Seeking for well-being: Solo Traveler's Preference on Tourism Program

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Abstract:

Solo travel is one of the fastest-growing sectors in tourism. However, this lucrative market has not received enough attention from practitioners and scholars. This work investigated whether travelers using different modes (solo vs. group) prefer wellness tourism programs differently and the underlying mechanisms.

Study 1 used secondary data on wellness-related online reviews, revealing that solo (vs. group) travelers mentioned wellness more often and wrote longer reviews that received more likes. Study 2 showed that the need for eudaimonic well-being mediated this relationship, while Study 3 explored how time landmark moderated this mediation effect. Our work helps tourism practitioners better understand the solo travel market and develop effective strategies.

Keywords: solo travel, wellness tourism, the need for the eudaimoni well-being

Track: Tourism marketing

1. Introduction of Paper

In recent years, solo travel has surged in popularity, becoming one of the fastest-growing segments in tourism (Bianchi, 2016). A Skyscanner survey found that 54% of travelers plan to travel alone in 2023 (Skyscanner.net, 2022). Scholars attribute this shift to changing attitudes toward marriage, family, and social norms, coupled with increased lifestyle personalization (Klinenberg, 2012). The rise in unmarried individuals and dual-income, no-kids households (DINKs) reflects growing independence, especially among women (Bianchi, 2022; Pereira & Silva, 2018). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further isolated social interactions (Yang et al., 2022), encouraging individuals to embrace solitary leisure activities, particularly solo travel (Vatyam, 2020). As the market for solo travel expands, it attracts more attention from tourism professionals. However, when searching for tourism services, the recommendations for solo and group travelers often overlap, despite differing motivations. Solo travelers seek independence, self-reflection, and personal growth (Sanchez de Rojas, 2020), while group travelers prioritize social connections and shared experiences (Garcia-Rada & Kim, 2021). This raises the question of whether solo and group travel modes lead to different preferences for tourism programs.

We hypothesize that solo travelers will prefer wellness tourism programs, such as sound therapy, which offer a peaceful, introspective experience away from distractions. We propose that this preference is mediated by a greater need for eudaimonic well-being among solo travelers. Furthermore, we consider boundary conditions: the effect will persist when framed by an end-time landmark (e.g., year's end), but will diminish with a fresh-time landmark (e.g., year's beginning).

To test our hypotheses, we conducted **three studies**. Study 1 utilized web crawler technology to analyze wellness reviews on TripAdvisor, demonstrating the positive impact of solo travel. Two online experiments examined the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being and the moderated mediation effect of time landmarks.

Our research **contributes** to the literature on solo consumption, well-being, and wellness tourism. First, it enriches the understanding of solo travel, addressing the gap in literature regarding differences between solo and group consumption modes. Second, it explores the role of well-being as a motivational factor in travel decisions. Lastly, this study connects demand-side travel modes with supply-side wellness tourism programs, offering practitioners insights on attracting different traveler segments using temporal cues.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 The solo travel and group travel

We define solo travel as traveling alone without familiar companions (Leary et al., 2003). Current research primarily explores the motivations and constraints of solo travel. Key motivations include self-related factors such as the desire for freedom, independence, and reflection (e.g., Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Seow & Brown, 2018). Additionally, constraints can arise from internal factors (e.g., insecurity), interpersonal factors (e.g., family concerns), and structural factors (e.g., time limitations) that inhibit planning and execution (e.g., Wilson & Little, 2005). However, solo travel is becoming increasingly popular as these constraints diminish, reflecting greater individual independence and lower social connections. Consequently, solo travelers often seek inner self-related tourism experiences.

In contrast, group travel involves at least one familiar companion (e.g., Khoa & Chan, 2023). Group travelers prioritize the happiness and comfort of their companions, focusing on the needs of the entire group (Huta, 2016; Huta & Ryan, 2010). Motivations for group travel are often relationship-oriented, including enhancing social bonds and creating shared experiences (e.g., Kelley et al., 2019). Joint travelers also prefer extraordinary tourism programs with high sensory stimulation, which foster shared, profound impressions (Garcia-Rada & Kim, 2021). Thus, there are distinct differences in motivations and program preferences between solo and group travel modes, but the literature on this topic remains underdeveloped.

2.2 The connection between the travel mode and the wellness tourism programs

Wellness tourism refers to travel activities aimed at enhancing personal well-being, such as practicing yoga in nature or experiencing the healing properties of local instruments (Global Wellness Institute, 2023). This field encompasses six wellness components: physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, social, and environmental health, with this study focusing on physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. According to Siess (2022), wellness tourism seeks to promote individual well-being and reduce stress through relaxing activities like yoga and meditation, typically set in natural environments.

Characteristics of Solo Travel. Solo travel uniquely allows individuals to escape daily distractions, facilitating full immersion in their travel experiences. This immersion can provide a beneficial escape from the pressures of work and interpersonal relationships, promoting self-repair (Li et al., 2020). Solo travelers face fewer decision-making constraints,

as they do not need to negotiate plans with companions, allowing for greater personal self-focus (e.g., Osman et al., 2020). In contrast, group travel often activates public self-awareness, leading individuals to compromise their preferences for the group's sake. Thus, solo travel emphasizes authentic feelings and self-examination, fostering self-reflection and personal growth (Diener, 1979; Eidelman & Silvia, 2010). Furthermore, solo travel aligns more with eudaimonic pursuits rather than hedonistic ones, as it provides time and space for self-exploration and identity discovery (Sanchez de Rojas, 2020). Group travel, on the other hand, often emphasizes hedonistic and social values (Bastos & Brucks, 2017; Caprariello & Reis, 2013). Thus, solo travel is a vital avenue for self-companionship, self-discovery, and personal growth, essential for pursuing meaning.

In this context, we posit that both wellness tourism (supply side) and solo travel (consumer side) share the objective of enhancing the connection with the self to achieve holistic well-being. Therefore, wellness tourism programs may better meet the needs of individuals who travel alone compared to those who travel with others. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals who travel alone will exhibit a more positive attitude toward wellness tourism programs compared to those traveling with others.

2.3 The need for eudaimonic well-being

Well-being theory distinguishes between two types of well-being: eudaimonic and hedonic (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Hedonic well-being focuses on the pursuit of pleasure and comfort, often associated with immediate gratification (e.g., Halem et al., 2024). In contrast, eudaimonic well-being emphasizes living in alignment with one’s true self and values, highlighting meaning, purpose, and self-realization (Halem et al., 2024). Thus, solo travel appears to align more closely with the pursuit of eudaimonic well-being.

Ryan et al. (2008) identified four motivations for eudaimonic well-being: 1) seeking intrinsic goals (e.g., self-growth); 2) autonomous behavior; 3) mindfulness and high private self-consciousness; and 4) engaging in activities that fulfill psychological needs (e.g., independence). These motivations resonate with the needs of solo travelers and the benefits of wellness programs. Consequently, solo travelers may exhibit a heightened need for eudaimonic well-being, leading to a stronger preference for wellness programs. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Solo travel (vs. group travel) induces a greater need for eudaimonic well-being, resulting in a higher preference for wellness tourism programs.

2.4 The time landmark

Dai et al. (2014) explored the "fresh start effect," which suggests that individuals are more likely to pursue goals after significant temporal landmarks, such as the beginning of a new year, month, or week. Their research showed a marked increase in Google searches for "diet" and gym attendance at these times, indicating that fresh starts can motivate behaviors aligned with eudaimonic well-being, such as setting personal goals. In contrast, studies on temporal endpoints (e.g., year-end, month-end) indicate that these markers heighten awareness of life's significance, leading to emotional responses and a focus on hedonic activities (Ye & Zhou, 2019).

Based on this, we propose that when the time landmark is an end-time cue (e.g., "Spring is ending; enjoy solo wellness travel"), solo travel may heighten the need for eudaimonic well-being. This mode encourages personal reflection and self-improvement, resulting in a stronger preference for wellness tourism programs that emphasize these benefits. Conversely, group travel in such contexts may prioritize hedonic experiences (e.g., "Spring is ending; enjoy wellness travel with friends"), making group travelers less inclined to engage in wellness programs. However, when a fresh time landmark is present, both solo and group travelers may be equally motivated to participate in wellness tourism as they perceive ample time for eudaimonic pursuits. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: When presented with an end-time landmark, solo travel (vs. group travel) will induce a greater need for eudaimonic well-being, leading to a higher preference for wellness tourism programs. This effect will not be present under fresh-time landmark conditions.

3 Methodology

3.1 Study 1

To assess the impact of solo travel on preferences for wellness tourism programs, we employed web crawler technology to gather public reviews from TripAdvisor.

Data Collection. We collected 11,822 reviews of wellness tourism programs from TripAdvisor, covering the period from March 2015 to August 2024. The focus was on service providers with over 50 wellness-related reviews globally, identified by the keyword

"wellness". We extracted data including usernames, locations, travel dates, modes, post dates, review content, and user ratings. The travel modes were coded as follows: solo = 1, friends = 2, family = 3, couple = 4, business = 5. We also calculated review lengths for further analysis.

Data Analysis. Wellness-related reviews, to evaluate the effect of solo travel on wellness program preferences, we conducted a Chi-square analysis. Results indicated that 13.5% of reviews in the solo travel condition were wellness-related, significantly higher than those for friends (7.4%), family (6.0%), and couples (10.1%) (χ^2 (4) = 106.66, $p < .001$). Notably, there was no significant difference between solo and business travel groups (13.5% vs. 10.2%), as business travel can also be considered a form of solo travel. Overall, the solo travel condition demonstrated greater concern for wellness.

Review Length and Likes: We performed a Multivariate General Linear Model Analysis on review length and likes. Significant differences were found between solo and group conditions for both review length (F (4, 11813) = 38.89, $p < .001$) and likes (F (4, 11813) = 7.62, $p < .001$). Planned contrast analysis, using the solo condition as the reference group, revealed that solo travelers wrote significantly longer reviews compared to friends ($p < .001$; 95% CI: -15.01, -10.21), family ($p < .001$; 95% CI: -16.98, -11.24), and couples ($p < .001$; 95% CI: -6.65, -1.97). Similarly, solo reviews received more likes than those from group travelers (solo vs. friends, $p = .029$, 95% CI [-.07, -.004]; solo vs. family, $p = .002$, 95% CI [-.09, -.020]; solo vs. couples, $p = .013$, 95% CI [-.07, -.008]). These findings suggest that solo travelers invest more effort in their reviews, yielding more useful content than group travelers. Thus, these results preliminarily support our hypothesis (H1).

3.2 Study 2

This study aims to replicate the effect of the solo travel on wellness tourism programs and verify the mediation role of the need for eudaimonic well-being. We conducted a scenario-based online study on the Prolific and 120 participants were recruited from the Prolific and were random assign into one of two groups, a between subject design (solo travel vs. group travel). Participants got £0.6 paid per person after finishing this study.

Procedure. We manipulate the travel mode. 1) We told the participants that, in the solo (or group) condition, "Now imaging that you would travel alone (or travel with friends) in Hawaii, United States. You have booked a hotel, named Kolani Hotel, for your staying and received the email of reservation confirmation from the hotel". Next, the participants read words, "Before arriving, you received an email about a wellness program provided by the

hotel. The email contents are as follows". Then we provided the detailed information (see Appendix A) about a wellness program offered by the hotel, this program address the healing power of the sound bath workshop, which help customers escape from their daily life's pressure.

2) After reading all words, participants were asked to indicate their willing to attend this program using three items (e.g., "how likely are you to register this wellness workshop?" (1 = Extremely unlikely, 7 = Extremely likely; Morwitz, 1997). Next, four items were used to measure the need for the eudaimonic of well-being (e.g., "The workshop should be purposeful for me"; α = .958; Kokkoris, 2016) on the 7-point scale. Then we asked them a manipulation check question "Please indicate that all answers you provided are based on the ____ scenario, (1) travel alone; (2) travel with friends, (3) not sure". Finally, they reported their demographic information and be disbanded.

Manipulation check. Four of participant did not pass the manipulation check question, hence, 116 participants (50.9% Female) were included for further analyzing.

Willing to participant. To test the effect of the solo travel on the preference for the wellness tourism program, an One-way ANOVA Analysis on the willing to participant showed that there was a significant difference (F (1, 115) = 6.56, p = .012) between the solo travel condition and the group travel condition. That is, the solo traveler reported a higher willing to attend the workshop than the group traveler ($M_{\text{solo travel}}$ = 4.77, SD = 1.67; $M_{\text{group travel}}$ = 3.94, SD = 1.85). That is, the solo travel would make tourists show a higher preference on wellness tourism activities than the group travel. Thus, H1 is supported again.

The need for the eudaimonic well-being. To verify the mediation, we performed an One-way ANOVA on the need for the eudaimonic well-being. The results manifested a significant difference between the solo and group condition (F (1, 115) = 4.66, p = .033). The participants in the solo condition had a higher need for the eudaimonic well-being than that of the group condition ($M_{\text{solo travel}}$ = 5.47, SD = 1.00; $M_{\text{group travel}}$ = 4.96, SD = 1.43). That is, the solo traveler would generate a higher need for the eudaimonic well-being compared with the travelers in group travel. These results provided preliminarily evidence for H2.

Mediation Analysis. To furthermore attest the mediation of the eudaimonic well-being, a mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4, Hayes, 2017) was performed. In this model, the travel mode is the independent variable (solo condition = 1, group condition = 0), the willing to participant is the dependent variable, the need for the eudaimonic well-being is the mediator. The results showed a significant indirect effect "solo traveler → the need for the eudaimonic well-being → willing to participant" (B = .41, SE = .20, 95% CI = [0.83, 0.04).

This means, the solo travel would predict a higher need for the eudaimonic well-being, then induces a stronger preference on wellness tourism program. Hence, these finding provide substantial evidence for H2.

3.3 Study 3

A 2 (solo vs. group travel) by 2 (end-time vs. fresh-time landmark) between-subject design was conducted to test H3.

Procedure. Three hundred and eighty participants were recruited from the Prolific. We manipulated the travel mode as that of in the study 2 and also manipulated the time landmark by showing the temporal cue. In the end-time (vs.end-time) landmark and the solo (group) travel condition, we presented a advertising on a tourism program ("Autumn is so short so you won't have that much time to travel alone for exploring yourselves! Check out wellness hiking experiences in Hong Kong" vs. "Autumn just began so you will have a lot of time to travel with your loved ones! Check out wellness hiking experiences in Hong Kong"). Then, participants evaluated their willing to join in this program and the need for eudaimonic well-being as that of the study 2. Finally, participants answered the manipulation check questions and provided their demographic information.

Willing to participation. The two-way ANOVA Analysis revealed a significant interaction effect (F (1, 376) = 3.96, p = .047). The further simple effect analysis indicated in the end-time landmark condition, the participants in the solo travel mode condition showed a higher willing to participant in the wellness tourism ($M_{\text{solo travel}}$ = 4.76, SD = 1.60; $M_{\text{group travel}}$ = 4.03, SD = 1.63; F (1, 376) = 9.94, p = .002). But there was no difference between these two travel modes for the fresh-time landmark condition ($M_{\text{solo travel}}$ = 4.92, SD = 1.65; $M_{\text{group travel}}$ = 4.41, SD = 1.51; F (1, 376) = 0.096, p = .756).

The need for the eudaimonic well-being. The interaction effect was founded (F (1, 376) = 6.26, p = .013). Additionally, participants assigned in to the solo mode condition, indicated a higher need for the eudaimonic well-being in the end-time group ($M_{\text{solo travel}}$ = 5.54, SD = 1.18; $M_{\text{group travel}}$ = 5.05, SD = 1.32; F (1, 376) = 7.69, p = .005), but there was no difference between for the fresh-time landmark conditions ($M_{\text{solo travel}}$ = 5.40, SD = 1.24; $M_{\text{group travel}}$ = 5.52, SD = 0.95; F (1, 376) = 0.539, p = .463). This results supported the H2 preliminarily.

To verify the H3, we performed the moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 8, Hayes, 2017). The results manifested a significant indirect effect (B = .47, SE = .19, 95% CI = [0.11, 0.85), and this effect only exited in the end-time landmark condition (B = .37, SE

= .14, 95% CI = [0.64, 0.09) but not was found in the fresh-time condition (B = .10, SE = .12, 95% CI = [-0.14, 0.10). These results provided evidence for the H3.

4. Conclusions and Limitations

Conclusion. This study links solo travel to wellness tourism, concluding that solo travelers prefer wellness programs more than group travelers due to their higher need for eudaimonic well-being. However, this positive effect diminishes under fresh-time landmarks. These findings have managerial implications for tourism professionals. The research not only examines the impact of solo travel on individual well-being but also its influence on the broader tourism environment, highlighting both internal and external effects. This dual focus provides significant wellness benefits for travelers while generating economic value for tourism enterprises, supporting local employment, and preserving traditional cultures at tourist destinations.

Limitations. Alternative explanations, such as self-autonomy, should be considered. This paper specifically explores the impact of solo travel on self-related wellness tourism programs, but future research should also examine interaction-related and environmental wellness activities.

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