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SOLO TRAVELLERS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: TRIPADVISOR FORUM ANALYSIS

Lucie Sara ZÁVODNÁ[a], Martin MUSIL[b]

[a] College of Polytechnics Jihlava, Tolsteho 16, Jihlava, Czech Republic, luciesara.zavodna@vspj.cz
[b] Prague University of Economics and Business, nam. W. Churchilla 4, Prague, Czech Republic, martin.musil@vse.cz

Abstract

This study examines the consumption patterns of solo travellers, exploring the nuances of their travel behaviour, the factors influencing their choices, and their preferred destinations. The authors used text-mining techniques to analyse the discourse surrounding solo travel on TripAdvisor forums. A comprehensive dataset of 74,672 English-language comments posted between January 8, 2008, and May 31, 2023, was collected from this forum and used as the basis for analysis in this study. The primary objectives were to: (1) delineate the intricacies of solo travellers' consumption behaviour; (2) examine differences in consumption behaviour among solo female travellers; and (3) identify the destinations most frequently discussed by this demographic. The findings reveal distinctive consumption behaviours among solo travellers, particularly in relation to financial considerations, safety concerns, and gender-specific issues. Notably, solo female travellers frequently discussed safety-related aspects, including preferences for secure destinations, interactions with locals or fellow female travellers, and ensuring safety during transportation. Regarding destination preferences, the analysis indicates a substantial focus on several regions. Europe emerged as the most prominent, mentioned in 8,029 cases, followed by America (2,368), Australia (2,346), and Asia (2,322).

Keywords: solo travel; consumption behaviour; female travel; TripAdvisor; text mining

INTRODUCTION

Due to changes in family structures and increasingly individualised lifestyles, 'spending singles' were identified as one of the top ten global consumer trends in 2016 (Kasriel-Alexander, 2016; Yang et al., 2022b). Solo travel has since become one of the fastest-growing segments in the tourism sector (Euromonitor, 2019; Solo Traveler, 2023). According to recent studies, however, solo travel remains a relatively under-researched segment, and only a limited number of works have examined the experiences of solo travellers (Bianchi, 2016; Brown et al., 2020; Yang, 2020; Yang et al., 2019).

Existing research has predominantly focused on women's solo travel experiences, particularly those of Asian women (Khan et al., 2021; Wynne-Hughes, 2023; Yang et al., 2017; Pereira & Silva, 2018; Seow & Brown, 2018; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang et al., 2019;

Karagöz et al., 2021; Terziyska, 2021; Hosseini et al., 2022; Otegui-Carles et al., 2022; Solo Traveler, 2023). Other studies have addressed solo travel in different contexts, such as its relationship to couple vacations (Coffey et al., 2024; Durko & Petrick, 2013; Durko, 2014).

Online travel reviews have been widely employed as an important data source in tourism research (Sung et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2021). Review platforms are essential not only for potential users of tourism services but also for visitors to destinations (Zervas et al., 2021). They provide valuable insights into travellers' perceptions, levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and decision-making processes (Zelenka et al., 2021).

The use of TripAdvisor and similar platforms as databases for empirical analysis has become common in tourism research. Studies of tourist reviews on these platforms are typically consumer-oriented, focusing on tourists' use of such media and their influence on tourist behaviour (Özen, 2021). Although digital content plays a significant role in solo travel—with solo travellers relying heavily on various types of information obtained through social media (Cho et al., 2020)—this dimension has not yet been systematically examined in solo travel research. Cho et al. (2020) argue that this type of information constitutes a critical element in understanding the phenomenon of solo travel. Moreover, Pereira and Silva (2018) emphasise the need for qualitative methodologies (e.g., content analysis of travel blogs and forums) to identify additional motivational dimensions of solo travellers.

This paper addresses this research gap through a comprehensive qualitative analysis of discussions within the TripAdvisor travel forum. Its primary objective is to identify the most prevalent topics in solo travellers' conversations on the Solo Travel TripAdvisor forum and to compare these themes with insights from the existing literature. Building on prior scholarship on solo travel, we also examine the extent to which online discussions serve as a source of knowledge about individual consumption within the tourism market.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent years, the solo travel sector has attracted growing academic interest and is beginning to take on a more clearly defined shape, although detailed and extensive research remains limited (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022). Moreover, no general consensus currently exists on the definition of a solo traveller. The modified definition proposed by Laesser et al. (2009), which distinguishes solo travellers according to specific criteria, has thus far been considered sufficiently appropriate (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022). Existing studies emphasise that solo travellers do not constitute a homogeneous group; segmentation and comparison are necessary to generate more nuanced insights and enhance comparability. Nevertheless, several core principles of solo travel can be identified.

Scholars generally agree that solo travellers are individuals who arrive at a destination alone, irrespective of whether they subsequently join a group or complete their journey with people they meet while travelling, provided they are not accompanied by friends or family (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022). Business travellers are typically excluded from this category. The prevailing consensus is that there are two main types of solo travellers: those travelling alone 'by default" and those travelling alone 'by choice" (Bianchi, 2016; French et al., 2017; Terziyska, 2021; Hosseini et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022b).

As a heterogeneous group, solo travellers exhibit diverse motivations (Pereira & Silva, 2018; Osman et al., 2020; Terziyska, 2021; Ernszt & Marton, 2021; Yang, 2020; Ejupi & Medaric, 2022). Researchers have employed in-depth interviews and literature reviews to explore the underlying factors that shape solo travel motivations and constraints. Motivations may differ depending on whether individuals are first-time or experienced solo travellers (Bianchi, 2022). A substantial body of literature focuses specifically on women. These studies suggest that women who choose to travel alone are motivated less by the journey itself than by the experience of leaving their comfort zones, cultivating independence, and achieving autonomy (Bianchi, 2016; Pereira & Silva, 2018; Yang, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2022). Solo female travellers often seek personal growth and development through enhanced self-confidence and empowerment. Additional motivations include gaining prestige and escaping family roles, with the latter particularly relevant for Muslim women (Yang, 2020; Nikjoo et al., 2021; Hosseini et al., 2022).

Only a limited number of studies have examined gender differences in solo travel (Laesser et al., 2009; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Yang, 2020). These works suggest that men exhibit different preferences from women (French et al., 2017; Osman et al., 2020). For men, personal feelings appear to play a less significant role than they do for women. Overall, women have remained the central focus of solo travel research, with recurrent themes including constraints, safety, travel behaviour, and the experiences of Asian women, who are often regarded as particularly vulnerable due to cultural and religious contexts (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022).

In contrast, the consumer behaviour of solo travellers has rarely been investigated, and when considered, it has typically been incorporated into surveys (Uatay et al., 2019; Sung et al., 2020; Bianchi, 2022). More commonly, research has addressed women's risk perceptions or other influencing factors associated with solo travel.

One notable exception is Cho et al. (2020), who analysed large-scale online hotel reviews to evaluate hotel services from the perspective of solo travellers and to derive managerial implications. Their results revealed the most frequently used keywords in reviews. Traveller attribute preferences and association rules showed significant differences between solo and

non-solo travellers. Texts written by solo travellers were predominantly associated with negative emotions, whereas those by non-solo travellers included a mix of positive and negative emotions. Furthermore, relatively few review texts influenced solo travellers' satisfaction, while non-solo travellers' satisfaction appeared to be shaped by a more diverse set of keywords.

The application of text mining to analyse the opinions and questions of travellers expressed in TripAdvisor comments and reviews represents a novel research direction in the study of solo travel.

DATA AND METHODS

Several studies show that past experience predicts future behaviour (Albarracin & McNatt, 2005; Sommer, 2011; Ye et al., 2017). Building on this, we assume that forum posts provide a valid reflection of solo travellers' likely behaviours. We acknowledge, however, that some respondents may change their intentions or may not have the opportunity to act as stated.

The study addresses the following research questions:

(RQ1) What are the characteristics of solo travellers' consumption behaviour?

(RQ2) How does the consumption behaviour of solo female travellers differ?

(RQ3) Which destinations are most frequently mentioned by solo travellers?

A total of 74,672 English-language comments were collected from Solo Travel forum on TripAdvisor between 8 January 2008 and 31 May 2023 and used for the analysis in this study. The data collection process was carried out using a specially developed application programming interface (API). All comments from the Solo Travel forum were automatically recorded for text-mining analysis. Gender was determined according to self-reported information provided by forum participants during registration; however, the reliability of this information cannot be fully guaranteed.

In addition to quantitative text-mining analysis, word-for-word quotations from the forum were examined. These illustrative excerpts provided contextual detail and helped to interpret patterns identified in the computational analysis.

The analytical procedure followed the five-step framework of Ugur and Akbiyik (2020), which operationalises the foundational definition of text mining introduced by Feldman and Dagan (1995). Feldman and Dagan conceptualised text mining as the transformation of unstructured text into structured information through natural language processing (NLP) and statistical methods. Ugur and Akbiyik extended this by proposing a staged process that guides practical implementation. In this study, Feldman and Dagan's work provided the theoretical foundation, while Ugur and Akbiyik's model structured the execution of the analysis. The five steps were implemented as follows: (1) Data Collection: Retrieval of 74,672 English-language

comments using a custom API. (2) Text Parsing: Segmentation of text into words and sentences. Stemming and lemmatisation were applied to normalise word forms (e.g., "travelling," "travels" → "travel"). (3) Text Filtering: Removal of stopwords (e.g., "the," "and"), low-frequency terms, high-frequency noise, and irrelevant forum-specific tokens (e.g., usernames, signatures). (4) Data Transformation: Construction of structured datasets by weighting words according to their cumulative frequency and distribution. Term Frequency–Inverse Document Frequency (TF–IDF) weighting was applied within WordStat 9. (5) Text Mining: Application of clustering, proximity plots, and multidimensional scaling to identify themes, behavioural patterns, and co-occurring terms. We employed the software WordStat 9, a content analysis and text-mining programme capable of rapidly extracting themes and automatically identifying patterns through clustering, multidimensional scaling, proximity plots, and related techniques.

The analysis used WordStat 9, a content analysis and text-mining programme that can automatically extract themes and identify patterns through clustering and related techniques. Through this combination of computational and illustrative approaches, the methodology enabled the identification of solo travellers' behavioural characteristics, gender-based differences, and destination preferences.

RESULTS

We begin with descriptive statistics summarising the dataset, which is representative of the sample population. The dataset comprised 74,672 unique comments. Empty, deleted, or inappropriate comments (e.g. 'This post has been removed at the author's request") were excluded. All comments were posted between 8 January 2008 and 31 May 2023 in the Solo Travel forum on TripAdvisor. The total text corpus consisted of 8,120,067 words, of which 4,970,535 were excluded. On average, each sentence contained 15.5 words and each paragraph 31.0 words.

Following the descriptive analysis, further examinations were conducted to explore word and phrase usage. Several lexical variants were grouped for analysis, such as travel/traveling/travelling, trip/trips, city/cities, http/www, year/years, and day/days. Table 1 presents the 26 most frequently used words within the forum, all with a frequency of 7000 or higher. Among the top 10 is PLACES, which appears primarily in questions regarding the best places to travel and recommendations for destinations suitable for solo travellers. Related terms such as PLACE, CITY, TOUR, COUNTRY, and DESTINATION also feature prominently. The only specific geographic reference among the top terms is EUROPE. Among the salient terms occurring within the top 30 words, several are of particular interest. For example, the term TRAIN appears 8,281 times. Another frequently discussed mode of transportation is

FLIGHT with 6,215 occurrences, followed by BUS with 4,624 occurrences and CAR with 4,285 occurrences. Solo travellers also frequently address issues related to BUDGET (7,462 occurrences), MONEY (5,942 occurrences), and EXPENSIVE (4,835 occurrences).

Table 1 Extracted words

		FREQUENCY	% SHOWN	% PROCESSED	% TOTAL	NO. CASES	% CASES	TF • IDF
1	TRAVEL	39631	1,96%	1,28%	0,49%	22417	30,02%	20710,4
	TRAVELLING	8392	0,42%	0,27%	0,10%	6428	8,61%	8938,2
	TRAVELING	6729	0,33%	0,22%	0,08%	5262	7,05%	7751,9
2	TRIP	29594	1,47%	0,95%	0,36%	18390	24,63%	18010,2
	TRIPS	7421	0,37%	0,24%	0,09%	5647	7,56%	8321,5
3	SOLO	29344	1,45%	0,94%	0,36%	18484	24,75%	17793,1
4	TIME	28979	1,43%	0,93%	0,36%	18682	25,02%	17437,7
5	PEOPLE	22740	1,13%	0,73%	0,28%	14636	19,60%	16093,9
6	GOOD	21655	1,07%	0,70%	0,27%	16102	21,56%	14428,2
7	FORUM	16047	0,79%	0,52%	0,20%	10413	13,94%	13729,5
8	PLACES	15242	0,75%	0,49%	0,19%	10857	14,54%	12764,4
	PLACE	11946	0,59%	0,38%	0,15%	9084	12,17%	10929,2
9	DAY	15149	0,75%	0,49%	0,19%	9531	12,76%	13543,5
	DAYS	13736	0,68%	0,44%	0,17%	8977	12,02%	12637,5
10	YEARS	13059	0,65%	0,42%	0,16%	11592	15,52%	10564,7
	YEAR	8640	0,43%	0,28%	0,11%	6978	9,34%	8894,2
11	CITY	12038	0,60%	0,39%	0,15%	8032	10,76%	11656,8
	CITIES	7601	0,38%	0,24%	0,09%	5556	7,44%	8576,9
12	GREAT	11891	0,59%	0,38%	0,15%	9436	12,64%	10682,5
13	THINGS	11038	0,55%	0,36%	0,14%	8153	10,92%	10616,8
14	WWW	10591	0,52%	0,34%	0,13%	7741	10,37%	10425,4
	HTTP	8527	0,42%	0,27%	0,11%	6165	8,26%	9236,7
15	TOUR	10138	0,50%	0,33%	0,12%	6146	8,23%	10995,3
	TOURS	6769	0,34%	0,22%	0,08%	4524	6,06%	8242,2
16	MAKE	9375	0,46%	0,30%	0,12%	7574	10,14%	9317,2
17	EUROPE	9161	0,45%	0,30%	0,11%	6545	8,76%	9685,5
18	TRAIN	8281	0,41%	0,27%	0,10%	5118	6,85%	9639,6
19	HOTEL	8205	0,41%	0,26%	0,10%	5663	7,58%	9190,5
20	COUNTRY	8160	0,40%	0,26%	0,10%	6323	8,47%	8749,4
21	STAY	8083	0,40%	0,26%	0,10%	6460	8,65%	8591,6
22	DESTINATION	7996	0,40%	0,26%	0,10%	6076	8,14%	8712,0
23	LOCAL	7827	0,39%	0,25%	0,10%	5641	7,55%	8780,3
24	VISIT	7802	0,39%	0,25%	0,10%	6226	8,34%	8418,0
25	LONG	7563	0,37%	0,24%	0,09%	6382	8,55%	8078,8
26	BUDGET	7462	0,37%	0,24%	0,09%	5834	7,81%	8261,9

Note: Frequency - The raw count of how many times the word appears in the dataset. %Shown - The percentage of total words displayed in the analysis that this keyword represents. %Processed - The proportion of the keyword relative to the cleaned or filtered text (after removing stopwords, punctuation, etc.). %Total - The keyword's share relative to the entire dataset, not just the words shown. No. cases - The number of forum posts that contain the word at least once. %Cases - The percentage of forum posts containing the word, relative to all documents in the dataset. TF – IDF (Term Frequency × Inverse Document Frequency) - A weighting measure used in text mining to highlight words that are frequent in a specific document, high TF–IDF = distinctive keyword.

To provide more detailed insights into the dataset, multi-word expressions containing a minimum of two and a maximum of five words were extracted and examined (see Table 2). Only phrases occurring at least 50 times were considered. Table 2 lists the 32 most frequently repeated phrases, all with a frequency of 800 or higher. Several of these phrases were grouped, for example solo trip, solo travellers, solo travel, solo traveller, and travelling solo.

Table 2 Extracted phrases

	FREQUENCY	NO. CASES	% CASES	LENGTH	TF • IDF
YEARS AGO	9090	8809	11,80%	2	8437,6
SOLO TRAVEL	5166	4215	5,64%	2	6449,0
SOLO TRIP	2826	2535	3,39%	2	4151,9
SOLO TRAVELLERS	1726	1491	2,00%	2	2933,6
TRAVEL SOLO	1358	1278	1,71%	2	2399,1
SOLO TRAVELLER	1296	1199	1,61%	2	2325,5
TRAVELLING SOLO	1194	1118	1,50%	2	2178,7
TRAVELING SOLO	1173	1099	1,47%	2	2149,1
SOLO TRAVELER	1153	1068	1,43%	2	2126,8
SOLO TRAVELERS	1147	1016	1,36%	2	2140,6
GOOD LUCK	3656	3623	4,85%	2	4804,3
TRAVEL FORUM	2148	1906	2,55%	2	3421,8
TRIP ADVISOR	1801	1443	1,93%	2	3086,7
TRAVEL INSURANCE	1328	1025	1,37%	2	2473,3
TOP QUESTIONS	1316	1113	1,49%	2	2403,9
PUBLIC TRANSPORT	1289	1129	1,51%	2	2346,6
DAY TRIP	1264	1077	1,44%	2	2327,0
DAY TRIPS	1181	1036	1,39%	2	2194,1
DESTINATION FORUMS	1245	1121	1,50%	2	2270,3
MEET PEOPLE	1177	1052	1,41%	2	2178,8
LONELY PLANET	1166	1086	1,45%	2	2142,3
SOLO FORUM	1076	998	1,34%	2	2016,5
COSTA RICA	1050	837	1,12%	2	2048,0
SOUTH AMERICA	1037	876	1,17%	2	2002,1
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT	1021	799	1,07%	2	2012,0
TIME OF YEAR	932	877	1,17%	3	1798,9
GREAT TIME	907	885	1,19%	2	1747,1
GOOD IDEA	900	868	1,16%	2	1741,2
SOLO FEMALE	887	829	1,11%	2	1733,7
SAN FRANCISCO	873	678	0,91%	2	1782,6
CREDIT CARD	846	640	0,86%	2	1748,7
TRAIN TRAVEL	828	683	0,91%	2	1688,1

Note: Frequency - The raw count of how many times the phrase appears in the dataset. No. cases - The number of posts that contain the phrase at least once. %Cases - The percentage of forum posts containing the phrase, relative to all documents in the dataset. TF – IDF (Term Frequency × Inverse Document Frequency) - A weighting measure used in text mining to highlight words that are frequent in a specific dataset.

Table 2 illustrates four thematic categories: (1) health concerns (insurance), (2) financial concerns (single supplement, credit cards), (3) social concerns (meeting people, solo female travel), and (4) transport concerns (public and train travel). Health concerns are primarily demonstrated through discussions on travel insurance. Respondents debated the most appropriate insurance companies, policies, and regulations. For instance, one traveller noted: 'I travel for at most a month at a time, and am never without travel insurance.' Financial concerns were evident in discussions of the single supplement and credit card usage. One respondent remarked: 'Finding solo supplement-free resorts is harder and harder these days, especially now that travel has accelerated.' Another stated: 'If you don't want to pay a single supplement, don't use a tour operator as it's always their policy.' Further concerns centred on credit card transactions, conversion rates, and security. As one traveller advised: 'If you use a credit card for goods and services, you may be offered the choice of paying in the local currency … the conversion rate back to your own currency can be eye-wateringly poor, so I would suggest you opt for paying in the local currency.'

Solo travel does not necessarily imply isolation. Many respondents emphasised the importance of social interaction, often seeking opportunities to meet fellow travellers or locals. For example: 'A friend of mine who often travels alone says that you meet people all the time— at the airport, in hostels…' and 'Only reason I am looking at a hostel is to meet people.' Transport-related concerns included advice on modes of travel and connectivity. A recurring theme was the preference for trains in Europe, described as both convenient and efficient: 'Most European countries have great train networks and that is a particularly good way for a solo traveller to travel.'

Destinations also emerged in the extracted phrases, notably Costa Rica, South America, and San Francisco. These discussions frequently overlapped with COVID-19 travel restrictions and quarantine requirements. For instance, one respondent advised: 'If you only have two weeks and it's your first foreign trip, I suggest you focus on Costa Rica.'

To address Research Question 3 (RQ3), we conducted a named-entity extraction (Table 3). This analysis revealed the most frequently mentioned locations (frequency $\geq$ 2,000). Europe (8,029), London (4,653), and the UK (4,136) were the most prominent. Europe was commonly described as safe and easy to navigate: 'I think Europe would be easier planning and travelling to figure out but likely more expensive.' When not referring to Europe broadly, travellers frequently mentioned specific cities, including London (4,653), Paris (3,497), Rome (2,354), Amsterdam (2,085), Barcelona (1,846), Prague (1,498) and Venice (1,494). Countries such as the UK (4,136), Italy (3,020), Thailand (2,725), Japan (2,643), Spain (2,421), Australia (2,346),

and Mexico (1,707) also appeared prominently. The differences between continents are clear: Europe (8,029 mentions) dominated discussions compared with America (2,368), Australia (2,346), and Asia (2,322).

Table 4 Extracted topics

NO	KEYWORDS	COHERENCE (NPMI)	EIGEN VALUE
1	HTML; TRIPADVISOR; WWW; SHOWFORUM; HTTP; HTTPS; SHOWTOPIC; AU; UK	0.429	4.01
2	EARLY; LATE; MID; NOVEMBER; OCTOBER; MARCH; DECEMBER; APRIL; JANUARY; SEPTEMBER; FEBRUARY	0.333	3.10
3	LAPTOP; APP; CONTENT; PHONE; LIMITED; ADVISOR; ACCESS; FULL; WEBSITE	0.509	2.93
4	AGO; EDITED; YEARS	0.121	2.49
5	TOP; PAGE; SIDE; QUESTIONS; HAND; SECTION; LINKS	0.397	2.43
6	SUPPLEMENT; SINGLE; CHARGE; ROOM; DOUBLE; PAY	0.364	2.39
7	HISTORY; ART; ARCHITECTURE; MUSEUMS; CULTURE; FOOD; NATURE	0.363	2.35
8	TOUR; GROUP; TOURS; ESCORTED; COMPANIES; COMPANY; ORGANISED; JOIN	0.331	2.30
9	PLANET; LONELY; ROUGH; GUIDES; GUIDE	0.447	2.22
10	DC; WASHINGTON; BOSTON; YORK; CHICAGO; NYC	0.447	2.15
11	CAMBODIA; LAOS; VIETNAM; THAILAND; MALAYSIA; INDONESIA; SINGAPORE	0.441	2.09
12	TICKETS; TICKET; BUY; BUYING; PASS; ADVANCE; PLANE; BOUGHT; ROUND	0.308	2.04
13	CREDIT; CARD; CARDS; CASH; BANK	0.420	1.98
14	HONG; KONG	0.290	1.94
15	RICA; COSTA	0.260	1.94
16	DINNER; LUNCH; MEAL; RESTAURANT; TABLE; BREAKFAST; EAT; EATING; SIT; EVENING	0.409	1.88
17	PRAGUE; BUDAPEST; VIENNA; BERLIN; MUNICH	0.338	1.85
18	SOUTH; AMERICA; CENTRAL; AFRICA; NORTH; EAST	0.285	1.83
19	LAS; VEGAS	0.321	1.78
20	ENGLISH; SPEAK; LANGUAGE; SPEAKING; SPANISH; FRENCH; ITALIAN	0.395	1.75
21	PUBLIC; TRANSPORT; TRANSPORTATION; SYSTEM	0.282	1.73
22	BOX; SEARCH; ABOVE; THREADS; TYPE; CLICK	0.349	1.70
23	SEASON; RAINY; PEAK; HIGH; LOW; PRICES	0.309	1.69
24	QUESTION; FORUM; ANSWER; POST; SPECIFIC; QUESTIONS; ASKED; ANSWERS; POSTING; POSTED; ORIGINAL	0.324	1.67

Table 4 (continued)

25	TRAVELLERS; FELLOW; SOLO; TRAVELERS; TRAVELLER; FEMALE	0.231	1.66

Note: Coherence (NPMI) - Normalized Pointwise Mutual Information looks at how often the top words co-occur across the dataset. Eigenvalue - How much the topic contributes to explaining the data structure. It represents the amount of variance (information) that the topic explains. Higher eigenvalue = stronger, more influential topic.

Returning to the research questions, several conclusions can be drawn. RQ1 examined aspects of solo travellers' consumption behaviour. The analysis revealed three recurring themes in the forum discussions: financial considerations, safety concerns, and gender-related issues. These themes should be interpreted as important concerns expressed by solo travellers rather than as characteristics that are necessarily unique to them, since the study does not provide a direct comparison with general travel behaviour. R: 'I don't want to spend a lavish amount of money, but I am also not on a super-strict budget.' R: 'Go to booking.com and search for hotels. That will be your biggest single cost.' Questions about safety are connected to insurance, staying safe during travel (also with a focus on women travelling solo) and destinations. R: 'I find safety is far more about how one behaves than it is about where one is. Behave in a safe manner and chances are you'll be just fine.'

RQ2 focuses on the consumption behaviour of solo female travellers. Gender was identified based on self-reported information provided by forum participants at registration; however, the accuracy of this data cannot be assured. There were many topics in this area. Mostly women were asking about safe destinations for women, meeting other local or travelling women and safety during transportation. R: 'There will be many women wandering, driving, on public transport travelling around alone.' R: 'I was really nervous travelling to Greece, (and as a black female, I was worried about the possible racism I may face, but I didn't at all)...' R: 'But I agree that for single female travellers strongly Muslim countries are likely not a great idea. There are other places that are similar for other segments of travellers.' R: 'I don't think Jordan is a very good choice for solo female travellers...' Solo travellers do not select destinations solely because they are suitable for solo travel; for example R: 'As a solo traveller I do not choose my destinations based on being a solo traveller - I choose destinations that I want to visit. My travel status has zero to do with it.' Another traveller has different reasons for visiting, stating: 'I often choose my destination by weather first and then how difficult visas going to be, once I have those two things sorted, I start looking at things that I really want to experience in a place.'

RQ3 was asking about the most frequently mentioned destinations by solo travellers. Our analysis indicates a substantial focus on various regions. Europe emerged prominently in

discussions, with 8,029 cases, followed by mentions of America in 2,368 cases, Australia in 2,346 cases and Asia in 2,322 cases.

DISCUSSION

When contrasting the outcomes of our investigation with those of other researchers, certain recurring themes emerge. The three themes identified in this study—finance, safety, and gender—are well supported by existing literature. In addition, previous research by Yang et al. (2022a) and Kachru et al. (2021) highlights two further themes: autonomy/self-actualization and structured social interaction.

Building on the findings of Zavodna (2024), who examined patterns of behavior among senior travelers on TripAdvisor, several parallels can be identified. Analysis of discussions on TripAdvisor indicates that seniors predominantly focus on topics such as insurance, tour operators, payment processes, destinations, and customer service. Within these domains, their primary concerns are related to health, safety, and the overall quality of services. Solo travel is not seen as a major barrier—many seniors reported confidently traveling alone or joining groups in the final destination. Moreover, findings of Goodwin and Lockshin (1992), who uncovered discriminatory practices against solo travellers such as single supplements in the tour, cruise and accommodation sectors, our study reached similar conclusions. Participants in forums often discussed single supplement payments and strategies to avoid them, indicating a shared concern about marketing practices that emphasise togetherness and discriminate against solo consumers. Similar findings are reported by Massidda et al. (2022). They note that solo travelers incur higher per-capita costs due to single supplements on rooms and tours, and often compensate by reallocating their budgets—spending more on accommodation while reducing expenditures on food and transport (e.g., opting for public transport and casual dining)

A recent study conducted by Bernard et al. (2022) identified perceived risk and safety as a primary constraint for solo female travellers, a finding reflected in the consumption behaviour of solo travellers in our study. This research also highlighted constraints related to fear or uneasiness stemming from participants' familial ties, where family commitments and lack of support influenced travel constraints. Similar results were observed in the study by Wilson and Little (2008), who emphasised spatial constraints, often termed the 'geography of women's travel fears,' as significant factors. Additionally, Teng et al. (2023) found out in their research that solo women display higher risk perception, avoid unsafe products, and seek women-only or central lodging.

An examination of solo travel through the work of Daniels (2008) and Falconer (2011) reveals a predominant focus on women's assessments of risks and safety. They note the existence of dedicated chapters on women's safety in travel guidebooks. In our study, guidebooks like Lonely Planet emerged as a noteworthy topic, ranking ninth in the extracted themes. Respondents endorsed guidebooks as credible sources for solo travel, a sentiment echoed by Caruana et al. (2008) and Elsrud (2005). Additionally, these researchers observed that gendered discourses, mediated through guidebooks like Lonely Planet, could potentially limit the actions and subject positions of women engaging in solo backpacking.

Overall, the topics are connected to frequent topics in the literature and found by experts. However, discussions and questions on TripAdvisor revolve more around recommendations in the most common two to three specific areas and around questions about the most common two or three problems. The questions are of a purely practical nature, i.e. they reflect people's real insight into what they expect during travel or experience. This may also be indicated by the frequent usage of 'year/s ago' or 'good luck'.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes significant findings to the knowledge base of professionals in the tourism industry. The practical and managerial implications of this research extend to tourism destination managers, offering valuable insights into the specific consumption behaviour of solo travellers in the realm of travel.

As a recommended source for destination marketing, this study provides a foundation for building strategies that capitalise on destinations perceived as safe and suitable for solo travellers. It serves as an informative resource for shaping the offerings of tourism entities. For effective communication of these offerings, it is beneficial to concentrate on four primary categories: 1) Health concerns, 2) Money concerns, 3) Meeting people concerns and 4) Transport concerns. Using these categories as focal points can strengthen the effectiveness of destination marketing efforts in catering to the unique preferences and considerations of solo travellers. Practical implications of this study include several recommendations for practitioners (hotel managers, destination managers,…): 1) It would be helpful for solo travellers to add information about practical things in the destination, this includes payments – especially about credit and debit card usage, visas, safety, health risks, doctors nearby, daily budget, exchange rates, currency etc. 2) Solo travellers often want to meet new people, give them information on where to meet local people or where they can meet other travellers. 3) Give information about

safety in the destination with the focus of women (solo travelling). 4) Provide tips on what to visit in the destination, with a focus on solo travellers (e.g., places, restaurants).

Several limitations should be acknowledged in the interpretation of our findings. Firstly, it is important to recognise that a considerable segment of solo travellers may abstain from participating in online discussions, leading to potential sampling bias. This implies that the insights gained from our study might not be fully representative of the entire spectrum of solo travellers, as those who refrain from engaging in online discourse may hold distinct perspectives. Secondly, the authenticity of the information provided by online discussants remains a challenge. Verification of the accuracy of self-disclosed information about travel behaviour and preferences is inherently difficult, introducing an element of uncertainty into our study results. Trustworthiness and reliability of the data are contingent upon the honesty and transparency of the individuals sharing their experiences on the TripAdvisor forums. False postings remain a persistent challenge for social networking services.

In this study, data were collected exclusively from the Solo Travel forum. As a result, our analysis is limited to the perspectives of individuals who self-identify as solo travellers. Consequently, we were not able to compare solo traveler behavior with general travel behavior, which would have been particularly relevant for addressing Research Question 1 and Research Question 3.

Furthermore, it's crucial to note that this study focused exclusively on English-speaking forums, thereby limiting the generalisability of our findings to a specific linguistic and cultural context. Non-English-speaking solo travellers may exhibit diverse consumption behaviours and preferences that are not captured within the scope of our research. Lastly, the participants contributing to discussions on TripAdvisor are inherently a specific subgroup with distinct interests and characteristics. This selectivity introduces a potential source of bias, as the preferences and behaviours of TripAdvisor participants may not be wholly representative of the broader population of solo travellers. Generalisations from our study should be made cautiously, considering the unique characteristics of those who actively engage on the TripAdvisor platform.

In future research endeavours, it would be insightful to delve into several key questions. Firstly, the investigation could focus on understanding why Europe consistently emerges as a top-recommended destination for solo travellers in forums and what distinctive advantages it holds over other continents. Additionally, exploring how destination management can leverage these advantages could provide valuable insights for the industry. Moreover, given the identification of certain destinations as particularly advantageous for solo travellers, there is an

opportunity to extract lessons from these examples and to consider strategies for replicating their success. Another crucial area for exploration lies in the realm of technology's impact on solo travel. This involves questioning and scrutinising the role of technological tools such as mobile apps and social media in facilitating and shaping the overall experiences and decision-making processes of solo travellers.

Furthermore, the research could extend to investigating the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of solo travel, with a dedicated focus on sustainable practices and responsible tourism. Understanding the ecological and social implications of solo travel can contribute to fostering more conscientious travel behaviour. The potential health benefits and challenges associated with solo travel present another avenue for enquiry, encompassing aspects such as stress reduction, mindfulness and the overall impact on the well-being of individuals undertaking solo journeys. Exploring the intersection between solo travel and digital nomadism could shed light on how the prevalence of remote work influences travel patterns and contributes to the unique lifestyle of solo travellers. This aspect reflects the evolving dynamics of work and travel in the contemporary landscape.

Deeper insights into the gender-specific experiences of solo travel, considering safety concerns, societal perceptions and the influence of gender on individual travel choices, represent rich areas for research. Understanding these dynamics can inform more inclusive and responsive travel practices. Assessing the economic contributions of solo travellers to local economies, including an exploration of spending patterns, accommodation preferences and participation in local activities, offers a comprehensive perspective on the economic impact of solo travel. Lastly, investigating the accessibility of destinations for solo travellers with disabilities, including an examination of challenges and opportunities for enhancing inclusivity in solo travel, aligns with the broader goal of promoting accessible and equitable travel experiences. Each of these research avenues contributes to a more nuanced understanding of solo travel, enriching the discourse on this evolving and diverse travel phenomenon.

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