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Exploring Motives Associated with Solo Travellers

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Abstract

Solo travel has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary tourism, attracting individuals seeking independence, self-discovery, and authentic cultural engagement. Unlike traditional group travel, solo travel is motivated by deeper psychological, social, and experiential factors, ranging from personal growth to exploration and freedom from routine. The present study aimed to explore the motives associated with solo travellers. A descriptive research design was adopted, with purposive sampling of 321 solo travellers from Vadodara and Ahmedabad cities. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed that more than half of the respondents relied on social media as the primary source of information before undertaking solo travel. Leisure travel was the most preferred type of tour (53%), followed by adventure, cultural, and heritage tours, while religious travel was least chosen. Weighted mean analysis highlighted that curiosity to explore new places, boosting self-confidence, engaging with people from diverse backgrounds, stepping beyond comfort zones, and enjoying one's own company were the strongest motivational factors. The study concludes that solo travel in India is largely intrinsic and self-exploratory in nature, driven by personal development, exploration, and mental well-being. The implications suggest that tourism service providers and stakeholders should design inclusive, personalized, and experience-driven travel products catering to the needs of solo travellers, thereby supporting sustainable tourism aligned with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Keywords: Solo Travel, Travel Motives, Tourism, Solo Travellers.

Introduction

Travel has always been an integral part of human existence, serving purposes that extend beyond leisure. Historically, journeys were undertaken for survival, trade, pilgrimage, and exploration, often involving hardship and unpredictability. The term "travel" itself originates from the Old French word *travail*, meaning toil or labor, reflecting the challenges associated with early forms of mobility[1]. With the advent of industrialization and globalization, tourism gradually transformed into a structured, large-scale activity that catered to leisure, recreation, and cultural exchange.

In contemporary times, the tourism industry has become one of the fastest growing sectors globally, contributing significantly to economic development, employment, and cultural connectivity[2]. A notable transformation in modern tourism is the rise of the "new tourist," described by Buhalis[3] and Poon[4] as independent, informed, flexible, and environmentally conscious. Unlike traditional mass tourists who preferred packaged and group tours, new tourists actively seek personalized, authentic, and experience-oriented travel. Within this context, solo travel has emerged as a significant phenomenon. Solo travel refers to individuals undertaking trips alone, organizing itineraries independently, and choosing destinations and services without relying on group tours[5] . While solo travel was historically perceived as unusual or even socially deviant, it has now become mainstream, fueled by factors such as rising individualism, digital connectivity, and changing socio-cultural dynamics[6] . Studies reveal that motivations for solo travel often extend beyond recreation, encompassing psychological needs like self-discovery, empowerment, and freedom from social obligations[7] . For many travellers, it provides an avenue for identity exploration, confidence-building, and personal transformation.

Globally, surveys by platforms like Klook and Kayak highlight a steady increase in solo travel, particularly among women, youth, and working professionals[8] . These travellers often seek authenticity, cultural immersion, and opportunities for meaningful interactions with local communities. Far from being isolating, solo travel is increasingly recognized as an enabler of social connection, as travellers meet new people and engage more deeply with host cultures.

In the Indian context, solo travel has gained momentum in the last decade. Factors such as growing financial independence, digital empowerment, changing lifestyle aspirations, and exposure to global tourism trends have encouraged more Indians to travel alone[9] . Among young adults and women, solo travel is often associated with breaking stereotypes, enhancing self-confidence, and fulfilling aspirations of independence. However, despite the growing visibility of solo travellers in media and industry surveys, academic research on solo travel in

India remains scarce, especially concerning the underlying motives and behaviours.

Travel motivations have been extensively studied as a foundation for tourism behaviour, it is classified solo travel into two categories: by choice and by default[7] . Solo travellers by choice deliberately seek autonomy, exploration, and personal growth, while those by default lack travel companions due to life circumstances (such as living alone)[8] . Studies highlight motives including novelty-seeking, escape, relaxation, self-esteem, self-empowerment, and social connection[9] . Wilson and Harris[10] particularly emphasized women's solo travel as a means of empowerment and identity exploration.

Despite extensive global research, there is a noticeable dearth of studies from the Indian perspective. Existing Indian literature has largely focused on theoretical examinations of travel intentions, leisure constraints, tourist satisfaction, gender equality in hospitality, and feminist perspectives on women's empowerment. Only a limited number of empirical studies specifically examine solo travel in India, particularly psychological and behavioural dimensions. Prior research includes exploratory work on Indian women travelling alone, wellness and self-discovery through solo travel, barriers to independent journeys, risks such as violence, and the role of travel journalism in shaping experiences. These gaps underscore the need for more systematic inquiry into the motivations and experiences of Indian solo travellers.

Understanding the motives of solo travellers is crucial for tourism stakeholders, including service providers, destination managers, and policymakers. Motivebased insights can help in developing inclusive and personalized products, designing safety measures, and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Moreover, solo travel contributes to broader global agendas such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by fostering cultural exchange (SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities), supporting local economies (SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth), and encouraging innovation in tourism services (SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). While solo travel research has contributed to the literature, the majority of these studies defines the solo traveller from an arrival-status perspective and offered little indication about the general characteristics of solo travelling. But there was a dearth of research conducted on the Travel Motives associated with the Solo Travellers in Indian Perspective, therefore the present investigation was undertaken.

Objective of the Study: The present study aimed to explore the motives associated with solo travellers.

Methodology

To attain objectives, Descriptive research design was used for the present study. The unit of inquiry consisted of 321 solo travellers from Vadodara and Ahmedabad cities. The sample was selected using purposive sampling. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data on travel motives, pre-travel characteristics. The questionnaire contained several sections such as: Section: I; contained questions related to demographic characteristics of the respondents, Section: II; included questions related to motives associated with solo travellers, in which respondents were asked to respond on a 3-point continuum scale in terms of "To High Extent", "To Moderate Extent" and "To Low Extent"which were scored 3 through 1 respectively. High score reflected highly motived with the factors associated with solo travelling. To test the validity of the scales prepared, the entire tool was given to a panel of 7 judges, from which 3 were the experts from Family and Community Resource Management Department and 4 were the experts from Tourism field. The judges were requested to judge whether the listed items of the scales were clear, ambiguous, relevant, irrelevant, negative or positive. The items on the scales that had 90% agreement by the experts were finally selected for the scales to be used.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the present study are discussed in separate sections: i. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents: This section dealt with the background characteristics of the respondents: Gender, Age, Educational Qualification of the respondents, Occupation, Marital Status, Type of the Family, Size of the Family, No. of children in the Family, Total Personal Income and Monthly Family Income of the respondents.

Table-1: Demographic Characteristics of the respondents (n=321).

Demographic Characteristics	f	%
Age		
15-25	5	2
26-36	87	27
37-47	168	52
48-58	61	19
Gender		
Male	148	46
Female	173	54
Educational Qualification		
Diploma	19	6
Undergraduate	59	18
Graduate	61	19
Post Graduate	167	52
Ph.D.	15	5

Occupation		
Student	4	1
Business	94	29
Full Time Job	183	57
Part Time Job	12	4
Homemaker	28	9
Marital Status		
Married	245	76
Unmarried	67	21
Divorced/Separated	9	3
Type of Family		
Nuclear	182	57
Joint	139	43
Total No. of Family Members		
2-7	268	83
8-13	43	13
14-20	10	3
No. of Children		
0-3	301	94
4-7	20	6
Personal Monthly Income (in □)		
Below □ 30,000	8	2
□ 30,001- □ 80,000	149	46
□80,001- □ 1, 30,000	89	28
□ 1,30,001- □ 1,80,000	53	17
Above □ 1,80,001	22	7
Total Monthly Family Income (in □)		
Below □ 80,000	12	4
□ 80,001- □ 1,30,000	9	3
□1,30,001- □ 1, 80,000	115	36
□ 1,80,001- □ 2,30,000	75	23
□ 2,30,001- □ 2,80,000	83	26
Above □ 2,80,001	27	8

The demographic profile of respondents (Table-1) showed that the majority were middle-aged, with 52% in the 37–47 years category, and a slightly higher proportion of females (54%) than males (46%). More than one half (52%) were postgraduates and employed full-time (57%). Marital status indicated that most of the respondents (76%) were married, and more than one half (57%) belonged to nuclear families.Income distribution revealed that nearly half (46%) earned a personal monthly income of □30,001–□80,000, while 36% reported a household income between □1,30,001 and □1,80,000. Overall, the respondents were predominantly middle-aged, well-educated, employed, married individuals from nuclear families with smaller household sizes and moderate-to-upper income levels.

Sources of Information used

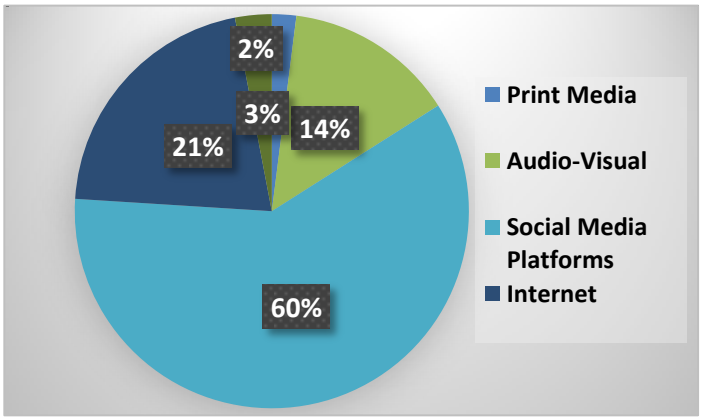

Figure-1: Distribution of the respondents according to Sources of Information Used (n=321)

The data revealed that (Figure-1) morethan one half of the respondents (60%) got information throughvarious social media platforms such as, Facebook, Instagram and blogs while few of the respondents (2%) got information through Newspapers and Magazines.

Types of Tour Selected

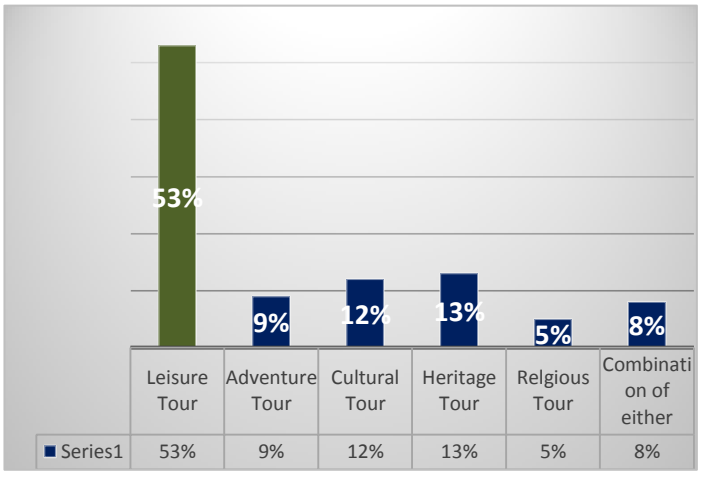

Figure-2: Distribution of the respondents according to Types of Tour selected for the most recent Solo Travel Experience (n=321).

The findings revealed that (Figure-2) morethanone half of the respondents (53%) had selected leisure tour while very few of the respondents (5%) had selected religious tour for the most recent Solo Travel Experience.

Motives Associated with Solo Travellers: This section dealt with the various motives associated with the solo travellers.

Table-2: Distribution of the respondents according to Weighted Mean Scores obtained in relation to Motives associated with Solo Travellers (n=321)**.**

Sr. No.	Motives Associated with Solo Travellers	Weighted Mean Scores Obtained (n=321)
1.	To explore the depths of identity through self-discovery and transformative experiences	2.8
2.	To gain insight into beliefs, values, and unique qualities through self - exploration of sites	2.6
3.	Curiosity to explore new places	2.9
4.	To escape from routine lifestyle	2.7
5.	Escaping from Restrictions and Exploring New opportunities	2.8
6.	To seek novelty in education and career to become self-reliant	1.8
7.	To overcome one's own fears, handle the challenges with newfound resilience	2.7
8.	To adapt new situations with ease	2.4
9.	To Boost Self Confidence	2.9
10.	Engage with people from diverse backgrounds to broaden perspective and build networks	2.9
11.	The availability of personalised solo travel packages encourages the choice and exploration of various destinations	2.4
12.	To explore adventures beyond comfort zone	2.9
13.	To Learn new valuable life Skills by seeking intellectual enrichment	2.6
14.	To connect with local communities and learn about their culture, lifestyle, music, art, etc.	2.5
15.	To get interesting and exciting experiences by exploring new and less ventured destinations	2.7
16.	To grow as a person in many ways and enhance various skills such as; resource savior, anger management, etc.	2.4
17.	To enjoy the diversity of cuisine and culinary arts across the globe	1.6
18.	To get a better understanding of conservation and preservation through visits to cultural and historic sites	1.4
19.	To develop emotional stability	1.9
20.	To learn to balance between work and travel	1.5
21.	To relax and enjoy the company of one's own	2.9
22.	To be able to travel in accordance with my own preferences, not others'	1.3
23.	Due to not having a travelling companion	2.2
24.	To Share travel experience with others and make new friends	2.6
25.	To improve communication and language skills	2.8
26.	To get relieved from stress, fatigue, boredom and frustration	2.9
27.	To learn about the time, money and energy management practices and how it should be implemented for smooth solo travel	2.1
28.	To Visit friends or relatives for the better facilitation of social interactions	1.6
29.	To improve health and mental well-being by indulging in various recreational activities such as sports and adventure, attending yoga camps, swimming, spa, hiking, climbing, undergoing medical treatments, etc.	2.7
30.	To seek solitude through silence and go away from the crowd	1.5
31.	To fulfil a lifelong dream and ambition	2.8
32.	To better appreciate Mother Earth and to use resources in line with environmental sustainability	2.4
33.	To form new relationships with the local people while solo travelling	2.3
34.	To share my culture with others when solo travelling	2.5
35.	To disconnect from the digital world, to be immersed in oneself	2.4

The data on weighted mean scores (Table2) revealed that respondents highly motivated to travel solo by factors such as curiosity to explore new places, boosting self-confidence, engaging with people from diverse backgrounds, exploring adventures beyond their comfort zone, and enjoying the company of one's owneach receiving a weighted mean score of 2.9. These top-rated motives highlighted the intrinsic and self-exploratory nature of solo travel. Motives with relatively lower influence but still noteworthy were learning new skills, cultural immersion, adaptability to new situations, reflecting a secondary focus on intellectual and cultural enrichment. In contrast, the least significant motives included travelling due to lack of a

companion, time and money management, and those related to culinary experiences, visiting relatives, emotional stability, balancing work and travel, solitude, and environmental appreciation), indicating that practical, relational, or sustainability-related factors were not primary motivators. Overall, the findings suggest that solo travellers are primarily motivated by psychological fulfilment, adventure, self-confidence, and meaningful exploration.

Conclusion

The findings confirm solo travel is intrinsically motivated, emphasizing psychological growth and cultural engagement. Social media strongly influences pre-travel behaviour, while leisure and adventure dominate. The findings of the present study revealed that more than half of the respondents relied on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and travel blogs as their primary source of information prior to their solo travel experiences. This reflects the growing influence of digital media in shaping tourism behaviour, particularly among younger and independent travellers. In terms of tour preferences, a majority of the respondents selected leisure tours, followed by adventure, cultural, and heritage tours. In contrast, only a very small proportion of respondents chose religious tours for their most recent solo travel experience, indicating a shift away from traditional pilgrimage-based travel towards lifestyle and exploration-oriented tourism. Analysis of the weighted mean scores highlighted several motivational factors that strongly influenced solo travel decisions. Respondents reported being highly motivated by curiosity to explore new destinations, the desire to boost self-confidence, opportunities to engage with people from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, the thrill of exploring adventures beyond their comfort zone, and the enjoyment of spending quality time with oneself. These top-rated motives demonstrate that solo travel is largely intrinsic and self-exploratory in nature, with individuals travelling not merely to visit places but to achieve deeper personal fulfilment. The study thus underscores that personal development, exploration, and mental well-being are among the key driving forces behind the growing trend of solo travel.

The implications of these findings are significant for both solo travellers and tourism stakeholders. For travellers, solo journeys provide opportunities for empowerment, self-reflection, and enhanced psychological well-being. For stakeholders—including travel agencies, destination managers, and policymakers—understanding these motivational factors can help in designing inclusive, personalized, and meaningful travel experiences. By recognizing the importance of solo travel motives, stakeholders can foster a more responsible travel culture that not only enhances individual experiences but also generates positive impacts on host communities and the environment. Furthermore, by aligning with broader sustainable tourism practices, these efforts can directly contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

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