

MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN SOLO TRAVELLERS

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ABSTRACT

The concept of female solo traveler, despite recent, has become a relevant tourist segment. As tourists, these women are looking for journeys that bring more than a trip from one place to another. They choose to go alone in the pursuit of adventure, independence, feeling of personal fulfillment, individuality and escape. They do not travel alone because they have no choice or because they are loners. They are driven by specific and consciousness motivations.

In this conceptual work, a set of solo travel motivations are categorized based on literature review, in order to identify why women choose to travel alone. Even if it is a market that has not been very explored and studied has gained numerous supporters around the world, translating into an expressive impact not only in sociological terms, but also in its tourist experience.

An extensive literature review focusing on the concept of tourism motivations and experiences provide a framework that allows assesses the specific motivations that driven women into travel alone and the corresponding solo traveler experience dimensions. The multi-dimension scales considers eight motivations dimensions: (1) escape, (2) self-identity and development, (3) challenge, (4) connectedness with others, (5) learning, (6) adventure, (7) new life perspectives, and (8) autonomy; and five experience dimensions: (1) sense, (2) feel, (3) think, (4) act, and (5) relate.

The focus of this article is to explore the relationship between these motivations with women solo travel experiences providing a conceptual model.

KEY WORDS: women, motivations, solo traveler, experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The earliest know female travellers were primarily pilgrims, making the journey to Holy Land and Jerusalem. Since the end of the nineteen-century, there has been a set of social and political facts and changes that increase the female participation in contemporary travel (Wilson & Harris, 2006).

Nowadays, women are increasingly choosing to travel alone (Wilson & Little, 2008). Western women in today's society have increased options, which have opened up a range of tourism and recreation choices (Wilson & Little, 2005, p.159).

Within this context the present study aims to identify the main motivations of women solo travelers and relate these motivations with a specific tourism experiences' dimensions.

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traveler experience dimensions. The multi-dimension scales considers eight motivations dimensions: (1) escape, (2) self-identity and development, (3) challenge, (4) connectedness with others, (5) learning, (6) adventure, (7) new life perspectives, and (8) autonomy; and five experience dimensions: (1) sense, (2) feel, (3) think, (4) act, and (5) relate, based on Schmitt' model tourism experience (Schmitt, 1999).

3. THE CONCEPT OF SOLO TRAVELER

In some way solo travel was and is regarded as a journey travel invoking a kind of spiritual travel. And this relation of tourism with the need to meet spiritual needs and cultural enrichment goes back to pilgrims, and the ideia of trying to find meaning in their lives closely linked to the divine and religious issue (Cohen, 1979, Silva 2011).

However, this relationship of experience with tourism was not only related with religious reasons but instead with deep social transformations. The counterculture movements evident in the 1960s, more prominently in

the US, profoundly affected generations around the world, introducing new mindsets and ways of facing the journey. The hippie movement had a deep impact on youth values, with new behaviors and sensory and sensorial experiences promoting the desire and feeling of freedom (Groppo, 2004).

Related with the pioneering character and behavioral experimentation of the hippie counterculture, the drifter concept arises directly linked to this important sociological background. A drifter seeks adventure, faces risks and anticipates new tourist attractions (Enzensberger, 1985). Cohen (1972) defines a drifter as venturing 'furthest away from his home country. (...). The drifter has no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel.'

In the 1990s backpacker terminology begins to be commonly used, as a variant of explorer or drifter. This tourist was recognized as young, budget tourists on extended holiday (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). Most backpackers travel alone or in small groups, look for cheap accommodations and are quite flexible in the type of tourism (Scheyvens, 2002). They seek experiences, and want to explore unusual places, being mainly a journey of discovery (Haigh 1995).

Although the terminology of backpacking tourism is frequently used, nowadays, the concept of solo traveling become more common, defining people who want to travel alone and seek to live the feeling of discovery.

4. SOLO TRAVELERS WOMEN MOTIVATIONS

Tourists in general are moved towards search of experiences that provide escape, freedom and pleasure (Wilson & Little, 2005).

The relationship between travel and experience is the key point of why women choose to travel alone. The goal is not

the journey per se, but the involvement and the acquired competences. Solo women travelers seek adventure, social interaction, education and self-understanding (Bond, 1997).

Despite the fact that each woman has her own reasons to travel alone, it is possible to recognize some common motivations. And the main motivations that lead women to choose to travel alone are the need to get out of their comfort zone in order to develop a sense of autonomy and individuality (Wilson & Little, 2008), and the challenge and personal growth (Chiang & Jongaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).

Wilson and Harris (2006), after analyzing several testimonies of female travelers, introduce the concept of meaningful travel. The journey translates into the search for something much more valuable than relaxation and leisure. These women want to evaluate they own values, develop their identities and acquire knowledge.

Another relevant reason it's the importance of socialization for these tourists. The human development factor, previously stated is reliable with the ties created, the interaction with other travelers and the autochthonous (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006).

Despite the significant sociological aspects, motivations related with culture and learning are also mentioned in tourism literature. The woman solo traveler desires the escape of the daily life, looking for diverse cultural contexts other than those to which she is used to. This issue is associated to the duality about familiarity vs novelty when describing explorers and drifters (Crompton, 1979; Bond,1997; Silva, 2011).

Finally, and in a broader sense, all these factors can be grouped together, agreeing that a female solo traveler seeks an adventure, a memorable experience, and leisure (Bond, 1997) as we can see in table below.

Table 1. Main motivations dimensions of women solo travelers and research studies

Challenge and Overcoming	(Bond, 1997; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Chiang & Jongaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010)
Self-recognition	(Wilson & Harris, 2006)
Contact with other travelers	(Jordan and Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006)
New life prespectives	(Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Chiang & Jongaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).
Escape to routine	(Crompton, 1979; Bond 1997)
Learning, New experiences	(Crompton, 1979; Bond, 1997)
Autonomy	Bond; 1997; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Chiang e Jongaratnam, 2006; Wilson and Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).
Adventure and Leisure	(Bond, 1997)

Source: Own production

5. TOURISM EXPERIENCE

According Pine and Gilmore (1999), a tourist experience can be defined as a “set of activities in which individuals engage on personal terms” (p.12). For Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007), who analyzed this concept from the consumers’ perspective, a tourist experience is something “pleasant, engaging, and memorable” (p.120), allowing each tourist to build his or her own travel experiences so that these satisfy a wide range of personal needs, from pleasure to a search for meaning.

Schmitt (1999) conceptualized experience as individual and shared experiences. The model comprises *sensing*, *feeling* and *thinking* in individual experiences and acting and relating are considered as shared experiences (Loureiro, 2014).

5.1. Sense

Sense dimension is allied with sensory experiences. Appeal to the senses (hearing, taste, touch, sight, smell) with the aim of creating sensorial experiences, increasing value to the products.

5.2. Feel

This experience dimension is related with affective experiences, creating feelings, moods and emotions.

5.3. Think

The think dimension is associated with cognitive experiences that engage tourists creatively, generating thought, surprise and/or provocation.

5.4. Act

Act dimension is concerned with physical experiences, behaviors, lifestyles. Create physical experiences aimed at the physical development of the consumer showing him / her alternative forms to the lifestyle and interactions.

5.5. Relate

Relate dimension is linked with experiences of social identity, reference groups or cultures. This dimension contains aspects of the other dimensions mentioned above. This is of identification with the individual, related to his self, integration, as for example: with his social and cultural identity.

6. METHODOLOGY

A conceptual model is proposed, based on the previously presented literature review, which additionally provided the grounds for defining dimensions and suggesting the operationalization of the motivation and experience constructs and corresponding dimensions.

From the literature review, it is accepted that motivation is multidimensional. Tourists pursue to satisfy not one single need but a number of distinctive needs concurrently. Thus, a review of literature was conducted to develop a list of motivations items, which are generally used to measure tourism and travel motivations, adapting to women solo travel.

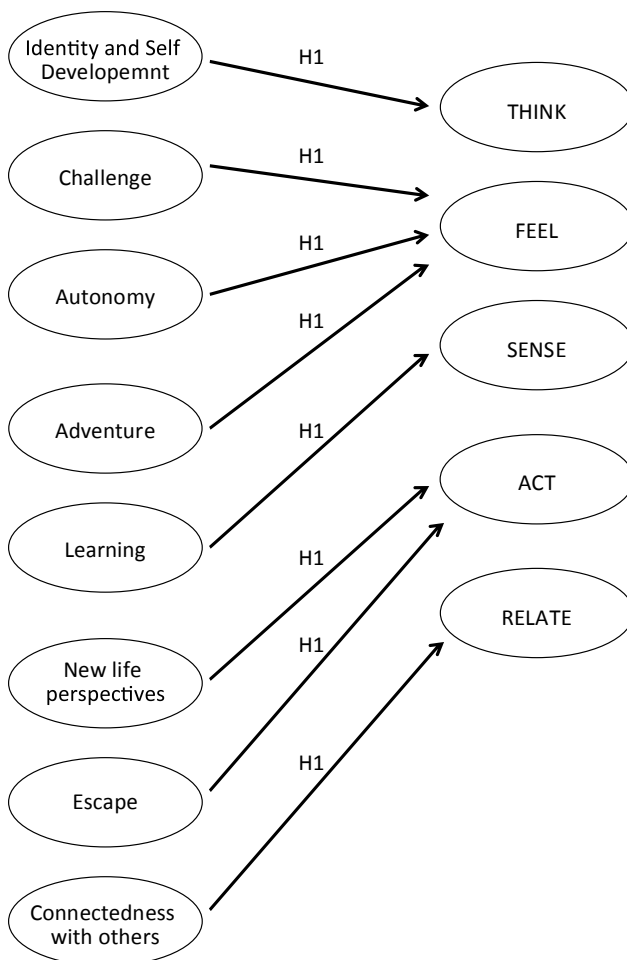
On the other hand, the travel experience variables considered pre-established dimensions and scales from the tourism literature review based on the experience model of Schmitt (1999), in which *thinking*, *sensing*, *feeling*, *acting* and *relating* are considered the experience dimensions.

7. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model “Women Solo Travelers: Motivations and Experiences” proposed considers eight motivations dimensions and five dimensions of tourism experiences.

The hypothesized conceptual model that is suggested is described in Fig. 1. This model recommends that each dimension of motivations will positively predict particular dimension of tourism experience, rising in the following eight hypotheses.

Figure 1. Hypothesized Conceptual Model: Women Solo Travelers: Motivations and Experiences



Source: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/target_review.htm, EC (2015b:3)

H1 – *The identity and self-development motivations positively influences the think dimension of solo women travel experiences*

The concept of identity arises from the multiple and differentiated roles an individual play in society (Lynch, 2007).

Independent travel is perceived as a way to women search for self-identity and self-development due the meaningful travel it is travelling alone (Wilson & Harris, 2006).

In this sense, it is hypothesized that identity and self-development motivations positively influences the think experience dimension, generating and improving thoughts and cognitive experiences.

H2 – The challenge motivations positively influences the feel dimension of solo women travel experiences

Dealing with the challenge of travel alone, many women reported a strong feel of empowerment (Wilson & Harris, 2006). In this way it is suggest that challenge motivations positively influence the feel dimension of solo women travel experiences.

H3 – The autonomy motivations positively influences the feel dimension of solo women travel experiences

It is assumed that the autonomy motivations positively influences the feel dimension of solo women travel experiences because for women the possibility of making their own choices and control their own actions create feelings of control and independence (Wilson & Harris, 2006), a kind of a freedom sense that improve the affective experience of travel alone.

H4 – The adventure motivations positively influences the feel dimension of solo women travel experiences

Solo travel is also about an adventure experience. In fact, travelling alone per se is an adventure (Elsurd, 2005).

Adventure/excitement motivations in tourism are associated with deliberate risk, danger, and sensation seeking (Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004). Thus, it is suggest that adventure motivations positively influences the feel dimension of solo women travel experiences.

H5 – The learning motivations positively influences the sense dimension of solo women travel experiences

People desire to learn new things and develop new insights and skills because of the tourism experiences (Poria, Reichel & Brian, 2006; Richards, 2002; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). People learn about the world and expand their knowledge because of eye-opening travel experiences (Tuang & Ritchie, 2011) and the multisensory-encounter experiences (Kastenholz et al, 2012).

Within this, it is proposed that the learning motivations positively influences the sense dimension of solo women travel experiences because predispose women to a sensorial and memorable tourism experience.

H6 – The new life perspectives motivations positively influences the act dimension of solo women travel experiences

Independent travel is a meaningful part of people's lives and women in particular, through these experiences, reconsider their perspectives on life and ambition new ones (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).

Considering that the act dimension of the experience is concerning with behaviors and lifestyles (Schmitt, 1999), being the lifestyle the main dimension of act experience (Roberts & Sparks, 2006), it is suggested that the new life perspectives motivations positively influences the act dimension of solo women travel experiences.

H7 – The escape motivations positively influences the act dimension of solo women travel experiences

One of the most attractive tourism characteristics is the ability to provide different and intensive experiences in which the tourist's standard social structures and conventions are eliminated (Silva, Abrantes & Lages, 2009).

The desire to travel is usually associated with the desire to escape from the daily life routine. In case of the women solo travellers, women do not travel alone only to see new places but to get new experiences and to feel independent in a way to escape the pressure from society. Also, travelling alone for women is an escape from the domestic and family responsibilities and from the femininity that challenges the dominant masculine image of adventure (Elsrud, 2005).

Considering act dimension of the experience as a physical experience, behavior and lifestyles, which provides her alternative forms to the lifestyle and interactions, it is hypothesized that the escape motivations positively influences the act dimension of solo women travel experiences.

H8 – The connectedness with others motivations positively influences the relate dimension of solo women travel experiences

Tourism is a social phenomenon that allows people to develop social interaction, to satisfy social acceptance, approval and integration needs (Silva, Abrantes & Lages, 2009).

Independent travel allows women meet new persons, building personal connections, make new social friends networks and learning how to better relate with others (Wilson & Harris, 2006). So, it is suggest that the motivation of contact with others positively influences the relate dimension of solo women travel experience by promoting experiences of social and cultural identity and social and cultural integration.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The presented study provides a conceptual framework that relates women traveler preferences with tourism experiences, based on previous experience dimension model by Schmitt (1999).

Tourism is an experimental phenomenon (Frochot & Morrison, 2000) where experiences are sought in relation to feelings of motivation (den Breejen, 2007).

The women's motivations for independent travel and tourism experiences are related to the desire to learn, self-development, challenge themselves, find a sense of identity and autonomy, meet new people and experience new life and adventure moments. These motivations

influences the solo women travel experiences turning it into a memorable tourism experiences.

The study aims to increase social and scientific knowledge of motivations and experiences concerning with solo travelers in order to fulfill the existence research gap in tourism literature. It pretends also to deepen the discussion on gender and tourism and particularly the role of women in travel and tourism.

On the other hand, the study could have also practical and managerial implications for tourism destination managers providing a conceptual framework of solo women motivations travel. Managers should highlight the most significance aspects of their uniqueness like the destination culture, local way of life and activities that stimulate visitors' senses and feelings, imagination, lifestyles and social encounters.

Nevertheless, the model has some limitations to be considered. Despite the review of literature that was been undertaking, it possible that the study could omit and not consider other important dimensions of motivations or tourism experiences. Thus it is suggests the application of qualitative methodology in the future such as content analysis of travel blogs, ad forums in order to identifying another possible motivational dimensions.

Also, and due the fact that motivations change overtime depending on travel patterns behaviors, it could be interesting investigate the differences between first-time and repeat solo independent women travel.

Finally, the relationship between motivations and constraints could also be relevance to analyse in future research, particularly how the constraints women feel impact on their motivations to travel alone.

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