

A Comprehensive Review of Approaches to Measuring Destination Attractiveness: Towards an Integrated Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

Destination attractiveness plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' expectations, decision-making, and overall satisfaction, making it a central concept in tourism research and destination management. Since the 1970s, scholarly efforts have evolved from attribute-based measurements emphasizing resources, infrastructure, and services, to consumer-centered perspectives grounded in push-pull theory and means-ends theory. Despite these advances, existing approaches often lack integration and fail to capture the complex, value-driven nature of travel behavior in today's personalized tourism context. This article systematically reviews peer-reviewed literature on destination attractiveness measurement using qualitative content analysis of studies published between 1970 and 2024. We critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of existing approaches and identify key research gaps. Based on this analysis, we propose an integrated theoretical framework that connects intrinsic motivations (push factors) and destination attributes (pull factors) through the value-assignment processes articulated by means-ends theory. The framework clarifies how specific attributes translate into expected consequences and personal values, offering a more comprehensive understanding of attraction formation. It also provides practical guidance for policymakers and tourism managers to design strategies that align with tourists' value systems and enhance destination competitiveness. This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of tourism research and lays the groundwork for future empirical studies that test and refine the proposed model.

Keywords: Attractiveness Measurement, Destination Attractiveness, Integrated Theoretical Framework, Means-ends Theory, Push-pull Theory

Introduction

Destination attractiveness is a fundamental concept in tourism behavior research, serving as the basis for explaining how tourists form expectations, make travel decisions, and evaluate their satisfaction with a particular locality (1). Previous studies have shown that destination attractiveness significantly influences tourists' expectations, satisfaction, intention to return, destination choice, perceived motivations and benefits, positive attitudes toward social influences, as well as the length of stay and expenditure during the travel experience (2). However, due to the diversity in how this concept is understood, measurement approaches vary widely, leading to inconsistencies and a lack of comparability across empirical studies. Destination attractiveness is a multidimensional construct, comprising various interrelated dimensions (3). Many analytical frameworks are

derived from the study of well-known destinations; nevertheless, such frameworks may be unsuitable as normative tools for planning and policymaking in other contexts (4). This limitation arises because the factors shaping attractiveness are destination-specific, context-dependent, and subject to change over time (5).

In parallel with these conceptual challenges, tourism behavior itself has undergone substantial changes over the past decades. The evolution from standardized mass tourism toward increasingly segmented, experience-oriented, and personalized travel has fundamentally altered how tourists perceive and evaluate destinations (6). Advances in digital technologies and the widespread availability of online information have enabled tourists to actively compare alternatives, customize itineraries, and co-create travel experiences. As a result, subjective interpretation,

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perceived value, and personal meaning have become central elements in destination choice and post-visit evaluation (7). These behavioral shifts imply that destination attractiveness can no longer be adequately captured by static inventories of destination attributes alone, but must also reflect how such attributes are cognitively interpreted and emotionally valued by tourists.

A model was developed to assess the attractiveness of a tourist destination, comprising five groups of attributes that contribute to Turkey appeal: (a) Natural factors, (b) Social factors, (c) Historical factors, (d) Entertainment and shopping facilities and (e) Infrastructure, food, and accommodation. This work is recognized as one of the pioneering studies in measuring destination attractiveness through the evaluation of specific attributes (8). Over time, this model has been adopted and further developed by scholars worldwide (9–13). This approach primarily regards the destination as an objective entity that can be directly assessed, typically aligning with a supply-side perspective in tourism.

In recent years, however, modern research trends have increasingly shifted toward explaining attractiveness from the tourism consumer's perspective (14). From this demand-side viewpoint, tourists travel because they are driven by internal motivations and are attracted by the external characteristics of the destination (15). Consequently, attractiveness is understood as the result of a subjective evaluation process, shaped by each tourist's personal motivations, perceptions, and values (16).

Approaches based on influencing factors such as push–pull motivation and personalized experience value are increasingly applied to measure destination attractiveness in a more comprehensive manner (17–18). Unlike methods that simply list the available characteristics of a destination, this approach emphasizes the process through which attraction is formed. It highlights personal feelings, expectations, and deep-seated motivations that reflect the subjectivity inherent in travel behavior. Measuring destination attractiveness through the lens of push and pull motivations has become a prevalent trend, as evidenced by the growing number of related articles published in prestigious scientific journals in recent years (19–22).

Despite these developments, existing studies still lack a unified framework that fully integrates both supply-side attributes and demand-side motivations. This lack of integration has resulted in fragmented findings, making it difficult for researchers and policymakers to apply existing frameworks effectively. More specifically, while attribute-based models provide valuable insights for destination planning and competitiveness assessment, they often under-specify the cognitive mechanism through which destination attributes become personally meaningful (11–14). Conversely, motivation-based approaches capture tourists' internal drivers but frequently leave implicit how external attributes are translated into perceived value and overall attractiveness (19–21). This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive review of current measurement approaches. Therefore, this review proposes integrating lens to explain not only why tourists travel and what attracts them, but also how destination attributes are cognitively transformed into personal value and perceived attractiveness.

The present study aims to review and systematize existing approaches to measuring the attractiveness of tourist destinations. It particularly focuses on analyzing the advantages and limitations of current measurement directions. Special attention is given to distinguishing between assessing constituent attributes and evaluating influencing factors. Accordingly, this study reviews and synthesizes existing measurement approaches to destination attractiveness, identifying theoretical gaps and outlining directions for future research, with practical implications for policymakers and tourism managers.

Methodology

The present study adopts qualitative content analysis to systematically synthesize existing approaches to measuring destination attractiveness. The analysis aims to identify underlying theoretical foundations, examine the strengths and limitations of dominant measurement approaches, and reveal conceptual gaps in the literature. This method is particularly suitable for theory-oriented review studies, as it enables in-depth interpretation of conceptual structures, measurement logic, and implicit

assumptions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative bibliometric techniques.

The review is based on secondary data from peer-reviewed academic publications indexed in major international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. Relevant studies were identified using the keywords “destination attractiveness” in combination with “attributes”, “measurement”, “framework”, and “factors”, ensuring coverage of both supply-oriented and demand-oriented research streams as well as conceptual and measurement-focused studies.

Document selection followed a three-step process: a) initial screening based on titles, abstracts, and keywords b) exclusion of studies outside the tourism field or lacking academic rigor and c) removal of duplicate records or publications with insufficient information. The review period spans from 1970 up to 2024, intentionally chosen to capture the major phases in the evolution of destination attractiveness research, from early attribute-based models to contemporary motivation- and value-oriented approaches.

Qualitative content analysis was conducted at the conceptual level. Each selected study was examined to determine how destination attractiveness was defined, operationalized, and theoretically explained. Particular attention was paid to whether attractiveness was conceptualized primarily as an objective set of destination attributes, a function of tourist motivation, or a subjective value-based evaluation process. This theory-driven coding approach enabled systematic comparison across studies and facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, conceptual overlaps, and theoretical discontinuities.

The analysis is organized around three core themes: a) conceptualizations of destination attractiveness; b) applied measurement approaches; and c) research gaps and limitations. By comparing studies within and across these themes, the analysis moves beyond descriptive synthesis to uncover key theoretical gaps, especially the lack of integration between supply-side attribute-based models and demand-side motivational and value-based explanations. Methodological rigor is ensured through transparent selection criteria, consistent conceptual coding and systematic cross-comparison of theoretical arguments and measurement logics, thereby supporting the

development of an integrated theoretical framework.

All tables and figures are compiled by the authors based on the literatures reviewed, and sources are therefore reported collectively in the methodology rather than repeated in individual captions.

Results

Concept of Destination Attractiveness

The term attractiveness originates from the Latin verb *attrahere*, meaning “to draw toward” or “to attract” (10, 23). Destination attractiveness reflects the extent to which a destination can deliver perceived benefits to tourists. Importantly, this perception may occur both before and after travel and does not necessarily imply an immediate behavioral decision. A destination is considered attractive when it possesses characteristics that align with tourists’ expectations and motivations, not only through its objective attributes but, more importantly, through how these attributes are perceived and interpreted by different types of tourists (24).

Attractiveness can emerge even before direct experience, through exposure to information, images, word of mouth, or promotional activities (11). This highlights that destination attractiveness is not solely an outcome of on-site experience but can be formed at pre-visit stages through cognitive and affective evaluations. Accordingly, contemporary research distinguishes between objective attractiveness and perceived attractiveness, with the latter increasingly becoming the focus of scholarly attention (11). Perceived attractiveness represents tourists’ subjective assessment, shaped by familiarity, expectations, prior experience, and emotional responses (25). Thus, attractiveness cannot be determined solely by physical or infrastructural features but emerges from a synthesis of objective and subjective factors, including the perceptions of tourists and other stakeholders (26).

Across the reviewed studies, this shift from resource-based evaluation toward perception- and value-based interpretation represents a consistent conceptual trend in destination attractiveness research. From a behavioural psychology perspective, attractiveness has been conceptualized as a cognitive–affective evaluation reflecting tourists’ perceptions of a destination’s capacity to satisfy their motivations and

preferences. Rather than a direct expression of travel intention, attractiveness captures an intermediate evaluative stage mediating between destination attributes and subsequent attitudinal or behavioural responses (27). Thus, attractiveness should be understood as a multi-stage perception-based construct that may be formed pre-visit, reinforced on-site, and reassessed post-visit, rather than as a behavioural decision outcome.

Beyond functional attributes, destination attractiveness encapsulates perceived benefits, symbolic meanings, and experiential value associated with a destination. These evaluations are inherently value-laden, shaped not only by what a destination possesses, but by what those attributes signify and enable for the individual tourist. This explains why similar destination features may be perceived as highly attractive by some tourists while remaining less appealing to others (4, 11).

Contemporary scholarship further reinforces this view by redefining destination attractiveness as a multidimensional and dynamic construct that integrates cognitive appraisal, emotional engagement, and value interpretation under evolving tourism conditions. Emerging studies increasingly suggest that attractiveness transcends a static inventory of destination attributes and should instead be understood as a perception-based process through which destinations become meaningful via individualized interpretation and emotional resonance.

This consideration is particularly important for Vietnam, where destinations display clear differences in resources, image, and perceived experiences. Such diversity necessitates an understanding of attractiveness that incorporates

not only physical characteristics but also tourists' perceptual perspectives. A perceptual approach was applied in the evaluation of Hue's attractiveness, confirming that perceived attractiveness provides richer explanatory power than purely attribute-based assessments (11).

Building on these approaches, an integrated definition of destination attractiveness conceptualizes it as a set of tourists' beliefs, ideas, and perceptions formed through the interaction between accumulated experiences and the destination's physical attributes (15). Destination attractiveness can therefore be understood not as a static property of place, but as a dynamic evaluative construct shaped through the interplay between destination attributes and tourists' perceptual and value systems. This conceptualization provides a suitable theoretical foundation for developing the measurement framework in this study and serves as the basis for this review.

Measurement Approaches

In contemporary tourism research, destination attractiveness has been conceptualized and measured through a variety of approaches, reflecting the evolving understanding and analytical objectives of different periods (14). The reviewed literature indicates a clear progression in measurement logic, from early resource-oriented assessments toward more perception and value-based interpretations of attractiveness. To clarify the evolution of measurement logic across the extended review period (1970–2024), Table 1 summarizes the major phases in destination attractiveness research based on dominant conceptual perspectives and measurement parameters.

Table 1: Phases in the Evolution of Destination Attractiveness Measurement (1970–2024)

Phase	Time period	Dominant perspective	Key parameters of destination attractiveness	Typical measurement approaches
1	1970s–late 1980s	Supply-side, resource-oriented	Tangible destination attributes (natural resources, infrastructure, services, accessibility)	Attribute inventories; multi-attribute evaluation models
2	1990s–late 2000s	Demand-side, perception-oriented	Tourists' perceptions, destination image, familiarity, perceived quality	Construct-based attribute scales; image and perception models
3	2010s–2024	Motivation-, value-, and experience-oriented	Cognitive–affective evaluation; motivational alignment; perceived value and meaning	Push–pull models; experience- and value-oriented frameworks

Note: This phased classification serves as the organizing structure for the subsequent review of measurement approaches.

Attribute-based Measurement of Destination Attractiveness

The earliest and most widely adopted approach views attractiveness as the aggregation of a destination's objective attributes, including natural resources, culture, infrastructure, services, safety, price, and accessibility (8, 28, 29). This method often employs multi-attribute evaluation models with specific scales for each component. Historically, this approach dominated destination attractiveness research from the 1970s through the late 1980s, reflecting a planning- and supply-oriented paradigm.

The first system of destination attributes comprising five categories: natural, social, historical, entertainment/shopping facilities, and accommodation infrastructure was proposed in 1974 (8). A later study distinguished between natural attributes, such as landscape, climate, and heritage, and man-made factors, including accommodation, transportation, and services (30). Another study classified attributes into primary (heritage, resources, climate, etc.) and secondary (services, entertainment, infrastructure) groups, noting that the former typically influence destination choice, while the latter enhance the overall experience (31). Subsequent research refined the original indicators into four main factors: tourism services, cultural/historical factors, rural accommodation, and outdoor recreation (26). These classification efforts illustrate a gradual refinement of attribute structures rather than a fundamental shift in measurement logic.

Although these models vary in classification, there is consensus that attractiveness attributes are inherently tied to specific types of destinations and should be measured within their local contexts. Since the 1990s, the construct-based approach has gained widespread acceptance and has been applied in numerous empirical studies to assess the attractiveness of tourist destinations worldwide (9, 32–34). In Vietnam, this approach has also been employed in studies of destinations such as Hue and Ly Son Island, primarily as a tool to evaluate the level of development and competitiveness of destinations within the context of tourism planning and management (11–13). This phase reflects the institutionalization of attribute-based measurement as a standard analytical tool in destination evaluation.

The strengths of this approach include its ease of quantification, its suitability for competitiveness assessment, and its ability to generate comparable indicators for destination management, thereby supporting planning, investment, and policy formulation. However, certain limitations are evident. From an objective, supply-side perspective, destination attractiveness is regarded as a complex concept that requires comprehensive and systematic evaluation (25). Measurement typically relies on quantitative data, which objectifies the level of attractiveness and enables comparisons across multiple destinations. Nevertheless, this reliance on quantitative, attribute-based analysis primarily reflects the potential attractiveness of a destination, without fully capturing the actual attractiveness as perceived or experienced by tourists (26).

Moreover, an excessive focus on physical characteristics may overlook emotional, experiential, and motivational dimensions that are increasingly central to modern travel behavior (25, 33). Environmental changes such as modernization, urbanization, and industrialization can influence individuals' needs and desires, shaping perceptions, emotions, beliefs, and attitudes toward a destination (35). As tourism demand becomes more individualized and experience-driven, the explanatory power of static attribute inventories becomes increasingly limited. The dynamic and personalized nature of contemporary tourism calls for flexible models that incorporate perceived value, an aspect not fully addressed by the attribute-based approach (16, 36). Additionally, attributes such as infrastructure, services, and environmental conditions can change rapidly, making measurement results outdated if not regularly updated.

Consequently, many scholars argue that the attribute-based model is better suited for geographical studies, destination planning, and regional analysis, but falls short in explaining destination choice behavior in tourism psychology or marketing research (26). While useful for management purposes, it cannot fully capture the complexity of tourists' decision-making.

In summary, while the attribute-based approach remains a valuable tool for assessing tourism resources and supporting destination management, it is insufficient to fully capture

tourists' psychological and experiential dimensions. This conceptual limitation, consistently identified across the reviewed studies, has prompted researchers to explore alternative approaches that emphasize tourists' motivations, perceptions, and value systems. These developments have led to the emergence of influence-based measurement models, which will be discussed in the following section.

Influence-based Measurement of Destination Attractiveness

The push-pull theory is one of the fundamental frameworks for explaining tourist behavior and, in particular, for operationalizing destination attractiveness. In this model, the determinants of attractiveness are divided into two groups that can be measured, typically via quantitative surveys, while simultaneously accounting for both personal motivations and external attraction factors. The framework was first applied to tourism in 1977, distinguishing push factors internal, socio-psychological needs such as the desire to escape everyday life, relax, explore oneself, or signal social status from pull factors, namely external destination features such as natural landscapes, favorable climate, cultural heritage, and service quality that render a place attractive to tourists (17). It was later extended to include seven socio-psychological categories of push motivations: escape, relaxation, discovery/novelty, prestige, family bonding, nostalgia, and social interaction, while emphasizing that pull factors encompass natural conditions, facilities, and destination-specific cultural and entertainment activities. Thus, the push-pull framework explains both why tourists wish to travel and why they choose particular destinations (18).

Subsequent studies confirmed the interactive nature of these two groups of factors. One study demonstrated that push factors generate demand, whereas pull factors reinforce, guide, or activate destination choice, thereby shaping specific patterns of tourism consumption (37). Across the reviewed literature, this interaction is consistently identified as a core mechanism underlying the formation of perceived destination attractiveness. This bidirectional relationship underpins explanations of how perceptions of destination attractiveness are formed.

Within this context, approaching destination attractiveness from a motivation perspective is

increasingly regarded as more comprehensive than purely attribute-based models. Destinations and travel motivations are inseparable: a place is unlikely to be attractive without individual motivation, while motivation itself is unlikely to form without the presence of attractive destination features (38). This perspective represents a conceptual shift from viewing attractiveness as a static set of destination attributes toward understanding it as a dynamic outcome of motivational processes. In other words, attraction emerges from the dynamic interaction between intrinsic needs and extrinsic characteristics, as initially proposed and later reinforced by recent studies (17, 19, 20, 39, 40).

Concretely, push factors capture intangible personal or social drivers such as the desire for relaxation, adventure, learning, status enhancement, or relationship building, which can prompt trip planning even before a destination is identified (41). By contrast, pull factors are observable attributes of the destination natural resources, cultural heritage, ethnographic characteristics, tourism services, and destination image that shape the traveler's final choice (42). Crucially, the appeal of pull factors is not purely objective; it is filtered through tourists' perceptions, emotions, and value systems. Attraction materializes only when external features are interpreted, integrated, and assigned meaning within tourists' internal frames of reference (27). This implies that push-pull theory implicitly assumes a cognitive-evaluative process, even though this process is not explicitly theorized within the model itself. The push-pull model therefore not only captures the mechanism of destination choice but also highlights the mediating role of perception in the formation of attractiveness.

Put succinctly, push motivations explain why individuals want to travel, whereas pull motivations determine where they go (43). These factors do not operate independently; rather, they interact dynamically and are contingent on context, market segment, and tourist demographics (26, 44). This flexibility, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the psychology of tourist behavior make the push-pull model a robust theoretical foundation for measuring destination attractiveness. However, the reviewed studies also indicate that, when

applied in isolation, the push–pull framework has limited explanatory power in clarifying how destination attributes are transformed into personally meaningful values. This conceptual limitation provides a clear rationale for integrating complementary cognitive theories in order to advance the measurement of destination attractiveness.

Empirical Studies Applying the Push - pull Model and Its Limitations

Recent empirical studies emphasize that segmenting tourists by motivation yields distinct perceptions of destination attractiveness. A growing body of research has operationalized the push–pull framework to examine determinants of attractiveness (19, 21, 22, 45, 46). The increasing number of publications in reputable journals underscores the prominence of this approach. Across different empirical contexts, these studies consistently demonstrate that motivation-based segmentation produces differentiated evaluations of destination attractiveness, reinforcing the

explanatory relevance of the push–pull framework.

To develop an appropriate measurement model, researchers must not only identify destination attributes but also concurrently elicit and explain tourists' subjective motivations. Analyzing the interaction between push and pull factors is a critical premise for constructing an influence-based measurement framework, an approach that is increasingly favored in the international literature (44). While widely applied, studies also note that measurements focusing on only one side (push or pull) risk incomplete or biased assessments of destination attractiveness. This observation suggests that destination attractiveness emerges most clearly when both dimensions are examined simultaneously rather than in isolation. Given the extensive volume of push–pull research, Table 2 does not aim to be exhaustive; instead, it highlights representative empirical studies that reflect dominant analytical strategies in measuring destination attractiveness (18-22, 47-49).

Table 2: Empirical Studies Measuring Destination Attractiveness Based on Push-Pull Factors

Year	Journal	Theory	Push–Pull Components / Dimensions (Push / Pull)		Sample Size	Analytical Method
2019	Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship	Travel Motivation / Push–Pull	2	4	213	CFA, EFA
2020	Journal of the Knowledge Economy	Travel Motivation / Push–Pull	2	3	332	ANOVA
2020	Sustainability	Push–Pull	2	4	332	CFA, EFA
2021	GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites	Push–Pull	6	6	235	CFA, EFA, SEM
2022	Sustainability	Travel Motivation	-	4	599	CFA, EFA
2022	Island Studies Journal	Push–Pull	1	3	332	Fuzzy AHP
2022	Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners	Travel Motivation / Push–Pull	2	1	370	SPSS
2026	Economics and Environment	Travel Motivation / Push–Pull	2	1	205	EFA, ANOVA

The synthesis of these empirical studies indicates that the push–pull approach provides a comprehensive analytical lens by jointly considering intrinsic motivations and external destination attributes. Beyond descriptive categorization, the reviewed studies reveal that motivation-based models are particularly effective in uncovering the underlying drivers of tourist behavior that are not captured by attribute-based measurements alone. Consequently, the push–pull approach constitutes a robust theoretical foundation for elucidating how destination attractiveness is formed.

The empirical studies reviewed above demonstrate that the push–pull model is both contextually flexible and adaptable to a wide range of quantitative analytical techniques in contemporary tourist behavior research. Despite being one of the most popular and influential theoretical frameworks in tourism studies, the push–pull model also exhibits certain limitations when applied to measuring destination attractiveness. These limitations become especially evident when the model is used to explain not only destination choice but also the deeper formation of perceived attractiveness.

Foremost among these is the inherent variability of push factors internal, socio-psychological motivations that tend to evolve continuously depending on life stage, social circumstances, and personal experiences. In the context of rapid globalization, modernization, and technological advancement, tourist behavior has become increasingly volatile and difficult to predict. This renders the quantitative measurement of such motivations challenging in terms of both stability and generalizability (9, 50). As a result, empirical findings based solely on push motivations may lack temporal consistency and explanatory depth.

In addition, pull factors, although easier to observe, are not entirely objective. The attractiveness of a destination does not arise solely from its physical attributes but also depends on how tourists interpret and integrate these attributes into their personal systems of values and expectations. Consequently, cognition, emotion, and experience become decisive elements in shaping perceptions of destination attractiveness. It has been observed that the emotional interplay between push and pull factors throughout the experiential journey forms the foundation for generating new motivations and reshaping future destination choices (50). However, the push-pull model does not explicitly theorize how this interpretive and value-assignment process occurs.

Recent studies further demonstrate that the push-pull model, when applied without incorporating subjective cognitive and experiential-emotional dimensions, struggles to fully capture the reality of today's highly personalized tourism landscape (27). Within the context of the experience economy, measurement models must place greater emphasis on tourists as active agents who create and evaluate destinations, rather than as passive respondents to pre-existing motivations. This limitation highlights the need for complementary theoretical perspectives capable of explaining the cognitive mechanisms through which destination attributes are transformed into personally meaningful evaluations.

Empirical research integrating the push-pull model with the means-ends theory to measure destination attractiveness remains relatively scarce, highlighting significant academic potential for developing an integrated theoretical framework grounded in these two perspectives. It has been suggested that no single theory can

comprehensively explain travel behavior, as motivation is a complex phenomenon encompassing multiple levels of goals, perceptions, and value orientations. This provides a solid rationale for combining multiple theories to enhance analytical depth (51).

In this study, the push-pull theory is employed to identify motivational sources stemming from both internal drivers and external attraction factors, while the means-ends theory serves as a value-oriented cognitive framework. By integrating these two perspectives, the proposed approach explicitly addresses the theoretical gap identified in the empirical literature namely, the absence of a clearly articulated mechanism linking destination attributes, motivational drivers, and personal value formation. In the context of modern customer-oriented marketing, measuring destination attractiveness should extend beyond analyzing constituent attributes and instead be approached from the perspective of tourist behavior and cognition. Integrating these two theories enables the construction of a more comprehensive measurement model, aligned with the growing emphasis on personalized experiences and market-oriented destination management.

Discussion

Integrated Push-pull and Means-Ends Framework

Within this integrated framework, the means-ends theory plays a complementary role by explaining how tourists assign value to the pull factors identified through the push-pull model. The theory was first introduced in 1982 to explain consumer decision-making, emphasizing not only specific product attributes but also the benefits and personal values derived from those attributes (52). In the tourism context, it has been applied to gain deeper insights into tourists' destination choice behavior, particularly how they connect the tangible elements of a destination to personal and emotional goals (16). Importantly, this perspective allows destination attractiveness to be conceptualized as a perceptual and evaluative construct that precedes intention and choice, rather than as a direct proxy for behavioral decision-making.

At the core of this theory lies a hierarchical cognitive structure comprising three levels:

specific attributes, expected consequences, and personal values (52). In tourism, the pull factors of a destination can be seen as means to achieve particular outcomes such as relaxation, exploration, learning, or social connection, while push factors represent the tourist's intrinsic needs. Accordingly, pull factors are not merely functional but also symbolic, reinforcing personal values such as freedom, growth, or belonging (53). This hierarchical structure provides an explicit cognitive mechanism through which destination attributes are interpreted and transformed into personally meaningful evaluations of attractiveness. One of the most influential applications of the means-ends theory used the laddering technique to explore how tourists link destination attributes to their value systems (52). Although focused on choice behavior, the findings demonstrated the theory's utility in analyzing perceived cognition as an intermediate, highly personalized stage prior to actual consumption. In the same vein, it has been emphasized that destinations are truly attractive only when they activate tourists' personal values and goals, meaning that the same attribute can be perceived differently depending on each group's value orientations (53).

Empirical evidence further supports this perspective. For instance, a study applied the Hierarchical Value Map to show that destination perception is not merely a reflection of objective information but also the result of subjective value interpolation and emotional attachment (54). In the context of urban sustainable development, the theory was extended through the A-C-V (Attribute-Consequence-Value) model, demonstrating that destination image is shaped not only by its attributes but also by the value interpretations and emotional associations of the local community (55). These findings reinforce the argument that destination attractiveness emerges through a cognitive-evaluative process rather than as a simple aggregation of destination attributes. The synthesis of these studies indicates that the means-ends theory is highly effective not only in explaining choice behavior but also in analyzing value perceptions and emotional connections to tourist destinations. More importantly, it clarifies the mechanism through which pull factors

(destination attributes) can activate or resonate with push factors (intrinsic motivations) via the process of personal value attribution. From this integrative perspective, destination attractiveness can be understood as the point at which push-related needs and pull-related attributes converge through value-oriented cognition. Accordingly, pull factors may be viewed as value symbols interpreted within tourists' subjective frames of reference (56, 57).

Over the past two decades, empirical research has reinforced the argument that the means-ends theory functions as both a behavioral and a cognitive framework with strong explanatory power, making it especially suitable for studying destination attractiveness as a subjective, value-driven phenomenon (16, 53-55). Many scholars also contend that the means-ends theory conceptualizes a consumption-related cognitive structure in which information is stored and organized hierarchically in memory (56). This dual motivational-cognitive orientation allows the theory to bridge the gap between internal motivations and external destination characteristics, a gap that remains under-specified in traditional push-pull applications. This orientation enables the theory to explain how tourists assign meaning and value to destinations (57).

As such, the means-ends theory elucidates both the motivations and the mental structures linking destination attributes, expected outcomes, and personal values, thereby clarifying the cognitive processes underlying destination attractiveness. In tourism research, it has also been used to understand the underlying values shaping the behavior of both tourists and host communities, expanding its application from individual behavioral analysis to broader socio-cultural frameworks (58, 59). Therefore, the means-ends theory serves as a fundamental cognitive complement to the push-pull model in explaining perceptions of destination attractiveness within an integrated framework.

To synthesize this integration, Figure 1 illustrates how push-pull motivations converge through the means-ends cognitive structure (C-V) to form perceived destination attractiveness.

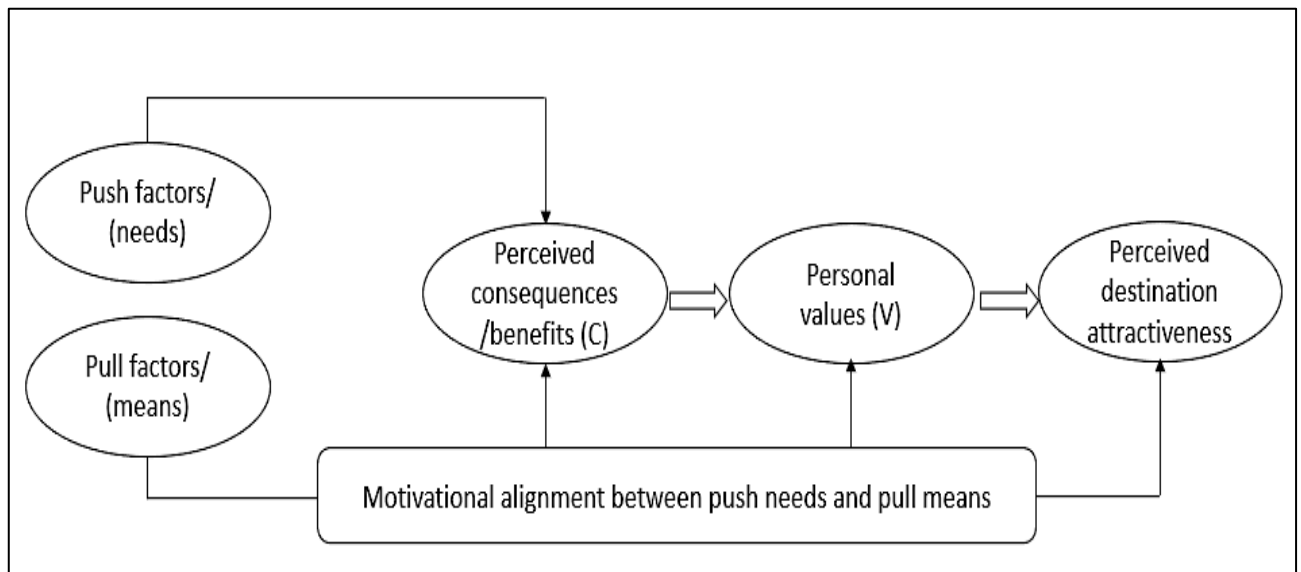


Figure 1: Integrated Push–Pull and Means–Ends Framework of Perceived Destination Attractiveness

Application of the Integrated Theoretical Framework

Over the past two decades, the means–ends theory has been extended beyond behavioural analysis to explain how tourists perceive and evaluate destinations through the alignment of attributes, expected outcomes, and personal values. In the present study, the push–pull theory is employed to identify sources of motivation arising from both internal drivers and external attraction factors, while the means–ends theory is used to explain how tourists assign value to destinations based on their personal goals. This integration explicitly positions destination attractiveness at the perceptual stage of the tourism decision-making process, prior to the formation of travel intention or actual destination choice.

It is important to note, however, that the analytical boundaries between these two theories are not entirely distinct. Certain push factors in the push–pull model, such as the need for self-expression or the search for meaning, are inherently value-oriented. Conversely, the means–ends theory, originally developed to explain product choice behavior, is not limited to cognitive structures alone (52). Thus, the two theories should not be viewed as absolute functional contrasts but rather as intersecting frameworks in which cognition, values, and behaviour are intertwined in the decision-making process.

Instead of assigning rigidly separate functions, this study adopts a functionally integrated and analytically compatible approach. The push–pull

theory addresses the question “Why do people want to travel?” (17, 18). The means–ends theory answers “How does a destination become personally meaningful to each individual?” (16, 52). By combining these perspectives, the integrated framework explains not only the sources of travel motivation but also the cognitive–evaluative process through which destination attributes are evaluated as attractive. The framework clarifies the process of value interpolation, whereby destination attributes are translated into perceived attractiveness, and traces the links between needs, perceptions, and motivations, thereby strengthening the theoretical foundation for the proposed model. Importantly, the integration proposed in this study does not diminish the explanatory role of push–pull factors in shaping destination attractiveness; rather, it deepens existing explanations by explicating the cognitive mechanism through which these factors are transformed into personally meaningful evaluations.

The principal advantage of this framework lies in its ability to comprehensively capture both push and pull motivations in the process by which individual tourists perceive and interpret destination attractiveness across different contexts. By combining psychological depth (intrinsic motivation and personal value systems) with objective destination attributes, the framework provides a more complete understanding of attraction formation. It also resolves a key limitation in existing literature by distinguishing destination attractiveness as a

perceptual construct rather than conflating it with intention or choice. Thus, the integrated push–pull and means–ends framework is expected to serve as a valuable academic reference for studies measuring and forecasting destination attractiveness. Furthermore, it suggests practical applications in destination management and competitiveness enhancement in the contemporary experience economy.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the present study proposes an integrated framework to guide the measurement of tourist destination attractiveness from a personalization and value-orientation perspective. This integration of the push–pull and means–ends theories rests on a solid theoretical basis, is supported by empirical evidence, and aligns with modern approaches in tourism behaviour research where individual perception, value orientation, and experience play central roles. By linking intrinsic motivations with destination attributes and clarifying the process of value assignment, the framework contributes to advancing the theoretical basis for measuring attractiveness from the tourist's personal perspective.

In the Vietnamese context, this framework can be applied to the analysis of well-known destinations such as Hue, as well as emerging destinations such as Binh Phuoc. These destinations represent both mature and emerging tourism markets, illustrating the versatility of the proposed framework in different development contexts. Although not yet empirically tested, the framework offers a conceptually robust basis for future studies examining perceived destination attractiveness among both actual visitors and potential tourists. This integrated theoretical framework therefore provides an important academic foundation for future measurement and application studies in destination management within the experience economy.

Conclusion

Destination attractiveness is a complex concept, encompassing both objective elements represented by destination attributes and the subjective perceptions and value systems of tourists. Measurement approaches have evolved from structural, attribute-based models emphasizing supply-side factors (e.g., resources, infrastructure, services) toward influence-based

perspectives. Among these, the push–pull framework has been particularly prominent, explaining how intrinsic motivations interact with extrinsic destination features in shaping attraction perceptions. Importantly, this review highlights that destination attractiveness should not be conflated with travel intention or destination choice, but rather conceptualized as a perceptual and evaluative construct that may precede such behavioural outcomes.

In the context of personalized and value-oriented tourism, this study proposes an integrated theoretical framework combining push–pull theory with means–ends theory to advance understanding of how attraction perceptions are formed. The framework links intrinsic motivations to personal values through a process of value attribution, whereby destination attributes (means) are cognitively interpreted in terms of expected consequences and personal goals. By articulating this cognitive mechanism, the proposed integration addresses a key theoretical gap in destination attractiveness research and provides a deeper explanation of the relationships among emotions, values, and perceptions in the tourism experience.

The principal advantage of this framework lies in its ability to incorporate both psychological dimensions (motivations, personal values) and objective destination characteristics, offering a more dynamic and personalized reflection of modern tourism behaviour. Unlike traditional approaches relying on static attribute inventories or isolated motivational dimensions, the integrated framework conceptualizes destination attractiveness as a value-mediated perception shaped through individual meaning-making processes. It also holds potential for guiding destination development strategies aligned with tourists' expectations and market demands.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The proposed framework remains conceptual and has not yet been empirically validated or operationalized through a specific measurement instrument. Future research should test and refine the framework through quantitative applications across diverse destination contexts, including heritage sites, tourist cities, border regions, and ecological destinations. Further studies may also explore how perceived destination attractiveness operates

within broader behavioural models, potentially linking motivations, satisfaction, attachment, and revisit intentions.

In summary, this article not only systematizes existing approaches to measuring destination attractiveness but also contributes an academically grounded integrated framework aligned with contemporary tourism research trends. By positioning destination attractiveness as a cognitive-affective and value-oriented construct, the study advances conceptual clarity and provides a robust foundation for future theoretical and empirical investigations, bridging the gap between scholarly understanding and practical destination management.

Abbreviations

A-C-V: Attribute-Consequence-Value, AHP: Analytic Hierarchy Process, ANOVA: Analysis of Variance, CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis, EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis, SEM: Structural Equation Modeling, SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

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Author Contributions

Sui Nghiep Phat: conceptualization, methodology, literature review, data curation, drafting manuscript, project administration, Quoc Nghi Nguyen: theoretical framework development, methodology refinement, data, analysis, review, editing, Tran Thi Ngoc Lien: supervision, critical revisions. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

Data Availability

The data are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors used ScienceDirect AI only to assist in identifying and summarizing relevant literature. All analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were

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