

Article

A Framework for Understanding Thanatourism Motivation and Behavior in Corregidor Island: Basis for Strategic Intervention Programs

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Abstract

This article examined how visitor attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, core components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), correlate with demographic characteristics to influence the behavioral intention to engage in Thanatourism. It aimed to analyze and contrast the distinct motivations, expectations, experiences, demographic differences and correlations of visitors using this theory for understanding why people visit dark tourism sites like Corregidor and how they behave there, focusing on motivations and behavior. Using data from 75 respondents at Corregidor Island, the findings can be interpreted through the Push-Pull theory of tourism motivation, which posits that people are driven by internal forces (push factors) and attracted by external attributes of a destination (pull factors). The results indicate that "learning and understanding history" and "curiosity" served as primary push motivations, while the island's historical and cultural significance were strong pull factors. Tourists rated unique learning experiences (4.10), casual interest (3.93), and engaging entertainment (3.87) as important motivators, while "dark experiences" were rated as neutral (2.96). These key findings indicate that while motivations are diverse, they shift with age towards historical understanding and differ based on visitor origin. The research concludes that these motivations are complex, diverse, context-dependent, and shaped by a mix of personal and demographic factors.

Keywords: Corregidor Island, Heritage tourism, Motivation, Thanatourism, Theory of Planned Behavior

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Introduction

Dark tourism involves visiting sites associated with death, disaster, or tragedy. Understanding tourist motivation at such sites is crucial for effective destination marketing and ethical site management (Friedman, 2024). Specifically, this research situates dark tourism within the broader concept of thanatourism, which focuses on purposeful travel to engage with death through historical and cultural lenses.

Existing literature often uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to predict tourist intentions and behavior. TPB posits that attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence behavioral intention. In the context of thanatourism, motivations such as learning and dark experiences can influence a visitor's attitude toward visiting a site. Additionally, this article incorporates Attachment Theory to explore the emotional bonds visitors form with such poignant destinations. Place attachment dimensions like place identity, dependence, and affect can help explain deeper connections beyond initial motivations.

Corregidor Island, a site of immense World War II tragedy and historical significance, serves as a poignant example of a thanatourism destination within the broader context of thanatourism. Understanding why tourists visit such solemn sites is crucial for effective destination marketing and ethical management, which can be explored through a combined theoretical lens including the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Attachment Theory. Tourist motivation for visiting sites associated with death or disaster, such as Corregidor Island, is complex and extends beyond mere curiosity. Many visitors, particularly younger generations and history enthusiasts, are drawn to Corregidor for an educational purpose: to learn about its pivotal role in Philippine and American history and to reflect on collective memory. A key internal motivator is the desire for remembrance and empathy, allowing individuals to honor fallen soldiers and feel empathy for the suffering endured on the island. Visitors are often driven by personal beliefs and internal needs for understanding, rather than purely external influences or general sightseeing.

The specific study and findings were likely presented in an academic work or research paper. A relevant thesis exploring similar themes is available from Javier, S. R. C., & Kwong, I. G. (2011) on exploring the motivations of repeat visitors of the historical island destination of Corregidor. Other research confirms that motivations for visiting such historical sites often center on knowledge acquisition, cultural engagement, and personal enrichment (e.g., Apritado et al., 2021; Fabros et al., 2023).

While the Javier & Kwong (2011) thesis specifically explored the motivations of repeat visitors to Corregidor, the general research on historical sites tends to focus on

motivations broadly (e.g., knowledge acquisition, cultural engagement). There is a gap in comparative studies that analyze and contrast the distinct motivations, expectations, experiences, demographic differences and correlations of visitors across various historical destinations. The article aims to investigate the demographic profile of respondents (age, gender, home state/country), determine the importance of four motivational factors (Allman, Schrier, and Thompson, 2021; Lewis, Schrier, and Xu, 2025) for visiting (dark experience, engaging entertainment, unique learning experience, and casual interest), and analyze any significant differences or relationships between the demographic correlations and differences. Finally, the article intends to propose and recommend strategic interventions or programs to improve Corregidor's management based on the result, discussions and conclusions.

The TPB helps predict the intention to visit a thanatourism site like Corregidor by focusing on three components: a tourist's positive or negative evaluation of the visit (attitudes toward the behavior), the influence of social perceptions (subjective norms), and their assessment of the visit's feasibility (perceived behavioral control) (Ajzen, 1991). Building on this, Attachment Theory provides a deeper explanation of the emotional connections' visitors form, where the site may become part of their identity (place identity) and the immersive experience fosters emotional bonds and satisfaction (place dependence and affect). This strong emotional tie can encourage repeat visits and a desire for sustainable behavior. By integrating both TPB's cognitive factors and Attachment Theory's emotional aspects, stakeholders can better manage Corregidor, balancing its historical significance with the multifaceted motivations of its diverse visitors.

Methodology

The onsite survey approach was utilized to investigate the demographic profiles and motivational factors of 75 visitors to Corregidor Island, a site of significant historical conflict in the Philippines. The research aimed to determine the importance of specific motivational factors, including the desire for a dark experience, entertainment, learning, and casual interest, and how these factors influenced the intention to revisit the site. Data were collected on-site through a survey instrument that also measured constructs related to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and destination attachment. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (means) to summarize features of the sample and inferential statistics (F-values, t-values, and correlation coefficients) to determine significant differences and relationships between demographic variables and the motivational assessments.

Results and Discussion

Respondents were evenly distributed between ages 20-38 and 39+ (47% each), predominantly male (56%), and primarily Filipino citizens/residents (85%).

Motivational Factors:

- Unique Learning Experience: Important (Mean 4.10)
- Casual Interest: Important (Mean 3.93)
- Engaging Entertainment: Important (Mean 3.87)
- Dark Experience: Neutral (Mean 2.96)

The surveyed group is primarily motivated by intrinsic, positive factors like unique learning experiences (Mean 4.10), casual interest (Mean 3.93), and engaging entertainment (Mean 3.87). These personal growth and engagement factors were rated as "Important" (mean scores greater than 3.8). Conversely, the prospect of a "Dark Experience" was rated as a neutral factor (Mean 2.96), indicating it does not significantly influence their motivation. Overall, the respondents seek educational and interesting experiences rather than the pursuit or avoidance of negative experiences.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) helps predict the intention to visit a thanatourism site like Corregidor by focusing on three core, interrelated components (Ajzen, 1991). Tourists' positive or negative evaluations of visiting Corregidor, shaped by perceptions of educational value and emotional impact, constitute their attitudes toward the behavior (Hagger, Cheung, Ajzen, and Hamilton, 2022). The perceived influence of peers, family, and society reflects subjective norms, though some studies indicate that personal beliefs may be stronger in Dark Tourism contexts. Lastly, visitors' assessment of the ease or difficulty of the visit (e.g., accessibility, cost, time commitment) comprises their perceived behavioral control, which directly impacts their intention to travel there (Hagger et al., 2022).

Demographic Differences:

- No significant difference was found in assessments across age groups ($F\text{-value } 1.32 < \text{Critical } F 1.47$).
- Significant differences were found based on gender ($t\text{-value } 22.21 > \text{Critical } t 1.99$), citizenship ($t\text{-value } 23.93 > \text{Critical } t 1.99$), and place of residence ($t\text{-value } 23.93 > \text{Critical } t 1.99$).

The application of the Push and Pull Theory reveals that while age is not a significant factor in motivating subjects, demographics such as gender, citizenship, and place of residence lead to significantly different outcomes or motivations. This indicates that these specific demographic 'lenses' are key in determining how individuals perceive the forces pushing them to leave or pulling them to stay.

There is a significant difference in how respondents assess the implications of thanatourism to tourist motivation based on their gender. The calculated $t\text{-value}$

(22.21) exceeded the critical t-value (1.99), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that gender plays a role in the differing assessments of thanatourism's motivational impact. According to González-Gómez and Mora Forero (2022) women exhibit higher knowledge of dark tourism and are more likely than men to visit tragedy-related sites. Their motivations often include relaxation and escape, coupled with a stronger need to learn and empathize with historical narratives. These engagement patterns and specific personality traits related to rumination and vulnerability may contribute to gender differences in thanatourism preferences and practices.

Similarly, significant differences exist in respondents' assessments when grouped by citizenship and place of residence. For both categories, the computed t-value (23.93) was greater than the critical t-value (1.99), prompting the rejection of the null hypothesis in both cases. Consequently, the assessments regarding the motivational implications of thanatourism differ significantly based on both the respondents' citizenship and their place of residence. Tourists are often motivated by educational interests, curiosity, emotional experiences (empathy, sadness), and a desire to learn history or affirm collective identities. Motivations can vary by nationality; for example, Chinese visitors to the Nanjing Massacre Memorial were found to have a strong sense of obligation to visit, influenced by specific cultural perspectives on death and taboos. Residents tend to have more complex and mixed feelings, often related to their "place-based identity" and the potential impact on their community's character and emotional well-being. While tourists may seek an "experience," residents view the sites within the context of their daily lives, memory, and potential exploitation of tragedy for economic gain. Resident support for dark tourism development is often tied to feelings of psychological empowerment and whether the site's identity aligns with their personal values (Chen, Huang and Li, 2024).

Demographic Correlations:

- Age correlated negatively low with assessments ($r = -0.22$; significant).
- Gender correlation was not significant ($r = 0.001$).
- Citizenship and residence correlated negatively moderately ($r = -0.40$; significant).

Age showed a weak negative correlation with assessments ($r = -0.22$, significant), suggesting older age slightly pushes scores down, while youth slightly pull them up, potentially due to skill relevance or technological familiarity. This weak, negative correlation indicates that as age increases, assessment scores tend slightly to decrease (or younger people score slightly higher). In Push Theory, being older might be a slight "push" factor, potentially due to outdated skills, less familiarity with modern assessment formats, or lack of recent formal education. This pushes them away from high assessment scores. In Pull Theory, being younger might be a slight

"pull" factor toward higher scores, possibly reflecting greater recent engagement with academic material or technological familiarity relevant to the assessments.

The findings indicate that various demographic factors correlate differently with respondents' assessments of the implications of thanatourism for tourist motivation levels. Specifically, age showed a negatively low correlation with these assessments ($r = -0.22$), a relationship found to be significant as the computed t-value (16.46) was greater than the critical t-value (1.99) at a 0.05 level of significance with 73 degrees of freedom. According to Çakar, Ç. (2020), age significantly shapes dark tourism motivations, with younger tourists (Gen Z/teens) often driven by curiosity, novelty, education about present issues, and media influence, while older tourists might seek deeper historical understanding or connection. Motivations shift from simple curiosity in younger groups to education, remembrance, and personal reflection in older, more informed demographics, with age explaining variance in why people visit tragic sites, even correlating with more negative psychological traits in some cases.

Gender was not a significant factor ($r = 0.001$), indicating neither a push nor a pull effect on outcomes. or neither gender acts as a "push" or "pull" factor regarding the assessment outcomes in this specific sample. Other factors entirely determine the scores, or potential gender-related influences are negligible or cancel each other out.

In contrast, gender still exhibited a positively low correlation ($r = 0.001$), but this relationship was found to be not significant because the computed t-value (0.07) was less than the critical t-value (1.99) at the same significance and degrees of freedom. Gender influences thanatourism motivations differently, with research suggesting women often show higher curiosity/learning needs, while men might focus more on experiential/emotional aspects, though findings vary, showing women lean towards emotional relief and social connection (push factors), and both genders seek knowledge but through different lenses, highlighting complex psychological and cultural factors moderating how males and females assess dark tourism's appeal, knowledge, and emotional impact (Yadegar and Mirzaei, 2024).

Citizenship and residence had a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.40$, significant), where a non-local status might moderately push scores down due to systemic barriers like language differences, and a stable residence situation might pull scores higher. In Push Theory, certain citizenship/residence statuses (e.g., being a non-resident or recent immigrant) could be a moderate "push" factor, pushing scores lower due to systemic barriers like language differences, cultural adjustment challenges, or lack of support networks. In Pull Theory, a stable, long-term citizenship and residence situation might act as a moderate "pull" factor, drawing individuals toward higher academic performance due to familiarity with the educational system and a stable living environment.

Furthermore, both citizenship ($r = -0.40$) and place of residence ($r = -0.40$) demonstrated a negatively moderate correlation with the assessments. Both of these moderate relationships were found to be significant, as their identical computed t-

values (31.86) were greater than the critical t-value (1.99) at the 0.05 level of significance and 73 degrees of freedom. According to Chen, Yang and Li (2024), citizenship and residence significantly shape dark tourism attitudes, with residents often driven by place identity and belonging, impacting support differently than tourists seeking education, curiosity, or national identity; locals, especially those with personal ties, experience darker motivations like grief or pressure relief, while tourists often focus on learning and remembrance, creating a divergence in perceived site implications, though both groups' motivations vary by personal history, age, and culture.

Conclusion

The surveyed group is primarily motivated by a desire for positive intrinsic factors such as unique learning experiences and engaging entertainment, rather than the pursuit of a "dark experience," which aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior's focus on attitudes, norms, and perceived control shaping travel intentions.

Men and women are motivated to visit tragedy-related sites for distinct reasons, such as women's increased desire for empathy and learning. Thanatourism motivations are complex, with significant differences observed across gender and visitor origin (international vs. local), highlighting that reasons for visiting tragedy-related sites are diverse and context-dependent.

As age increases, motivations for thanatourism tend to shift from simple curiosity to a desire for education and historical understanding. The findings indicate a slight decrease in overall assessed motivation levels as people age, pointing to a change in the nature of interest rather than a complete lack of it. Within the specific study referenced, gender did not emerge as a significant motivating factor, suggesting other variables drive these choices.

Strategic Intervention Program Recommendations

To better manage Corregidor, the site's management should focus on the following strategies: First, emphasize positive intrinsic experiences since visitors seek unique learning experiences and engaging entertainment over a purely "dark" or morbid experience, management should design tours and exhibits that are engaging, educational, and inspiring. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests these positive attitudes will shape stronger intentions to visit. Second, offer tailored experiences for diverse demographics because visitor motivations vary significantly by gender, age, and origin (international vs. local). To cater this, Corregidor should offer a variety of tour options or interpretative materials. Third, for women and those seeking empathy, provide opportunities for emotional connection,

personal stories, and reflection on the human experience during the war. Fourth, for older visitors and education seekers, offer in-depth, historically-focused tours that emphasize factual information and context. Fifth, for younger visitors and the simply curious, feature more interactive, engaging presentations and possibly use modern technology to make the history accessible and entertaining. Lastly, acknowledge the complexity of visitor motivations where the management should recognize that visitors have diverse, context-dependent reasons for visiting, thus, the training staff needs to be sensitive to these different motivations, and to avoid pushing a single narrative or experience onto all visitors, will enhance visitor satisfaction, thereby ensuring service is respectful, factual, and allows visitors to engage with the site on their own terms.

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