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## Exploring Motivational Factors for Dude Ranch Vacations

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## Exploring Motivational Factors for Dude-Ranch Vacations

### 1.0 Introduction

From inception in the early 1900s, to the establishment of a niche opportunity some 70 years later, dude ranches have been a popular choice for a segment of travelers (Kast, 1941; Rodnitzky, 1968).

There is an abundance of research regarding customer motivation across various sectors of the hospitality industry, including the lodging sector, which covers Bed-and-Breakfasts and nature-based resorts (Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008; Scarinci & Richins, 2008; Zupan & Milfelner, 2014), as well as food-choice motivations (Chakrabarti & Baisya, 2007; Nasir et.al, 2014). Studies outside of hospitality and tourism also explore what drives customer choice in purchase decisions (Jalalkamali, Nikbin, Hsu, & Chen, 2010; Nwankwo, Hamelin, & Khaled, 2014). As there are no studies that examine choice motivation in dude-ranch vacations, the primary objective of this study is to determine the main driving factors behind customers' purchasing decisions on a guest ranch. In addition, this study aims to explore the sources of information used in dude-ranch vacation-purchasing decisions: What kinds of source of information (personal/impersonal; online/offline) are the most important to travelers?

The study will contribute to the body of literature by extending existing motivational research into a new area. This study will provide dude-ranch owners/operators with valuable information on what prospective customers are looking for in a dude ranch. In turn, such insights are expected to facilitate optimal decision making on where/how monetary and service resources should be allocated to both attract customers and provide them with the experience of a lifetime.

Having introduced the dude-ranch vacation product, the paper will present a literature review of motivational theories, specifically purchase motivation, followed by research design. Then the paper will discuss findings, limitations, and implications.

#### ***A review of dude ranches***

“The charm of ranch life comes in its freedom and the vigorous open-air existence it forces a man to lead,” proclaimed former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt in his 1885 *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (True West Editors, 2011). Dude ranches had begun as early as the 1870s. Howard Eaton is generally credited with starting the first dude ranch, Custer Trail Ranch, in South Dakota. Due in part to promotion by notable figures such as Roosevelt, stories of ranch life and exceptional hunting spread, and soon, the Eatons found themselves hosting

visitors from back East. It didn't take long before the costs of hosting guests became a financial burden, but visitors eventually recognized this during their visits and offered to pay the Eatons for room and board. Howard Eaton then began charging guests an average of \$10 a week for lodging, meals, and the chance to play cowboy (Clayton, n.d.; Dude Ranchers' Association, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Rodnitzky, 1968; Schaffroth, 2011). Over time, the Eatons developed a unique experience tailored to improve guests' mental and physical condition through riding and ranch chores. Through the focus on guests' well-being and enjoyment, the Eatons set a standard of hospitality for dude ranches that continues in guest ranches today. It didn't take long for other ranches to realize that tourism was a serious business and that they could "make on dudes what (they) lost on cattle (Weiss, 2004)."

The 1920s brought about the expansion of the railroad, which acted as a catalyst for the dude ranch industry, with ranches appearing across the West and Southwest. At the same time, the cattle industry was facing challenges, with many ranchers struggling financially. Several key players representing railroads, ranchers, and national parks came together for a meeting to forge a mutually beneficial relationship. The meeting lasted two days and was essentially the first-ever meeting of the Dude Ranchers' Association. During this meeting, six objectives were laid out, forming the groundwork for a profitable, lasting partnership: "to establish cooperation among ranchers and railroad officials; discuss the transportation and proper care of guests; create advertising and publicity for the association; standardize practices; create an efficient sales organization; and protect fish and game" (Clayton, n.d).

As a result of the partnership, the ranches and parks received a much-needed marketing boost and saw an increase in guests traveling on the railroads. As visitors traveled from the East Coast and Midwest, they found that the railroads could offer an escape from the daily hustle and bustle of urban life to a unique experience of the Western spirit that ranches had become known for. Ranches quickly became a *home away from home*, and lasting relationships were often built between guests and staff. The remote location of the ranches often led to creative socializing, such as costume parties, games, and contests. These social interactions became just as important as the riding and outdoor experiences. These tangible and intangible features continue today, as ranch vacations continue to provide that special brand of Western hospitality (Clayton, n.d.).

The dude-ranching industry has continued to grow, and ranches can be found throughout North and South America, and as far away as Australia and New Zealand. Within the United States, the heaviest concentration of ranches can be found throughout the West and Southwest. According to the Dude Ranchers' Association (DRA), ranches registered with the DRA are located in the following 12 Western states and two Canadian provinces: Arizona, Arkansas, California,

Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming, and Alberta and British Columbia, Canada (Dude Ranchers' Association, 2016). Ranches registered with the DRA can be found within approximately 43 national parks, with others located in various state parks and near national monuments. Dude-ranch visitors in the United States grew from 15,000 visitors per year in 1936 to an estimated 40,000 guests per year in 2011 (Schaffroth, 2011). Nowadays, more than 87,000 people look for the dude-ranch experience annually (Barnes, 2015), indicating that this is a popular choice for a segment of travelers. With the establishment of the DRA, guidelines were implemented, establishing a set of standards that would govern dude ranch – also known as guest ranch -- businesses. These guidelines included the following: A dude ranch should be horse-oriented, primarily offer American-style dining, provide adequate accommodations, and promote weeklong stays (Dude Ranchers' Association, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Rodnitzky, 1968). The objectives of the DRA continue to be the preservation, protection, and promotion of these unique vacation experiences. Additionally, the association strives to maintain the core principles of dude ranching: horses, hats, hospitality, heritage, honesty, and heart (Dude Ranchers' Association, 2014). While the DRA is not the only association that ranches can belong to, it is one of the most recognized. A variety of other organizations, associations, and marketing groups alike assist ranches with promoting the product to consumers through a variety of marketing media, such as website advertising, trade shows, and various consortium partnerships.

While the core offerings and spirit of dude ranching remain the same, the offerings that guests expect have changed. The dude-ranch product today is similar to that of a resort hotel in that not all accommodations are the same. Generally speaking, customers search among three main categories of ranches: working guest ranches, which are functioning cattle or sheep ranches; dude ranches, in which horseback riding is the main component of the experience, along with various outdoor activities; and resort dude ranches, which are typically larger than the previous two, featuring horseback riding as an option, along with other activities and on-site facilities, such as spas (Dude Ranchers' Association, 2014; Magill, 2010; Rodnitzky, 1968). Aside from these three distinctions, ranches vary in visitor capacity, location, range of accommodations, meal selection, and pricing. A visual representation of the options available to potential customers interested in selecting a dude-ranch vacation is presented in Appendix A.

Academic writings on business, marketing, tourism, and hospitality make vague references to dude ranching, more as a side note than as a principal topic. Crampon (1986) mentioned dude ranches as one of the lodging options available to tourists traveling to Colorado. Carlsen and Edwards (2008) looked at innovation and sustainable tourism in a case-study context, one of which was a

working cattle ranch that was considering tourism as an option for sustainability. Stanger (2010), in writing about the history of family vacations in America, talked about how the popularity of TV westerns in the 1950s and 1960s led to more Americans taking vacations to dude ranches and Old West theme parks. The small majority of publications that focus on dude ranches are published in historical or social science journals, and even those are few and far between (Johnson, 2012; Kast, 1941; Rodnitzky, 1968). Although little research has been conducted on dude ranches in the hospitality and tourism industry, an exception is a study by Pegas, Ollenburg, and Tynon (2013) who examined agritourism as a way for cattle ranches and farms to generate extra income. A review of the literature has found no studies that examine motivational influences in choosing dude-ranch vacations. With a variety of options available, determining the primary motivation in selecting a ranch would provide dude-ranch managers/operators with insights into what prospective customers are looking for.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1. Motivational Theories**

The quest to find what drives consumer purchases spans across a variety of fields and can be narrowed to a single word: *motivation*. Chang (2007) determined that motivation can be defined as the reflection of needs and wants that emerges when an individual wants to satisfy a need, and can be viewed as a critical variable in relation to purchasing decisions and the outcome of satisfaction. Another definition is that motivation is the driving force that initiates and directs behavior (Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Tangeland, 2011).

There seems to be a consensus across tourism literature that understanding customer motivations will assist in understanding choices, preferences, and needs (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Chan & Baum, 2007; Gnoth, 1997; Scarinci & Richins, 2008; Tangeland, 2011). Scarinci & Richins (2008) quoted Kim, et.al. (1996): “Motivation is only one of the many variables which influence the destination choice process. However, motivation is a fundamental driving force in helping to explain tourist behavior (p.273).” Tangeland (2011) said motivation to purchase a specific product will not come about unless the tourist is aware of that product and believes that it will satisfy his or her needs, which could imply that sources of information have an effect on purchasing decisions.

The importance of understanding customer motivation has been established across various literature streams, and several theories have been discussed in motivational research. Most motivation literature in consumer behavior and tourism studies starts with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a theoretical foundation (Chang, 2007; Chien, Yen, & Hoang, 2012; Kozak, 2002).

It may then branch into Pearce's hierarchal travel career steps, or travel ladder, (Scarinci & Richins, 2008; Chang, 2007; Chien et al., 2012), or the concept of "push and pull" factors (Chan & Baum, 2007; Chang, 2007; Chien et al., 2012; Gnoth, 1997). Other studies use the Plog's travel personality or Cohen's work on "strangeness" vs. "familiarity" when covering tourist motivations to travel (Chen, Mak, & McKercher, 2011). This study seeks to use the push-pull factors as a basis for determining purchase motivations when choosing dude-ranch vacations, as they have explained what drives consumer purchases in similar environments, such as beach-based resorts in Vietnam (Chien et al., 2012), eco-lodge accommodations (Chan & Baum, 2007), and nature-based tourism destinations in Norway (Tangeland, 2011).

The push-and-pull concept, as it relates to travel decisions, discusses how individuals are *pushed* by various psychological factors and *pulled* to a particular place as a result of the tangible and intangible attributes of the destination (Jeong, 2014; Sangpikul, 2008). More specifically, push factors are the internal motivating factors that drive or create a desire to travel, be it for adventure, rest, and relaxation; the need for social interaction; or the desire for prestige. Pull factors are often referred to as *destination attributes* -- such as natural attractions, quality of beaches, or recreational facilities -- that individuals look for as a reflection of their push motivations (Jeong, 2014; Fjelstul, 2013; Sangpikul, 2008). While these are two separate motivational forces, most research agrees that they work together (Chan & Baum, 2007; Chang, 2007; Chien et al., 2012; Gnoth, 1997). Chan & Baum (2007), when determining the motivational factors in eco-tourists selecting eco-lodge accommodations, found that consumers were motivated by destination attributes and activities, as opposed to lodge attributes. Chien et al. (2012) noted that motivation is multidimensional, and they sought in their model to combine push-and-pull factors with the theory of planned behavior and past experiences to determine purchase intentions.

## 2.2. Push-and-Pull Factors

Push-and-pull theory has been identified as being a valuable tool for marketers in understanding what drives tourists to a particular destination, and this understanding allows marketers to satisfy travelers' needs and wants (Al-Haj Mohammad & Som, 2009; Jeong, 2014; Sangpikul, 2008).

Chan and Baum (2007) broke down push-and-pull factors into sub-categories to further identify what motivated customers to purchase eco-lodge accommodations, but this is not uncommon in other motivational research (Chang; 2007; Crompton, 1979; Opperman & Chon, 1997). A study by Crompton (1979) found seven push motives: escape, self-exploration, relaxation, prestige, regression, kinship enhancement, and social interaction. When reviewing articles

pertaining to dude ranches, common phrases emerge: “get away to simpler times,” “Dude-ranch vacations can be therapeutic,” and “one-of-a-kind escape” (Dude Ranchers’ Association, 2014). This leads to an assumption that consumers who choose dude-ranch vacations are looking to escape the hustle and bustle of city life. Stanger (2010) wrote that “Westerns were popular on television and in the movies, providing viewers an escape from life's tensions, promoting the family ideal, and "reasserting masculinity in a domesticated family culture" (p. 92). Following on the Western theme, a requirement for membership into the Dude Ranchers’ Association is that a “Dude ranch shall exemplify the Western ranch ideal of personal, homelike hospitality and atmosphere.” This is in line with the birth of dude ranching in the 1800s (Dude Ranchers’ Association, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Rodnitzky, 1968).

Pull factors, the tangible and intangible attributes that consumers look for in a destination, also have been explored in studies. Lefkoff-Hagius and Mason (1990) defined tangible attributes as the concrete, physical, and objective attributes of a product and where intangible refers to the abstract, beneficial, and subjective attributes of a product. Crompton (1979) found two pull motives, novelty and education, and Sangpikul (2008) found four categories of pull factors: travel arrangements and facilities, cultural and historical attractions, shopping and leisure activities, and safety and cleanliness. Appendix A offers eight tangible and intangible criteria that are offered throughout various dude ranches -- riding terrain, type of vacation, time of year, ranch size, accommodation type, amenities, activities, and pricing structure – from which consumers can select. When choosing a dude-ranch vacation, these factors all fall under the definition of pull factors. The tangible attributes are categorized as accommodation type, amenities, and activities offered, while the intangible attributes are categorized as pricing structure, ranch size, type of vacation, and time of year.

### **2.3. Impact of Push-and-Pull Factors on Dude-Ranch Vacation Purchasing Intentions**

Push-and-pull factors have been used in tourism as a means to help tourism destinations market themselves. Knowing what motivates people to travel (push) and offering the products (pull) that match consumers’ desires allow tourist destinations to better satisfy consumers’ needs and wants (Sangpikul, 2008).

As previously mentioned, there is no consensus regarding which factor is a bigger determinant of purchase motivations. Jeong (2014) found that push motivations were significantly related to destination choice and activity selection in marine destination selection, which is consistent with early studies in push-and-pull theory (Gnoth, 1997). Sangpikul (2008) found that most studies on travel motivation focus on the push-based approach to focus on segmentation by

reasons/desires in travelers' destination choices. Chien et al. (2012) found that pull motivations were stronger in bringing tourists to beach-based resorts in Vietnam and noted that the implication is that practitioners should focus on amenities that entice travelers. Chan and Baum (2007) found empirical evidence that pull factors outweighed push factors in eco-lodge-accommodation choices, noting that it is the unique settings of the lodges that attract eco-tourists and that the main motivational factors depend on experiential factors from the natural environment. They cite earlier studies (Blamey, 1995; Eagles, 1992; Wight, 1995, 1997) to which their results add support (Chan & Baum, 2007). Sangpikul (2008) argues that "pull factors are fundamentally related to benefit segmentation...which is useful segmentation technique to understand tourists' buying behavior (p. 27)." Fjelstul (2013) explored pull factors in the recreational vehicle (RV) industry as the singular influence on campground stays, and said that once travel intentions were declared, destination attributes become the driving influence. Considering the limited selection of dude ranches and the varying categories of the product that differ mainly in tangible and intangible attributes offered, it is further hypothesized that:

H: Pull factors motivate consumers to purchase dude-ranch vacations more than push factors.

#### ***Sources of information relating to purchasing decisions***

An information search was defined by Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1993) as the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory and/or the acquisition of information from the environment. A further look into information searches finds that they can influence and determine consumer behavior (Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004; Murphy, Mascardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). Determining where and how consumers acquire information assists managers in making informed marketing decisions, which closely correspond to push-and-pull motivational theory. Furthermore, Ramkissoon and Uysal (2011) point out that a search for information can be considered the starting point in the vacation decision-making process, in which the prospective consumer evaluates product options and forms purchase intentions.

More recent studies have broken down the information-search process into an online and offline context (Choi, Lehto, Morrison, & Jang, 2012; Dodd et al., 2005; Lopez & Sicilia, 2011). The sources can further be categorized as personal or impersonal sources of information (Lopez & Sicilia, 2011). Lopez and Sicilia (2011) studied tourist-search behavior preferences, looking at online/offline and personal/impersonal information sources, and found that travelers use online searches when impersonal sources are involved, but when more specialized



services are needed, particularly for expensive or lengthy trips, they still rely on personal, offline sources.

With a variety of information sources available to consumers, and with the Internet making information more readily available, electronic word-of-mouth (WOM) has been shown to play a factor in consumer-purchase decisions (Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Fjelstul, Wang, & Li, 2012; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011). In the context of dude-ranch vacation-purchase intentions, WOM, as a personal source of information; traditional marketing avenues, such as associations specializing in dude-ranch vacations; and travel agents/tour operators, as impersonal sources of information, could have an important role in purchasing decisions when planning a dude-ranch vacation. In this study, two research questions will be addressed: 1) What source of information was the most important in the decision-making process when planning a dude-ranch vacation? 2) What type of information sources (personal or impersonal; online or offline) was the most important? This study will look beyond merely motivational theory, as a result of previously mentioned past studies, and instead explore the implications of adding sources of information to the purchase-intention process.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1. Description of Research Design and Procedures**

The research design for this study began with a review of motivational theory, respective to push-pull theory. Based on the literature, the hypothesis was formed, and the literature, both academic and industry-related, was reviewed for references to key dimensions of dude-ranch attributes. It was determined that a dude-ranch-specific survey was necessary. Additional input for the survey's development was received via emails from a panel of five industry experts, including a former assistant ranch manager, a ranch-marketing coordinator, and two repeat customers, each having taken more than 10 ranch vacations.

To measure motivational factors and purchasing intentions for dude-ranch vacations, a specific survey technique was used. To ensure concept validity, the questionnaire was designed to mirror similar studies in resort settings (Al-Haj Mohammad & Som, 2009; Chien et al., 2012; Jeong, 2014), with questions altered to reflect dude-ranch amenities. The questionnaire was pre-screened by a panel of experts from both academia and the dude-ranch industry before being pre-tested on a sample group to ensure construct validity. Preliminary tabulations based on a sample group of 50 helped ensure that the questionnaire met the needs of the research, and minor revisions were made before the survey was distributed to a larger sample, via email distribution. Prior to distributing the finalized survey, the instrument and distribution procedures were approved by the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) of the Committee on the Use of Human Research Subjects. The survey was created and distributed through Qualtrics, an online survey software system.

### **3.2. Sample**

The target population for this study was general consumers who were interested in purchasing a dude-ranch vacation or who already had purchased a dude-ranch vacation. To reach this population, contact with dude-ranch marketing organizations (such as the Dude Ranchers' Association and Top Fifty Ranches), tour operators specializing in adventure tours, and dude ranches was made via email, which included an explanation of the purpose of the study and an invitation for them to participate by distributing the survey to their current clientele or by providing a client list to researchers. A total of 40 dude ranches across the United States and Canada were contacted via email and Facebook messaging. Of the ranches contacted, less than 5 percent responded to email or messaging. Those ranches that responded either declined to participate or expressed interest in the study, but did not respond after subsequent follow-up. Snowballing via social media and email was the primary method of data collection for this study. More specifically, the primary researcher posted a link to the survey through a personal Facebook page, and the survey information was distributed to an initial list of 20 participants who had frequented a guest ranch at least once. These participants elected to take the survey, then shared the survey through Facebook posts. In addition, a major adventure travel tour operator distributed the survey through its Facebook page, which has over 2,000 likes, and a small corporate event planning company, with over 700 likes, also distributed the survey on its Facebook page.

### **3.3. Measures**

The survey contained 40 questions across five sections (purchase intentions, pull motivations, push motivations, source of information, and demographic information) and began with screening questions to filter out respondents who had been on dude-ranch vacations from those who had not been on a dude-ranch vacation. Screening questions then were used to separate those who had not been on a ranch vacation based on level of interest. If the respondent indicated that he or she was interested in taking a dude-ranch vacation, the respondent was asked to continue with the survey, but if the respondent was not interested, he or she was directed to the end of the survey and asked only to answer demographic questions. Therefore, only respondents who indicated either that they had been on a dude-ranch vacation or were interested in taking a dude-ranch vacation were asked to respond to all questions.

Purchase intention, the dependent variable, was assessed through the independent variables of push motivation and pull motivation. Purchase intention was measured using one statement, adapted from Chien et.al, (2012), with a 7-point Likert scale from (7) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree: “I intend to choose a dude-ranch vacation in the next 12 months.”

Push motivations were measured with 13 statements, on a 7-point Likert scale, from “very important” (7) to “not important at all” (1) (Al-Haj Mohammad & Som, 2009; Sangpikul, 2008). Respondents were asked to “think about why a dude-ranch vacation appeals to you,” followed by 13 statements in four categories of push motivations, with four determining “novelty and knowledge seeking” motivations, such as “I want to experience the Western lifestyle”; three gauging “nature and adventure” interests, such as “I can connect with nature”; three on “ego enhancement,” such as “I want to go to the places that my friends go”; and three concerning “rest and relaxation,” such as, “This is the time I can escape from the ordinary or routine environment at home” (Table 2).

Pull motivations were measured by 23 statements on a 7-point Likert scale, from very important (7) to not important (1), to measure both tangible and intangible items (Al-Haj Mohammad & Som, 2009; Chien et al., 2012; Jeong, 2014). Respondents were asked to “indicate the level to which you feel each item is important/unimportant in your dude-ranch vacation experience,” followed by a variety of tangible and intangible ranch attributes. The attributes presented included the following: three statements to indicate accommodation preference, with options of rustic, moderate, or luxury accommodations; four to identify activity preferences; one for amenities; two to determine time of year preferred; four for riding terrain, such as “The uniqueness of the desert”; two for pricing structure, “An all-inclusive pricing structure”; two for type of vacation, including “An authentic experience on a cattle ranch”; and five for ranch size, with options ranging from a guest capacity of less than 25 people to a guest capacity of more than 50 people (Table 2).

The final two portions of the survey contained questions regarding what sources of information respondents would use, or had used, to make purchase decisions regarding guest-ranch vacation purchases, as well as questions on demographic information. Questions regarding source of information were adapted from Bieger and Laesser (2004). The sources included both online/offline and personal/impersonal sources (Lopez & Sicilia, 2011), with the following: destination information brochure, tour operator brochures, family/friend referrals, travel agents specializing in dude ranches, dude-ranch associations, dude-ranch websites, and travel magazines (Table 3). Demographic information and travel-characteristics questions included questions that covered age, gender, education, marital status, number of family members, number of vacations taken per year,

average length of stay per vacation, total funds spent per vacation, state or country of origin and annual household income (Table 1).

#### 4.0. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1. Profile of the Respondents

A total of 206 surveys were accessed online, of which 164 were filled out entirely, providing a 79.6 percent initial response rate. Overall, most respondents (72 percent) were female, and over 57 percent were single with no children. When looking at the travel characteristics, 82.9 percent take 1-3 vacations per year, with 53.4 percent staying three to five nights and 55.5 percent spending under \$2,000 (Table 1). From the screening questions, 27 percent of respondents (n=52) had been on dude-ranch vacations, and 73 percent (n=140) had not been on a dude-ranch vacation. Of those who had been on a dude-ranch vacation, 60 percent only had been on one dude-ranch vacation, with 28 percent having been on two or three vacations. Further data also noted that those who had been on a ranch vacation booked in advance, with almost 37 percent booking four to six months in advance and approximately 27 percent booking either one to three months in advance or seven to 12 months in advance. For those respondents who had not taken a dude-ranch vacation, 63.8 percent indicated that they were interested in going on a dude-ranch vacation. Table 1 presents the demographic and travel characteristics of respondents. IMB SPSS version 22 was utilized for the statistical analysis of the data.

Table 1. Demographics & Travel Characteristics

<i>Demographics</i>	Total Respondents	
	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Gender		
Male	46	28%
Female	118	72%
Age		

18 to 24	76	46.6%
25 to 34	33	20.2%
35 to 44	19	11.7%
45 to 54	15	9.2%
55 to 64	12	7.4%
65 to 74	7	4.3%
75 or older	1	0.3%
 Education		
High school/GED	4	2.4%
Some college	22	13.4%
2 year college degree	66	40.2%
4 year college degree	36	22.0%
Master's degree	31	18.9%
Doctoral degree	3	1.8%
 Family structure		
Single without children	94	57.7%
Single with children	5	3.1%
Married without children	21	12.9%
Married with children	31	19.0%
Living with partner (no children)	11	6.7%
Living with partner (with children)	1	0.6%
 Annual household income		
under \$20,000	41	25.3%
20,000-39,999	37	22.8%
40,000-69,999	24	14.8%
70,000-99,999	52	16%
over 100,000	34	21%
 Occupation		

Management, professional, related	45	27.6%
Service	38	23.3%
Sales and office	12	7.4%
Farming, fishing, forestry	1	0.6%
Government	5	3.1%
Retired	7	4.3%
Unemployed	13	8.0%
Other	42	25.8%

### *Travel Characteristics*

#### Frequency of vacations (per year)

0 times	6	3.7%
1-3 times	136	82.9%
4-6 times	18	11.0%
7 or more times	4	2.4%

#### Average length of stay (per vacation)

1-3 nights	41	25.2%
3-5 nights	87	53.4%
5-10 nights	30	18.4%
10 or more nights	5	3.1%

#### Total monies spent (per vacation)

\$0-\$2,000	91	55.5%
\$2,000-\$5,000	51	31.1%
\$5,000-\$10,000	14	8.5%
\$15,000 or more	1	0.6%
Prefer not to answer	7	4.3%

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*Note.*  $N = 164$

## **4.2. Ranks of Attributes of Push-and-Pull Factors in Dude-Ranch Vacations**

The mean ratings of push-and-pull factors were analyzed (Table 2). A review of the pull attributes showed that “value for your money” and “quality of food and beverages” scored the highest, with a mean score of 6.09. Mean ratings showed that the availability of a variety of riding activities (mean=5.56) and the riding terrain (mountains, mean=5.84; open meadow, mean=5.72; variety of terrain,

mean=5.59; and desert, mean=5.05) also were important to respondents. A Western feel (mean=5.66) and authenticity (mean=5.38) were seen as somewhat important in the decision-making process for respondents. These responses indicate that when respondents are looking for a dude-ranch vacation, the variety of riding activities offered, Western ambiance offered, value for their money, and food and beverage quality are just as important as the physical attributes of the ranch and its location.

When reviewing push attributes, “to enjoy myself and make myself happy while relaxing” scored the highest, at 6.14. “Experience adventure” (mean=5.93) and “visit new places” (mean=5.92) scored almost identically, followed by “time that I can escape from the ordinary or routine environment at home” (mean=5.72) and “just want to travel, go somewhere and do something different in a different environment” (mean=5.69), implying that relaxation and escape are intrinsic motivators for those looking to participate in a dude-ranch vacation.

Table 2. Ranks of attributes of pull and push factors

<b>Push Factors</b>	<b>Mean</b>
To enjoy myself and make myself happy while relaxing	6.14
Experience adventure	5.93
Visit new places	5.92
Time that I can escape from the ordinary or routine environment at home	5.72
Just want to travel, go somewhere and do something different in a different environment	5.69
Connect with nature	5.60
Time that I can physically rest and relax	5.32
Experience luxury things, nice food, and comfortable place to stay	5.04
Want to experience the Western lifestyle	4.84
Want to see and meet new groups of people	4.75
Rich Cultural links	4.68
Go to the places my friends go	4.03

I can fulfill my dream and self-curiosity about living in the West and being a cowboy/cowgirl	3.75
<b>Pull Factors</b>	
Good value for money	6.09
Quality of Food & Beverage	6.09
The uniqueness of the mountains	5.84
The uniqueness of the open meadows	5.72
Western Feel	5.66
A variety of terrain in one location	5.59
Diversity of Riding trails	5.59
Variety of riding activities	5.56
Authentic Cattle Ranch experience	5.38
All-inclusive pricing structure	5.35
The uniqueness of the desert	5.05
Moderate accommodations	4.88
Ability to ride year round	4.79
A variety of amenities such as spas, hot tubs, and room service	4.66
Rustic accommodation	4.64
25 persons or less guest capacity	4.62
Activities that include no horseback riding	4.34
Luxury accommodations	4.32
Having to trailer to trails (n=95)	4.12
30-50 person guest capacity	3.97
Activities for children (n=95)	3.33



> 50 person guest capacity (n=95)	3.19
Experience the seasons	2.23

*Note. N=95, \*Seven-point Likert scale was used for rating importance ranging from 1 = “not at all important” to 7 = “extremely important”.*

### 4.3. Results of Factor Analysis and Regression Analysis

The 23 pull factors and 13 push factors were analyzed separately using principal-components analysis with the varimax rotation method. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were used to test the data fit. The KMO measure was .733 and .723 for pull and push, respectively, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was found to be 719.304 (pull) and 485.012 (push), with a 0.000 significance level for both pull and push. These figures suggest that the use of exploratory factor analysis was appropriate. The factors derived follow Hair et al. (2005) suggestions that eigenvalue must be higher than 1.0, and factor loading should be greater than 0.50. Of the 23 pull attributes, 13 had factor loadings of .50 or greater, and of the 13 push factors, eight had factor loadings of .50 or greater. Table 3 shows the variables for both pull and push attributes whose factors loaded at .50 or higher.

Table 3. Factor loadings for pull and push factors

Attributes of pull and push factors	Factor Loading	Mean	St. Deviation
<b>Pull Factors (n=94)</b>			
Variety of riding	.633	5.56	1.032
Ability to ride year round	.622	4.79	1.632
Experience the seasons	.691	2.23	1.282
Mountains	.762	5.84	1.085
Open Meadows	.771	5.72	1.158
Desert	.566	5.05	1.440
Variety of terrain	.669	5.59	1.072
Value for money	.536	6.09	1.064

All-inclusive pricing structure	.526	5.35	1.397
Western feel	.691	5.66	1.223
Authentic cattle ranch	.561	5.38	1.392
Diversity of riding trails	.692	5.59	1.231
Trailer to trails (n=95)	.507	4.12	1.563
<b>Push Factors (n=95)</b>			
Want to experience Western lifestyle	.524	4.84	1.490
Want to visit new places	.532	5.87	1.175
Want to see and meet new groups of people	.626	4.75	1.591
Connect with nature	.547	5.60	1.292
Experience adventure	.731	5.93	1.214
Just want to travel, go somewhere and do something different in a different environment	.728	5.69	1.203
Time that I can escape from the ordinary or routine environment at home	.664	5.72	1.182
To enjoy myself and make myself happy while relaxing	.766	6.14	.996

A multiple regression was conducted to examine the impact of push-and-pull factors on purchase intentions when buying dude-ranch vacations. The attributes of push-and-pull factors with factor loadings at .50 or higher were summed up and averaged to obtain the independent pull and push variables. Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis, which show that pull factors significantly influenced purchase intention ( $\beta = .321$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and push factors were not shown to significantly influence purchase intentions ( $\beta = .167$ ,  $p = .142$ ). While this supports the study's hypothesis that pull factors motivate customers to purchase over push factors,  $R^2$  shows that 19 percent of the variance in intention to purchase a dude-ranch vacation can be explained by the model.

Table 4. Result of regression analysis for purchase intention in dude ranch vacation

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i> value
Pull Attributes	.042	.015	.321	2.854	.005
Push Attributes	.033	.022	.167	1.483	.142

Note:  $R^2 = .190$ ; Dependent variable: purchase intention of dude ranch vacation

#### 4.4. Importance of Source of Information in Dude-Ranch Vacations

The starting point in the vacation decision-making process is key, as this can significantly influence the decision in purchasing (Ramkisson & Uysal, 2011). The data, shown in Table 5, is pointing heavily to those data sources that are considered “personal sources” as the primary source of information for prospective consumers, indicating that tapping into previous guests for WOM referrals could be beneficial to bringing in new customers through relationship-building processes with current customers. The high scores are consistent with previous studies that indicate that WOM is critical as consumers rely heavily on the suggestions, and past experiences, of friends and family when selecting a vacation destination (Abubaker & Mavondo, 2014; Cetin & Dincer, 2014). This study indicates that this is no different in the dude-ranch vacation-selection process. Additionally, the website, TripAdvisor.com and social media were cited as important starting points for consumers to glean information, indicating that these online information outlets should not be overlooked by ranch marketers and should be managed accordingly (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). Interestingly, dude ranch-affiliated websites scored high in importance for consumers. This is most likely a result of the product being so unique and specialized, but it also indicates that partnerships with dude-ranch consortiums could prove to be beneficial for marketing the product to consumers. From an academic perspective, the results of the study provide support for the literature in that “personal sources” have a larger impact on motivation to purchase than “impersonal sources.”

Table 5. Perceived importance of information sources ranked highest to lowest

	Mean	St. Deviation	Category
Family/Friend	5.39	1.445	Offline/Personal
Social Media	5.27	1.497	Online/Personal
Dude Ranch Affiliated Website	5.24	1.613	Online/Impersonal

Trip Advisor	5.13	1.762	Online/Personal
Travel Magazine	4.62	1.436	Offline/Impersonal
Online Travel Agency	4.41	1.691	Online/Impersonal
Tourism Bureau	4.40	1.541	Offline/Impersonal
Tour Operator Brochure	4.39	1.603	Offline/Impersonal
Western Magazine	4.36	1.552	Offline/Impersonal
Association Magazine	4.10	1.550	Offline/Impersonal
Travel Agent	4.07	1.759	Offline/Impersonal

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*Note, N=93*

## 5.0. Conclusions

The major finding in the study is that the survey data supported the hypothesis that pull factors emerge as more significant over push factors in shaping consumer intentions when purchasing dude-ranch vacations. For example, “good value for your money” and “the uniqueness of the mountains” were significant motivational attributes in dude-ranch vacation-purchasing intentions. In choice motivation when choosing dude-ranch vacations, unique natural environments and authentic ranch experiences could attract more consumers. The results of this study are consistent with previous studies (Chan & Baum, 2007; Chien et al., 2008), which noted that pull factors were related more heavily to traveler motivation in unique settings. However, this is not consistent with other studies (Gnoth, 1997; Jeong, 2014; Sangpikul, 2008), which found that push factors were significantly related to destination choice and activity selection.

When looking at specific pull attributes, value for your money and quality of food and beverages were the only two attributes that scored as being “very important” in dude-ranch selection. This suggests that having made the decision to purchase a ranch vacation, prospective guests are focused primarily on obtaining value for their money (i.e., what is included in the price, what is extra, is it a la carte?) and looking for ranches that highlight the food and beverage offerings (i.e. is there a trained culinary chef at the ranch, are images of the food available, what beverages are included in the meal price?). These two attributes were followed by a mixture of tangible and intangible attributes that scored in the “somewhat important” category of factors that prospective guests look for in choosing a ranch for vacation. Those attributes included the terrain in which riding takes place, thereby indicating that those seeking a dude-ranch vacation are

looking for connections with nature not just in the surrounding vistas, but also in the terrain available for riding. Additionally, many respondents said the vacation should have a “Western feel,” suggesting that the connection with Western culture is important in the selection process. While authenticity of the ranch was expected to be high, it did not score as high as anticipated, indicating that the “working-ranch vacation” aspect is not as significant as the overall atmosphere and location of the ranch. The highly rated pull attributes suggest that ranches should highlight the food and beverage offerings in marketing material. Additionally, findings suggest that a ranch should promote not only the location, showcasing scenic vistas, but also the availability of riding opportunities that prospective consumers could partake in as part of the experience. When making adjustments to prices, ranch operators should be mindful that “value for your money” and “all-inclusive pricing” were both important to prospective consumers.

Turning from external attributes to internal motivating factors, the study found that most prospective consumers are looking for escape, relaxation, and self-exploration when choosing a ranch vacation. These are the benefits of an authentic dude-ranch vacation, which can provide customers with unique escape experiences from their ordinary lives at home and at work. Thus, the dude-ranch industry needs to effectively utilize these internal factors to create a desire for unique adventures and develop strategies to provide unique services and experiences to attract more consumers who seek escape, adventure, relaxation, and the desire for prestige. This coincides with current marketing trends that promote dude-ranch vacations as a “one-of-a-kind escape” (Dude Rancher’s Association, 2014). These internal motivators pair well with the external attributes that were found to be important, showing the links between pull and push motivators. In other words, internal factors push consumers by driving a desire to seek escape, adventure, and relaxation, while external factors pull/attract them with unique natural environments, Western feel and experiences. Eventually, these two factors impact consumers’ satisfaction, vacation behavior, and intention to be a repeat customer. Therefore, the dude-ranch industry should provide services that match internal and external factors to meet consumers’ unique needs and preferences (Chien et al., 2012).

The study may provide managerial insight for dude-ranch operators by giving them an understanding of what motivates customer-purchase intentions. This information will help to determine where funds should be spent to make the product more attractive. By examining the primary sources of information, managers can determine where marketing dollars should be spent for the greatest return on investment. This study found that personal sources were the most important category of information sources in dude-ranch vacation-purchase decisions. These results suggest that promotions through social media or a referral-reward system are likely to be more cost-effective investment decisions

with stronger effects compared with money spent on commissioning travel agents or advertising through traditional sources.

One of the limitations of this study is the sampling method. It is understood that convenience sampling occurred through the use of snowballing, but we attempted to minimize this by contacting a population other than those with a specific interest in dude-ranch vacations, such as tour operators and event managers. Secondly, the data was collected during peak-season for most dude ranches, which could partially explain the relatively low response rate from those ranches that were contacted. Given the relatively small sample size, the results may not represent the whole sample population. Future research in this area should seek to capture a response from a greater sample population. Additional studies could also seek to determine how ranches can best market themselves to consumers, with a focus on the pull attributes. This information could further assist ranches in understanding the consumer and better tailoring both the ranch product to the consumer and the most efficient ways to attract future ranch visitors. Given that very little research has been done in this sector, focus-group studies would be beneficial to help further analyze customer motivations. The results from the focus group could provide insights, as well as assist in modifying the survey for use in the future. Furthermore, future studies could examine the service setting between the service provider (ranches) and consumers (guests), to determine guest satisfaction, potentially identify service gaps, and further explore consumer motivations. Given the lack of academic attention this sector has received, there is a plethora of opportunities for collaboration between academia and the industry. Both sectors have the opportunity to benefit from collaborative work, with academics advancing research into a new sector and the industry gaining valuable insights and expertise focusing on the needs and wants of dude-ranch vacation-seeking tourists.

Appendix A: Selecting a Dude Ranch vacation (*Source: Dude Ranchers' Association, 2014*)

General Criteria	Factors	Definitions/Other Considerations
Riding terrain	Open Meadows, Prairies, Mountain, Desert	Common states: Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, South Dakota, Nebraska, California, British Columbia (Canada)*This is not a complete list, only those ranches with DRA memberships
Type of Vacation		

	Working Dude Ranch	These are working cattle or sheep operations. Your horseback riding adventures will be determined by the ranch's livestock and the work related to them. Be prepared to experience these activities first hand
	Dude Ranch	Horseback riding is central to these ranches. The cowboy in you will experience Western riding and a variety of outdoor activities
	Resort Dude Ranch	Horseback riding is featured, and these ranches offer an array of diverse activities and onsite facilities. These are typically larger ranches
Time of Year	Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall	Ranches in the northern climates are busy during the summer, some may only be open in the summer, and those in the southern climates may be open year-round and busy during the winter months.
Size of Ranch		
	Guest Capacity	Some ranches max at 8 guests, some max at 100+ guests. The main difference will be in the dining and social experience
	Physical space	Some ranches own large amounts of land, allowing for diversity in rides. Other ranches lease land and may trailer off property to riding trails.
Accommodations	Rustic, Moderate & Luxury	
Amenities	Hot tub, pool, wireless internet, TV' s, spa, room service, etc.	
Activities		
	Riding activities	Overnight pack trips, hunting trips, all-day rides, half-day rides, cattle drives, team penning, guest rodeos, gymkhana, etc.
	Children' s activities	Availability of structured children' s programs
	Non-rider activities	Hiking, fly-fishing, canoeing, tennis, volleyball, western dancing, hay rides, rec room, photography, culinary lessons, etc.
Pricing structure	All-inclusive	Most ranches include lodging, meals, and basic level of riding activities. Extra charges may include private lessons, fly fishing, massages, overnight trips, alcoholic beverages, airport transfers, etc.

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