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**CONTRIBUTIONS TO BOOKS**

- Sharma T., Kwatra, G. (2008) Effectiveness of Social Advertising: A Study of Selected Campaigns, Corporate Social Responsibility, Edited by David Crowther & Nicholas Capaldi, Ashgate Research Companion to Corporate Social Responsibility, Chapter 15, pp 287-303.

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# PERCEPTION, TOURIST SATISFACTION AND DESTINATION LOYALTY TOWARDS SALALAH, SULTANATE OF OMAN

*MAYA MADHAVAN*
*RESEARCH SCHOLAR*
*BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY*
*COIMBATORE*


*DR. A.P. GEORGE*
*DIRECTOR*
*VIMAL JYOTHI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT*
*KANNUR*

## ABSTRACT
*This study tested a model that examined the relationships among Travel Motivations, Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty. Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the conceptual model. The empirical results of this study revealed that travel motivations and Perceptions positively influenced Tourist Satisfaction towards Salalah which in turn influenced the loyalty towards Salalah. The findings of the study highlighted that Salalah is perceived by the tourists as offering serene natural beauty which is a perfect place to have an ideal vacation. However, it also revealed that the hygiene facilities are to be improved. Overall the results of the study highlighted Salalah has a positive image as perceived by the young domestic tourists.*

## KEYWORDS
travel motivation, destination image, perception, tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty.

## INTRODUCTION
Tourism is experiencing great expansion around the globe. Tourism market is becoming competitive as tourist activity is growing. Tourism being an economy nourishing factor has turned tourist destinations into a complex and highly competitive global marketplace and hence destinations compete. This situation urges the marketer to create effective positioning strategies. The success of any tourist destination is highly influenced by the quality of the destination, services provided in the destination and how satisfied and loyal the tourists are with the destination. A thorough analysis of the travel motivations of the tourists and the image of a specific destination and tourist satisfaction is highly inevitable to create destination loyalty and thereby destination branding. The review of tourism literature discloses an abundance of studies on the concepts of motivation, service quality, satisfaction, destination loyalty etc. Still the concept of destination loyalty remains unexplored. Especially with regards to Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) has not been thoroughly investigated. Some destinations emphasize on repeat visitation since it is easy and less expensive to retain existing travelers than to attract new ones(Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006). There is a strong link between loyalty and profitability in the tourism industry (Baker & Crompton, 2000).

Sultanate of Oman is the second largest country among the GCC member countries. Blessed with picturesque mountains, breath taking valleys, tranquil coastlines etc. there is huge tourism potential in Oman. Salalah, which is in the Dhofar region of the Sultanate is the popular tourist destination in Oman due to its green natural beauty. Khareef season or harvest season which is normally the summer season in Oman is the time to visit Salalah. There is a flow of domestic as well as international tourists towards Salalah as it is absolutely unbelievable that this region is extremely green and cool with frequent showers not normally seen in the Gulf countries.

Destination image is broadly explained as tourists' holistic perception of a particular destination(Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) or as their psychological description of the particular place (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996). Destination image is complicated and contains cognitive, affective and behavioral elements(Pike & Ryan, 2004). A destination image is "the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place" (Lawson & Baud-Bovey, 1977).

Some researchers have used the multi characteristic approach in evaluating destination image(Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007) whereas some others have used a single item method to measure the image. Others have assessed the overall destination using a single-item method(Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001).

The measurement of destination image can help managers in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a tourist destination which helps to predict tourists behavioral patterns towards the destination and revisit intentions thus providing valuable information to destination managers for developing the tourist places matching with tourist expectations(Bigne et al., 2001; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

The level of tourists' loyalty towards a destination is clearly visible in their intentions to revisit the destination and their recommending the destination to others(Oppermann, 2000). Thus, a thorough knowledge of tourists' loyalty is vital to destination marketers and managers(Flavian, Martínez, & Polo, 2001). It is clearly evident that a tourist is said to have loyalty to the destination only if his expectation matches the experience or it is above his expectations which creates a sort of delight in tourists'(Rajan, 2015).

Motivation refers to "a dynamic process of internal psychological factors (needs, wants, and goals) that generate an uncomfortable level of tension within individuals' minds and bodies"(Fodness, 1994). Application of motivation theory to the marketing actions in tourism industry involves the design and marketing of travel products as solutions to the customer needs(Nurmi, 2013).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE
In their research on Travel Motivations and Behavior of Tourists to a South African Resort **(Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2012)**states that travel behavior is the way in which tourists behave according to their attitudes before, during and after travel. Prior Knowledge on travel behavior can help in marketing and product planning and development which can augment the number of visitors to tourism products such as resorts. The results showed that the main travel motivations are rest and relaxation, enriching and learning experiences, participation in recreational activities, personal values and social experiences. These results indicated that travel motivations significantly influence tourist satisfaction.

Researchers have identified factors influencing travel behavior of tourists such as factors motivating the tourist to travel, attitude of the tourist, various conditional factors and environmental factors which persuade the personal importance of the tourist **(Venkatesh, 2006; Laws, 1995)**. According to Gartner (as cited by **Pike, 2008**) motivation begin the decision-making process. This occurs when a certain need or want cannot be met at residence. Motivations are visible outside when a tourist wants to satisfy a need or want and this can be seen as a very important variable in relation to their travel decisions and the outcome of satisfaction.

**(Aziz, Yusof, Ayob, Bakar, & Awang, 2015)** in their study on behavioral intentions of medical tourists in Malaysia analyzed that medical tourists perceptions regarding service quality in health services leads to positive behaviors with regards to selection of available health care facilities provided by the developing countries. Their research found out that positive perception of the medical tourists leads to high satisfaction levels and their future behavioral intentions are highly influenced by the perception of service quality.

**(Di Marino, 2008)** analyzed the destination image of French Riveira from the Italian Tourists perspective. The purpose of the study was to analyze the strategic dimension of a destination image as a vital strategic management tool for a destination, which could help to maintain the tourist flows towards that destination. It is necessary to understand the role of the image in travel decision-making process and how a positive image is noteworthy in the mind of the consumers. The study analyzed the image of the French Riviera in the Italian tourist's market. The study investigated how a positive image about the destination could successfully influence the decision making process of the tourists and influence their level of satisfaction

**(Valle, Silva, Mendes, & Guerreiro, 2006**) in their research explored the relationship between travel satisfaction and destination loyalty intention. The study was conducted with 486 tourists who visited Arade, a Portuguese tourist destination. SEM was used as the analysis method and it was substantiated that satisfaction is a vital antecedent of loyalty. The study used categorical principal components analysis (CATPCA) provided an elaborate analysis on the cause-effect relationship between satisfaction and loyalty by establishing that greater levels of satisfaction resulted in increased probability of future repeat visits and loyalty towards the destination. Clusters of tourists were also recognized and analyzed in relation to satisfaction levels and loyalty intentions.

**(da Costa Mendes, Oom do Valle, Guerreiro, & Silva, 2010**)in their research on an important destination in Algarve, Portugal, used data from a survey conducted on tourists belonging to different nations during peak season. They identified the reasons that lead to satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the tourism experience and used structural equation modeling, to determine the relationship between satisfaction levels with the tourism experience and tourist destination loyalty. The findings of the study supported that satisfaction positively impacts tourist loyalty intention.

The research paper by **(Truong & King, 2009)** examined the limit to which Vietnam as a destination satisfied the Chinese tourists. The research explored a number of variables, including socio-demographics, service quality and travel characteristics; and analyzed the importance that travelers give to various destination attributes and their satisfaction with Vietnam's tourism products. By investigating the relationship between importance and satisfaction from the perspective of Chinese tourists, the paper makes a contribution to the literature. The findings should provide Vietnamese service providers with insights into the perceptions and satisfaction levels of Chinese tourists. The study revealed that majority of the Chinese tourists were very satisfied with Vietnam as a tourist destination thus concluding that satisfaction is highly influenced by service quality and other destination attributes and satisfaction highly influenced destination loyalty.

In the research done by**(Yoon & Uysal, 2005)** they investigate the influence of travel motivations and tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty. The structural causal model was tested by structural equation modeling (SEM). The results of the study supported the relationship between satisfaction and destination loyalty at a significant level of 0.05. It was also revealed that tourist destination loyalty is positively affected by tourist satisfaction with their experiences. Travel motivation exerted a direct positive relationship with destination loyalty.

**(Kao, Patterson, Scott, & Li, 2008)** in the research explored the travel motivations of Taiwanese tourists towards Australia and its impact on satisfaction and destination loyalty. The study investigated whether there is any significant difference among the motivation of travelers and how it impacted their level of satisfaction. Sample size for the study was 547. Validity, Reliability etc was calculated and was found to be satisfactory. The results exposed that there were four different travel motivation groups. The groups were considerably different in terms of their satisfaction and destination loyalty. The results confirmed that motivation; satisfaction had a positive impact on destination loyalty.

**(Chaiboonsri & Chaitip, 2008)** in their research study used structural equation modeling to test the casual relationship between tourist travel motivation and destination satisfaction. Data was collected from 100 tourists who travelled to Thailand. Results indicated that the travel cost satisfaction of tourists has a positive influence on tourism product, tourism product attributes and tourism product management and their motivation to visit the destination again. The findings exposed that the tourist demographics exerted no influence on tourism product management.

## NEED/IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

People have a negative and positive feeling towards a destination. This influences the image towards a destination (Brezovec, Brezovec, & Jančič, 2004). This image will influence the decision making by the tourist and will also affect the satisfaction level. Perceived images are the basis of the evaluation or selection process and thus provide the link between motivations and destination selection(O'Leary & Deegan, 2003).

An understanding of tourists' differences in perceptions, images and motivations and culture toward a destination is essential to comprehend and predict tourism demand and its impact on the tourism location. This study is intended to find out the image of Salalah as a tourist destination among the domestic student tourists as they represent a vital tourist segment. Analyzing the image of the destination from the domestic traveler point of view is vital to find out the areas of improvement in the destination. This will help to attract more tourists towards the destination.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Understanding tourists' differences in perceptions and motivations towards a destination is essential to comprehend and predict tourism demand and its impact on the destination branding. In fact, the understanding of destination image and visitors' perceptions is critical for a destination in order to derive a base for more effective and efficient future strategic planning. In this way, it is very significant to understand the image formation process and at what point the image influences consumers' selection choice of a particular destination (Sirakaya, et al., 2001)

The study focuses on certain factors that influence the visit intention of students who form the vibrant segment of tourists towards Salalah, in the Dhofar region of Sultanate of Oman. This study will help the destination marketers to understand what is desired by the potential tourists and since tourism products are intangible in nature it is very important to provide the tourists with a unique experience. This study is a unique attempt to measure the destination image of Salalah and its impact on loyalty from the student tourists' point of view.

## OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the research is to test a theoretical model of factors that influence destination loyalty towards Salalah.
1.    To analyze the influence of travel motivation on Tourist Satisfaction.
2.    To study the impact of perception on tourist satisfaction
3.    To analyze the impact of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty.

## HYPOTHESIS (ES)

A positive destination image will impact in tourist satisfaction and has effect on tourist revisit intentions(Chi & Qu, 2008). This view is supported by(Yu & Dean, 2001). According to them satisfaction is a better predictor of intentions than perceptions [image]. Satisfaction of tourists is considered as the factor that highly influence revisit intentions or loyalty towards a destination(Cronin Jr & Taylor, 1992; Kozak & Rimmington, 1998). Based on this theoretical premise the following hypotheses are proposed in its null form.

H1: Travel Motivation has no positive significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction.
H2: Perception has no positive significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction.
H3: Tourist Satisfaction doesn't positively influence Destination Loyalty

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research employed descriptive research with the use of needed statistical tools. Data was collected using structured questionnaire adapted from standardized sources and modified to suit the context.

### POPULATION AND SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY

Population of the study comprised of student tourists who visited Salalah during Khareef season. Sample Size is 120.

**SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

The basic instrument used for the study is Questionnaire. Questionnaire is divided in to five different sections. Fist part of the questionnaire deals with demographics, second part with travel motivations measured on a five point likert scale. Third part comprised of perceptions which is also measured on five point likert scale. Section four and section five deals with satisfaction and loyalty which are also measured on five point likert scale.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data Analysis was done using SPSS-21. Data was checked for missing values, outliers, normality etc. Descriptive Statistics as well as pie chart, correlation, regression, F Test, ANOVA, SEM etc. were used as tools for analysis.

**RELIABILITY OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

Cronbach alpha was computed to test the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha calculated is 0.744 which is above the threshold of 0.6. Hence the instrument was considered as reliable to continue with the research.

**TABLE 1: RELIABILITY VALUES – CRONBACH ALPHA**

| No | Item | No of Items | Cronbach Alpha |
|----|------|-------------|----------------|
| 1 | Travel Motivation | 17 | 0.86 |
| 2 | Perception | 14 | 0.75 |
| 3 | Satisfaction | 4 | 0.62 |
| 4 | Loyalty | 6 | 0.79 |

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the respondents is analyzed by percentage analysis.

**TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS**

| No | Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|----|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Gender | Male | 56 | 46.7 |
| | | Female | 64 | 53.3 |
| 2 | Age | 20-24 | 13 | 10.8 |
| | | 25-29 | 34 | 28.3 |
| | | 30-34 | 40 | 33.3 |
| | | 35-39 | 18 | 15.0 |
| | | 40-44 | 8 | 6.7 |
| | | 45-49 | 4 | 3.3 |
| | | 50 and above | 3 | 2.5 |
| 3 | Education | Diploma | 47 | 39.2 |
| | | Advanced Diploma | 54 | 45.0 |
| | | Bachelor | 19 | 15.8 |
| 4 | Marital Status | Married | 79 | 65.8 |
| | | Single | 37 | 30.8 |
| | | Separated | 4 | 3.3 |

Respondents were asked about the information sources which they rely when they plan a trip to Salalah. Majority of the respondents 93.4% attached very high importance to the information they receive from the family and friends to be reliable

A total of 3 hypotheses were proposed in this study. The hypotheses proposed are tested using suitable testing methods like multiple regression, ANOVA, SEM etc. The hypotheses are stated in its null form.

**TABLE 3: RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES TESTING**

| No | Hypothesis | R | R2 | F value | Sig Level | Durbin Watson | Decision |
|----|-----------|---|-----|---------|-----------|---------------|----------|
| 1 | Travel Motivation has no positive significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction. | .122[a] | .015 | 2.796 | .183[a] | 2.011 | Supported alternate hypothesis |
| 2 | Perception has no positive significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction. | .331[a] | .110 | 14.523 | .000[a] | 1.973 | Supported alternate hypothesis. |
| 3 | Tourist Satisfaction doesn't positively influence Destination Loyalty | .725[a] | .526 | 130.779 | .000[a] | 1.823 | Supported alternate hypothesis. |

From the analysis it was found out that travel motivation is significantly influencing the satisfaction level of student tourists ; Whereas perception regarding the destination significantly affected the satisfaction levels and hence loyalty. The young tourists attached very high importance to the concept of image. They were satisfied with Salalah as a tourist destination and showed the intention to return to this destination.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study tested the conceptual model to examine the relationships among Travel Motivations, Destination Image, Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty towards Salalah. The overall image of Salalah as a tourist destination is positive and the findings of the study indicated that tourists were satisfied with their trips to Salalah. The findings of the study revealed that Salalah is perceived by young domestic tourists as a destination with natural scenic beauty, especially its beaches and the gravity point. However, the local young tourists were not comfortable with the toilet and rest room facilities available at the destination which signifies the need for improvement of hygiene facilities at Salalah. Economical accommodation facilities for student groups are to be provided during the Khareef season which is suggested by the respondents. The natural scenic beauty of Salalah is a competitive advantage to Oman, which can be tapped to attract more international tourists as well. Despite the tourist influx during the Khareef, the destination remains untapped in other seasons. By offering various activities like mountaineering, adventurous trekking etc. the destination could be developed to an all season one. Majority of the respondents perceived Salalah as one offering rest and relaxation, offering a different culture and rich in traditional art forms.

## LIMITATIONS

The sample size for the study is only 120. The sample comprised of only student tourists at university level. A large sample size with the inclusion of various segments of the population will be good to get a more detailed idea about tourist perceptions. Comparison of the perceptions of different segments among the domestic tourists as well as the international tourists will give a clearer picture on what is really needed by the travelers which can benefit it in the development and branding of Salalah as an international tourist destination.

## SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The inclusion of more variables would have given a much better results for the study. In the future the research could be done on a large scale by including culture as a variable which may give significant results. The moderating and mediating influence of the demographic factors and the role of service quality also could be included in the future research.

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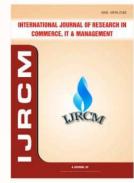
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