

# Tourists Motivation to Attend Indigenous Cultural Events: A Case of Kaamatan Harvest Festival, Sabah, Malaysian-Borneo

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**Abstract**— Festivals play a major part in a city and local community. This study evaluates tourists' motivation to attend an indigenous cultural event, Kaamatan, held in Sabah, Malaysian-Borneo. A survey was conducted on 30th and 31st May 2015 at the Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA) grounds, where the Kaamatan Harvest Festival was held. The use of random and convenience sampling methods gained a total of 445 respondents with self-administered survey. The study results indicated that the main tourist motivations to participate Kaamatan Harvest Festival are to learn local culture, variety seeking, knowledge gain and to enhance relation. These findings are comparable with other previous motivation studies and will be use to further assist the event organizer to improve tourists visit experience.

**Keywords**—Tourists Motivation, Cultural Events, Kaamatan Harvest Festival

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE Kaamatan Harvest Festival is one of the biggest events in Sabah. The Kadazandusun indigenous community celebrates it annually in the month of May. The Kadazandusun ethnic group is the largest in Sabah, comprising more than 35 dialectical ethnic groups. Kaamatan is celebrated to honor the spirit of Hominodun who was the only daughter of Kinoingan, God the Almighty creator. The sacrifice of Hominodun by her father is to ensure the local villagers will not starve during the long season of famine where her body parts were buried and

miraculously grew a bountiful paddy (Topin, 2015).

The Kadazandusun people honor Kinoingan's sacrificial deed by conducting traditional rituals like *Magavau* (performed to appease the paddy spirits) during this festival. Kaamatan signals the end of planting cycle, a time to harvest. Farmers will take the opportunity to thank the paddy spirits for providing them a generous harvest. They also pray to God (Kinoingan) to get blessing of a fruitful harvest for the subsequent year. It is a local thanksgiving celebration where the Kadazandusun community celebrates the occasion over *tapai* (local rice wine). Part and parcel of the celebration would be the *Unduk Ngadau* (beauty pageant) and *Sugandoi* (singing contest). This is also the time to seek forgiveness and to strengthen friendships among the community (Topin, 2015).

Kaamatan has become one of the major national festivals of Malaysia and has been celebrated over 55 years in Sabah. On the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of May annually, the finale of Kaamatan is held at Hongkod Koisaan Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA) in Penampang, Sabah. Visitors are entertained by a variety of unique cultural dances, traditional sports competition, local craft showcase and the opportunity to sample local food and drinks. In general, Sabah has live events and festivals that draw visitors' attention especially among International tourist for unique and vibrant cultural experiences. This includes Regatta Lepa Semporna, Pesta Kaamatan, Pesta Rumbia, Tamu Besar Kota Belud, Borneo Bird Festival, Sabah International Folklore Festival and many

more. Despite the availability of cultural tourism activities in Sabah, the question of why tourist motivated to attend local cultural related event of Kaamatan can be asked. This is proven by the limited contribution of motivational studies found in cultural attractions although diverse research has investigated tourists' push-pull travel motivations as to conclude a better insight of travel behavior (Van Vurren & Slabbert, 2011; Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad, 2010; Saayman, Slabbert & Van Der Merwe, 2009; Correia, Oom Do Valle & Moco, 2007).

In relation to this, four similar studies were found on travel motivations but none performed in a similar setting. The studies include travel motivations of tourists to exotic places (Correia et al., 2007), travel motivations of package tour travelers (Chang, 2007), an analysis of push and pull travel motivation of foreign tourists to Jordan (Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad, 2010) and the recent one by Van Vuuren and Slabbert (2011) on travel motivations of tourists to South African resort. Correia et al. (2007) identified the travel motivation variables for visiting exotic destination includes learning, leisure, social relationship, convenience of facilities, core attractions and landscape features. Chang (2007) revealed that the package tour travelers' motives are seeking pleasure and relaxation, socializing, socio-economic factors and to fulfill psychological needs. Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad (2010) indicated the main push and pull tourists' motivational factors to Jordan are to fulfill prestige, enhance relation, to join events and activities, accessibility and affordable. Meanwhile, Van Vuuren and Slabbert (2011) found that the tourists motives to a resort are to rest and relax, learning experiences, to involve in recreational activities, personal values and for social experiences. These mention studies showed that there are little similarities of travel motivation factors found in terms of leisure, social relations, learning and participation in events/activities. Van Vuuren and Slabbert (2011) concluded that different types of tourists who travel to a different destination might have different travel motivation.

To elucidate the previous studies found, this research is to fill the gap to understand visitors' motivation to attend indigenous cultural events particularly the Kaamatan Harvest Festival 2015 (KHF2015). The key objective of this study is to identify the tourists' push and pull travel motivation factors of visiting KHF2015. It is vital to understand the motivation variables that influence tourists travel behavior. It aims at giving tourism marketers an insight of tourist motivation for the use of travel package product, destination development and promotional activities. Knowing the significance of travel motivation factors can also complement destinations to meet the desired needs of individual visitors from different markets. Simultaneously, knowledge of visitors' motivation is critical to forecast the offering of tourism product that matches the future travel demand. This research will further assist the government in developing better tourists' retention strategies through the

investigation of tourists' motivation in visiting the desired destination. Hence, understanding the tourists' motivation is significant in developing tourism sector in Sabah.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation becomes an important topic of central interest in tourism and leisure study (Mahika, 2011; Van Vuuren and Slabbert, 2011; Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad, 2010; Hsu and Huang 2008; Crompton, 1979). Hsu and Huang (2008) stated that travel motivation relates to why people travel. Tourist motivation has the purpose of revealing consumer's desires when opting for a travel destination (Mahika, 2011). In line with this, it is commonly accepted that push and pull motivations are frequently used in most tourist behavior studies. The issues play a vital role in attempt to value factors that can motivate tourist behavior. This is further agreed by previous researchers that the results of the motivation studies of tourist behavior require more than understanding their needs and wants (Mahika, 2011; Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad, 2010; Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

The concept of push and pull motivations is that people travel because they are pushed by their own internal forces and pulled by the external forces of destination's characteristics (Pearce, 2005). In other words, push motives explain the decisions to travel and pull motives justify the option with the chosen destination. Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad (2010) confirmed that tourists decided to go on vacation to fulfill intrinsic needs while their decisions on where to go are based on destination attributes. This is agreed by Yoon and Uysal (2005) where push motivations can be seen as the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, prestige, health and fitness, adventure and social interaction, family togetherness, and excitement. Meanwhile, pull motivations are those that are inspired by destination attractiveness such as beaches, recreation facilities, cultural attractions, entertainment, natural scenery, shopping, and parks.

Motivations for travel covered a broad range of human behaviours and experiences (Esichaikul, 2012; Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2011). A list of travel motivations includes rest and relaxation, excitement, social interaction, health, learning, adventure, family interaction, status, physical challenges, value for money, nostalgia, visiting historical sites and escape from routine or stress (Pearce, 2005; Huang & Tsai, 2003). Motivations such as desire to relax, rest, stays inactive are now substituted with the desire to learn, discover new places, to meet people and to live new experiences (Mahika, 2011). Tourists nowadays opt for intellectual active holidays that normally spend their free time visiting museums, art galleries, cultural places and historical sites (Esichaikul, 2012; Mahika, 2011; Huang & Tsai, 2003). They are those who demand holidays that stimulate them psychologically in terms of learning new skills and to increase knowledge. Jang and Wu (2006) further examined the travel motivations of Taiwanese

tourists and identified knowledge seeking, hygiene and safety are the most crucial travel motivations. A recent study also found that rest and relaxation, visiting natural attractions, learning, experiencing new things and safety are the senior European tourists' main motivation to visit Thailand (Esichaikul, 2012). Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad (2010) reconfirmed that the needs for prestige and social interactions are among important push attributes of foreign tourist to Jordan while the pull attributes demonstrate a variety of tourism offerings on its heritage, natural attractions, food, culture, affordability, safety and local hospitality.

There are also discoveries when tourists were asked to describe the purpose of travelling, where they only provide their memory of the image destinations rather than sharing their real motivational reasons (Pearce 2005; Uysal and Jurowski, 1994). This in line with Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) where the problem is always about the discrepancy that exist between the reasons for traveling tourists declared and their actual reasons. Mahika (2011) further stated that reasons for tourists not to declare their true traveling motivations are based on their desire to appear in different personality around people. According to Klenosky (2002), tourists may have multiple motivational forces for valuing the importance of a particular attribute or pull factor. For example, beaches may be important to visitors because they have other opportunities for water-based activities, getting a tan and socializing with others. This in line with Sirikaya and McLellan (1997) study who found that local hospitality and services are rated as the most important tourists motivation factor in spring break destination selection. This factor includes seven attributes: climate, availability of beaches, good accommodations, large hotels, feeling welcomed, friendly residents, and good food. These attributes are highly important to visitors and each attribute may derive its importance from very different sources. In sum, there are needs for an extensive research to identify and describe the emerging travel motivation factors. Little research has found examining travel motivational push and pull factors in cultural attractions, although the concept is often used to explain motivation in the travel markets. There is no doubt this issue plays an important role to understand the variation of desired needs that motivate tourist behavior.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection was carried out for two consecutive days at the festival grounds, the Kadazandusun Cultural Centre in Penampang, Sabah. Among the criteria for the respondents to qualify in participating for the survey is their ability to comprehend the English Language. The sample of this study consisted of a mixture number of local and international visitors who attended the KHF2015 on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015. According to the Head of the Documentary and Research Committee of KDCA, it is estimated to have 3000-5000 visitors (personal communication, May 13, 2015). The overall attendance cannot be predicted, as there is no

information or statistical data on visitors' arrival to the festival grounds. Given the population estimate, the sample size for this study is 500 participants. Through the use of random and convenience sampling methods, only 480 questionnaires were completed across the 2-day distribution. An overall response rate of 89% was achieved. The breakdown of the questionnaire distribution is shown in Table I.

TABLE I  
QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTION

Day	Distribution	Completed Surveys	Valid Responses	Distribution Rate %
1	250	232	213	92.8%
2	250	248	232	99.2%
	500	480	445	

The questionnaire design consists of structured and unstructured questions in the English Language. The questionnaire comprises of four (4) main sections; A) Demographic Profile, B) Information and Trip Planning, C) Customer Service, and D) Travel Motivation. The criteria of a valid and complete questionnaire would include respondents' age, gender and at least 70% of the questionnaire completed. The questionnaire scope presents dichotomous (Yes/No), open-ended questions, multiple-response questions (more than 1 answer) and 5-point Likert scale (Sections C and D).

IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In total, there are 28 statements posed to seek the respondents' agreement/disagreement in their motivation to KHF2015, by using a 5-Likert scale (5-Strongly Agree 4-Agree, 3-Neutral, 2-Disagree, 1-Strongly Disagree). The reliability statistics according to Cronbach Alpha's test is 0.982, which proves that the items are internally consistent and reliable. More than 85% of the festival-goers (n=445) responded to this section and the Mean results are presented in Table II.

Generally, respondents agreed that visiting KHF2015 motivates them to appreciate local culture (m=4.174), to have an enjoyable time (m=4.0171), to attend festivals (m=4.0273) and live entertainment (m=4.0525). A total of 93% of the respondents (n=445) are motivated to visit KHF2015 to learn local culture, arts and traditions (m=4.4251). They also feel that it is an affordable tourist attraction (m=4.0474). Respondents seek for variety in terms of searching for traditional food (m=4.0837) and to enjoy outdoor activities (4.0613) as well as to gain knowledge particularly on foreign destinations (m=4.0051) and experiencing new and different culture (m=4.1322). In terms of ranking (Table III), visitors are most motivated to visit the KHF2015 due to its history and culture (m=4.4251), variety seeking (m=4.0725), to gain knowledge (m=4.0687) and to enhance relation (m=4.0183). At the bottom rank, the respondents formed an agreement that

attending the KHF2015 may or may not be the reason to fulfill prestige (m=3.6146).

TABLE II  
VISITORS' TRAVEL MOTIVATION TO ATTEND KHF2015  
(BY MEAN VALUE)

STATEMENTS	Mean Value	
<b>Fulfilling Prestige</b>	<i>To increase my social status</i>	3.5485
	<i>To visit a place that my friends have been to</i>	3.6617
	<i>To visit a destination that would impress my family &amp; friends</i>	3.6337
<b>Enhance Relation</b>	<i>To enhance communication with local community</i>	3.9509
	<i>To exchange customs and traditions</i>	3.9756
	<i>To participate in new activities</i>	3.9726
	<i>To appreciate local culture</i>	4.1740
<b>Seeking Relaxation</b>	<i>To be away from home</i>	3.4286
	<i>To find excitement</i>	3.8701
<b>Enhance Social Circle</b>	<i>To have enjoyable time with my travel</i>	4.0171
	<i>To visit friends and relatives</i>	3.5323
	<i>To meet new people</i>	3.7883
<b>Sightseeing Variety</b>	<i>To fulfill my dream of visiting a foreign country</i>	3.6354
	<i>To sightsee touristic spots</i>	3.7769
	<i>To explore cultural resources</i>	3.9722
<b>Escaping from Daily Routine</b>	<i>To satisfy the desire to be somewhere else</i>	3.7974
	<i>To visit a place that I have not visited before</i>	3.9121
<b>Gaining Knowledge</b>	<i>To increase knowledge about foreign destination</i>	4.0051
	<i>To experience new different culture</i>	4.1322
<b>Events and Activities</b>	<i>To do activities with entire family</i>	3.6883
	<i>To attend festivals and events</i>	4.0273
	<i>To enjoy live entertainment</i>	4.0525
<b>Easy Access and Affordable</b>	<i>It is an affordable tourist attraction</i>	4.0474
	<i>It is a safe destination</i>	3.8825
	<i>It is value for money</i>	3.8122
<b>History &amp; Culture</b>	<i>To learn local culture, arts and traditions</i>	4.4251
<b>Variety Seeking</b>	<i>To search for traditional food</i>	4.0837
	<i>To enjoy the outdoor activities</i>	4.0613

Note: Instruments adapted from Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad, (2010)

TABLE III  
VISITORS' TRAVEL MOTIVATION TO ATTEND KHF2015  
(BY RANKING OF OVERALL MEAN)

TRAVEL MOTIVATION	Mean
<b>History &amp; Culture (Pull)</b>	<b>4.4251</b>
<b>Variety Seeking (Pull)</b>	<b>4.0725</b>
<b>Gaining Knowledge (Push)</b>	<b>4.0687</b>
<b>Enhance Relation (Push)</b>	<b>4.0183</b>
Events and Activities (Pull)	3.9227
Easy Access and Affordable (Pull)	3.9140
Escaping from Daily Routine (Push)	3.8548
Sightseeing Variety (Pull)	3.7948
Enhance Social Circle (Push)	3.7792
Seeking Relaxation (Push)	3.6494
Fulfilling Prestige (Push)	3.6146

V. DISCUSSION

This study attempt to comprehend tourists' motivation to attend cultural events and to extend the empirical evidence on push and pull motivation factors. In general, the push and pull motivation factors that found in the mention literatures was supported. This study reconfirmed that tourists' motivation is determined by both internal and external factors. In simplified words, tourists went to attend cultural events because they wanted to fulfill their intrinsic needs and their decisions to visit are based on the event features.

The study revealed that the "pull" factors of the KHF2015 are mainly on learning the local culture, arts and traditions. The tourists that attended the event ranked this factor as the most significant motivations. This indicates that tourists aspired to learn more about the local culture and KHF2015 undeniably offer them new learning experiences by participating in cultural activities that incorporates traditional dance, music, food and beverages, cultural arts and crafts that is ethnically Sabah. This findings supported the arguments made by Mahika (2011) where tourists' motivations today mostly filled with desire to learn, to meet people and live new experiences as compared before where tourists are more into relaxing, resting and stay inactive. Esichaikul (2012) and Huang et al. (2003) also highlighted in their study that tourists nowadays opt for intellectual active holidays by visiting museums and cultural places to learn new things. It is essential for responsible parties to ensure that the learning experience and interpretation of cultural arts and presentations are at its best throughout the festival areas especially on the multi-ethnic traditional houses. As these houses were built not only as an opportunity for the local and foreign visitors to take photographs, it is also a way for the visitors to learn the various ethnics in Sabah through their house design, the cultural dance, the rituals as well as the local foods & drinks served.

The second highest motivator identified as the pull attributes, which associated to variety seeking. KHF2015 have offered various outdoor sports activities such as mamarampanau (walking on bamboo stilts), *mipulos* (arm wrestling), *mipadsa* (knuckle wrestling), *monopuk* (blow piping) and *migayat lukug* (tug of war). This results indicated that the tourists motivation for outdoor activities and sports have proved similarities from previous studies (Van Vuuren and Slabbert, 2011; Slabbert and Van Der Merwe, 2009; Law, Cheung and Lo, 2004). Other than that, tourists can enjoy the traditional beverages and culinary delights that await them which include *tapai*, *lihing*, *montokou*, *ombuyat*, *hinava*, *tuhau*, *kulupis* and many more (Topin, 2015). This could potentially increase more tourists visitation, their spending habits and to extend frequent visits. This is agreeable by Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad (2010) having said that a country should capitalize its own culture, traditional food and natural attractions by emerging a sustainable destination image to encourage more tourists' visit. Hence, KHF2015 can be recognized as one of the indispensable cultural events in Sabah that helps the state to develop its tourism product mainly in heritage tourism, including culture

tourism and ethnic tourism (Prentice, 2003). This in line with Norazlita and Ahmad Azmi (2009) as Malaysia is well known its multi-racial and multi-cultural population that is portrayed in its festivals, food and general way of life.

Looking into push attributes, the study asserted that knowledge seeking and to enhance relation were among the most important intrinsic motives that trigger the tourists to visit KHF2015. These results are consistent with the recent studies found on tourists motivational push factors (Negrusa, Yolal, 2012; Van Vuuren and Slabbert, 2011; Bashar Aref Mohammad and Ahmad Puad, 2010). Tourists prefer going to places that one has not visited before to gain new knowledge and experience. Besides that, tourists love to build friendship and to show their appreciation to the local community whilst visiting such indigenous event. Therefore, the programs or activities offered by KHF2015 organizer should indirectly encourage tourists to interact with the local community and to expose them with cultural experiential learning environment. This is agreed by Sdnali and Chazapi (2007) where cultural events can promote cross-cultural communication that may enhance the mutual understanding between the event organizer and visitors.

This study is a powerful instrument not only in the hands of the tourism parties but also to the cultural association to identify the strength and areas for improvement to ensure the marketability of Kaamatan in the coming years. As the main product offered by this festival basically focusing on the Kadazandusun culture, it is quite difficult to associate with new and innovative products or services to refresh the expectations of people that will be coming again to the festival in the following years. By knowing exactly the motives that make the visitor to come and visit the KHF2015, the responsible parties may withdraw or reduce the number of those products for which there is a decline in demand and improve more to what interest the visitors more. Moreover, by knowing the tourists needs, a better preparation can be done to provide additional services that can help to improve their visiting experience and to create a better image afterwards. It is quite interesting to explore the visitors' motivation factors by focusing at the millennial tourists' market niche for future tourism product and travel package development.

#### VI. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

The results of this study provide justifiable evidence that tourist motivation is closely associated with self-intrinsic desires and destination's attributes. The main tourists' motivational factors of visiting KHF2015 include learning local culture, variety seeking, to gain knowledge and enhancing relation. As inbound and domestic tourism are becoming an important sector in Sabah economy, it can be said that the study findings have a significant managerial implications for the state's core attractions and support services in tourism industry. These are fundamental to increase tourists' satisfaction and to encourage repeat visit.

Future research may consider generating more applications related to destination behavior concerning destination loyalty,

facilities satisfaction, travel behavioral characteristics, and tourists' travel intention. Subsequent studies may also need to consider multiple dimensions in tourism push-pull motivational framework. By knowing the motives that make tourist opt to choose travel destination, government can take measures to encourage more tourism activities, to increase the number of tourists, to help the local economy, to improve local hospitality and services. The overall goal of this study is to enhance the understanding on tourists' push and pull motivation factors in directing travel behaviors of visiting cultural events. This study, however, has its own limitation. As with any empirical investigation, the specific findings of this research have limited generalizability due to the particular respondents and study setting involved, the sampling method used and the analysis procedures. The study findings generally demonstrate factors that motivate tourists to attend Kaamatan Harvest Festival in Sabah. To conclude, the push factors of knowledge seeking and to enhance relation influenced tourists visit to KHF2015 and they are also pulled by factors to learn local culture and variety seeking.

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