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ANALYSING THE PUSH AND PULL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LENGTH OF STAY AMONG ELDERLY THAI TOURISTS

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Abstract

Population aging is a global phenomenon, with the elderly population projected to rise significantly. By 2030, one in six individuals will be aged 60 or older. Thailand is experiencing rapid aging, expecting over 20 million elderly by 2040. This study examines the push and pull factors influencing the length of stay among Thai elderly tourists, using data collected from 400 participants aged 60 and above through the Snowball Sampling Technique. Key findings indicate that socializing (81.7%), family connections (80.4%), and seeking new experiences (78.8%) are the most influential push factors. For pull factors, the destination's ambiance (86.8%), favorable weather (82.7%), and cultural appeal (80.9%) are paramount. The causal model shows that push factors have a direct effect on pull factors (0.859) and the length of stay (0.770), with an indirect effect (0.178) mediated through pull factors. These findings underscore the growing importance of elderly travelers as a market segment, emphasizing the role of social, experiential, and environmental factors in shaping their travel decisions.

Keywords: Push and Pull Factors, Elder Society, Tourists

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Introduction

Population aging is an irreversible global phenomenon, with the number of people aged 65 and over rising from 761 million in 2021 to a projected 1.6 billion by 2050. By 2030, it is expected that one in six individuals globally will be aged 60 or older (United Nations, 2024). Asia and Europe are home to the world's most rapidly aging populations, and Thailand, in particular, has been classified as an aged society since 2005 (Tantirat et al., 2020). The swift growth of the elderly demographic is anticipated to significantly impact a range of industries, including tourism (Cejudo, 2019). Modern elderly populations see themselves as younger and more active due to "active aging" and increasingly participate in activities traditionally avoided by older generations (Barbaccia et al., 2022). These individuals report higher levels of satisfaction with their health and social lives, leading to an increased interest in travel and tourism post-retirement (Qiao et al., 2022). In 1999, over 593 million international travelers were aged 60 and above, projected to exceed two billion by 2050 (Liew et al., 2021). In Thailand, where the elderly population is expected to surpass 20 million, or 30% of the total population, by 2040 (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2021), excursion tourism has become a growing interest among seniors. However, financial constraints and concerns about location and environmental conditions remain significant considerations for this group (Panriansaen et al., 2024). As elderly individuals increasingly represent a key market segment for global tourism, this study aims to analyze the push and pull factors that influence the length of stay for Thai elderly tourists, positioning them as a critical focus for future tourism development, as highlighted by the World Tourism Organization.

Literature Reviews

Elder Society

According to the 2023 WHO reports, the number of people aged 65 years or older worldwide is projected to more than double, rising from 761 million in 2021 to 1.6 billion in 2050. In 2021, 1 in 10 people worldwide were aged 65 or above. 2050 this age group will account for 1 in 6 people globally.

PRB has published the top 50 countries with the highest number of older Adults. Asia and Europe are home to some of the world's oldest populations, those ages 65 and above. Japan has the highest percentage of elderly citizens, 28% of the population, followed by Italy at 23%. Finland, Portugal, and Greece ranked in the top five, with just under 22%.

A country can be defined as an "aging society" if the share of people aged 65 years or more is between 7% and 14% of the total population, as an "aged society" if the share is between 15% and 20%, and as "super-aged society" if the share is 21% or higher. (OECD)

Thailand is among the fastest-aging countries in the world. Since 2005, the country has been classified as an 'aged society' as people aged 60 years and above accounted for 10% of the population. According to the 2024 report from the Thai Department of Elderly Persons, the country has 13 million elderly, 19% of the total 66 million people. It is expected that the country's elderly population will increase to 28% and that Thailand will become a 'super-aged society' by the next decade (World Health Organization, 2023). Future population aging will occur more rapidly, with the number of older persons projected to increase to over 20 million by 2040; at this point, they will constitute over 30% of the population. Moreover, within the next decade, persons 60 and older will outnumber children under age 15 for the first time in Thai history (Knodel et al., 2013).

As a result of this population explosion, it is anticipated that senior tourism will become an evolving and changing market segment. In fact, according to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), one of the 2020 future market trends is an increasing number of elderly tourists. Tourism by seniors is substantial, such that people older than 60 will likely have made more than 2 billion international trips by 2050 (United Nations, 2024), far more than the 593 million

trips made in the early 2000s (Patterson, 2006). In 1999, over 593 million international travelers were 60 years and over. According to Eurostat, in 2021, the share of European tourists in the “silver” age category traveling for personal purposes constituted 33% of the total number of European tourists (Eurostat, 2024). In the United States, the “silver” age tourist segment constitutes approximately 25% of the American tourist market, with baby boomers alone spending a staggering \$157 billion annually on travel (Condor Ferries, 2024). This level of tourism activity accounted for approximately a third of the total amount spent on holidays that year. By 2050, this figure is projected to exceed two billion trips per annum (World Health Organization, 2023).

The Behavior of Elder Tourists

Elderly travel behavior is characterized by motivations and preferences shaped by external conditions, inner desires, and socio-demographic factors. Studies reveal that the primary motivators for senior tourists include personal well-being, escaping daily routines, socializing, and seeking new experiences (Patuelli & Nijkamp, 2016; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002). Seniors are drawn to tourism as a way to improve their mental, physical, and social well-being, with travel serving as a means of maintaining an active lifestyle that can enhance life satisfaction and combat the aging process (Przybysz & Stanimir, 2022; Fan et al., 2025). The desire for comfort, relaxation, and cultural enrichment is pivotal in their choice of destinations and activities (Alén et al., 2016).

Economic factors significantly shape elderly travel patterns. The availability of disposable income, often due to pensions or retirement savings, allows many senior tourists to invest in high-quality services and longer trips (Liew et al., 2021). However, disparities exist within this demographic based on income levels, with lower-income seniors engaging more in religious or spiritual travel while higher-income individuals seek leisure and cultural activities (Pohle & Amouyal, 2024). This highlights the heterogeneous nature of the senior travel market, where socioeconomic status, education, and health create distinct subgroups with varying preferences (Boksberger & Laesser, 2008).

The behavior of senior tourists also reflects their unique travel preferences and planning habits. Older adults prefer comfortable, safe, and high-quality travel options, with a strong inclination toward domestic travel and off-peak season trips to avoid crowds and take advantage of cost savings (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Seniors also tend to plan their trips well in advance, particularly for longer journeys or international travel, relying heavily on personal experiences, word of mouth, and print media as primary sources of information (Resonate, 2021). Travel companions and accommodation preferences vary, influenced by factors such as family circumstances, income, and the purpose of travel, with tour packages often appealing to seniors for their convenience and security (Patterson, 2006).

Cultural and regional differences further influence the travel behavior of elderly tourists. In the U.S., “silver” tourists prefer domestic travel and premium services, contributing significantly to the leisure travel market, while European seniors prioritize cultural heritage and leisure time diversification (European Commission, 2020). In Asia, where older people continue to work beyond retirement age, travel patterns are shaped by collectivist values and a preference for short, domestic trips with educational and wellness components (Huang et al., 2024). Particularly in Thailand, Excursion tourism emerged as a primary desire among older people, offering opportunities for exploration and novelty. However, financial constraints limited the frequency of such activities. Moreover, the research identified significant demands for suitable venues and facilities for recreational pursuits, with concerns raised regarding unfavorable locations and environmental factors. (Panriansaen et al., 2024).

The Factors Affect the Length of Stay of Elderly Tourists

The length of stay at a tourist destination is influenced by various factors, particularly among senior travelers, who generally demonstrate a tendency for more prolonged visits due to unique

socioeconomic characteristics. Age plays a significant role in this dynamic, with research consistently showing a positive correlation between increased age and longer stays (Alegre & Pou, 2006; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002). This trend is primarily attributed to the greater availability of leisure time post-retirement, as seniors no longer face the constraints of work and family obligations (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002). Additionally, higher discretionary income among this demographic facilitates extended stays, although this pattern may reverse as income declines and health deteriorates in older age groups (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002).

International trips also tend to have a positive relationship with the length of stay for seniors, as these trips often require more significant time and financial investment, which elderly travelers seek to maximize (Wu & Carson, 2008). Research highlights that seniors traveling independently instead of on package tours generally stay longer, reflecting their preference for flexibility and personalized experiences (Bai et al., 2001). Additionally, the types of activities engaged at the destination, such as cultural visits or shopping, further extend their stay, as seniors tend to immerse themselves more in the local culture (Ferrer-Rosell et al., 2014).

Economic factors such as discretionary income and group size also affect the length of stay. Studies suggest that seniors with higher incomes and those traveling alone or in smaller groups tend to stay longer, likely due to fewer economic restrictions and the greater freedom that solo travel affords (Alegre & Pou, 2006). However, financial and health constraints, particularly among older seniors, can limit travel frequency and duration (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Panriansaen et al., 2024).

Push and Pull Factors and Previous Studies

The concepts of push and pull factors emerged in the study of migration in the 19th and 20th centuries. Early theorists like E.G. Ravenstein laid the groundwork for understanding migration patterns. Over time, sociologists and geographers expanded these ideas to analyze global migration trends, particularly during significant historical events such as the Industrial Revolution, post-World War II migrations, and contemporary refugee crises.

Push factors describe why individuals might emigrate from their homes, including poverty, lack of social mobility, violence, or persecution. Pull factors describe why an individual might settle in a particular country. Push factors are commonly supposed to include higher wages, social services such as education or health care, or more nebulous concepts like equality or freedom.

In tourism research, this motivation concept can be classified into two forces, which indicate that people travel because they are pushed and pulled to do so by “some forces” or factors (Dann, 1977; 1981). According to Uysal and Hagan (1993), these forces describe how motivation variables push individuals into making travel decisions and how they are pulled or attracted by destination attributes. In other words, push motivations are related to the tourists’ desire, while pull motivations are associated with the characteristics of the destination choices (Cha et al., 1995; Crompton, 1979). Push motivations are more related to internal or emotional aspects. Pull motivations, on the other hand, are connected to external, situational, or cognitive factors.

Researchers began applying the concepts of push and pull factors to tourism in the late 20th century, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s (Crompton, 1979; Jafari, 1987). One of the key figures in this area was J. J. Boniface, who introduced the idea that travelers are motivated by both internal (push) and external (pull) factors (Boniface & Fowler, 1993).

Push factors in tourism include desires such as escape, adventure, or relaxation, while pull factors encompass the attractions of specific destinations, such as natural beauty, cultural experiences, or recreational opportunities (Kim & Perdue, 2011). This framework has since become foundational in tourism studies, helping to analyze consumer behavior and destination choices.

Several studies have examined the push and pull factors that motivate elderly tourists, using different methodologies to explore the internal and external drivers of senior travel behavior. Push factors, internal motivations prompting individuals to travel, are consistently identified across the literature. You et al. (2000) found that visiting family and friends, seeking novelty, and improving knowledge were primary push factors for elderly travelers. Similarly, Norman et al. (2010) highlighted the desire for escape, education, and ego enhancement, while Huang and Tsai (2003) identified rest, relaxation, and socializing as key motivations. Other researchers, such as Jang & Wu (2006), underscored factors like knowledge enhancement, self-esteem, and health as primary push motivations. Sangpikul (2008) further supported these findings by emphasizing novelty, rest, and ego enhancement as major drivers for elderly tourists.

In contrast, pull factors and external attributes of a destination that attract tourists were also explored in these studies. According to You et al. (2000), elderly tourists are drawn to destinations that offer good public transportation, cleanliness, and cultural attractions. Norman et al. (2010) found that natural surroundings, good weather, and budget-friendly accommodations are significant pull factors. Huang and Tsai (2003) identified historical and cultural attractions, hotel and restaurant quality, and travel safety as critical external motivators. Wen et al. (2024) expanded on these findings by highlighting the importance of cleanliness, destination facilities, medical services, and the cost of travel. Jang & Wu (2006) and Sangpikul (2008) further demonstrated that cleanliness, safety, and natural sights significantly attract elderly tourists.

These studies suggest that elderly tourists are motivated by personal (push) and external (pull) factors. Internally, the desire for relaxation, knowledge acquisition, socialization, and health improvement are significant motivators. Externally, the availability of clean, safe, and accessible destinations and cultural and natural attractions plays a crucial role in senior travel decisions. This duality of motivations highlights the importance of understanding both push and pull factors in catering to the needs and preferences of the elderly tourism market.

Research Methodology

For this research study, we will administer questionnaires targeting elderly individuals aged 60 years and older in Thailand, by the definitions established by the United Nations and the World Health Organization. This research aims to collect data from a sample of 400 participants utilizing the Snowball Sampling Technique. This method will initiate with one or more identified participants, who will subsequently refer to additional participants. The sampling process will continue based on these referrals until we achieve the desired sample size.

Research Results

The sample consists of 400 participants, of whom 67% identify as female and 33% as male. The age distribution is as follows: 43% of the participants are between 60 and 65 years old, 21% are between 66 and 70, and 36% are over 70.

The analysis of a causal relationship model of push and pull factors influencing the length of stay among elderly Thai tourists has latent variables for three and observed variables for 13. The relationship exists between [0.533, 0.783] as in the details shown in Table 1

Table 1 Correlation

Variables	Push 1	Push 2	Push 3	Push 4	Push 5	Pull 1	Pull 2	Pull 3	Pull 4	Pull 5	Len 1	Len 2	Len 3
Push 1	1												
Push 2	.690**	1											
Push 3	.756**	.783**	1										
Push 4	.653**	.753**	.718**	1									
Push 5	.665**	.776**	.728**	.717**	1								
Pull 1	.556**	.727**	.662**	.746**	.685**	1							
Pull 2	.595**	.740**	.641**	.747**	.740**	.705**	1						
Pull 3	.601**	.673**	.641**	.718**	.663**	.762**	.665**	1					
Pull 4	.624**	.690**	.672**	.746**	.654**	.781**	.639**	.667**	1				
Pull 5	.568**	.663**	.559**	.648**	.582**	.639**	.700**	.714**	.734**	1			
Len 1	.654**	.752**	.605**	.739**	.623**	.764**	.775**	.778**	.745**	.670**	1		
Len 2	.642**	.647**	.699**	.754**	.741**	.600**	.641**	.635**	.683**	.533**	.612**	1	
Len 3	.607**	.741**	.739**	.758**	.769**	.748**	.740**	.736**	.698**	.614**	.685**	.620**	1

Push 1 seeking for knowledge and success for ownself (Ego)

Push 2 resting, escaping, and relaxing (Escape)

Push 3 seeking new experiences (Fun&Joy)

Push 4 building a relationship with close acquaintances and others (Socialising)

Push 5 building relationships with family members (Family)

Pull 1 image of a place (Image)

Pull 2 weather conditions (Weather)

Pull 3 suitability and ambiance of the travel destination (Ambience)

Pull 4 historical appeal (Culture)

Pull 5 expenses for travelling

Len 1 relaxation at the travel destination

Len 2 exceeding satisfaction with the travel destination

Len 3 exceeding satisfaction with the accommodation

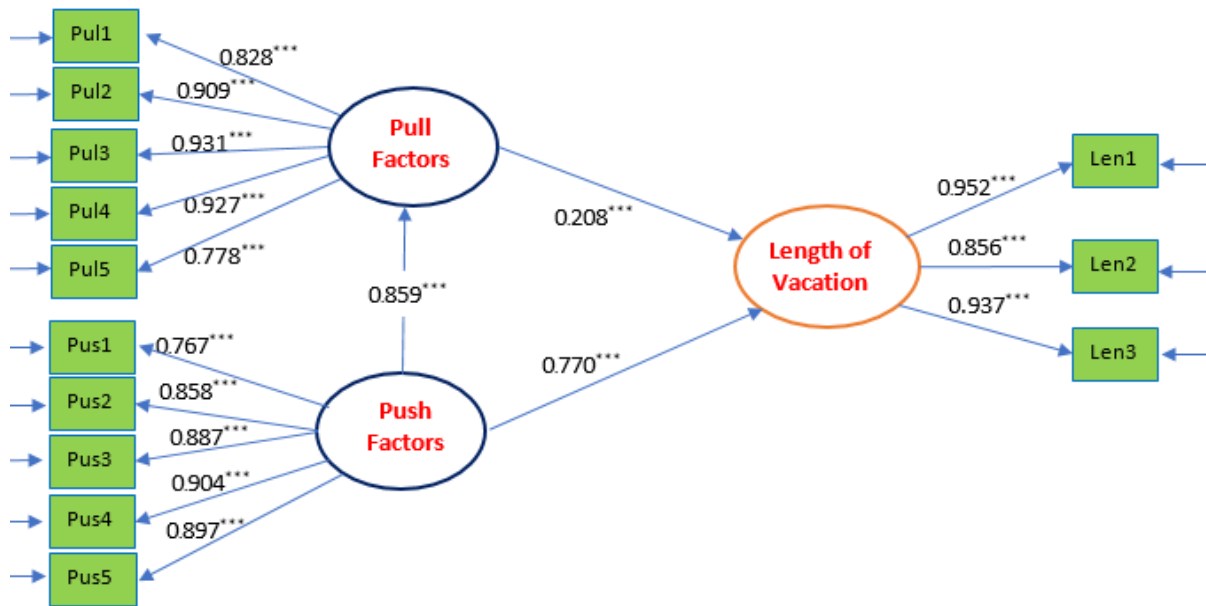


Figure 1 The analysis of a causal relationship model of push and pull factors influencing the length of stay among elderly Thai tourists

The analysis of a causal relationship model of push and pull factors affecting the length of stay among elderly Thai tourists shows that the push factors have a direct positive effect on the pull factors and the vacation length by 0.859 and 0.770, respectively.

The push factors indirectly affect the length of vacation through the pull factors by 0.178. The pull factors have a positive direct effect on the length of vacation by 0.208, as shown in Table 2

Table 2 Latent variables, total effects (TE), direct effects (DE) and indirect effects (IE)

Latent variables	Push Factors			Pull Factors		
	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE
Pull Factors	0.859***	0.859***	-	-	-	-
Length of Vacation	0.948***	0.770***	0.178***	0.208***	0.208***	-

***p-value < 0.001

Analyzed by specific factors, the Push Factors components with the highest weights are establishing relationships with close acquaintances and others (Socializing), followed by building relationships with family members (Family) and seeking new experiences (Fun & Joy). These three aspects account for 81.70%, 80.40%, and 78.80% of the variation in Push Factors, respectively. This finding aligns with You et al. (2000), who found that some primary push factors for senior travelers are visiting family and friends and seeking novelty. This proves that socializing and feeling fun and joy are the top drivers for elderly Thai tourists.

For Pull Factors, the component with the highest weight is the suitability and ambiance of the travel destination (Ambience), followed by weather conditions (Weather) and historical appeal (Culture). These three aspects explain 86.80%, 82.70%, and 80.90% of the variation in Pull Factors, respectively. This result is consistent with Norman et al. (2010), who identified natural surroundings and favorable weather as significant pull factors, and Huang & Tsai (2003), who highlighted historical and cultural attractions as critical external motivations. It is also supported by Ferrer-Rosell et al. (2014), who claimed that seniors tend to immerse themselves more in the local culture, affecting their stay length.

Regarding the Length of Vacation, the component with the highest weight is relaxation at the travel destination, followed by exceeding satisfaction with the accommodation and the travel

destination. These three aspects account for 78.80%, 76.40%, and 69.10% of the variation in the Length of Vacation, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3 latent variables, observed variables, Standardized Regression Weights (β), se, t and R^2

Latent variables	Observed variables	Standardized Regression Weights (β)	se	t	R^2
Push Factors	Push 1	0.767	—	—	0.5880
	Push 2	0.858	0.042	23.796***	0.7360
	Push 3	0.887	0.044	24.830***	0.7880
	Push 4	0.904	0.043	24.607***	0.8170
	Push 5	0.897	0.046	18.525***	0.8040
Pull Factors	Pull 1	0.828	—	—	0.6860
	Pull 2	0.909	0.06	18.923***	0.8270
	Pull 3	0.931	0.06	19.757***	0.8680
	Pull 4	0.904	0.058	20.224***	0.8090
	Pull 5	0.897	0.061	20.038***	0.7060
Length of Vacation	Len 1	0.952	—	—	0.7880
	Len 2	0.856	0.035	28.307***	0.6910
	Len 3	0.937	0.028	37.517***	0.7640

***p-value < .001

The results of the model fit index assessment indicate the following: $\chi^2 = 26.164$, $df = 17$, $\chi^2/df = 1.539$ (less than 2), p-value = 0.072, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.965, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.960, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.991, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.970 (greater than 0.95), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.029, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.041 (less than 0.05). All indices indicate a good fit. Details are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 The model fit index assessment

Goodness-of-fit statistics	Measurements	Values	Results
χ^2/df	Less than 2.00	1.539	Passed
p-value	More than .05	0.072	Passed
GFI	More than .95	0.965	Passed
AGFI	More than .95	0.960	Passed
CFI	More than .95	0.991	Passed
NFI	More than .95	0.970	Passed
RMR	Less than .05	0.029	Passed
RMSEA	Less than .05	0.042	Passed

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has demonstrated that push and pull factors significantly influence the length of stay among elderly Thai tourists, with push factors playing a predominant role in shaping their travel behavior. Push factors, such as socializing, family bonding, and seeking new experiences, were found to have the strongest impact on the travel decisions of elderly tourists. Among these, socializing emerged as the most influential factor, followed by family connections and the pursuit of enjoyment. These findings underscore the importance of emotional and relational motivations in elderly tourism, which aligns with previous research that highlights the central role of interpersonal relationships and novelty in influencing senior travel patterns.

While pull factors, including the ambiance of destinations, weather, and cultural appeal, also contribute to the decision-making process, their influence was secondary to push factors. Notably, the destination's ambiance was the most significant pull factor, highlighting the importance of comfort and suitability for elderly travelers. The length of stay was closely linked to the elderly tourists' relaxation at the destination, satisfaction with accommodations, and overall travel experience, with relaxation being the most critical factor. The robust model fit, as indicated by strong goodness-of-fit indices, further supports the reliability of these findings. These insights suggest that by enhancing destination ambiance, offering suitable accommodations, and fostering opportunities for social interaction, the tourism industry can better meet the needs of elderly tourists, thereby promoting longer stays and improving overall satisfaction in this growing market segment.

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