exchange in most of the countries. On the other hand, most of the governments consider tourism as a guideline for development of the country, because of the multiplier effect of tourism income, in which foreign exchange provided by tourists will commence expending for local products and services. Tourism industry as one of the important and global pillars of the economy becomes more important day by day. So, most of the governments consider it as a suitable way to alleviate today's economic crisis.

Azerbaijan is a region with unique geographical, geopolitical and climatic conditions. There are nine climate zones out of 11 in the country. There are a lot of medical, mineral and thermal springs, medical mud and oil in Azerbaijan which are mostly located in the Guba, Shamakhi-Ismayilli, Masalli-Lankaran, Balakan-Zaqatala, Sheki-Qabala, Nakhchivan, Ganjabasar regions. There are 12 reserves and six national parks, which constitute 2.4 percent of the area of the republic and can be found in all the climate zones existing in Azerbaijan. Six caves, including Azikh cave are included in paleontological nature monuments. If we consider these entire natural conditions, the tourism sector should have an important place in forming GDP in Azerbaijan.

In 2009. 17,000 tourists visited this country which 7 percent of them were Iranian (State Statistic Committee of Azerbaijan Republic, 2011). Tourism is a small but increasingly important contributor to the economy of Azerbaijan, with international tourism receipts amounting to AZN800 million (€715 m) in 2007 and reached AZN952 million (€ 850 m) in 2008.

According to Euromonitor report the number of Iranian tourists in Azerbaijan is reported 182,000 in 2007 and 200,000 in 2008 and the amount of incoming tourist receipts was estimated 799,3 million euro in 2008 and 896,8 million euro in 2009 (Euromonitor: Travel and Tourism in Azerbaijan, 2009).

In tourism research motivation has been a common area of study (Crompton, 1979, Awaritefe, 2004, Park and Yoon, 2009). One of the most narrowed frameworks to study tourist motivation is the "Push" and "Pull" model which postulates that tourists' choice of a destination is influenced by the above forces: push factors are those which push individuals from home while pull factors are those factors which pull the individual to a destination.

As Lam and Hsu (2005) suggest, people travel because they are pushed by internal motives and also because they are pulled by external forces of a destination (Lam and Hsu, 2005). The "push" motivations have been used to explain the desire for travel, as they are the starting point of understanding tourists' behavior (Lam and Hsu, 2005, Kim et al, 2008).

United States Agency in analyzing the factors affecting the choice of travelers states that the most important factors for Iranians choosing their trips are cost, type of service, distance and amenities. But in general interests of those traveling abroad include seeing something new, shopping, having fun and

good entertainment during the trip, outdoor atmosphere and good food.

2.1 Research Model

In the first phase by referring to the literature review and Delphi method, pull factors of Azerbaijan as a destination for Iranian tourists are determined. Then by the same method five criteria are determined for analyzing these factors and by pair-wise comparison these factors are weighted.

In the next step, TOPSIS method is used for ranking the importance of 20 pull factors of Azerbaijan.

2.2 Statistical Population, Sample Size and Sampling Method

All technical managers of tourism companies were s statistical population of the preset study. In this study Statistical Population is calculated by application of Morgan table and equals 1000 persons according to reports presented in Euromonitor 2009 report about real number of active traveling agencies. Sample Size of this study amounts to 278 persons. Random classified sampling method was used and one technical manager was selected from each company.

2.3 Validity & Reliability, Measuring Tools

Provided initial questionnaire was given to university professors and experts in charge, with the aim of presenting their views on validity of questionnaire and whether questions posed at the questionnaire are appropriate or not. Necessary changes were made at questions on the basis of viewpoints of lecturers and officials in charge. Cronbach's Alpha Test was used for testing reliability of questionnaire of study (Bland and Altman, 1997). For this reason, 82 study questionnaires were distributed among statistical population (individuals set for this study). Then each answer was studied individually and response rate of each question was calculated. In the same direction, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test was made through the application of SPSS software package. Generally, test reliability rate was obtained 792% at large.

2.4 Method of Analysis

2.4.1 Delphi

Delphi method starts with identification of the problem and selected experts (Delphi panel) based on their experiment related to the defined problem. A questionnaire is designed and distributed to the Delphi panel. Then data is collected and analyzed to reach consensus in responses. If the respondents have reached consensus a report is developed based on responses, if not, a new questionnaire is developed based on the results of the previous round and again distributed to the panel. This process is repeated until consensus is reached and based on which a final report is developed (Pill, 1971).

2.4.2 Weighting the Criteria

The basic procedure to carry out the pair-wise comparison consists of prioritization of criteria by pair-wise comparison (weighing). Rating the relative priority of the criteria is done by assigning a weight between 1 (equal importance) and 9 (extreme importance) to the more important criterion, whereas the value reciprocal to that is assigned to the other criterion in the pair. The weightings are then assigned a number and averaged in order to obtain an average weight for each criterion (Saaty, 1990).

2.4.3 TOPSIS

For ranking and selecting the most appropriate suppliers TOPSIS method is more appropriate due to the following reasons:

In this technique, due to permission of desirability exchange between the attributes, it is possible to improve a supplier performance through its comparative advantage in some areas, despite its poor performance in other cases. In TOPSIS decision making technique, interaction effect of attributes is considered. This technique also considers Conflict and compatibility between attributes (Triantaphyllou, 2000, Ho et al,2010 , Shih et al, 2007, Iranzadeh and Chakherlouy, 2010, Manikrao Athawale and Chakraborty, 2010). TOPSIS decision making technique is less sensitive compared to weighting technique. Considering the subjects covered in this study, compensating models and its constructive subgroup, TOPSIS technique, is used for evaluating and ranking the suppliers.

2.5 Reorganization and Weighting of Evaluative Criteria

Referring to literature review and research background, 5 criteria are recognized for analysis of pull factors of Azerbaijan as a destination for Iranian tourists and then by administration of questionnaire, aspects and ideas of tourism and geography experts are acquired. Then weight of each criterion is calculated on the basis of pair-wise comparison.

Matrix of pair-wise comparison of decision makers is calculated by using geometric mean as follows:

In this method after completing pair-wise comparison matrix, first geometric mean of each line of matrix is calculated; in the second phase the present column is normalized by dividing each attribute to the sum of present attributes.

The new column matrix is the matrix of weight of the indexes of the considered problem. Below the mathematical form of this method is provided:

$$\begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & . & . & a_{1n} \\ . & . & . & . \\ . & . & . & . \\ a_{n1} & . & . & a_{nn} \end{bmatrix} \xrightarrow{1} \begin{bmatrix} \sqrt[n]{a_{11}\dots a_{1n}} \\ . \\ . \\ \sqrt[n]{a_{11}\dots a_{1n}} \end{bmatrix}$$

$$= \begin{bmatrix} \pi_1 \\ . \\ . \\ \pi_2 \end{bmatrix} \xrightarrow{2} \begin{bmatrix} \dfrac{\pi_1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}\pi_i} \\ . \\ . \\ \dfrac{\pi_n}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}\pi_i} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} W_1 \\ . \\ . \\ W_n \end{bmatrix}$$

In this research 5 basic criteria are recognized to analyze the pull factors of Azerbaijan as a destination for Iranian tourists, which are shown in the matrix of pair-wise comparison (Table 1).

Table 1: Matrix of Pair-wise comparison of basic criteria

criteria	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditur	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouragin g others
Number of tourists	1	0.5	1.6	3.5	4.7
Amount of expenditure		1	2.4	2.7	2.2
Length of stay			1	3.1	1.8
Second visit				1	
Encouraging others					1

After forming the model in expert choice and importing the matrix of pair-wise comparison, the weight of criteria and sub-criteria was calculated as shown below. Table 2 shows the prioritization of the pull factors of Azerbaijan as a destination for Iranian tourists which are determined on the basis of AHP method (expert choice software). As shown in table 2 amount of expenditure is the most important criteria with relative weight equal to 0.343. So, it is the most affective factor among all important factors in strategic decision-making of Iranian tourists, and number of tourists with relative weight equal to 0.292 is in the next priority. Consistency rate of pair-wise comparison is equal to 0.06 which is acceptable, because it's lower than 0.10.

Table 2. Weighting the basic criteria

row	Basic criteria	weight	priority
1	Number of tourists	0.292	2
2	Amount of expenditure	0.343	1
3	Length of stay	0.179	3
4	Second visit	0.076	5
5	Encouraging others	0.11	4

In Table 3 matrix of decision and in table 4 matrix prepared in the basis of five criteria stated above and 22 pull factors about Azerbaijan as a destination for Iranian tourists, which are prioritized by TOPSIS (2005) software and Excel are shown.

Table 3. Decision matrix of pull factors of Azerbaijan as a destination for Iranian tourists

Row	Pull factors	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditure	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
1	Low expenses in destinations	0.0298	34.8	24.41	39.5	26.40
2	Social security	0.0209	23.6	33.70	22.65	43.60
3	Religious, cultural and language similarities	0.0504	25.8	57.30	47.24	62.80
4	Variety of attractions	0.0332	43.85	25.70	47.2	27.40
5	Cultural attractions	0.0531	25.26	45.00	19.78	46.20
6	Visiting the places which are shown in the film	0.0259	34.89	42.84	28.83	45.32
7	Economic and political close relationships	0.0460	37.37	60.20	51.04	37.90
8	Suitable accommodating	0.0383	56.89	33.40	41.88	23.00
9	Climate	0.0348	36.09	32.00	69.09	25.80
10	Performing activities which are not available in origin country	0.0448	37.44	26.90	16.11	22.60
11	Quality of services	0.0421	68.57	45.32	55.27	35.80
12	Public health and hygiene	0.0798	39.55	12.03	33.6	36.20
13	Modern attractions	0.0546	50.59	23.79	38. 5	35.70
14	Festivals and events	0.0964	46.2	35.20	38.27	44.20
15	Cheap shopping	0.0337	18.4	23.52	33.6	24.70
16	Natural attractions	0.0812	27.01	28.26	67.02	26.90
17	Recreational attractions	0.0613	18.03	38.27	36	33.00
18	Hospitable people in destination	0.0676	38.9	32.51	58.02	26.90
19	Accessibility	0.0514	35.70	7.67	27.90	33.60
20	Low expenses in destinations	0.0298	38.30	28.92	35.00	58.30

Table 4. normalized decision matrix of pull factors of Azerbaijan

Row	Pull factors	Number of tourists	Amount of expendi	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
1	Low expenses in destinations	0.0298	0.0472	0.0372	0.0059	0.0490
2	Social security	0.0209	0.0320	0.0513	0.0622	0.0281
3	Religious, cultural and language similarities	0.0504	0.0350	0.0872	0.0200	0.0586
4	Variety of attractions	0.0332	0.0595	0.0391	0.0103	0.0585
5	Cultural attractions	0.0531	0.0343	0.0685	0.0097	0.0245
6	Visiting the places which are shown in the films	0.0259	0.0473	0.0652	0.0244	0.0357
7	Economic and political close relationships	0.0460	0.0507	0.0916	0.0015	0.0633
8	Suitable accommodating	0.0383	0.0772	0.0508	0.0061	0.0519
9	Climate	0.0348	0.0490	0.0487	0.0144	0.0857
10	Performing activities which are not available in origin country	0.0448	0.0508	0.0409	0.0145	0.0200
11	Quality of services	0.0421	0.0930	0.0690	0.0202	0.0685
12	Public health and hygiene	0.0798	0.0536	0.0183	0.0071	0.0417
13	Modern attractions	0.0546	0.0686	0.0362	0.0013	0.0477
14	Festivals and events	0.0964	0.0627	0.0536	0.0824	0.0475
15	Cheap shopping	0.0337	0.0250	0.0358	0.6554	0.0417
16	Natural attractions	0.0812	0.0366	0.0430	0.0133	0.0831
17	Recreational attractions	0.0613	0.0245	0.0583	0.0072	0.0446
18	Hospitable people in destination	0.0676	0.0528	0.0495	0.0132	0.0719
19	Accessibility	0.0514	0.0484	0.0117	0.0144	0.0346
20	Suitable transportation system	0.0546	0.0520	0.0440	0.0164	0.0434

Table 5. Weighted normalized decision matrix

Row	Pull factors	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditure	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
1	Low expenses in destinations	0.0087	0.0162	0.0067	0.0004	0.0054
2	Social security	0.0061	0.0110	0.0092	0.0047	0.0031
3	Religious, cultural and language similarities	0.0147	0.0120	0.0156	0.0015	0.0064
4	Variety of attractions	0.0097	0.0204	0.0070	0.0008	0.0064
5	Cultural attractions	0.0155	0.0118	0.0123	0.0007	0.0027
6	Visiting the places which are shown in the films	0.0076	0.0162	0.0117	0.0019	0.0039
7	Economic and political close relationships	0.0134	0.0174	0.0164	0.0001	0.0070
8	Suitable accommodating	0.0112	0.0265	0.0091	0.0005	0.0057
9	Climate	0.0102	0.0168	0.0087	0.0011	0.0094
10	Performing activities which are not available in origin country	0.0131	0.0174	0.0073	0.0011	0.0022
11	Quality of services	0.0123	0.0319	0.0123	0.0015	0.0075
12	Public health and hygiene	0.0233	0.0184	0.0033	0.0005	0.0046
13	Modern attractions	0.0159	0.0235	0.0065	0.0001	0.0053
14	Festivals and events	0.0281	0.0215	0.0096	0.0063	0.0052
15	Cheap shopping	0.0098	0.0086	0.0064	0.0498	0.0046
16	Natural attractions	0.0237	0.0126	0.0077	0.0010	0.0091
17	Recreational attractions	0.0179	0.0084	0.0104	0.0005	0.0049
18	Hospitable people in destination	0.0197	0.0181	0.0089	0.0010	0.0079
19	Accessibility	0.0150	0.0166	0.0021	0.0011	0.0038
20	Suitable transportation system	0.0159	0.0178	0.0079	0.0012	0.0048

Table 6. Prioritization of the pull factors by TOPSIS method

Row	Pull factors	D_i^-	D_i^+	$D_i^- + D_i^+$	CL_i	priority
1	Low expenses in destinations	0.0277	0.0509	0.0786	0.3528	4
2	Social security	0.0186	0.0533	0.0719	0.2587	12
3	Religious, cultural and language similarities	0.0553	0.0214	0.0767	0.7207	1
4	Variety of attractions	0.0213	0.0511	0.0724	0.2948	10
5	Cultural attractions	0.0245	0.0514	0.0759	0.0322	6
6	Visiting the places which are shown in the films	0.0220	0.0524	0.0744	0.2957	9
7	Economic and political close relationships	0.0108	0.0558	0.0666	0.1621	20
8	Suitable accommodating	0.0183	0.0519	0.0702	0.0261	11
9	Climate	0.0140	0.0545	0.0684	0.2040	17
10	Performing activities which are not available in origin country	0.0276	0.0499	0.0776	0.3563	3
11	Quality of services	0.0178	0.0534	0.0712	0.2500	14
12	Public health and hygiene	0.0222	0.0527	0.0748	0.2964	8
13	Modern attractions	0.0137	0.0546	0.0683	0.2004	18
14	Festivals and events	0.0226	0.0512	0.0737	0.3063	7
15	Cheap shopping	0.0169	0.0547	0.0715	0.2359	16
16	Natural attractions	0.0169	0.0531	0.0700	0.2420	15
17	Recreational attractions	0.0259	0.0503	0.0763	0.3400	5
18	Hospitable people in destination	0.0185	0.0532	0.0717	0.2581	13
19	Accessibility	0.0264	0.0462	0.0726	0.3637	2
20	Suitable transportation system	0.0132	0.0562	0.0694	0.1902	19

2.6 Interpretation of the table

Surveying the results obtained from TOPSIS shows that factor number 3 (Religious, cultural and language similarities) weighted 0.7207 is of the most importance for Iranian tourists. Accessibility weighted 0.3637 and Performing activities which are not available in the country of origin weighted 0.3563 and then low expenses in destination weighted 0.3528 are in the next priorities.

The factor of close economic and political relations between the country of origin and destination weighted 0.1621 are of the least importance for Iranian Tourists traveling to Azerbaijan.

3. Conclusion

Azerbaijan including a variety of tourism attractions is a suitable destination for tourists from different countries specially tourists from Iran. There is no doubt that similar language, religion and culture is one of the most important reasons for interest of a large number of Iranians to visit Azerbaijan.

In addition geopolitical position and accessibility to this country has facilitated access of tourists. Existence of open social space which provides peace and comfort for Iranians is the third reason of selecting Azerbaijan by Iranian tourists.

On the other hand suitability of expenses in destination and providing cheap package tours has been able to attract the attention of the most of the Iranians to select the destination. Existence of recreational attractions and more important cultural attractions specially the ones located in Baku historical city are pull factors of tourists to this country.

Holding events and festivals and cleanness of Baku historical city have not been ineffective. On the other hand, places shown through satellite causes to attract tourists from the country of origin.

Also, verification of tourism attractions, accommodation, social security and hospitable people of Azerbaijan have a key role in making Iranians select this country as their destination.

What is evident is that Azerbaijan Republic politicians should consider the value of service

quality, introducing and marketing natural attractions, creating modern attractions and promotion of transportation system in their plans to attract more Iranians to this country.

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