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Carvalho, N., Rodrigues, H. & Brochado, A. (2023) Double or nothing: push and pull factors of casinos in Europe. *GeoJournal* 88, 2233–2246

Double or nothing: push and pull factors of casinos in Europe

Abstract Gambling tourism is a subject that has been gaining a lot of interest and notoriety over the last two decades. Push and pull factors have for long been the backbone of tourism studies and this research seeks to expound on this theory within the area of casinos. In this study, 1383 google reviews from five different countries in coastal Europe: Casino Vila Moura, Algarve (Portugal), Casino Barrière Le Croisette, Cannes (France), Casino de Monte-Carlo, (Monaco), Casino Malta, (Malta), and Regency Casino Thessaloniki, (Greece) were analyzed with the software Leximancer. The main objective of this study was to identify the concepts in the reviews and then pinpoint what push and pull factor these concepts belonged to and how important this was when choosing a casino destination in Europe. The results highlight the importance of the pull factor while choosing a destination and reveals that gamers seek mainly table games as they attract both players and other tourists who tend to gather around the tables to watch. Among the greatest push-factors is the excitement of winning money in slot machines. Findings also demonstrate that casinos located in Europe offer world-class gambling services that are both engaging and fun to engage in. This study adds to earlier research by employing the push and pull motivation framework within the area of casinos based on user-generated content.

Keywords Gambling Tourism · Casino · Push factors · Pull factors · Europe

Introduction

Gambling is a prominent feature of human society, and its evolution has given way to a new market- place. Locations like Las Vegas and Macau nowadays boast billion-dollar casino resorts that contribute to annual revenues of several billion dollars (Statista, 2022). Gambling has evolved, and not only have the games changed but so too has the casino business model. For example, Las Vegas' non-gaming rev- enue today is higher than the gaming revenue (Sum- mary, 2012). The business model's focus has shifted to different revenue streams

such as hotels, dining, and entertainment, prompting casino resorts to offer a multitude of services to provide the client with a much more encompassing experience than just gam- bling (Schwartz, 2019). Gambling tourism is important because it is an activity that brings wealth to a city/location and can raise the level of income there, as seen in places like Macau, which before Covid, was set to overtake Qatar as the richest place in the world (Tang & Kim, 2022). Investing in gambling tourism will have a multiplier effect on other areas including hotels, shopping, din- ing, and entertainment, which can in turn bring pros- perity to a region and have a positive impact on soci- ety (Lehto et al., 2014; Leiper, 1989; Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015). As acknowledged by Lee et al., (2021), studies on casino tourism address large casinos located mainly in large urban areas, for example, Las Vegas, Atlan- tic City, and Colorado in the USA, or isolated casi- nos in Singapore or Vietnam (Wu & Chen, 2015). Europe, which is the continent most visited by tour- ists (www.statista.com) and its Mediterranean areas have an enormous role in the tourism industry, and yet casino tourism there is understudied (Richard, 2010). Since 2005 Europe has been the region that attracts the largest number of inbound tourists, and even with the Covid-19 pandemic statistics indicate that Europe continues to lead the tourism industry in international visitors (www.statista.com). This study addresses the call made in the tourism literature (e.g., Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012), by targeting casino-tour- ism development in other contexts, namely European casinos located in the Mediterranean area. Although the push and pull framework has been used in different fields of hospitality and tourism research Rita, Brochado, & Dimova (2019), there are few publications in the literature targeting casino gamblers in Europe. Push factors include benefits for local tourism in Europe, namely learning, entertain- ment, costing, socialization, and escape from pres- sure, all of which are factors that “push” the tourist into the need to take a gambling vacation (Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012). Pull factors, which have been much less studied, are attractions that entice tourists into choosing a specific location. A location's reputa- tion, the leisure activities, the number of casinos, and/ or the size of the casino (e.g., number of tables/slots), the quality of hotels, and the dining opportunities in the location are all considered to be pull factors. The main goal of this research is to examine the push and pull factors of casinos in Europe located near the Mediterranean Sea from a new perspective, and addresses the following research questions:

RQ1-What are the push and pull factors of greatest influence in Europe as revealed in the shared online narratives of a large pool of casino visitors in five Mediterranean locations? RQ2- In order of importance, what are the main concepts linked to push and pull factors?

Literature review

Gambling and the development of the tourism industry

Gambling tourism has increased considerably over the last two decades and locations like Macau, Singapore, and Las Vegas have developed into mega-hubs that attract millions of visitors every year (Henderson, 2008). Casino games are increasingly employed to stimulate tourism development and growth (Walker, 2013). Many examples exist of development projects undertaken in which casinos were utilized specifically to attract and boost tourism (Mihalič, 2000). One example is the Grand Ho Tram Strip (Ba Ria-Vung) in Vietnam, launched in July 2013. This development project was created to attract tourists from abroad, for the most part targeting those from mainland China. The Ba Ria-Vung Tau province saw an increase from 11 million visitors in 2012 to 25.3 million in 2020 (Lee et al., 2021) and it seems that Vietnam's investment in casino tourism has also paid off, as in 2018 tourist arrivals reached 15.49 million, representing an increase of 54.7% from 2016. Note that the Vietnam initiative also included investment in golf courses and additional tourism and hospitality development. Las Vegas might be the most famous gambling location worldwide, but Macau's meteoric rise as a gambling Mecca in the last 20 years has produced astonishing figures and provides one of the most clear-cut examples of how gambling and casinos can be used as an effective strategy to attract visitors and boost tourism. According to the World Tourism Organization, in 2019 Macau boasted 39.4 million visitors (www.tradingeconomics.com), and 36 billion US dollars in gaming revenue among 41 casinos (www.Fortune.com). This is a near fourfold increase in tourists over 18 years, up from 10.28 million in 2001 (www.tradingeconomics.com), and the gross gaming revenue in 2002 was around only 3.5 billion US dollars (Sheng & Gu, 2018). Even with inflation in mind, this increase was so large that it turned Macau into the gambling capital of the world. Las Vegas continues to boast extraordinary numbers too, having generated 11.9 billion US Dollars in gaming revenue and attracting 42 million visitors in 2019 (www.statista.com). Casinos are one of the biggest contributors to the hospitality and tourism sector, yielding impressive revenue and profit figures resulting in a considerable economic impact in the area where located (Metaxas, 2016; Philander, 2019). The economic impact underpins the popularity of casino-development projects made in the last 20 years and is at the core of regional or international tourism growth strategies which attract visitors who are expected to purchase both casino products and complementary tourism services/experiences (Henderson, 2006; Ishihara, 2017).

Impact of gambling on society

The impact of legalized gambling on society is varied, having an economic, societal, and environmental impact, as well as tangible and intangible effects on a location. The economic impact witnessed in places like Macau and Las Vegas has been staggering and has fundamentally reshaped those cities. Casinos bring economic benefits to a location other than the direct revenues from gamers and the taxes on those earnings. These include substantial growth in employment and GDP per capita (Nichols et al., 2002; Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015). The spill-over or the multiplier effect is the most valuable approach to measuring the economic impact of gambling. There are three effects of the multiplier process: direct, indirect, and induced (Witt et al., 2013). The direct effect concerns only the casino industry itself; the indirect effect relates to creating an economy around casinos. Investment in casinos, and the employment it creates for workers in the casino itself (direct effect), is complemented by the indirect effect – i.e., employment among businesses that operate in the vicinity of the casino, including shops, restaurants, malls, and hotels. The induced effect is the rise of household income in this context. Nichols (1998) observed that the casinos in Atlantic City led to investment in tourism industries, convention facilities, and tourist capacities. One of the leading reasons why casino gambling has become so popular recently is the tax benefit it generates (Gu & Gao, 2006). The ability to then utilize the tax revenues to invest in the economy and society brings a great deal of value to gambling from the government's point of view. Nevertheless, the lower a person is on the socio-economic ladder, the less that individual will benefit from tourism than from other labor-intensive export activities (Gu et al., 2017). As such, with gambling and other forms of tourism, a just redistributive system is seen as a measure to mitigate the negative side effects of tourism (Gu et al., 2013). Nonetheless, Vong (2009) concluded that residents of locations with casinos developed more conservative views toward gambling, as it was perceived to be causing an increase in pollution, traffic, and overcrowding.

Casino features

A very prominent feature pertaining to the consumer's gambling experience is the servicescape. This refers to the physical space where a service is offered (in this case the casino) and it has a very important effect on the consumer as it can influence behavior and create an image that affects the whole consumer experience (Bitner, 1992). According to Lam et al. (2011), a perceived servicescape causes a cognitive response that influences people's beliefs about the workers and product. Features such as lighting, color, signage, textures, quality of materials, style of furnishings, layout, wall décor, temperature, etc. can all be utilized to elicit a cognitive response and emotional reaction from a consumer (Bitner, 1992). This is a very powerful tool that can convince a consumer to repurchase the service or not, as according to Wakefield and Blodgett (1996), the general attractiveness of the environment will influence servicescape satisfaction levels. Johnson, et al. (2004) and Lam et al. (2011) both argued that ambiance, navigation, seating comfort, interior décor, and cleanliness are very

Important factors when it comes to predicting customer satisfaction and intention to revisit a casino.

Gambling tourism destination success

As casino resorts and locations evolve into having additional non-gaming services, they begin to draw tourists who are seeking a holistic experience in which the gaming is only a part, and these non-gaming services thereby become decisive in choosing a travel destination (Bryant & Walker, 2010). There is complementarity and synergy between gaming and non-gaming products in casinos, meaning that complementary products create more demand together than they would by themselves (Kim & Kang, 2018), and this relationship can also be observed with non-gaming and gaming products in gaming locations, not just inside casinos (Henderson, 2006; Ishihara, 2017). It therefore becomes paramount for a gambling destination to present various non-gaming value propositions that emphasize gaming and non-gaming products differently to some degree. Unlike Macau's tourist structure, which is oriented almost exclusively to casino games, Las Vegas attaches more importance to other services, such as entertainment. This is reflected in the revenue figures for each city, with 90% of the revenue generated by tourism in Macau coming from casino activities, while in Las Vegas 63% of the revenue comes from other activities (Deng et al., 2021). Las Vegas markets itself as a diverse tourist destination – as both a party destination and a gambling destination – where people go not just to gamble but to visit nightclubs, enjoy private gatherings, and attend events like Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) or Boxing (Deng et al., 2021), and this is something that must be considered when analyzing the success of a gambling tourist destination. Even Macau, which has a much greater focus on gambling than Las Vegas, still offers tourists a complete experience, with sightseeing, shopping, vacationing, and entertainment in addition to gambling (Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015). Casinos offer a diversified experience, utilizing similar packaged service experiences in the same way as Disneyland (Luke, 2010). Another important factor to consider is the geography that surrounds the destination and the gambling markets surrounding that region. Macau and Las Vegas emerged under similar circumstances. With gambling being illegal in China, Macau opened to Chinese tourists as a gambling location, drawing on a large population who wanted to gamble but could not do so at home (Chan et al., 2015; Leiper, 1989). This pattern has been repeated many times and there are many examples of a gambling tourist location neighboring a country or region where gambling is illegal, encouraging gambling tourists to visit the location where gambling is legal. This is the case with Monaco and France, Macau and China, Atlantic City and the East Coast of the United States, and Las Vegas and the west coast of the United States (Leiper, 1989).

Push and pull theoretical framework

Push factors

Travel motivation is a concept in tourism research (Crompton, 1992; Goossens, 2000). Travel motivation is usually divided into two categories: push and pull (Chen & Chen, 2015; Mohammad & Som, 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Shi et al., 2018). Push factors – or motivations – are what drive a person to travel due to needs that arise as a consequence of an emotional and/or motivational imbalance, in the process creating a desire to travel (Dann, 1977; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014). Motivations are multi-dimensional, and tourists seek to satisfy more than one push factor at a time. Push factors often have a hierarchical order that varies from tourist to tourist (Ma & Lai, 2016; Oh et al., 1995). The idea of push factors started with Dann (1977), one of the forefathers of travel studies. According to Dann, push factors are intrinsic motivational influences on a person that generates an out-of-balance emotional situation, which can be resolved by traveling. These can vary from fatigue, socialization, thrill-seeking, learning, and discovery, to escape from mundane activities. According to Dann (1977), motivations are divided into anomie (the need to overcome the feeling of isolation that derives from everyday mundane life and “get away from it all”) and ego-enhancement (need for recognition that is acquired through the status increase that is gained from traveling (Fodness, 1994). Crompton (1979) identified seven socio-psychological needs (escape, exploration, relaxation, prestige, regression, socialization, and kinship-enhancement). Further studies have added more factors, including ego defense, knowledge, reward maximization, and value expression (Fodness, 1994). Dann (1981) and Iso-Ahola (1982) proposed two new dimensions: escaping and seeking. Escaping relates to eschewing everyday mundane life or personal problems; seeking relates to, for example, obtaining relaxation from mental fatigue or gaining knowledge of a new culture (Kim et al., 2003). Jang and Liping (2002) analyzed seven push factors for British tourists across seven destinations, namely knowledge-seeking, escapism, spending time with family and friends, novel experiences, fun, excitement, and relaxation. Mohammad and Som (2010) concluded that the motives to travel to Jordan were the need for prestige and social interaction. Chen and Chen (2015) conducted a widely acclaimed study on bird-watching travelers’ push and pull factors, with push factors consisting mainly of novelty seeking, competition, contribution and sharing, and spiritual refreshment. Prayag and Hosany (2014) report that the main reasons for United Arab Emirates (UAE) travelers to visit Paris were socialization with family/friends, novelty, prestige, and relaxation. In a study analyzing motivations to travel to Macau, Li et al. (2017) concluded that knowledge, relaxation, entertainment, and prestige were the main motivations. Analyzing gamblers’ psychology and motivations, individuals engage in gambling because it provides them with an emotional or psychological stimulus, and a gambler’s push motives include socialization, escape challenge, monetary rewards/winning (Lee et al., 2006). Chan et al. (2015) explored the differences among Chinese casino gamblers’ (to Macau) characteristics, motivations, and behaviors. Their study was conducted with two subgroups: gamblers from Hong Kong and gamblers from Mainland China. They concluded that both subgroups prioritized winning as

the main motivation, followed by challenge/social/ escape. Wong and Rosenbaum (2012) investigated Chinese casino tourists' push and pull factors and identified push factors including excitement, adventure, escape, sightseeing or exploration, and vacation time with family. Cotte (1997) divided the rewards from gambling into three types: hedonic, economic, and symbolic. Hedonic includes pleasure induction to enhance self-esteem or for entertainment (adding thrill to mundane existence); economic has to do with possible monetary gains; symbolic is connected to independence, escape from boredom, and control.

Pull factors

Pull factors are tangible characteristics, features, or attractions that attract tourists to a certain destination. These factors are external, situational, or cognitive aspects pertaining to the tourist (Klenosky, 2002). Pull factors are considered to be the supply side of tourism and include features like cultural attractions, the beach, nature, and activities such as casinos or theme parks (Lehto et al., 2014). Buhalis (2000) stated that a tourist destination is a combination of services, attractions, and experiences that are consumed under the destination's brand, providing the tourist with an integrated experience. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) studied 32 attributes and identified six pull factor areas: 1) social opportunities and attractions (such as festivals or concerts), 2) natural and cultural amenities (such as attractive scenery and parks), 3) accommodation and transports, 4) infrastructures, food, and friendly people; 5) physical amenities and recreation activities (such as weather and golfing), and 6) bars and evening entertainment (such as nightclubs). Jang and Liping (2002) determined that the five pull factors that British tourists valued above all were 1) cleanliness and safety, 2) sunny and exotic atmosphere, 3) natural and historical environment, 4), ease of access and value of the deal, and 5) outdoor activities. Mohammad and Som (2010) studied the push and pull factors of tourists to Jordan and found that pull factors included heritage (the monument of Petra being a perfect example, given its historical richness and impact), natural attraction, food, and culture, notably including attributes such as safety, affordability, friendly image, and hospitality, which had a great impact on creating the ideal conditions for the above-mentioned pull factors to come into effect. According to Li et al. (2017), destinations with several leisure offerings like shopping, dining, and entertainment pull tourists to a destination. Prayag and Hosany (2014) analyzed the motives and attractions of UAE tourists visiting Western Europe (Paris). Among the factors identified were luxury shopping, cultural exploration, luxury accommodation, and customized activities. Also, Li and colleagues (2017) studied pull factors in Macau and concluded that food, unique European culture, casinos, nightlife, and convenient transportation were among the highest scoring pull factors. Their study is very important to illustrate the case of a gambling destination offering a diversified number of pull factors to attract as many tourists as it can. Themed shopping malls, grandiose gaming floors, luxury hotel accommodations, and Vegas-style architecture are some of the pull factors that lure millions of casino goers to the casinos of Macau (Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012). Nevertheless, pull factors may vary considerably among tourists, as they value different destination attributes to different degrees and obtain information from very different sources (Klenosky,

2002). This assumption is that pull factor arising from attractive characteristics of those destinations and measure the place attractiveness to bring in visitors (Gu et al., p4).

Push and pull interaction

Push and pull factors have usually been identified as being associated with two different decisions at different stages of the travel decision-making process, pull related to *where to go* and push related to *whether to go* (or not) (Dann, 1981). Klenosky (2002) has advocated that these two factors should not be seen as independent, but as intrinsically and dynamically connected. Oh et al. (1995) showed that push and pull factors interact dynamically and symbiotically with each other. Klenowski (2002) utilized a “means-end” approach, in which the means are the pull factors, and the end is the push factors. This was a different approach to modeling the relationship between the two. According to Oh et al., (1995) product bundles are how different pull factors might match up with different push factors, encouraging a tourist to travel to a certain place because of its perceived benefits and how these perceived benefits will satisfy their motivations or needs (Mohammad & Som, 2010). It is important to match push and pull factors to create a marketing strategy in destination areas, as this will ensure that travelers’ motivations are properly understood, and which pull factors are most appropriate to fulfill those specific push factors. By understanding what a destination possesses or can build on, how those attributes differ from competitors, and understanding how and who those attributes attract, a tourist destination can create a competitive and enticing travel package for the consumer (Oh et al., 1995).

Methodology

Data source and collection

The data for this study were collected from the content of online user-share-generated reviews posted on Google Reviews (ReviewTrackers, 2018). The website gathers the latest online reviews and reflections on the experiences people want to have (www.reviewtrackers.com). To answer the first research question 1383 reviews were collected (most reviews were from January–March 2021 but the sample also includes reviews from 2018 to 2021) pertaining to five different casinos located in five Mediterranean coastal areas in Europe: Casino Vila Moura, Algarve (Portugal), Casino Barrière Le Croisette, Cannes (France), Casino de Monte-Carlo, (Monaco), Casino Malta, (Malta), and Regency Casino Thessaloniki, (Greece). Europe is the world’s leading destination for tourists and the Mediterranean basin is its main destination, and the coastal areas are thus important for casinos’ business.

Data analysis

To answer the second research question, Leximancer was chosen as the software to rank and analyze the text from online reviews. The software is a computer- assisted quantitative data analysis tool and is designated as an unsupervised semantic mapping of natural language that provides automated analysis based on statistical properties of text, extracting semantic and relational information (Pearce & Wu, 2016; Sotiriadou et al., 2014, p 218). The textual data from the reviews are used to produce a map of concepts that represent the data pictorially, enabling the reader to visually understand how concepts and themes are related while also showing the number and strength of connections (Tseng et al., 2015). These concepts will be part of themes, which represent a cluster of concepts that are closely related, and the closer they are to each other, the closer the relationship is (Lin et al., 2019). Before the thesaurus learning two major steps were required to obtain interpret results:

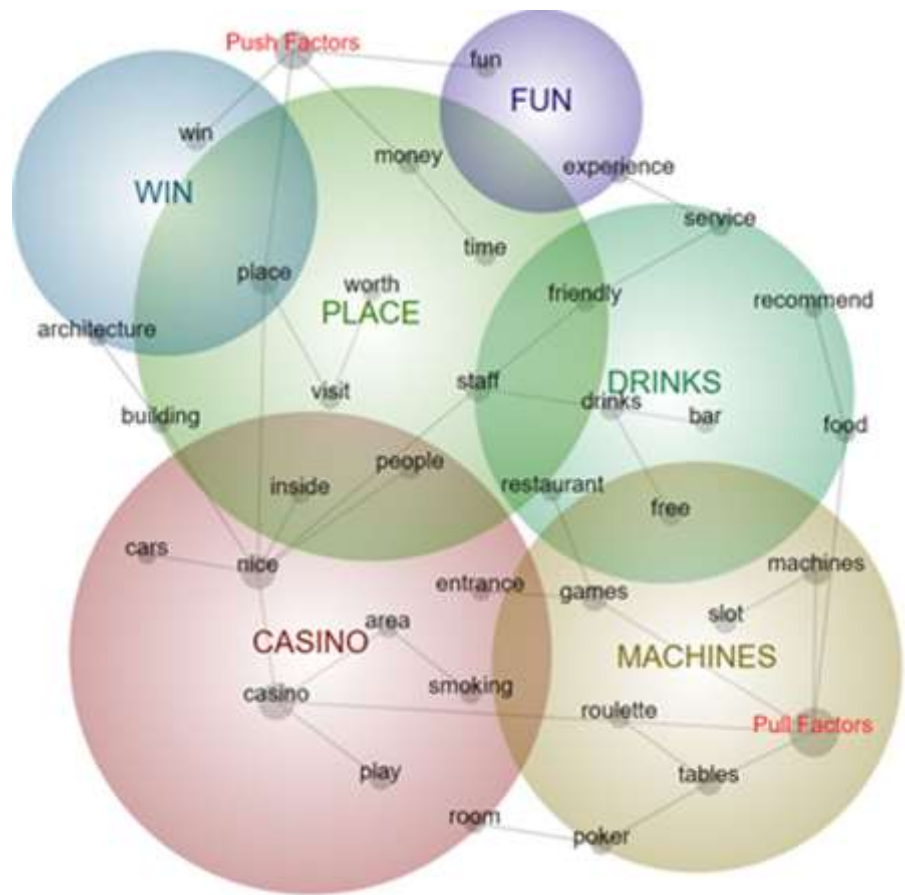
- 1). First a concept map was extracted without the use of auto tags, and the software produced a “ranked concepts by category” that provided an overview of concepts and their strengths (i.e., the probability that a concept like “table(s)” is close to other concepts “roulette” or “poker”), and relative frequency (the likelihood that this concept will be mentioned in the data) – reporting for each category (in this case push and pull factors) relative to one another.
- 2). Additionally, two auto tags were applied in the text processing settings, concepts that were categorized as associated terms related either to push or pull and appear in the concept map close. The use of the advanced feature “auto tags” is useful if one wishes to study groups within the data (Leximancer, 2021).

Results

Concept map

The content analysis using Leximancer produced a concept map (Fig. 1) demonstrating the most-recurring themes and concepts in the casino reviews. Leximancer identified six themes that have relevances ranging from [8% to 45%]: 1) “Casino” (45%), 2) “Place” (27%), 3) “Machines” (23%), 4) “Win” (12%), 5) “Drinks” (11%), and 6) “Fun” (8%). We can also see that the themes “Machines”, “Casinos,” and “Drinks” are close to the tag “Pull Factors”, and “Fun”, “Win”, and “Place” are close to the tag “Push Factors”.

Fig. 1 Concept Map- Casinos' Attractiveness based on push and pull factors (Source: Leximancer outputs)













As an example of how to explore the concept map, the themes “Casinos” and “Machines” overlap and are closely connected, the related concepts such as the number and type of machines (e.g., slot, roulette, tables) are closely related to the size and layout of the casino, and the servicescape will thus have a substantial effect on the games. Another example is the theme “Place”, the theme that shares the most boundaries with other themes. The sharing of boundaries reveals a close relationship with other themes. Individuals go to the “Casino” for “Drinks”, to play and to “Win”, and to have “Fun”, these themes are all closely tied to a location’s reputation, and act almost as a lynchpin to connect the themes and concepts.

Ranked compound concepts by category

The top ranked concepts (Table 1) are related to the pull factor. “Casino gamers” are drawn mainly to *table games* as they not only attract the players but also spectators who concentrate around the tables to cheer and watch. Nonetheless, many tourists who visit casinos prefer to play *slot machines*, as they are entertaining, exciting, and anyone can play and win. Furthermore, European casinos are also known for their *beautiful* and dazzling *atmospheres* and friendly *staff*, both of which appeal to tourists. Among the highest percentage of push-factors are the exciting motivation of *winning* money in slot machines; *casinos* in tourist attraction *places* in Europe offer world-class gaming services that are both engaging and *fun* to play. Finally, we can also see that some concepts are mentioned as both push factors and pull factors.

Pull factors

Pull factors relate to attributes that attract tourists and differentiate locations. *Casino*, *machine(s)*, and *drinks* are all factors that play a part in pulling the gambling tourism to locations in coastal Europe. *Casino*, *machines*, and *drinks* are all closely tied because gambling machines and games are what make a casino a casino, and drinks play a big part in the customer experience at a casino.

Category: COLUMN_pull-factor			
Concept	Rel Freq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence
tables	14	87	 1.6
slot	8	77	 1.4
play	8	73	 1.3
machines	17	71	 1.3
casino	30	65	 1.2
games	11	65	 1.2
atmosphere	8	64	 1.2
beautiful	10	64	 1.2
staff	11	56	 1.0
place	13	45	 0.8











Category: COLUMN_push-factor			
Concept	Rel Freq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence
win	13	85	 1.9
money	8	76	 1.7
fun	8	73	 1.6
time	6	56	 1.3
place	19	54	 1.2
staff	10	43	 1.0
beautiful	7	35	 0.8
games	7	34	 0.8
casino	19	34	 0.8
machines	8	28	 0.6

Table 1 Ranked concepts by category (source: Leximancer outputs)

The *casino* theme appeared in 650 reviews (47%) and is composed of the following concepts: *casino, nice, play, smoking, inside, room, area, cars, and entrance*. A reviewer further commented: The Casino is beautiful by day and night. My husband and I were here in September 2019 for our anniversary. We loved Monte Carlo and you can't visit without going to the Casino. The supercars lined up outside are worth a visit by themselves! La Trinité bar inside has a wonderful martini selection. Great photo opportunities outside looking back towards the Casino from the park in front.

The theme *machine(s)* was present in 406 reviews (29%) and relates directly to gaming/gambling in the casino. It comprises six concepts: *machines, games, tables, slot(s), poker, and roulette*. A casual gambler observed: Awesome casino in equally awesome surroundings! The building is beautiful, from the inside too. The good thing about the casino for beginners/casual/novice gamblers is that the entry to the slot machine area is free so you can get in, have some fun and get out without much damage :) the cafe de Paris adjacent is a great experience.

The theme of *drinks* was present in 311 reviews (22%) and contains the following concepts: *drinks, free, friendly, service, restaurant, food, bar, and recommend*. As stated in the following review: Great casino experience separated areas for smoking and not smoking people. Minimum bets on roulettes 5 euros and 10 euros on blackjack. Plenty of tables also a poker room, very nice staff, pretty cheap drinks especially during happy hours Monday to Friday 18-22.

Push factors

Win, fun, and place are all under push factors as these indicate or imply what motivated these casino tourists to travel to a certain location for gambling. Winning and having fun are closely related to place as the *return to player* (RTP) or perceived RTP percentage of a casino or location has influenced the decision of a player to go there.

Place, as a theme, existed in 543 online reviews (39%) and includes eight concepts: *place, staff, money, people, time, visit, building, and worth*. A reviewer noted: *The ambiance is nice and there is plenty of space and choice of tables for everyone. I am not a gambler and have only visited a few casinos, so it was an interesting eye-opener for me and I recommend a visit.*

The theme *win* is composed of 92 reviews (12%). Two major concepts are win and architecture. One gambler wrote: I played slots because I am not a gambler and I thought that was the simplest one. It is simple, no strategies are needed, and every spin seems random. I left as soon as I found myself winning.

The final theme is *fun*, mentioned in 64 reviews (8%). A gentleman summarized, “*It is a place of fun for those who like games of chance*”. He further stated,

[...] or even just give a relaxed, have a romantic dinner or with family and friends and watch musical shows, but always wallet very well stuffed, does not need to have much careful to still bring it empty.

Discussion

The question posed at the start of this study was, “What are the most influential factors of five casinos in coastal areas of Europe?”.

The analysis of these five casinos revealed that in the two categories (push and pull factors) the most important pull factors are *tables, slots, play, machines, casino, staff, games, beautiful, and atmosphere*, and the most important push factors are *win, money, fun, time, place, and staff*. Logically, the second question by rank of relevance concepts indicate one of the highest-scoring and most often recurring concepts in this study would relate to machines and/ or games, as this is what the heart of gambling is.

Casino attractiveness based on pull factors

The main theme close to Pull Factors (Fig. 1) was the *machines*, including physical forms of games such as poker, blackjack, and roulette (although the virtual mode of these games does exist, the reviews in this study refer to the physical table form), thus confirming that casino gamblers still prefer the casino’s physical-encounter experience (Fowler & Bridges, 2012). Our findings do indeed put a great emphasis on games, playing, and the fact that for casino goers, the major pull factor is related to the heart of the casino operation. What can be surmised with certainty is that gambling is the main attraction, and this is supported in the literature review (Chan et al., 2015).

As expected, *casino* was one of the most important themes detected in the study. The *casino* is related to the concepts of the inside area or the servicescape, described first in the literature by Bitner (1992) as the physical space where the customers (of the casino) participate in the activity. The environment, including the social environment, has an enormous effect on the consumer’s behavior and that person’s image of the service (Harris & Eze, 2008).

The influence of servicescape in casinos is supported by two other concepts in the Ranked concepts by category (Table 1), *beautiful* and *atmosphere*. The use of bright lights and colors to keep the customer awake; or having no clocks to remind the consumer of time (thereby encouraging her/him to “lose track of it”); and/or lack of windows to distract the customer from her/his immersion experience are ways to influence or enhance the consumer’s experience and behavior (Lam et al., 2011). In the theme *casino* the concept of architecture relates directly to interior décor, and it was mentioned in numerous reviews as the concept of the inside of the casino. The word beautiful was often paired with architecture, inside and the building itself, and both of these words and atmosphere are closely tied to the concept of a casino and its servicescape. Architecture plays an important role in transmitting an image of glamor, with grandiose gaming floors and luxury accommodation influencing the consumer experience and pulling the consumer to the casino (Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012). In our results, the ambiance also related to the smoking area, with both falling within the theme of *casino*. The issue of having smoking areas is controversial and meets with mixed reviews from visitors, a majority of whom complained about casinos not having separate smoking areas. This confirms the findings of Chan et al., (2012) who advocate that second-hand smoke worsens air quality inside casinos and affects customers negatively.

Another concept under the theme *casino* is the nice cars seen there, which could be considered a form of décor as they have a cognitive impact on the consumer’s experience, contributing to an image of prestige when the cars are appropriate to it (Bitner, 1992). The last theme close to Push Factors is *drinks*, they can be a differentiating factor among casinos. The food and beverage (F&B) industry has always had a very deep and intertwined connection with the casino industry, as the two have traditionally existed side by side to provide the consumer with a great experience (Shi et al., 2018). The casino industry might well be the industry that has mastered the use of complementarity of F&B (and hotel) and promotions to entice the customer to gamble (Philander et al., 2015). These “promotional comps” have a positive relationship with both revenue and gaming volume (Philander et al., 2015; Kim & Hang 2018). All of this demonstrates that the relationship between gambling and food and beverages is of great importance to the consumer and is a strong indicator of a more holistic experience, and that each enhances the other. The main takeaway from this study is the importance of *machines* as a pull factor among casino goers. The literature demonstrates that gambling tourists’ main reason to go to a gambling destination is to gamble. This plays into the belief that the offer of table games and specific slot machines will enhance the experience of the casino goer (Harvard, 2018) (Fig. 1). This study contributes to the field by establishing what really pulls tourists to a casino and how these pull factors rank in terms of importance.

Casino attractiveness based on push factors

The theme *win* is the most important push factor in the Concept map (Fig. 1) and in the Ranked concepts by category (Table 1). The concept with the second highest prominence is *money* and this is closely tied to winning, as the mentions of money posted reviews usually referred to ending the night as a big winner or big loser, which obviously affects the gamer's experience greatly. As seen in the literature review, money is one of the main reasons why gamblers gamble and the ultimate goal is to win (Chan et al., 2015; Cotte, 1997; Lee et al., 2006).

The theme *place* related to the casinos in Europe that are located near the Mediterranean Sea, has close connectivity with *win* because gamblers make a strong association with places they visit when it comes to winning, as reported in the literature regarding the main motivation of many gamblers (Cotte, 1997; Lee et al., 2006).

Place, in this study, also relates to concepts like *time* (having a great time was a common theme in the reviews), *visit* (it was worth the visit), and *rtaff* (the social aspect of the interaction) as seen in the concept map (Fig. 1). Findings also indicate that the beautiful atmosphere, and the place's proximity to the Mediterranean are intangible elements and major push factors for visiting the casino (Table 1).

Although described in the literature review usually as a pull factor (Mohammad & Som, 2010), in the casino context and in this study's context *rtaff* can be considered as both push and pull, as it implicitly points to a need for socialization and escape (Humphreys, (2010); Lee et al., 2006;. Lee et al., (2006) show a need for social approval as well, which comes from interacting with other players and with the croupier (also mentioned in the reviews). *Staff* points to learning as well (Chan et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2006; Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012), as posted comments mentioned croupiers teaching players how to play the games enhanced the consumer's experience. For this study, *rtaff* was considered as both a push and pull factor, confirming the study of Klenowski (2002), who argues that push and pull factors are so dynamic and closely tied that it is sometimes hard to determine which are which, and investigators must be led by the context and what the overall data say.

The last theme under analysis is *fun* (hedonic or pleasure-inducing). It is a push factor (Cotte, 1997). *Fun* also points to socialization or somewhere to pass the time and relax, or explore something new (Jang & Liping, 2002; Li et al., 2017; Prayag & Hosany, 2014). Li et al. (2017) noted that nightlife was one of the major attractions in Macau, and also food and beverage, and those other activities generate revenues greater than those of gambling (Summary, 2012). This demonstrates that for many gamblers much of the gambling experience is simply having a good time, and only a part of it has to do with gambling alone (Bryant & Walker, 2010).

The results from the Concept map show that the three themes of win, place, and fun overlap, representing the diversity of the Tourists' experience that combine the visit to historic casinos in Europe with the possibility to gamble, win and have fun. An area where the literature is lacking and this paper has produced some interesting results is related to staff, by which this factor can be considered as both a push and pull factor, as it points to a need for socialization and escape that was visible in the reviews compiled and analyzed. The ranking in importance of both push and pull factors for gambling tourists (i.e., the hierarchy of what motivates gamblers the most) is perhaps one of the most valuable contributions of the current study.

Conclusion

Gambling plays a major role in Europe's heritage, where many of the games find their origins (e.g., roulette). Many tourists travelling to Europe and its Mediterranean coast for the purpose of gambling are attracted to the casino's architecture, beautiful décor, and warm temperatures, which epitomize Europe's hospitality. Based on gamblers' online reviews of five casinos in the Mediterranean, this study identifies the main push and pull factors of those casinos. From a practical point of view the findings in this study can help casino managers to provide customers with the best experience. Having a wide array of games along with the most recent table games and slot machines will likely ensure the customer's satisfactory interaction with the casino. Having a service-scape that impresses the customer (providing signs of prestige) and that alters their cognitive experience will result in a much happier casino goer who will likely wish to repeat the experience. The casino literature can further investigate how important service-scape atmosphere attracts tourists to casinos and enhances casinos and hospitality success. This paper is expected to have theoretical implications. First, although earlier studies have targeted mainly China and the US casinos, Europe is the target for this study. Second, this study adds to the literature by employing the push and pull framework for casino gamblers.

The research confirms that game is a major pull factor in casinos and fills a research gap by disclosing in the narratives the specific games that attract tourists to casinos in Europe namely table games poker, blackjack, roulette, and slot machines. On the push factor side, it has confirmed the views expressed in the literature regarding winning as the main motivation to visit a casino (Mccartney & Ge, 2016).

Also, this research is innovative insofar as the authors collected data from online reviews to study motivations and performed an unsupervised content analysis. Finally, some of the themes presented in this study are present in the literature relating to gambling tourism. However, very little literature addresses the push and pull factors of gambling tourists in Europe.

The main limitations in this study are the low number of casinos from which the data were extracted (five); the fact that the data were extracted only from European casinos, although this provides a better understanding of European casino goers compared to the two gambling meccas of the world, Macau and Las Vegas. Data extracted from online reviews might diminish the data's credibility and might introduce a sampling bias, as people who leave online reviews may be a less diversified sample, thereby influencing the results.

The analysis of the heterogeneous push and pull motivations by gambler segment also merits future research.

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