

Critical factors influencing international tourists' decisions to choose tours to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



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Abstract Ho Chi Minh City - Vietnam's major economic and cultural center, is witnessing a substantial transformation in the tourism industry through digital transformation. This is a crucial step to help the city recover quickly from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and lay a solid foundation for a future of sustainable development. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors affecting international tourists' decision to choose Ho Chi Minh City as a destination. The study approaches the Pust-Pull theory, in which push motivation includes the following factors: Knowledge and discovery, entertainment and relaxation, family and friends, and financial conditions; pull motivation includes destination image and destination information. Pust-Pull factors simultaneously affect choosing a tourist destination in Ho Chi Minh City for international tourists. The study's method uses a convenient sampling survey design, including 422 international tourists in Ho Chi Minh City. Data are analyzed using statistical software SPSS 25.0 and SmartPLS 4.1.0.0, and research hypotheses are tested using PLS-SEM. The results show that push and five factors affect tourists' decision to choose a destination, all statistically significant at 5%. The study's unique contribution showed that knowledge discovery and financial conditions have the most substantial influence, while destination image is another factor that strongly influences the decision to choose Ho Chi Minh City as a destination. Finally, the authors proposed key recommendations for tourism businesses and stakeholders, which need to pay attention to digital transformation, a trend and a key factor determining tourism development to enhance appropriate policies to attract more international tourists to the city, contributing to sustainable economic development.

Keywords: tours, international tourists, destination selection, knowledge and discovery

1. Introduction

The role of tourism and its approach vary across the world, and it is universally agreed upon as necessary. Although tourism activities have ancient origins and have developed rapidly, the concept of tourism still differs in terms of its intrinsic meaning. Today, tourism has become a widespread socioeconomic phenomenon and an essential need in human life. This has driven scientists to study and develop the scientific connotations of the term "tourism". Tourism is organically combined on the basis of the needs of tourists, with the connection of tourism service providers, the participation of local residents in providing services, and the approval, facilitation, and assurance from local authorities where tourists are received. This combination forms an interactive and supportive relationship to meet the increasing and satisfying needs of individuals and groups undertaking travel (Crossley, 2020). Tourism is a business sector that encompasses activities such as organizing tours and producing and exchanging goods and services with businesses to meet travel, accommodation, dining, sightseeing, entertainment, and other needs of tourists. These activities must bring tangible economic, political, and social benefits to the host country and businesses (Qiu et al., 2018; Bayih & Singh, 2020).

Tourism is a comprehensive economic sector that is increasingly crucial to socioeconomic development. Tourism development will contribute to economic restructuring, increase national budget revenue, attract investment capital and export goods on the spot, and positively impact the development of related economic sectors (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Manosuthi et al., 2020). Moreover, tourism has become a crucial economic sector for many countries in the context of globalization and international integration. Particularly in Vietnam, the tourism industry has grown robustly, significantly contributing to national economic growth. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's most significant economic, cultural, and tourism hub, stands out as an attractive destination for international tourists. However, to attract and retain international visitors, it is essential to understand the factors influencing their travel choices. This study explores the determinants affecting international tourists' decisions to select Ho Chi Minh City tours.



Tourists' destination choices depend on various factors, including destination image, service quality, and personal experiences. For the tourism sector, understanding the behavior and concerns of tourists is essential (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019; Valduga et al., 2020). Tourism destinations compete with each other through their destination image; the nature of tourism products is intangible, and their image is expressed through the perception and experience of tourists; the experience is easily affected by restrictions and incidents during the travel process; these factors can worsen the destination image. In the context of Ho Chi Minh City, this research aims to clearly identify which factors strongly impact international tourists' decisions, thereby assisting businesses and tourism managers in developing more effective strategies. Ho Chi Minh City is renowned for numerous attractions, such as Ben Thanh Market, Notre Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon, and the War Remnants Museum. These sites not only hold historical and cultural value but also serve as significant attractions for tourists. Other studies have indicated that the attractiveness of a destination is one of the most critical factors influencing travel decisions. Therefore, maintaining and developing these attractions is necessary to retain international tourists.

In addition to destination beauty, cost, safety, and convenience are essential. Cost is a significant element in travelers' destination choices. Ho Chi Minh City could become popular because of its low prices and varied services. Transportation safety and convenience, including public transit and tourism support services, are essential. Local cultural and culinary experiences are also meaningful. Unique and original travel experiences leave tourists with deep memories. Ho Chi Minh City can provide such experiences with its diversified culture and great food. Thus, researching international tourists' trip choices to Ho Chi Minh City helps uncover crucial aspects and lays the groundwork for efficient business and tourism management strategies. Understanding these variables would assist Ho Chi Minh City in attracting more international tourists, improving tourism services, and sustaining the local tourism business. Therefore, the authors assess the critical factors influencing international tourists' decisions to choose Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, tours.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Literature review

International tourists are defined as visitors who cross international borders and stay at the destination for at least one night but not more than one year, primarily for leisure or business. This definition has been widely used in tourism research and management since 1995. Baloglu et al. (2014) expanded this concept by emphasizing "border tourism," where tourists move between countries and engage in multinational tourism experiences. This reflects the development of the tourism industry and how tourists interact with diverse tourism environments. Emphasizing the role of information and communication technology in creating connections between international tourists and destinations expands the definition of international tourists to include online aspects (Gretzel et al., 2015). In summary, international tourists are (1) individuals traveling from one country to another; (2) they are expected to stay at least one night at the destination but not for more than one year; and (3) their primary purpose is sightseeing, leisure, or participating in business activities unrelated to performing business operations or immigrating.

How travelers find, buy, use, and eventually eliminate the tourist goods they buy is part of consumer behavior in tourism. It concerns how people employ resources (including time, money, and effort) to buy tourist goods. This behavior provides insights into topics such as the products purchased by tourists. Why do people buy these items? Can you tell me where they get them and how often? Furthermore, it delves into how tourists assess products before, during, and after their acquisition. According to Becker et al. (2015), studying consumer behavior entails looking into how people spend their time and money to buy things that meet their requirements.

Businesses and the tourist industry must understand consumer behavior in tourism to develop innovative products and services. This includes models of consumer behavior in tourism. Researchers in consumer behavior and tourism industry experts need to determine what makes people buy things and how to get more people to buy those things so that they can fix this problem. Researching the elements that influence tourist spending is crucial. The tourist industry's customer behavior has been the subject of multiple models. Studies on tourist spending habits have relied on broad, detailed theoretical frameworks (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chew & Jahari, 2014).

Chew and Jahari (2014) developed a theoretical model based on five steps of the travel decision-making process. These steps are as follows: (1) acknowledge the need and desire to travel, (2) seek and evaluate relevant information, (3) make travel decisions, (4) prepare for and experience trips, and (5) evaluate posttrip satisfaction. The model aims to generalize the factors influencing tourists' travel decision-making. The writers state that many external and environmental elements impact each stage differently. The model was found to be lacking in key areas by Croy (2010), including tourists' perceptions, experiences, personality traits, and information processing. To fill these gaps, Gretzel et al. (2015) suggested a model that includes elements influencing consumers' decision-making processes in terms of choice and consumption.

Tourism incentives make people want to vacate, and tourist destination research often uses push-pull methods. This study revealed that education and discovery, entertainment and leisure, family and friends, and financial problems are push factors that influence travel decisions (Qiu et al., 2018). In contrast, pull factors are destination-generated and describe a location's attraction (Kani et al., 2017). This research considers destination image and information pull factors. Maghrifani et

al. (2022) suggested that tourists' subjective perceptions of a destination may be biased. Push factors explain travel desire, whereas pull factors explain destination choice.

2.2. Hypothesis development

All marketing, including tourism, requires customer behavior research. Understanding consumer behavior helps tourism researchers and managers meet tourist needs (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Daily postpurchase decisions include assessing the destination's tourism services, expressing intent to travel, and promoting the trip. This key component helps tourism managers understand the issue and develop effective client loyalty strategies. In addition, the theoretical foundation for selecting a vacation spot is based on the fundamental theory of tourist consumer behavior. According to Martín-Santana et al. (2017), travelers' knowledge and curiosity significantly affect their choices of tours. The research concluded that learning and cultural discovery experiences, such as visiting historical sites and interacting with local people, create profound memories and encourage tourists to return or recommend the destination to others. Another study emphasized that learning about the history and customs of a destination enriches the experience and positively influences travel decisions. All these studies indicate that the desire to enhance understanding, discover unfamiliar places, learn about unique cultures, and meet friends from different backgrounds are essential factors driving tourists to choose exciting and memorable tours. Nikjoo & Ketabi (2015) reported that guided tour programs and cultural experiences play crucial roles in enhancing the exploration of international tourists visiting Vietnam. For these reasons, the following hypothesis is proposed for H1 in Figure 1.

Activities designed to entertain and relax, such as going to tourist sites, taking part in cultural and athletic events, or eating local cuisine, are needed to provide visitors with good time, as they learn about and appreciate different cultures. A large body of research has established a correlation between leisure time activities and vacation locations, especially those that provide various amusements and facilities for unwinding (Park et al., 2017). According to research by Qiu et al. (2018), visitors' happiness and likelihood of returning to a location are heavily impacted by their opportunities for entertainment and relaxation. Attracting tourists and satisfying their need for relaxation and amusement are two of the most important goals of any tourism destination, according to Braimah et al. (2024). According to the report, attracting international travelers is greatly facilitated by leisure and relaxation activities. This includes cultural events, festivals, and amusement parks. The significance of leisure and entertainment in influencing vacation choices is highlighted in this research. To cater to visitors' demands for fun and leisure, tourist spots must have a firm grasp of what those visitors want and propose H2, as shown in Figure 1.

When a vacation spot is chosen, word-of-mouth recommendations from loved ones are significant. The final decisions made by visitors might be significantly influenced by the encouragement, support, and donations of their loved ones. According to research by Bayih & Singh (2020), recommendations from friends and family can significantly impact vacation plans. Family and friends may be a great source of inspiration, knowledge, and advice regarding vacation locations. Family and friends play crucial roles in the travel decisions of visitors, as revealed by Çelik & Dedeoğlu (2019). The choice of destination is significantly influenced by family and group vacation packages, and H3 is proposed, as shown in Figure 1.

Travelers' impressions of a place not only reflect their biases and assumptions but also embody those things. From its natural beauty to its cultural and historical components, this image encompasses all the essential aspects influencing travelers' perceptions of a location (Crossley, 2020). It is pivotal to how visitors and locals act when they reach an area. Tourists are heavily influenced by the perception of a place when they decide where to go on vacation. In the field of contemporary tourism, this idea has been extensively studied and assessed. Attracting tourists, spending more money, making more decisions, being happier, and even becoming loyal customers are all possible outcomes of a positive destination image, as shown by Guri et al. (2021) and supported by Manosuthi et al. (2020).

Additionally, research has demonstrated that a destination's image impacts tourists' intentions to choose a place. The survey revealed that to create a positive impression of Ho Chi Minh City among foreign tourists, preserving cultural values and improving the quality of tourism services are crucial, and H4 is proposed in Figure 1.

The term "destination information" describes how, according to Preko et al. (2020), while planning a vacation, it is helpful to consider not only previous experiences but also commercials, marketing methods, and recommendations from loved ones and acquaintances. Currently, tourism management agencies and enterprises disseminate numerous destinations and issue-related information on the internet and websites. Information seeking is a significant component of destination decisions, as stated by Soliman (2021). According to the study, people are likely to choose a vacation if they hear good things about it. On this basis, the following hypothesis is proposed for H5 in Figure 1.

Since people's incomes and payment capacities vary, planning for financial management while traveling is crucial. A person's ability to take a fulfilling vacation without putting undue strain on their finances is something to consider when planning a trip (Valduga et al., 2020; Slack et al., 2020). Finding a vacation spot that works with your budget, making sure you obtain your money's worth, and determining the best way to handle money are all financial concerns in tourism, according to An et al. (2019). The importance of cost in deciding on a place has been acknowledged by authors such as Hasan et al. (2019). Reasonable rates and promotional programs are essential in luring international travelers to Vietnam, according to Seetanah

et al. (2021), who researched the influence of financial considerations on travel decisions. On this basis, the following hypothesis is proposed for H6 in Figure 1.

The authors propose a theoretical research model from these foundations in Figure 1.

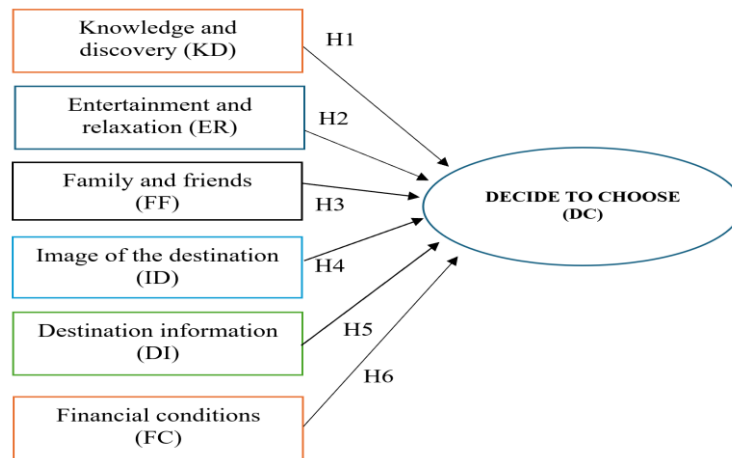


Figure 1 Theoretical research model for critical factors influencing international tourists' decisions to choose tours to Ho Chi Minh City.

Figure 1 shows that the model includes the following six components of independence: (1) knowledge and discovery (KD), (2) entertainment and relaxation (ER), (3) family and friends (FF), (4) image of the destination (ID), (5) destination information (DI), (6) financial conditions (FC), and one dependent factor is the decision to choose (DC).

3. Materials and methods

Choosing a destination is the core issue in tourists' tourism consumption. For the Vietnamese tourism market in general and HCMC in particular, surveying and researching the influence of factors on the choice of tourist destinations are necessary because they provide managers, organizers, and businesses with a clearer view of what international tourists want, especially for domestic tourist destinations. From there, products and services can be developed to satisfy the growing needs of tourists, and policies and plans can be established to promote the image of tourist destinations more effectively. This contributes to easier access for tourists and the development of the brand of destinations in HCMC, particularly Vietnam.

Several scales have been inherited and adjusted to fit the context of this study. Knowledge and discovery scale (KD, 5 items) inherited from Gretzel et al. (2015); entertainment and relaxation (ER, 5 items) and family and friends (FF, 3 items) inherited from Becker et al. (2015); image of the destination (ID, 6 items) inherited from (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chew & Jahari, 2014); destination information (DI, 5 items) inherited from (Kim & Ritchie, 2014); financial conditions (FC, 4 items) inherited from Martín-Santana et al. (2017); and decision to choose (DC, 3 items) inherited from (Park et al., 2017; Qiu et al., 2018). In total, the study comprises 31 items.

A convenience sample was used to gather data from a survey questionnaire. The survey was conducted via a Likert scale ranging from 1--5. Foreign visitors to Ho Chi Minh City were the focus of the study. To conduct first-hand investigations at popular city attractions, the research team enlisted the help of travel agencies in their quest to recruit survey takers. Both convenience sampling and direct surveying were employed to gather the data.

The standards proposed by Bayih & Singh (2020) served as the basis for sample size determination. According to Manosuthi et al. (2020), a sample size of 150 is likely to achieve convergence in analysis. For structural equation modeling (SEM), a sample size ranging from 50 to 100 can be used, according to Valduga et al. (2020) and Slack et al. (2020). A sample size that is five times larger than the number of variables that were observed was suggested by Hair et al. (2019). According to Hair et al. (2019), 155 samples are needed for the survey if the theoretical research model has 31 observed variables. The data were analyzed via PLS-SEM, a statistical method developed and implemented in SPSS in conjunction with SmartPLS.4.1.0.0 and SPSS 25.0. When assessing complicated models, PLS-SEM is seen as an appropriate analytical tool.

The research examined the variables impacting the choice of Ho Chi Minh City as a foreign tourist destination by applying push-pull theory. The researchers used a quantitative methodology and a structured questionnaire to gather primary data from foreign tourists. Using convenience sampling, participants were surveyed at well-known tourist locations such as Ben Thanh Market, Notre Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon, and the War Remnants Museum. Participant identification and recruitment were further aided by collaborations with regional travel companies. The authors used SPSS 25.0 and SmartPLS 4.1.0.0 software to conduct partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) statistical analysis on the acquired data.

To prove that the proposed theoretical model is suitable for the actual situation and that the hypotheses in the proposed research model are acceptable, it is necessary to verify the following essential indicators: (1) The investigation also evaluated

the measurement model on the basis of reliability; all the constructs satisfied the ≥ 0.7 criterion, and Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to ensure internal consistency. (2) To evaluate convergent validity, we used the average variance extracted (AVE) approach to check values over 0.5. (3) The Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio showed favorable discriminant validity. (4) Multicollinearity structural model evaluation verification was performed on the basis that the inner variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 5, indicating no multicollinearity. Predictive power: R^2 values were used to assess the explanatory power of the independent variables. Path coefficients (T values and P values) were significantly assessed by bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples.

4. Results

The survey sample related to gender, age, marital status, and region of origin. Among these, men account for 35.5%, and women account for 64.5%, indicating that female tourists account for a greater proportion. Tourists aged 25 - < 45 years accounted for 36.3%, the highest percentage among all age groups. Moreover, the proportion of respondents aged 65 years or older is the lowest, accounting for only 7.8% of the total number of people in the sample. People aged 45–65 years accounted for 33.2%, whereas participants aged < 25 years accounted for 22.7%. The number of tourists in the sample reported being married to 262 individuals, accounting for 62.1%, single individuals accounting for 28.2%, and the remaining group accounting for 9.7%. Visitors from Asia account for the highest proportion (52.4%), followed by Europe (33.6%), America (9.5%), and Australia (4.5%).

Table 1 shows that the reliability and validity of the primary constructs are presented on the basis of Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR), which are all higher than the standard threshold of 0.7, indicating the high reliability of the scales. All scales have an AVE value greater than 0.50, meeting the requirements. The analysis results show that the observed variables KD5, ER5, ID5, ID6, and DI2 have loading coefficients < 0.7 and should be eliminated from the analysis. Figure 2 presents the outer factor loading.

Table 1 Outer factor loading.

	DC	DI	ER	FC	FF	ID	KD
DC1	0.813						
DC2	0.822						
DC3	0.849						
DC4	0.805						
DI1		0.823					
DI3		0.716					
DI4		0.806					
DI5		0.808					
ER1			0.789				
ER2			0.729				
ER3			0.748				
ER4			0.756				
FC1				0.800			
FC2				0.822			
FC3				0.844			
FC4				0.788			
FF1					0.835		
FF2					0.811		
FF3					0.751		
ID1						0.798	
ID2						0.735	
ID3						0.865	
ID4						0.787	
KD1							0.847
KD2							0.813
KD3							0.833
KD4							0.745

The factor loadings of the observed variables are greater than 0.70, as shown in Figure 2, which means that they match the requirements. Figure 4 displays the results of the test for discriminant validity. The correlation coefficients between any two constructs have absolute values less than the square roots of their AVE values (which can range from 0.00–0.80). These measures meet the criteria for discriminant validity (Becker et al., 2015). Chen & Chen (2010) and Chew & Jahari (2014) evaluated discriminant validity via the more rigorous Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) criterion in addition to the Gretzel et al. (2015) technique. The computed HTMT values in Table 2 are notably lower than the cutoff value of 0.85, lending credence to the discriminant validity of the research model's scales.

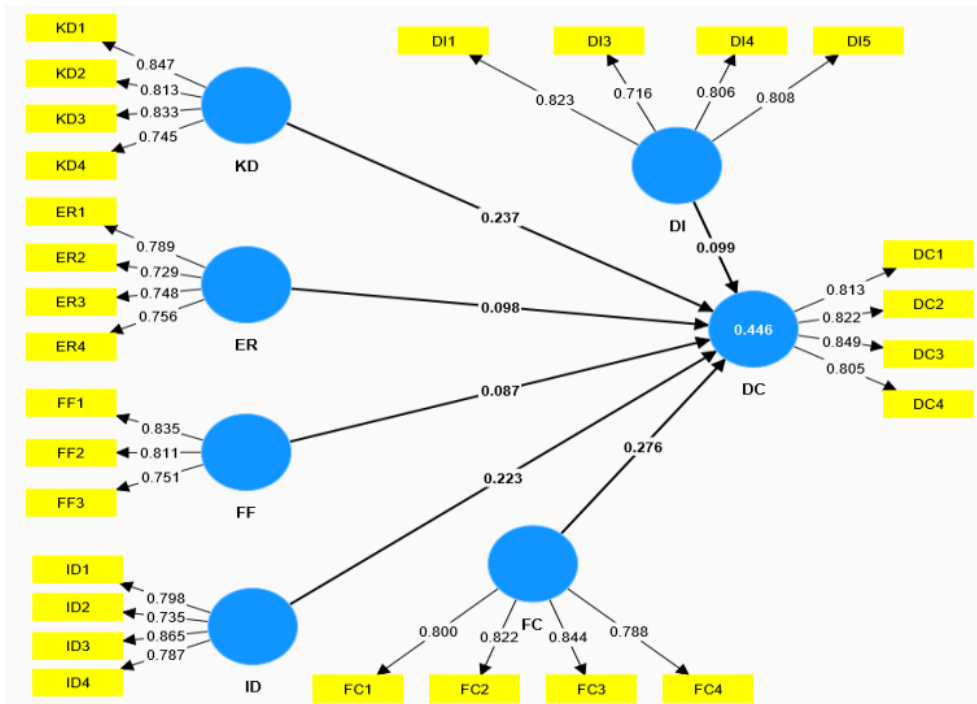


Figure 2 Output loading factor research model for critical factors influencing international tourists' decisions to choose tours to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Table 2 Construct reliability and validity.

Code	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DC	0.840	0.841	0.676
DI	0.802	0.822	0.623
ER	0.750	0.752	0.571
FC	0.830	0.831	0.662
FF	0.721	0.737	0.640
ID	0.808	0.812	0.636
KD	0.825	0.836	0.656

Table 2 shows that the structural indicators in the measurement model were assessed for internal consistency reliability and convergent and discriminant validity. Cronbach's alpha (CA), rho-A, and composite reliability (CR) were used to evaluate the reliability of the constructs; factor loadings of the observed variables, CR, and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to determine convergent validity. The evaluation criteria are based on achieving convergent validity when the factor loading is more significant than 0.70, the CR is greater than 0.50, and the AVE value is more critical than 0.50. In addition, significance testing in the PLS-SEM aims to determine the influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The PLS-SEM test was performed via the bootstrapping method to analyze the relationships between the exogenous and endogenous variables (Kani et al., 2017), the results of which are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Hypothesis testing for critical factors influencing international tourists' decisions to choose tours to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Hypothesis	Path Direction	Path Coefficient	t value	P values	VIF	Conclusion
H ₁	KD → DC	0.237	3.805	0.000	1.544	Accepted
H ₂	ER → DC	0.098	2.761	0.006	1.025	Accepted
H ₃	FF → DC	0.087	2.378	0.017	1.043	Accepted
H ₄	ID → DC	0.223	4.357	0.000	1.657	Accepted
H ₅	DI → DC	0.099	2.530	0.011	1.007	Accepted
H ₆	FC → DC	0.276	6.015	0.000	1.653	Accepted

The test results presented in Table 3 show that the relationships in the theoretical model are all statistically significant at the 5% level. Financial conditions (FCs) have the most substantial influence on decisions ($\beta = 0.276$), followed by knowledge and discovery (KD, $\beta = 0.237$) and destination image (ID, $\beta = 0.223$). Relaxation factors (ERs), destination information (DI) and family and friends (FFs) have a low level of influence.

Structural model analysis was performed via PLS-SEM with the following assessments: multicollinearity (VIF); R² is intended to measure the influence of the latent independent variable on the latent dependent variable; effect size f² (Hair et



al., 2019); and testing significance through estimating path coefficients (t values, p values). The results presented in Table 3 show that the VIF values are less than the threshold value of 5 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating that there is no multicollinearity phenomenon; the results show that the relationships (DI → DC; ER → DC, FF → DC) have a small degree of predictability, and the relationships (FC → DC, ID → DC, KD → DC) have a moderate degree of predictability. The R² value in this study was 0.446, which meets the moderate level (Hair et al., 2019).

5. Discussion

Using push–pull theory, this study explores the factors influencing international tourists' decisions to select Ho Chi Minh City as a travel destination. The findings reveal insights that align with and expand upon the existing tourism literature, highlighting specific areas of influence for strategic improvement in a city's tourism offerings. The results confirm the significance of push (internal) and pull (destination-specific) factors in shaping tourists' decisions. Among these, financial conditions ($\beta = 0.276$) emerged as the strongest determinant, indicating the pivotal role of affordability in attracting tourists. This aligns with findings from previous research emphasizing cost effectiveness as a crucial decision-making factor. Therefore, financial conditions strongly influence the choice of Ho Chi Minh City as a travel destination in this study. This factor can be considered from the perspective of travel costs. These costs often relate to transportation, hotels, dining, sightseeing fees, etc. Travel companies must publish price ranges for related services so that tourists can manage their expenses; small business owners and households selling related products need training to avoid unreasonable pricing for foreign tourists.

The empirical results show that the relationships in the theoretical research model are supported, providing a framework for predicting the decision to choose a tourist destination in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The statistical findings show that both push and pull factors influence the decision of international tourists to choose a tourist destination. This result is similar to those of previous studies (Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015; Martín-Santana et al., 2017). Destination image, a pull factor, strongly influences tourists' decisions ($\beta = 0.223$), indicating that for international tourists to Ho Chi Minh City, destination image strongly influences their choices. In addition, the image of the destination reflects the attractiveness of the destination, ranking third in influencing destination choice. This factor is related to the natural and cultural environment of the city and cultural and natural heritage sites. International tourists enjoy exploring and experiencing new cultures; therefore, tourism management agencies and local authorities should regularly organize and upgrade their cultural activities and facilitate international tourists' interaction with the local culture to increase their satisfaction and the intention to return. Food safety, traffic accidents, and rising food and accommodation prices during peak seasons must be addressed to make the city a friendly and safe destination. Managers need formal regulations and strict penalties for food safety and price stability to achieve this goal.

Additionally, establishing quick response teams to assist tourists in difficult situations is essential. In addition, marketers need to design effective marketing strategies and tools to make a city's tourism image more attractive. In the context of current technological development, marketing investment through social media building tourism websites, both from tourism businesses and activities at the state management level, will provide diverse tourism images, increasing the effectiveness of introducing the city's destination image to international visitors.

From the perspective of push motivation, the factors that come from within the choice, understanding these factors will help destinations understand their tastes, thereby allowing them to choose the appropriate service method to make tourists more satisfied. Destination information has a relatively small influence on the decision in this study ($\beta = 0.099$); however, this factor is significant in this study, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted in many different tourist destinations (Park et al., 2017; Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015). Knowledge and discovery are the second most influential factors among the push factors ($\beta = 0.237$), and this result is similar to that of many studies (Maghrifani et al., 2022; Bayih & Singh, 2020). In addition, knowledge and discovery are related to the desire to learn about a destination, which is one of the ways individuals perceive meaning through travel experiences. Individuals want to participate in various activities, especially being attracted to increased social interaction, to enhance their understanding of themselves. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh City has the Can Gio Biosphere Reserve with an area of 70,500 hectares associated with the Can Gio marine ecological urban area; the riverine ecological area along the Saigon River extends to the Cu Chi tunnels; Ben Duoc Temple is connected with the environmental agriculture area; high-tech agriculture; and eco-gardens and farms, ornamental plants, and flowers along the Saigon River link the Cu Chi district and Tay Ninh Province. Connecting these resources to tourism products will allow tourists to explore, combine entertainment and relaxation, and develop stable and sustainable tourism in Ho Chi Minh City.

Destination information significantly impacts the decision to choose a destination; however, the level of influence is not strong ($\beta = 0.099$). International tourists often refer to destination information through the media; therefore, negative information affects tourists' decisions. Destination image is a synthesis of information that tourists have, expressed through their beliefs and impressions of the destination (Çelik & Dedeoğlu, 2019; Seetanah et al., 2021); in fact, the information obtained depends on the events held at the destination, creating extraordinary impressions rather than reality (Crossley, 2020). This point shows that destination managers need a consistent and long-term promotion plan to create many channels to provide necessary information to tourists, ensuring consistency and long-term benefits. This factor is related to the tourism promotion program. Mohammed et al. (2021) proposed three stages in choosing a tourist destination, with the final stage

being the destination selected from the considerations in the previous stages. Destinations with potential tourism resources should focus on promotional activities, conveying accurate and attractive information to attract tourists. Valduga et al. (2020) and Slack et al. (2020) noted that destination promotion needs to clearly identify target customers, be directed directly to tourists or indirectly through tourism and travel businesses, and choose appropriate information transmission channels. In addition, entertainment and relaxation, family and friends, and destination information, although having less influence on tourists' decisions to visit Ho Chi Minh City, are still significant in this study. A destination is a series of individual products and opportunities combined to form a complete tourist experience. Destination information relates to the availability of information about the destination before and during the visit. The increasing importance of social networks in tourism has also been widely recognized; some studies have reported that word-of-mouth on social networks influences tourists' decisions. Managers and tourism businesses must establish long-term interactive relationships among all stakeholders, aiming to form an integrated system for tourists to organize information and manage their destinations throughout the journey. Enhancing features for tourism applications to connect destinations, accommodations, restaurants, attractions, and shopping and integrate additional information and 3D 2D images of tourist areas, historical sites, and attractions is essential. Entertainment and relaxation should also be emphasized through organizing fairs, cultural food festivals, nighttime tourism products, waterway festivals, and dockside activities.

The findings of this study show that push–pull theory helps understand the behavior of international tourists, especially in developing markets such as Vietnam, and provides detailed insights into marketing strategies by showing how psychological and practical factors combine to influence decisions. The results show that many factors attract tourists; therefore, improving the reputation of Ho Chi Minh City as a top tourism destination requires a holistic strategy.

6. Conclusions

In the increasingly competitive tourism industry, destinations must continuously adapt and enhance their competitiveness. Understanding the factors influencing tourists' decisions to choose a destination forms the basis for proposing programs and policies to attract tourists. This study identifies the factors that affect the choice of Ho Chi Minh City as a destination for international tourists. The factors of knowledge and discovery, entertainment and relaxation, family and friends, image of the destination, destination information, and financial conditions were selected to achieve this goal. The research results show that all the factors in the research model influence international tourists' decisions to choose Ho Chi Minh City. The results show that the push factors are knowledge, discovery and financial conditions, and the pull factor is destination image, which affects tourists' decision when choosing Ho Chi Minh City as a travel destination. Despite the contributions of this study, there are several limitations and suggestions for future research. First, the results were derived from a general sample of all tourists, while tourists from different market regions may evaluate the factors influencing their travel decisions differently. Future research could be designed to identify specific market regions so that tourism businesses can tailor tour programs to target specific market groups. Second, tourists of different ages may assess the impact of factors in the research model on travel decisions differently. This study did not evaluate this aspect. Future research should be designed to confirm whether there are differences among foreign tourist groups on the basis of age. Third, the convenience sampling technique is a limitation, as the results may not fully represent the general population.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to completing this study. Our heartfelt thanks to colleagues at the Faculty of Business Administration, Ho Chi Minh University of Banking, for their continuous support and valuable input throughout this research process. We also extend our appreciation to the international tourists who participated in our survey, providing crucial data that formed the backbone of this study. Finally, we are grateful to our families for their unwavering encouragement, making this research endeavor possible.

Ethical considerations

We confirm that we have obtained all consent required by the applicable law to publish any personal details or images of tourists, research subjects, or other individuals used. We agree to provide Multidisciplinary Science Journal with copies of the consent or evidence that such consent has been obtained if requested.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research is supported by Ho Chi Minh University of Banking (Grant number: 2163/QĐ-ĐHNH, Ho Chi Minh City, date 01/08/2023).

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