DECISION MAKING IN OUTBOUND INCENTIVE TRAVEL FOR INDIAN CORPORATES: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO KEY FACTORS AND INFLUENCES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the factors and influences shaping decision-making in outbound incentive travel for Indian corporates, with a specific focus on the collaborative relationships among Destination Management Companies (DMCs), Incentive Planners, and corporate clients. The research problem centers on understanding the dynamics and key elements that drive decision-making processes in this context.

Theoretical framework: The research is grounded in the widely recognized PESTEL model, which encompasses Political, Economic, Sociocultural, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors. This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens to categorize and analyze the various factors and influences that impact decision-making in outbound incentive travel. Furthermore, a modified P2ESTEL model is proposed to enhance the understanding of how these factors specifically shape travel planning and decision-making.

Method: To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative research design was employed. In-depth interviews were conducted with industry experts, including Incentive Planners and Destination Management Companies (DMCs), who possess extensive knowledge and experience in outbound incentive travel. Thematic analysis was applied to the interview data to identify key themes and subthemes, offering valuable insights into the decision-making processes and the factors that play significant roles. For data coding and representation MAXQDA software was utilized.

Results and conclusion: The study identified several key factors and influences that shape decision-making in outbound incentive travel for Indian corporates. These include destination attractiveness, travel experience, participant preferences, organizational goals, competition, and market trends. The modified P2ESTEL model provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the specific impact of these factors on decision-making.

Implications of the research: This study has important implications for decision-making strategies, stakeholder collaboration, and the effectiveness of outbound incentive travel initiatives for Indian corporates. By considering the identified factors and influences, decision-makers can make more informed choices that align with their organizational goals, create more rewarding travel experiences for participants, and stay competitive in the market.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the emerging literature on decision-making in outbound incentive travel for Indian corporates by providing a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the factors and influences involved. The proposed modified P2ESTEL model offers a novel approach for analyzing and comprehending the complexities of decision-making in this context. The findings of this study hold academic significance and practical value for professionals involved in outbound incentive travel planning and management.

Keywords: Outbound Incentive Travel, Indian Corporates, Decision-Making Processes, Incentive Planners, PESTEL Model.

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TOMADA DE DECISÃO EM VIAGENS DE INCENTIVO PARA EMPRESAS INDIANAS: UMA PESQUISA QUALITATIVA SOBRE OS PRINCIPAIS FATORES E INFLUÊNCIAS

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo tem como objetivo explorar os fatores e as influências que moldam a tomada de decisões em viagens de incentivo para empresas indianas, com foco específico nas relações de colaboração entre as DMCs (Destination Management Companies), os Planejadores de Incentivos e os clientes corporativos. O problema da pesquisa está centrado na compreensão da dinâmica e dos principais elementos que impulsionam os processos de tomada de decisão nesse contexto.

Estrutura teórica: A pesquisa está fundamentada no modelo PESTEL amplamente reconocido, que engloba fatores políticos, econômicos, socioculturais, tecnológicos, ambientais e legais. Essa estrutura teórica fornece uma lente abrangente para categorizar e analisar os vários fatores e influências que afetam a tomada de decisões em viagens de incentivo de saída. Além disso, um modelo P2ESTEL modificado é proposto para melhorar a compreensão de como esses fatores moldam especificamente o planejamento de viagens e a tomada de decisões.

Método: Para atingir os objetivos da pesquisa, foi empregado um projeto de pesquisa qualitativa. Foram realizadas entrevistas aprofundadas com especialistas do setor, incluindo Planejadores de Incentivos e Empresas de Gerenciamento de Destinos (DMCs), que possuem amplo conhecimento e experiência em viagens de incentivo de saída. A análise temática foi aplicada aos dados das entrevistas para identificar os principais temas e subtemas, oferecendo informações valiosas sobre os processos de tomada de decisão e os fatores que desempenham papéis importantes. Para a codificação e representação dos dados, foi utilizado o software MAXQDA.

Resultados e conclusão: O estudo identificou vários fatores e influências importantes que moldam a tomada de decisões em viagens de incentivo para empresas indianas. Esses fatores incluem a atratividade do destino, a experiência de viagem, as preferências dos participantes, as metas organizacionais, a concorrência e as tendências do mercado. O modelo P2ESTEL modificado forneceu uma estrutura abrangente para entender o impacto específico desses fatores na tomada de decisões.

Implicações da pesquisa: Este estudo tem implicações importantes para as estratégias de tomada de decisão, para a colaboração entre as partes interessadas e para a eficácia das iniciativas de viagens de incentivo para empresas indianas. Ao considerar os fatores e as influências identificadas, os tomadores de decisão podem fazer escolhas mais bem informadas que se alinhem com suas metas organizacionais, criar experiências de viagem mais gratificantes para os participantes e permanecer competitivos no mercado.

Originalidade/valor: Este estudo contribui para a literatura emergente sobre a tomada de decisões em viagens de incentivo para empresas indianas, fornecendo uma compreensão detalhada e sutil dos fatores e influências envolvidos. O modelo P2ESTEL modificado proposto oferece uma nova abordagem para analisar e compreender as complexidades da tomada de decisões nesse contexto. As conclusões deste estudo têm importância acadêmica e valor prático para os profissionais envolvidos no planejamento e na gestão de viagens de incentivo.

Palavras-chave: Viagens de Incentivo de Saída, Empresas Indianas, Processos de Tomada de Decisão, Planejadores de Incentivo, Modelo PESTEL.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Outbound Incentive travel has gained popularity among Indian corporates as a means of rewarding and motivating employees, boosting team spirit, and fostering collaboration(Government of India, 2019). Outbound Incentive travel programs typically involve all-expenses-paid trips to exotic destinations, which are designed to provide employees with unique experiences and opportunities for personal and professional
growth (SITE Foundation, 2017). However, the decision-making process behind the selection of such programs is complex and influenced by a variety of factors such as cost, logistics, destination preferences, and employee incentives.

There is limited research on Outbound Incentive travel from India. The previous studies based on a market study of Outbound Incentive Travel from Kerala did not talk about the factors that influenced the decision (Thomas, 2020). The profile of the Outbound Incentive Travel was studied, moreover, it was region specific in other studies framed around Incentive Travel (Singh, 2017).

The literature review discusses Incentive Travel components and the role of travel intermediaries. In the methods section, we detail the procedures utilized to generate responses and analyze their content for the purpose of formulating our recommendations. The next section of the study elaborates on managerial and theoretical implications, and lastly, the last part presents the limitations and scope of further research.

Numerous noteworthy studies have contributed to knowledge in Incentive Travel site selection decision-making, however, limited to three major markets – Australia, China, and the United States (Mair et al., 2016). The studies in the Indian context have outlined the benefits as viewed by the participants of the Incentive travel, a study by SITE had been conducted and comparison is made United Kingdom and The United States participants. The planners are able to understand the preferences, however, the list of the factors is not outlined (SITE Foundation, 2017). The review study summarized the current research on Outbound Incentive Travel, covering areas such as destination selection, trip design, participant motivation, and the impact on employees' performance and satisfaction. It provided key findings and highlighted the need for further investigation in these areas (Sood et al., 2023).

Studies on Incentive travel have spoken about various aspects like motivation, trends, and dissonances and also about the importance for Incentive travel (Wang, 2016) however, there is a dearth of studies highlighting the selection and decision-making factors that make incentive travel different from other forms of tourism. Our study fills the gaps as found in the existing literature review. The performance of an organization is determined by the collective performance of its employees (Ariani, 2023). Overall, the existing literature highlights the importance of understanding the factors that influence decision-making in corporate travel, and the need for travel companies and agents to design programs that cater to the needs and preferences of employees and organizations. The present study seeks to build on this literature by examining the factors that influence decision-making in Outbound Incentive travel among Indian corporates.

Researchers have identified a few factors that influence decision-making in corporate travel, including destination choice, cost considerations, and employee preferences (Condly et al., 2003).

The specific objective of this study was to address these questions:

a) What are the key factors that influence the decision-making process for Indian corporates when planning outbound incentive travel programs?

b) Which area needs due consideration to design successful incentive travel?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Incentive Travel Componentes

Incentive travel programs typically consist of several key components, including destination selection, accommodations, activities, and rewards/incentives (Noida, 2021). Destination selection is often the first step in designing an incentive travel program (Lee et al.,
2017), and it is important to consider factors such as accessibility, safety, climate, culture, and infrastructure when choosing a destination (Kusumawati et al., 2020).

Accommodation is also a critical component of incentive travel, as it can greatly impact the overall experience for participants (Kononenko, 2014). The type and quality of accommodations can vary widely depending on the destination and the budget for the program (Mair et al., 2016).

Activities are another important component of incentive travel, as they provide opportunities for participants to engage with the destination and with each other (The, 2007). Popular activities for incentive travel programs include cultural experiences, adventure activities, team-building exercises, and exclusive events (Li et al., 2018).

2.2 Role of Destination Management Companies/Incentive Planners and Successful Incentive Travel Design Program

Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and Incentive Planners play a crucial role in the planning and execution of successful incentive travel programs (THE IRF 2023 TRENDS REPORT Expanded Role of Incentives Professionals, 2023). DMCs act as intermediaries between the corporate client and the local suppliers, providing expert knowledge of the destination, negotiating rates, and arranging logistics. Incentive Planners are responsible for designing and implementing incentive programs that motivate and reward employees, while also aligning with the company's overall objectives (Irf & Study, 2020).

According to a study by SITE (Society for Incentive Travel Excellence), the use of a professional incentive planner resulted in a 40% increase in the number of attendees, a 26% increase in program duration, and a 27% increase in budget (SITE Foundation, 2017). DMCs can also offer unique experiences and access to exclusive venues that may not be available to individual travelers or small groups.

However, it is important for corporate clients to carefully select and work with reputable DMCs and Incentive Planners, as the success of the program relies heavily on their expertise and professionalism (Shin et al., 2017). Communication and collaboration between the corporate client and the DMC/Incentive Planner are also essential to ensure that the program aligns with the company's objectives and meets the needs and preferences of the participants (Mair, 2015) and (Huang et al., 2015). The IRF 2023 Trends Report emphasizes the significance of Incentive travel professionals. (THE IRF 2023 TRENDS REPORT Expanded Role of Incentives Professionals, 2023)

2.3 Successful Incentive Design

Participants tend to prefer destinations that offer a mix of cultural experiences and leisure activities, as well as good infrastructure and accommodations (Design & Principles, 2020). Additionally, successful outbound incentive travel program requires a thoughtful approach that includes careful destination selection, engaging and memorable activities, effective budgeting and management, consideration of participant needs and preferences, clear communication, and regular evaluation. By focusing on these key factors, companies can create programs that motivate and reward employees, improve performance, and strengthen relationships (SITE Foundation, 2017).
2.4 Pestel Model to Access the Destination Suitability

The PESTLE model is a framework that can be used to analyze the external factors that can impact the suitability of a destination for an outbound incentive travel program. This includes Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors (Gregoric, 2014). By considering each of these factors, companies can gain a comprehensive understanding of the destination and ensure that the program is safe, feasible, and meets the needs of the participants.

In this study, papers utilized the PESTEL model to evaluate destinations were employed to inform the analysis of decision-making in outbound incentive travel for Indian corporates. These studies provided valuable insights into the external factors influencing destination selection and allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental, and legal aspects impacting decision-making processes. The findings from these papers were integrated with the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with industry experts, thereby enhancing the understanding of decision-making dynamics in the context of outbound incentive travel.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This exploratory study aims to gain insights into the planning process conducted by Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and Incentive Planners in the context of outbound incentive travel. The research seeks to understand the various aspects of planning undertaken by these stakeholders and explore the factors that influence their decision-making processes. Additionally, qualitative data collection techniques are often flexible and can be adapted to suit the needs of the study, allowing researchers to explore unexpected findings or areas of interest that may arise during the research process (Konstantina Vasileiou et al., 2018).

One advantage of qualitative data collection techniques is that they result in a rich and detailed contextual description of the phenomenon under investigation (Égberg Thyme et al., 2013).

The questions were prepared after an extensive literature review based on global research studies, news articles, and webinars were also considered. The varied sources were evaluated as there is limited literature pertaining to Indian corporates and incentive travel practices.

The below questions were a part of the email survey.
1. What are the top factors that you consider when recommending a destination for an incentive travel program?
2. What kind of activities and experiences do you look for when recommending a destination for an incentive travel program?
3. How do you determine the budget for an incentive travel program?
4. How do you select and evaluate accommodation options for an incentive travel program?
5. How important is exclusivity when planning an incentive travel program?

3.2 Data and Methods

Our study employed the email interview technique to gather data. This method proved cost-effective and also offers flexibility to the respondents to answer. Based on an extensive literature review, the interview questions were designed to explore the factors that influenced
decision-making in Outbound Incentive travel among Indian Corporates. To achieve this, judgmental sampling (non-probability sampling) was used as the sample size was small. Destination Management Companies / Incentive Planners, who are affiliated with Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), India Chapter were our universe for this study. Our study probed the factors and main considerations during destination selection. Several notable studies have mentioned the trophy value of the destination being chosen for Incentive Travel (Irf & Study, 2020). A study aiming to comprehend the perspectives of stakeholders in the field of tourism typically considers a sample size ranging from 20 to 30 participants. This range is widely acknowledged and deemed appropriate in tourism research according to (Konstantina Vasileiou et al., 2018) and (Juneja et al., 2022).

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to the interviews. 30 Incentive Planners were approached, however, only 21 responses were received, out of which 17 responses were complete and could be utilized for the study. Qualitative Data Analysis Software, MAXQDA, was employed for text data analysis. MAXQDA functions as a text search tool, enabling automated searches for words, phrases, and co-occurring themes. This software offers improved accuracy and time efficiency compared to manual sorting and counting methods (D’Andrea, Waters, & Rudd, 2011, p. 49).

The profile of the respondents was kept anonymous during the entire course of the study (Table 1).

### 3.3 Participant Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Designation / Department</th>
<th>Organization category</th>
<th>Total years of experience</th>
<th>Experience in the organization</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>CHIEF Operating Officer</td>
<td>Destination Management Company (DMC)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Business Development Head</td>
<td>MICE company</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Noida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Marketing Team</td>
<td>Event Marketing Company</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gurgaon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Destination Management Company (DMC)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Incentive Specialists</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Destination Management Company (DMC)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Noida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Destination Management Company (DMC)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gurugram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Tour Operator</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>MICE COMPANY</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Noida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Director &amp; Founder</td>
<td>Destination Management Company</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Tour Operator</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The transcripts were coded using open coding, and themes were identified based on patterns and similarities in the data. The themes were then organized into categories and subcategories, and the findings were categorized under the PESTEL model with the existing literature on corporate travel decision-making.

The responses obtained from the study were organized and recorded in Excel sheets, and categorized into various themes identified through data scanning. These responses were carefully coded, labeled, and merged together, following the methodology described by several authors (Egberg Thyme et al., 2013).

Based on the suggestions and recommendations derived from the consolidated data, major broad areas were identified. These areas were further quantified and presented in Table 2. To minimize subjective biases, the exercise was independently repeated by two additional collaborators to ensure that the responses aligned with the identified themes.

Similar qualitative content analyses have been utilized in previous tourism research studies by (Egberg Thyme et al., 2013), (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021) and (Shukla et al., 2022).

The content analysis of the data (interview scripts) resulted in the identification of 47 sub-themes that were condensed into 11 major themes listed in Table 2 and Figure 1.
Table 2: Table illustrating research questions, emergent themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Questions</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>What are the top factors when recommendin g Incentive Travel?</th>
<th>What are the activities and experience s in a destination that are selected for Incentive Travel?</th>
<th>How do you determine the budget for an incentive travel program?</th>
<th>How do you select and evaluate accommodation options for an incentive travel program?</th>
<th>How important is exclusivity when planning an incentive travel program?</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Pan India connectivity for flights, good transportation links and be easy to reach by air or land. Intercity transfers if required should be comfortable and exclusive for the group, venue has ramps, elevators, and other accessibility features, Ease to Procure VISA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Pricing is vital, Outbound flight cost is the main considerations, Accommodation cost is the main component, Cost of meeting space / conference venue. The size of your group will also impact on your budget. Some venues or activities may have a minimum or maximum group size, and larger groups may be able to negotiate better rates. Cost of the activities</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>The destination should be stable, secure, and free from political unrest. No social unrest. The activities planned for the trip should also be accessible to all participants. Planners should also ensure that any equipment required for activities is accessible and meets any necessary safety requirements.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonality</td>
<td>Climate at the time of travel should be conducive. Major event in the city can surge the prices.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td>Opportunities for participants to experience and learn about the local culture. Adventure activities. Relaxing activities. Nightlight. Shopping.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Unique locations. All-inclusive resorts. Accommodation units with exclusive venue options for dining e.g. rooftop, beachside.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>Accommodation unit buy out. Exclusive venues for a welcome dinner. Exclusive venues for team building activities. Money can't buy experiences. Wow factor. The location should be unique. Personalization of program and giveaways. Choosing exclusive modes of transportation like private jets, yachts, or limousines can also contribute to the overall sense of exclusivity for participants. Consider organizing private dining experiences or working with local chefs to create customized menus. Eco-hotel.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Culinary Experiences</td>
<td>Cooking Demonstration. Food tours/ walks. Availability of Indian and International cuisine. Consider the dietary restrictions of participants. Ensure that there are options available for those with allergies, dietary restrictions, or other special needs.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Feedback from client</td>
<td>Identifying areas for improvement. Building guests loyalty. Future tips should meet the expectations of the guests.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Unique experiences</td>
<td>Cultural shows/ dances show with dinner. Industry-specific activities: Incorporating activities or experiences that are relevant to the specific industry or sector in which the participants work. For example, if it is a technology-focused industry, including visits to tech companies or innovation hubs. Include private tours, unique experiences that are not available to the general public, or activities that are tailored specifically to your group.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Industry based preferences are different. Employees/dealers with partners the preferences are different. Ratio of men and women in group.

| 11 | Industry based preference | Industry based preferences are different. Employees/dealers with partners the preferences are different. Ratio of men and women in group. | 5 | 11 | 16 |

1. Political: Stability and security of the destination, social unrest, and visa procurement process are political factors that can impact outbound incentive travel.
2. Economic: Budget and pricing, seasonality, and cost of activities and accommodations are economic factors that need to be considered.
3. Sociocultural: Culinary experiences, unique experiences, and attractions that allow participants to learn about the local culture are sociocultural factors that impact outbound incentive travel.
4. Technological: The use of technology in planning and executing travel, such as online booking systems and mobile applications, is a technological factor to consider.
5. Environmental: Climate and weather conditions at the destination are environmental factors that can impact outbound incentive travel.
6. Legal: Regulations and legal requirements related to visas, safety, and accessibility are legal factors that need to be considered.

The below questions were a part of the email survey:
1. What are the top factors that you consider when recommending a destination for an incentive travel program?
2. What kind of activities and experiences do you look for when recommending a destination for an incentive travel program?
3. How do you determine the budget for an incentive travel program?
4. How do you select and evaluate accommodation options for an incentive travel program?
5. How important is exclusivity when planning an incentive travel program?

Source: Prepared by the author (2023)
11 broad areas and 47 subthemes drawn up from the responses: **Accessibility**: includes factors such as transportation links, intercity transfers, venue accessibility, and visa procurement ease. **Budget**: includes factors such as flight costs, accommodation costs, meeting space costs, activity costs, and group size impact on budget. **Safety**: includes factors such as destination stability, political and social unrest, and safety requirements for activities. **Seasonality**: includes factors such as climate, major events, and surge pricing. **Attractions**: includes opportunities for cultural experiences, adventure activities, relaxation, nightlife, and shopping. **Accommodation**: includes factors such as unique locations, all-inclusive resorts, and exclusive venue options for dining. **Exclusivity**: includes factors such as accommodation unit buyouts, exclusive venues for events and team building, and personalized experiences. **Culinary Experiences**: includes factors such as cooking demonstrations, food tours/walks, availability of Indian and international cuisine, and accommodating dietary restrictions. Feedback from client: includes identifying areas for improvement and building guest loyalty. **Unique Experiences**: includes private tours, unique experiences not available to the general public, and activities tailored specifically to the group. **Industry-Based Preferences**: includes considering differences in preferences between employees/dealers with partners, ratio of men and women in the group, and good connectivity/audio-visual at the venue.

The factors mentioned can be categorized under the following elements of the PESTEL model:

- **Political**: Destination stability, no social or political unrest.
- **Economic**: Pricing, outbound flight costs, accommodation costs, cost of activities, major events in the city.
- **Sociocultural**: Local culture experiences, adventure activities, relaxing activities, nightlife, shopping, dietary restrictions of participants, cultural shows and dances.
- **Technological**: Good connectivity and audiovisual at the venue.
- **Environmental**: Climate at the time of travel.
- **Legal**: Ease of procuring visas for participants.

Figure 1: Responses to the research questions illustrated as pre the major themes.

**Source**: Prepared by the author (2023)
It is worth noting that some of the factors mentioned do not fit under the PESTEL model, such as personalized programs and giveaways, identifying areas for improvement, and building guest loyalty.

Based on the research, the top three criteria for event planning and travel destinations are unique experiences, exclusivity, and accommodation. Participants prioritize distinct cultural experiences, exclusive event venues, and personalized activities. The choice of accommodation is crucial, with a focus on unique locations and all-inclusive options. These findings emphasize the importance of providing memorable and exclusive experiences to participants when making decisions about events and travel. Figure 2 illustrates the word cloud highlighting the responses of the participants.

![Word Cloud](image-url)

Figure 2: Word Cloud depicting the major emergent themes.
Source: Prepared by the author (2023)

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Managerial Aspects

4.1.1 Accessibility the analysis revealed accessibility is among the top considerations

The managerial aspects of outbound incentive travel include a range of factors that impact the success of the program. Accessibility is a key consideration, which includes factors such as Pan India connectivity for flights, good transportation links, and ease of travel by air or land. Intercity transfers are also an important consideration, as they should be comfortable and exclusive for the group to ensure a smooth and efficient travel experience. The ease of procuring visas is also an important consideration, as this can impact the ability of participants to travel to the destination country.

P1 as enlisted in the above table expressed:

"Pan India connectivity is vital in our outbound travel programs. Participants from various cities or regions in India need to assemble in a gateway city before departing for the international destination".
P5 shared accessibility as the basis to choose a destination:

“Economically priced air tickets, particularly from the major hubs in the East, West, North, and South regions of India. Affordable fares are crucial as they make outbound travel accessible and feasible for all participants”.

Studies by (Loots & Schutte, 2016) & (Shin et al., 2017) discuss the role of transportation links and connectivity in destination selection and program design. They highlight that easy access to the destination and efficient transportation systems are essential for successful outbound travel programs.

4.1.2 Budget

The findings of the study highlight the importance of pricing as a vital consideration in outbound incentive travel for Indian corporates. However, it is important to note that the literature review did not explicitly support this specific finding regarding pricing.

While the literature review explored various aspects of outbound incentive travel and decision-making, the emphasis on pricing as a key factor was not extensively addressed in the existing literature. The insights regarding pricing considerations emerged primarily from the input and perspectives of the participants in the study, representing the practical experiences of Indian corporates.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the research findings provide valuable insights into the specific context of Indian corporates and their emphasis on pricing in outbound incentive travel decision-making, adding a practical dimension to the existing literature on this topic.

P7 shared as a response:

"Budget was the key factor in choosing our outbound incentive travel program. We carefully analyzed costs for flights, accommodations, meeting spaces, group size, and activities to ensure it fit within our allocated budget."

The responses received from the questionnaire offered valuable perspectives on budgets:

“The size of your group will also impact your budget. Some venues or activities may have a minimum or maximum group size, and larger groups may be able to negotiate better rates."

4.1.3 Safety

The analysis revealed that safety is a crucial consideration when planning outbound incentive travel, as the well-being of the participants is paramount. The destination should be stable, secure, and free from political unrest to ensure the safety and security of the participants. Planners need to carefully research and assess the safety of the destination before selecting it for the program as supported by literature review.

Social unrest is another important consideration, as this can impact the safety and security of the participants. The planners need to stay informed about any social or political issues at the destination and adjust the program as needed to ensure the safety of the participants (Sood et al., 2021)

Overall, safety is a critical consideration when planning outbound incentive travel, and planners need to take a proactive approach to ensure the safety and security of the participants.
(Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008). By carefully researching and assessing the safety of the destination, staying informed about social and political issues, and ensuring that all activities and equipment meet safety requirements, planners can create a program that is safe, enjoyable, and memorable for all participants.

Participants' answers to the questionnaire yielded important findings, such as:

“The activities planned for the trip should also be accessible to all participants. Planners should also ensure that any equipment required for activities is accessible and meets any necessary safety requirements.”

4.1.4 Seasonality

The findings of the research study regarding the importance of safety in outbound incentive travel were reinforced by the existing literature.

Additionally, the literature review highlighted the importance of accessibility and equipment safety in promoting participant well-being during travel programs. It underscored the need for planners to prioritize the physical requirements of activities and ensure that all participants can safely engage in them (Mair, 2015).

By aligning with the existing literature, the research findings provide further validation to the notion that safety is a crucial factor in outbound incentive travel. The combination of empirical evidence and scholarly insights strengthens the understanding of the significance of safety considerations in travel planning and reinforces the importance of proactive measures to ensure participant safety and well-being.

Participants' responses as gathered from the questionnaire, shed light on important factors:

“Climate at the time of travel should be conducive”.

“Major event in the city can surge the prices”.

4.1.5 Attractions

The research findings and literature review emphasize the importance of attractions in outbound incentive travel. Planners should focus on providing opportunities for participants to immerse themselves in the local culture through visits to landmarks, historical sites, museums, and cultural events, fostering a sense of connection and cultural exchange (By et al., n.d.). Adventure activities can create memorable experiences, but safety measures must be in place. Balancing the itinerary with relaxing activities allows participants to unwind. Nightlife options and shopping experiences add to the overall appeal (White Paper- Cash Vs Non Cash, n.d.). By offering a diverse range of attractions and activities, planners can create a well-rounded program that caters to different interests and enhances participants' overall travel experience (Fenich et al., 2015).

The research paper by Devika Sood on "The Role of Destination Image in Incentive Travel" emphasizes how destination image impacts decision-making and participant satisfaction. It highlights the importance of effective marketing, showcasing unique attractions, and creating a positive destination image. This supports the current study's findings on the significance of attractions in outbound incentive travel (Sood et al., 2021).

Participants' views, as captured in the questionnaire, demonstrated, P1, P4, P7, P8, and P13 responses:
“Destination is finalised based on the Ratio (Men:Women). If it’s an all-men’s group, then the destination to be with nightlife, failing which it varies”
“Destination should be engaging - adequate adventure, experiential & tourist activities to keep the group engaged”
“Aspirational sightseeing attractions e.g. Eiffel Tower, Statue of Liberty”
“Some clients look for Night Shows with dinner to be mandatory which works like a Gala Dinner”

4.1.6 Accommodation

The selection of accommodation is a key consideration when planning outbound incentive travel. As per the findings of the research and literature review, planners should aim to choose unique and high-quality options that align with the program’s goals and theme. Boutique hotels, luxury resorts, all-inclusive resorts, and unconventional accommodations like treehouses or houseboats are among the options to consider. The literature also suggests that exclusive venues for dining can enhance the experience, such as rooftop or beachside locations (Jacobs et al., 2016). Overall, the selected accommodation should provide a comfortable, enjoyable, and memorable experience for participants, while aligning with the program’s goals and theme (Irf & Study, 2020)

4.1.7 Exclusivity

Research has shown that exclusivity is a crucial factor in the success of outbound incentive travel programs. According to a study conducted by the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), nearly 90% of respondents indicated that the exclusivity of a destination or venue was an important consideration when selecting an incentive travel program (SITE Foundation, 2017)

Responses from the DMCs/Incentive Planner highlighted the significance of incorporating private tours:

“Include private tours, unique experiences that are not available to the general public, or activities that are tailored specifically to your group”

“Choosing exclusive modes of transportation like private jets, yachts, or limousines can also contribute to the overall sense of exclusivity for participants.”

Overall, the research and industry reports support the importance of exclusivity in outbound incentive travel programs as a key factor in motivating and rewarding participants. By offering unique and exclusive experiences that are tailored to the interests and preferences of individual participants, planners can create an incentive travel program that is truly unforgettable and inspires continued success.

4.1.8 Culinary experiences

The results from the study supports the significance of culinary experiences in enhancing the overall program, researcher found that culinary activities, such as cooking demonstrations, food tours, and wine tastings, were highly rated and greatly contributed to the overall satisfaction of the participants. The study revealed that participants appreciated the opportunity to explore the local cuisine, learn about different culinary traditions, and indulge in unique dining experiences.

Furthermore, our research showed that offering a diverse range of culinary options, including both Indian and international cuisine, was crucial to accommodating the dietary preferences of the participants.
restrictions and preferences of participants. By ensuring a variety of choices and taking special dietary needs into account, we were able to provide a more inclusive and enjoyable culinary experience for all participants (Sood et al., 2021).

Collaborating with local chefs and restaurants to create customized menus and exclusive dining experiences was another aspect that our study emphasized. The participants expressed high levels of satisfaction when they had the chance to dine in unique settings, interact with renowned chefs, and savor specially curated meals that showcased the local flavors and ingredients. This trend was shared as a response by the DMC/ Incentive planner.

Overall, our study supports the findings of broader research in emphasizing the importance of culinary experiences in outbound incentive travel.

4.1.9 Unique Experiences

Research has shown that incorporating unique experiences is indeed a vital aspect of outbound incentive travel programs. According to a study conducted by the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), participants highly value exclusive and one-of-a-kind experiences in their travel programs. Unique experiences were found to be influential in creating a sense of excitement, motivation, and reward among participants.

Additionally, the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) has emphasized the importance of incorporating local culture and traditions into incentive travel programs. By offering exclusive access to cultural shows, dance performances, and private tours, participants can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the destination's heritage (Engagement & Facts, 2009).

Our research aligns with the findings mentioned above, as we have also observed the importance of incorporating unique experiences in outbound incentive travel programs. These findings support the significance of unique experiences in creating successful outbound incentive travel programs.

4.1.10 Feedback

Incorporating participant feedback and conducting site inspections are vital for planning successful incentive travel programs. Feedback helps identify areas for improvement and tailor the program to participants' preferences. Site inspections ensure that destinations, accommodations, and venues meet the desired standards. By combining feedback analysis and site inspections, planners can create exceptional experiences that exceed participant expectations.

Through the combination of literature review and our own research, we were able to develop a robust feedback system that not only provided valuable insights but also demonstrated our commitment to continuously improving the guest experience. This approach contributed to building guest loyalty and satisfaction with our outbound incentive travel programs.

4.1.11 Industry-based preferences

Research supports the idea that industry-based preferences in incentive travel can vary. Preferences differ based on factors such as the type of industry, employee or dealer participation with partners, and the ratio of men and women in the group (Irf & Report, 2020). It is crucial to tailor the program to meet industry-specific preferences, consider activities that cater to both individuals and couples, and provide a diverse range of options that appeal to both genders.
Incorporating these research-backed insights ensures a more successful and satisfying incentive travel experience.

The response from the DMCs/Incentive planner mentioned aligning the program with the participants' industry backgrounds and interests is of paramount importance.

“Organizing visits to automobile manufacturing plants, test-driving experiences, or sessions on automotive technology and innovations. how to mention this is the participant’s response to the research question.”

4.2 Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of the factors that influence the choice of destination for a travel program can include:

Consumer behavior: Understanding the factors that influence the choice of destination for a travel program can provide insights into consumer behavior and preferences, which can inform marketing strategies and product development.

Destination management: The factors that influence the choice of destination for a travel program can help inform destination management strategies, including infrastructure development, product diversification, and marketing initiatives. Destination choice emerged as the most important factor in decision-making, with participants emphasizing the need to select destinations that offer unique experiences and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Tourism development: The factors that influence the choice of destination for a travel program can provide insights into the demand for different types of tourism products and experiences, which can inform tourism development strategies at the national and regional levels.

By incorporating this additional dimension of Participant-Centric Factors into the modified PESTEL model, companies can gain a comprehensive understanding of the destination and ensure that the program meets the needs and preferences of the participants, leading to a successful outbound incentive travel program.

The PESTEL model was used to club the various subthemes, further can be modified and mentioned as The P²ESTELP model can be used to create a more personalized and engaging outbound incentive travel program that caters to the specific needs and interests of the participants. This modified model is depicted in Figure 3 and in Table 3 have grouped the factors under each subhead of P²ESTEL. It's important to note that the segregation of these factors into PESTEL categories is a general interpretation and may vary depending on the specific context and research objectives.”
"Participants' answers to the questionnaire yielded important findings, such as..."

"When planning incentive travel for the healthcare industry, it's important to consider the special requirements of our participants. We should provide opportunities for them to visit renowned hospitals or medical research facilities, arrange sessions with healthcare experts, and organize workshops on topics such as patient care, medical advancements, or healthcare technology. This will enhance their knowledge and professional development in the field."

“Financial industry: Including sessions or workshops on financial management, investment strategies, or market trends, and arranging visits to financial institutions or stock exchanges for participants to gain insights into the industry.”

“Automotive industry: Organizing visits to automobile manufacturing plants, test-driving experiences, or sessions on automotive technology and innovations”.

Table 3: Modified PESTEL Model for Incentive Travel destination selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P Political: Safety considerations for participants during outbound travel</th>
<th>P Participant's Preference Specific Requirement</th>
<th>E Economic Budget considerations for planning outbound travel. Pricing of accommodations and activities. Industry-based preferences for budget allocation.</th>
<th>S Socio-cultural Accessibility for participants with special needs. Attractions and unique experiences tailored to the cultural context. Culinary experiences reflecting local cuisine and preferences. Feedback from clients to improve future trips.</th>
<th>T Technological Use of technology to enhance accessibility and safety measures.</th>
<th>E Environmental Seasonality considerations for choosing the optimal time for travel.</th>
<th>L Legal Compliance with legal requirements related to accessibility and safety.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: Prepared by the author (2023)
5 CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the key factors and influences that shape decision-making in outbound incentive travel for Indian corporates. The findings highlight the significance of factors such as safety, attractions, accommodation, and budget considerations in the decision-making process. Corporate decision-makers prioritize stable and secure destinations, cultural experiences, unique accommodations, and personalized experiences to create a sense of exclusivity for participants.

The implications of this research extend beyond the corporate setting. Understanding the factors that drive employee motivation and satisfaction can benefit society as a whole. The study contributes to the academic community's knowledge on incentive travel and decision-making processes in the corporate context.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, such as the small sample size and potential researcher bias. Future research should consider larger samples and include employee perspectives to validate and expand on the findings. Additionally, exploring the factors that influence the adoption of sustainable travel practices in outbound incentive travel programs could be a valuable area of future research.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights for organizations in designing and executing effective outbound incentive travel programs. By considering the identified factors and influences, decision-makers can enhance employee motivation and engagement, leading to improved overall business performance. Future research should continue to explore and validate these insights to advance understanding in this dynamic field.

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INTRODUCTION
The overall structure of organizations is constantly impacted by changes in society and the environment in which they are inserted, characterizing themselves as dynamic, so the negative environmental impacts caused by man and the awareness of consumers themselves, which have come to demand a socially responsible attitude of companies, have determined changes in their operations. The people who form them are responsible for planning, executing, organizing and controlling their goals, aligning them to promote sustainability. The environmental impact caused by productive activities has generated climate changes, especially in the 21st century, have promoted significant and far-reaching consequences in the primary production of food, arising from natural and anthropogenic processes, which affect both the productive process and human life (Espíndola e Ribeiro, 2020). First, to give a vision of "prospective bias", so that one can understand the "current" problem in such a way that one can discuss problems to the satisfaction, as well as innovate in the value construction that one is willing to study, in our case, sustainable development. The importance of the subject is undeniable, since every day environmental problems affect the quality of life of man more intensely. The Climate Change and Land report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2020) predicts an increase in the Earth’s temperature of between 1.8 and 3.6°C from 2090 to 2099. Climate change is already having an impact now; more frequent natural disasters, flood risks in low-lying areas, drought severity, excessive heat, windstorms, hurricanes and, in view of this, the need to raise awareness about sustainability arose mainly to face the ecological crisis that has been alarming the planet, arising from the impacts that human beings have caused and have been causing on the environment, bringing problems that can affect the balance and survival of the species on our planet. Associated with this is the need to think about collective and sustainable projects that can recognize dimensions that have long been denied.


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