



Destination Choice and the Behavioural Patterns of Solo Travel Content Creators in Sri Lanka

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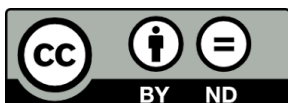
Abstract

This research study explores some unseen aspects of the lived experiences of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka with two main objectives. Namely, the destination choice and the behavioural patterns demonstrated during their solo travelling pre-, during, and post-stages. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to seek a structure of the lived experiences of the respondents, who are nine solo travel content creators on mainstream social media (Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram). The purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select the respondents. In-depth interviews were the primary data collection method, and the contents were used to supplement the interview data further. Thus, thematic and conventional content analyses were used, respectively. The content analysis also helped establish the study's trustworthiness through analytical triangulation. The selection of geographically unique and culturally rich destinations has become the top priority of the respondents' destination choices. Such destinations largely remain hidden or lesser known at the time of their discovery; according to the research findings, motivations to explore destinations as solitary cause the continuation of solo travelling. However, they tend to limit or discontinue solo travelling when it is familiar and hinders them. The implications of the study findings will be essential to understanding the lived experience of solo travellers who are also in the unique niche of 'content creators'. Further, it helps reveal the behavioural patterns by understanding the behavioural characteristics of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka of social, environmental and economic significance.

Keywords: Solo travelling, Destination choice, Behavioural patterns, Content creators, mainstream social media

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary context, the advent of digital platforms and social media has not only transformed how we experience and share our travels but has also given rise to a new increase in storytellers or travel content creators. These travel content creators, armed with cameras, laptops, and a passion for exploration, play a pivotal role in shaping how we perceive and engage with travel experiences. As they document their journeys, sharing vivid narratives, captivating visuals, and practical insights, they provide armchair travellers with a virtual window into the world's wonders. (Kim and Fesenmaier 2017). This phenomenon has gained significant attractiveness on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, blogs, and other social media channels, allowing these creators to gather dedicated audiences and influence travel trends.

Solo travelling has recently become a trend (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022). It is defined as travelling alone with no one else. Various travel activities, including backpacking, train journeys, self-driving, visiting friends and relatives, engaging in volunteer programs, embarking on day tours, and brief city getaways, constitute integral facets of solo exploration (Yang, 2021). Being in solitude and exploring new things are motivations for solo travelling, and most solo travellers try to have adventurous or relaxing experiences through their trips. According to Yang (2021), many solo travellers prefer to travel alone for freedom and flexibility. Solo travellers prefer to travel on an adventure, and some prefer to get authentic cultural experiences. Solo travellers show allocentric traits, so they like each other's different things. They have a lust for walking alone and enjoy the solitude greedily. Sri Lanka is a rich location for various activities (Wicramasooriya et al., 2020). Because tourists can do many tourism activities, Sri Lanka is a fine destination for solo travelling. Sri Lanka has recently become popular among female solo travellers worldwide and has been named one of the safest countries for female solo travellers (Life of Brit, n.d.).

Tourists prefer to share their unforgettable encounters on social media. Sharing the post-trip experience offers a chance to summarise the traveller's emotions and assessments as a narrative. This process exposes sentiments such as pride, enthusiasm, inspiration, frustration, irritability, animosity, nervousness, and fear among the travellers (Theobald, 2005). In this context, incorporating the solo travel experience into the content produced can be viewed as a significant factor.

Kim and Fesenmaier (2017) highlight the motivations for tourists sharing their travel experiences. Sharing the experience of a solo tourist is attractive and wonderful, among other content. Solo travellers represent a creative segment in postmodern society, and a comprehensive exploration of their behavioural patterns is required. Most of the available research was aimed at Western tourists (Bui et al., 2013), and the studies on the behaviour patterns of tourists are done on European tourists. It is impossible to consider that all the tourists in the world behave similarly. The reason is that Western and Eastern tourists are two groups that grew up based on totally different geographical and cultural factors (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003). Even for solo travellers, there is a high chance of motivational changes due to the change in the philosophy of thinking about the self, and it should be said that the attention of tourists in Eastern countries is very low compared to Western travellers (Bui et al., 2013). Studies on solo travellers have predominantly centred on Western nations (Yang, 2021; Khoo-Lattimore & Mura, 2016; Yang et al., 2017; Yang & Tung, 2018). This study addresses this gap by focusing on Sri Lanka as an Asian country where solo travel content creation is gaining popularity. This research aims to fill the information gap on the destination choice and behavioural patterns of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Nomadism and Content Development

Innovative concepts in travel involve applying technology to improve various aspects of the travel experience. Several tools, including mobile applications (apps) and devices (such as cameras, watches, etc.), come to the world as part of technological growth and can support mobile travellers, storage, and data processing strategies (Kim and Fesenmaier 2017). Such enhancements contribute to a smoother and more enjoyable travel experience. Smartphones and associated apps have expanded the scope of the tourism experience by enabling travellers to contact and share their experiences with family and friends in different places, whenever and wherever they want (Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2012). One of the key aspects of this digital transformation is the sharing of post-trip experiences. Travellers often use smartphones to capture moments and emotions during their journeys. This allows travellers to relive their experiences and provides inspiration and information for others planning similar trips. Social media, in this context, serves as a global platform for travel storytelling and information exchange (Kim and Fesenmaier 2017). However, with the advent of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others, travellers now have a powerful and far-reaching outlet to share their adventures with a global audience (Kim and Fesenmaier 2017).

Bui et al., (2013), carried out a study to understand how tourists' self-presentation is managed on social networking sites. The study results emphasise that more tourists are engaged in social activities through social networking sites while travelling and the support they get through social media positively contributes to their tourism experience (Bui et al., 2013). Travel companies build up social media strategies to enable direct dialogue with their customers, who can express any feelings related to their travel experience, positive or

negative (Zhang, 2020). Lin and Rasoolimanesh (2024) discussed factors influencing the intention to share tourism experiences on social media. As per the results, they have categorised influencing factors into three groups, including the psychological factors of tourists such as altruism, self-representation, and social relationships, tourism experiences, and technological factors related to the usage of social media, like e-literacy, trust in social media information, and perceived-ease-of-use (Lin & Rasoolimanesh, 2024).

Jonas, (2022), Discusses how technology can be an advantage to the solo traveller. According to him, solo travellers regularly use technology to share their experience with family and friends. Constant updates from family and friends help to reduce their loneliness. Another way technology can be used to enhance the safety and security of solo tourism by making track records (Jonas 2022)The study "How live videos and stories in social media influence tourist opinions and behaviour" has shown live videos and stories can enhance tourist experiences by making destinations more attractive. Also, the study revealed that live videos and stories have some particular and distinctive characteristics that make it easier for tourists to watch and publish tourism experiences in situ (Huertas 2018). (Kim, et al., 2012) Showed that video content generates a better attitude towards tourist destinations than only visual or auditory content (Kim et al. 2012). Akehurst (2009), explored his article about developing user-generated content like web logs or blogs. As per his results, tourism organisations cannot afford to ignore the development of user-generated content, peer-to-peer web applications and virtual communities, due to consumers trusting websites with reviews rather than professional guides and travel agencies (Akehurst 2009).

Solo Travel as a Content Development

Solo travel experience stands out among content writers as very appealing and engaging content, but there are very few studies on solo travel content development (Yang 2021). Storytelling and narrative forms of content, with video-graph, pictures, and text-oriented content, are included in the contents, where they include contents like the travel experiences gained by local people, landscapes and post-travel experiences here (Son 2011). Storytelling is a powerful way to convey travel experiences. Instead of merely presenting facts or information, storytelling adds depth, emotion, and a personal touch to the content. Narrative content involves structuring the information to create a cohesive and engaging story. This can be achieved through text, video, or both.

According to Schmidt (2007), solo travellers act in blogs as travel narratives, and those blogs are represented by themselves as self-presentations. They publish their solo travel experiences, motivations, and opinions as a narration or text post (Schmidt, 2007). Solo travel content creators play a significant role in today's digital landscape, sharing their motivations and travel experiences through various mediums such as blogs, vlogs, and social media. Their narratives provide valuable insights into different destinations and serve as sources of inspiration for fellow travellers. These content creators showcase the diverse motivations that drive people to explore the world independently, whether for self-discovery, adventure, cultural immersion, or the joy of wanderlust. As they continue to document their journeys, they contribute to a rich tapestry of travel stories that inspire and connect individuals from all walks of life, making solo travel an ever more accessible and motivating option for those seeking unique and enriching experiences. However, most of the studies conducted on solo travellers are incomplete, and most of them are based on the Western context (Chang 2021; Khoo-Lattimore and Mura 2016; Yang and Tung 2018)Therefore, this study studies destination choices and behavioural patterns of solo travel content creators in a non-Western context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to phenomenological research design, we sought to understand the meaning of the lived experiences of individuals who travel alone. Consequently, we selected a group of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka. The content creators who developed solo travel content on Sri Lankan social media (YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram) as part of the research population were selected based on their follower count. In addition, the important solo travel content they developed has been used for this purpose. In that instance, non-probability sampling methods (purposive and snowball sampling techniques) are used in this research as sampling methods. We found more fellow respondents through the snowball sampling technique using the respondents found through purposive sampling. Therefore, we selected 09 content creators who create content about solo travel experiences on Sri Lanka's social media. They were very famous, and we found other similar solo travel content creators through them.

Primary data was collected via conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka. When it comes to the saturation level, interviews were stopped because the answers to the interview questions that were responded to were the same. The interview protocol was developed based on the objectives of the research. Here, the interview is selected to collect the data with virtual interviews through Zoom meeting technology. Primary data was also obtained by analysing the content developed by those content writers. Their social media platforms, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, were chosen as the content for analysis. Therefore, we collected raw and unedited textual posts from social media.

We chose thematic analysis for significant data and content analysis for the alternative analysis method. The thematic analysis provides a structured and systematic approach to making sense of qualitative data, such as interview transcripts or other textual or visual data. Content analysis is a research method

used to systematically analyse and interpret the content of textual, visual, or audio material. Most studies based on social media content use content analysis for the data analysis. We use this method to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Therefore, content analysis was used to confirm the respondents' experience further.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Destination Choice

This study revealed some unique facts about the destination preferences of solo travel content creators. Table 1 below clearly shows the primary data about destination choices, activity participation at the destinations, and the nature of destinations of solo travel content creators.

Table 1: Destination Choice and Activity Participation

Destination Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risky Places and non-risky places ● Relaxing environment ● Hilly and mountain areas ● Unknown and hidden places ● Rural areas ● Uncommon Places ● Isolated destinations
Forms of Activity Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Solo camping ● Walking and Trekking ● Hiking- Mountain hiking, waterfall hiking, rail hiking ● Road Trips-Bike Tours, Bus Tours, Train rides ● Village Tours ● Volunteer travel

Nature of Destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mountain ● Waterfalls ● Forests-National Parks, Sanctuaries ● Villages ● Urban areas
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Source: Author's Own

According to the primary data analysis, the key preferred destination characteristics are risky, non-risky, uncommon, isolated, and rural. According to Cohen (1972, 1987), allocentric tourists choose risky places. They seek new experiences and adventure. Those who travel to risky and isolated places belong to that category. According to Cohen (1972), they are explorers. The reason is that they prefer unusual routes or destinations. Mid-centric travellers prefer less risky and safe locations. According to content analysis, it can be concluded that their preferred destination characteristics are different.

A few standard features can be identified in places where solo travellers like to travel alone. Risk perception is an extremely important factor in choosing a travel destination. It varies from person to person, and it is entirely subjective. Solo travellers tend to travel in both risky places and non-risky places. Because they have to take care of their safety, because they go alone, many people go to places with less risk. Accordingly, one of the solo travellers said;

I do not go to high-risk places when I go alone" (Respondent 04, Personal Interview, 2023). Another stated, "Generally if I do solo camping, I choose safe locations with less risk.

(Respondent 02, Personal Interview, 2023)

Another quote from a traveller revealed that he has an interest in risky places;

It depends on what I see, and I go to places with a risk. I like to visit hidden places that others have not visited. The risk must be compulsory, otherwise it is not worth visiting.

(Respondent 03, Personal Interview, 2023)

Relaxing and isolated areas can heal and calm people's minds, and the ability to calm the mind is highly personal, like freedom and escape. They are catalysts for motivation. Mehmetoglu, (2004), explained it further. The researcher found out such facts from the respondents. This statement by one respondent is proof that;

This environment is tranquil. The sounds of the animals around you and the river make you feel incredible freedom. Enjoying this freedom alone in a place like this is like enjoying heaven. It is so hard to describe in words.

(Respondent 06: Facebook, June 2021)

They prefer to go to unknown, hidden, uncommon, and isolated destinations like hills, mountains, and rural areas.

I like to see places rarely visited, such as hidden waterfalls and mountains where no one goes.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

Going to a commonplace makes no sense when going to a minor one, so I go to uncommon and safe places.

(Respondent 08, Personal Interview, 2023)

Another respondent said;

I have been to Devil's Stairs, Horton Plains, Nanperiyal, and Nagruk. Narangala has gone from Badulla side. So, do people like this live in Sri Lanka? Are there natural places like this? I visit natural places daily and touch people's lifestyles, society, and cultures. Life in the mountains is very different.

(Respondent 06, Personal Interview, 2023)

Solo travel content creators have shared their travel experiences on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram social media, and by studying them, they can identify the forms of activity participation at the destination. Solo camping is the most common recreational activity among solo travellers. The most traditional form of camping is tent camping at a campsite, in the forests or nearby waterfalls. Those texts are social media posts about solo camping;

Fly High. Solo travel girl. Solo camping at Kande Ela Lake Bank. Pine of the most incredible mornings of life.

(Respondent 01: Facebook, June 2023)

Throwback 2022. Flying me @ Narangala peak. Camping alone. Do not pull yourself down by being a female soul. Fly as you wish.

(Respondent 03: Facebook, April 2023)

Solo travellers go walking on foot because they like hiking. Depending on their fitness level, they have chosen short-distance and long-distance trekking. Social media posts shared their activities:

I walked through the forest towards Meemure. However, the sun was setting, so the forest was dark. The trees were so tall that I could not see anything around. There was no footpath, so I felt lost. I leaned on a nearby tree. Only more big trees could be seen.

(Respondent 05: Facebook, May 2021)

Another traveller revealed his experience abroad as;

Trekking along Thruso Valley to Zakagori Fortress

(Respondent 03: Facebook, August 2023)

Hiking is another everyday recreational activity for solo travellers that involves working on trails or paths in forests, mountains, national parks, or wilderness areas. Solo travel content creators usually choose hiking types such as mountain hiking, waterfall hiking and rail hiking. Following are the social media posts;

A night spent alone on the top of Narangala mountain | It was eight pm when the tent was pitched | Late-night solo camping | Solo Hiker.

(Respondent 06: YouTube, August 2023)

The journey along the railway line between the two railway stations from Galoya Junction to Agbopura, the longest distance between two railway stations in Sri Lanka, was completed. (Respondent 04: Facebook, August 2023)

NuwaraEliya Waterfalls Hunt-2 Days-400 KM-Solo Tour- From the foot of

Adam's Peak to NuwaraEliya city. Famous and unknown waterfall brides.

(Respondent 05: Facebook, August 2020)

Road trips are journeys or excursions that involve travelling by road, typically in a personal or public vehicle, over an extended period. A Road trip is a famous trip among solo travellers in Sri Lanka. Social media textual contents of travellers on road trips:

After three hectic weeks, I boarded the Badulla night mail as usual, thinking of flying freely.

(Respondent 01: YouTube, September 2023)

Another quote is;

Scenic Bus Routes-Rathnapura to Deniyaya.

(Respondent 01: YouTube, November 2022)

Solo travellers, responsible travellers and volunteer travellers. After seeing the harsh life of the villagers in the rural villages they met on the way, they were directed to do social care programs like helping them. A Facebook post of a traveller;

While I have my heart set on helping the children living in this village, because it is something that I cannot do alone, as I promised the other day, we will meet with a group in the hope that the children living in this village will dream and go there in the future. Good luck to all of you.

(Respondent 06: Facebook, November 2022)

Stories about authentic rural villages have been created in their contents. Their people's lives, agriculture, and traditions are created as travel notes in their video, photography or textual posts. Those are the examples of that;

After spending some time at the place, I started my journey again to reach Kalupahana before sunset...I was going to the villages; there is no gas or electricity in these villages, only a wood stove and a bottled lamp. The lives of these villages, which we see less of, are not as beautiful as we see. I got far from the village to join a program before them.

(Respondent 06: Facebook, November 2023)

According to primary data, solo travel content creators have visited mountains, forests, waterfalls and villages the most. They have trekked both the dry zone and the wet zone forests. Although there are dry zones and wet zone mountains, the most climbed are the Central Highland hills in the wet zone. Among the waterfalls visited are many hidden waterfalls. Explored villages. Most are villages with a complicated and harsh way of life. The Central highlands hills, the Sinharaja rainforest mountains and a few dry zone mountains have been climbed.

There is a place called Spinix, Lake Gala, Andirigala, Katukithula, Yahangala, Kehelpaddoruwa, and Dumbanagala on one side. On the other side, tracking of Duwili Ella, Gombaniya, and Hirigalpoththa can be seen. The highest place for Knuckles is in the Gombaniya. I have engaged solo in those areas.

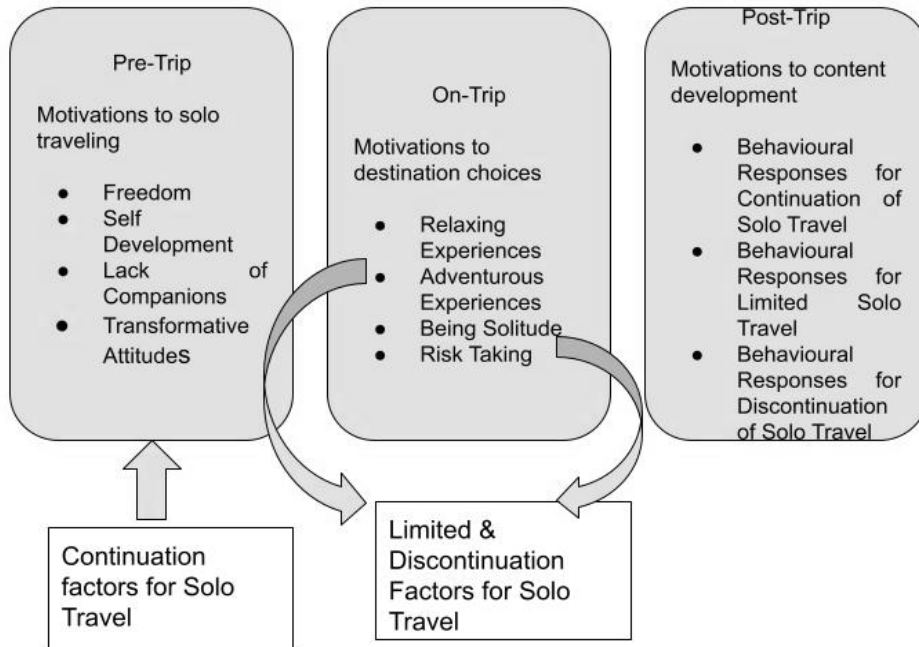
(Respondent 05, Personal Interview, 2023)

I went to Lakshapana. I remember those. I have been around for 10 to 11 months now for solo travelling. I have been to 2 times a month in those 11 months. I have also been to many places like Garadi Ella and Rivaston.

(Respondent 01, Personal Interview, 2023)

Behavioural Patterns

Several stages can be identified in the travel behaviour of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka. The expressions of the respondents of the study are in different behavioural stages. According to their behavioural responses, three behavioural stages can be identified. They are behavioural factors that contribute to the continuation of solo travelling, limited solo travel, and discontinuation. According to Dodds (2020), any tourist goes through the stages of the tourist experience life cycle called excitement, novelty, normalisation and familiarity. The researcher has also identified through the respondents that they tend to limit or discontinue their curiosity about solo travelling after it normalises.

Figure 1: Behavioural pattern of solo travelling

Source: Author's Own

Solo travel content creators exhibit a range of behavioural responses influenced by their experiences. Continuation of solo travel is a deeply personal and multifaceted decision, influenced by various behavioural factors. Travellers who prefer freedom, solitude, and self-development think that they will continue travelling solo. Some travellers continue to travel solo because of the motivation they get from the freedom they can enjoy by travelling solo. Accordingly, one of the solo travel content creators explained,

I will continue to do so. No matter how hard I work, I do those things. It comes out freely. It is a different thing. I have no intention of stopping yet. I have no intention of getting married right now, but I can say that even if I am married, the concept of solo will not stop.

(Respondent 06, Personal Interview, 2023)

Respondents who think that self-confidence should be enhanced should

continue solo travel. The motivation comes from the goal achievement, self-esteem, and personal development from the solo travel effects. The respondents who have strong personalities prefer to travel solo as a habit. Therefore, one of the travellers revealed that;

Solo travel is the only way to develop confidence and enjoy the freedom of solo travel without stopping and joining a group.

(Respondent 02, Personal Interview, 2023)

Another respondent said;

No intention of stopping. We also have to do a proper study on the subject. Some people take photos of flowers and trees, things in that forest. Sometimes, this particular plant may be an alien one that has not been found before. If we think of a flower, this flower may also be a species that has not been found before. In that case, a value is added to the journey. If you travel to Yahangala, you can find the chronicle of Ravana. If you want to go solo, that is your choice. Suppose you take care of your safety with good planning. In that case, many more solo travellers will be born in Sri Lanka because the happiness of going up a mountain alone is an incredible interest and a great confidence. We have to experience it ourselves. Therefore, safe travel is necessary.

(Respondent 05, Personal Interview, 2023)

Travellers who intend to develop solo travel as content continue to travel solo. One of the solo travel content creators explains;

I develop it as a concept and balance it with my work. It is a game. No matter how hard it is to do it, I do not stop it. It gives me something to society. I will not stop it because I can. That means many people are waiting for a video to be posted as a form of relaxation. That is something I like too. Then, a very different concept has spread among people. Many people do this while waiting for a primary target and progress. Through this, I have shared a very different experience with people.

(Respondent 06, Personal Interview, 2023)

Respondents who made risk as a motivation would like to continue travelling solo. One respondent expressed his opinion;

The risk must be compulsory; otherwise, there is no point in visiting. So, I have that type of motivation for solo travelling, which is somewhat different from others. I have a motivation for risk-taking.

(Respondent 03, Personal Interview, 2023)

Travellers who believe going with others will hinder their opinions and freedom say they will continue to travel solo. Accordingly, one of the respondents revealed that opinion;

That is a big reason why I am going alone. What do I want to do after going alone? I can do it alone. That is the biggest reason for me to go alone. In many places, it means that when I go with another person, I must agree with his views. I still feel the same feeling I had when I travelled solo. That means I have no intention of stopping going solo.

(Respondent 03, Personal Interview, 2023)

As a result of travelling alone, motivations such as solitude, love, enjoyment of freedom, and mental relaxation are behavioural factors that lead to continuing to travel solo. One of the solo travellers explained his way of thinking;

Solo traveling is a good medicine for mind relaxation and stress release. I do not know how to tell each person, but I have had 100% success.

(Respondent 04, Personal Interview, 2023)

Some travellers have reduced solo travel. Even if they travel solo with a significant intention before, they are reluctant to go alone. After hearing about the mishaps other fellow travellers face in their travel experience;

I realised that solo travellers have been limited in their travel due to the uncertainty of whether they will continue solo travel. One of the travellers said, Some people have met with accidents, especially when gunshots wound them. Those are the types of travellers who have to stop their solo travel. Some

travellers have seen ghosts. That type of traveller has the intention that they do not like to engage solo. There is an artificial law stating that guns will not be fixed between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. to hunt animals. Generally, people do not do wrong for us between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. After facing my friend with a gunshot, I also was uncertain whether I had to stop solo; however, I did not have a firm idea of stopping this.

(Respondent 03, Personal Interview, 2023)

Experienced travellers know the risk to life by travelling alone. That is why they are reluctant to travel solo. One of the solo travellers explains; *Nowadays, I rarely travel solo. I go with a group because there is less risk. Solo travelling is good. It is not mountain hiking. Solo travelling is good for seeing other things in Sri Lanka. It is a risky trip. If you are going to stay in the forests for a few days or go camping, there is a risk of travelling solo. There is a risk from animals. If a snake bites you, you are the only one in the place. Then 100% You have to take care of yourself. When you go with a group, you are less afraid. A friend of mine went to Maragala last year and got shot in the leg. A friend named (named withheld). He went with two others. They have brought him. If he had gone alone, he would not have come. That is why solo traveling is ordinarily good. One day, if the risk is less, it is better. Otherwise, I disagree.*

(Respondent 09, Personal Interview, 2023)

Due to the geographical location of some destinations, it is not easy to visit. Therefore, instead of solo travel, some respondents go for the group travel option. Some travellers believe that by going with a group, travel responsibilities can be shared among each other. Accordingly, one of the respondents stated;

There are some other places I like to go, but they are risky. So, I go to such difficult places with a team. Apart from that, I think I am done with my own.

(Respondent 01, Personal Interview, 2023)

Other respondents explained;

It is advisable to travel with a few people with good planning.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

Moreover, I have to do all my activities on solo travels. If we travel with others, we can share all those activities. If we travel as a group, one can bring water, one can bring firewood, some others can prepare the bonfire, and another can arrange the tent.

(Respondent 02, Personal Interview, 2023)

According to one traveller's opinion, some travellers have limited solo travel when their mental fitness is weak;

Only brave ones can do solo. This is an abnormal desire. Physical and mental fitness is one of the facts that a solo traveller shall compulsorily possess. Before travelling, we must search about the places, the manner of travelling, and our safety. We must have fitness and fearlessness.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

Demographic factors such as family responsibilities and relatives being opposite have also been reasons for some married respondents to limit solo travel. Thus, one traveller stated;

My family has said no, and my wife has said no. Nowadays, I rarely travel solo. I go with a group because there is less risk. We do not want to put others in trouble by going on a big trip.

(Personal communication, September 30, 2023)

Another one explained;

Family members tell me not to encourage solo travel. They encourage me to travel with friends.

(Respondent 09, Personal Interview, 2023)

Travellers also think that going alone is a dull and lonely experience. Therefore, one traveller expressed his boredom;

Because travelling solo is risky and lonely, I prefer to travel in a small group.

Respondent 02, Personal Interview, 2023

It is possible to identify several behavioural factors that affected the respondents who stopped solo travel. They are dissatisfied with solo travelling, and it can be highly subjective. Some travellers have discontinued solo travelling due to the risk of travelling. They have decided to do so for reasons such as facing challenges alone and possible risks from animals. One of the respondents expressed his negative opinion on solo travelling;

Solo travelling is something that should be done with strength and passion. However, I understand that it is a big lie. That means why we take risks. If there is a problem, we have no one. I think there is a risk in solo travelling and adventure solo travelling. There is no problem with regular solo travelling. There is no problem in going to a waterfall or the beach. If I get attacked by an animal, if I break an arm or a leg, I will die in the forest. Adventure alone is dangerous.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

When describing the experience of the respondents, expressions like fear were revealed. Such travellers have stopped travelling solo. Accordingly, one of the travellers stated;

When I was walking alone in the forest, I felt like the trees were watching me, like someone was following me.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

Physical fitness is one of the most important travel factors. Physical and mental fitness are behavioural factors if you want to travel solo. One respondent explained;

Physical and mental fitness is one of the facts that a solo traveller shall compulsorily possess.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

Transformative attitudes have arisen due to the strange experiences and fear experienced by travellers while travelling alone. A few travellers explained;

When I was walking alone in the forest, I felt like the trees were watching me, like someone was following me.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

Another traveller explained his opinion;

It was in the early days. Even if we first buy a product, it dramatically interests us. Then it goes away. That is how it is. After travelling solo, you think, oh, what is this? When you travel with someone else, you can tell what happened. However, when I go alone, those things are my memory. If your mind is strong, those who want can do it. However, it is dangerous. There are guns in the forest. It is advisable to travel with a few people with good planning. If you are travelling solo, you must have good knowledge. There are such travellers in foreign countries. So, they go in their free time because they have money and passion. So, I think it is not easy in Sri Lanka.

(Respondent 07, Personal Interview, 2023)

CONCLUSIONS

Solo travel content creators select risky, remote, unusual, and rural locations for their solo travels. Since adventure travel is popular among travellers, risk is seen as an essential component. Some travellers also choose less risky and safe locations and relaxing and tranquil environments. Tranquil, hilly mountain areas and the dark, mysterious nature vibe choose those destinations based on their feelings and enjoying the natural environment is the primary goal. They try to get the mental satisfaction of freedom and solitude from such environments. Most go to forests, mountains, rural villages and suburban areas. Accordingly, their trip types can be classified as solo camping trips, village tours, mountain hiking, waterfall hiking, rail hiking, road trips, train rides, bus tours and volunteer travels. Finally, after studying their destinations well, it can be seen that they have travelled to the same destinations. Central Highlands and the wet zone of Sri Lanka are their favourite

regions. Eventually, we can conclude that, in the beginning, they are tempted to travel solo because of their curiosity. However, with time, those experiences become familiar to them and become normalised. It may be hindering pathways to limiting or discontinuing solo travelling. However, finally, the experience becomes normalised or a hindrance; it becomes tedious for them. In the study, the feeling of boredom is also pointed out as one of the reasons travellers discontinue travel.

IMPLICATIONS

There is a notable trend for destination marketing implications. Solo travellers mostly travel to hidden, isolated locations. Revealing these locations to the world is inherently to promote unknown destinations. However, this can be done in a structured way. Tourism authorities such as SLTDA (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority) can directly support solo travel vlogging and destination promotion programs. The solo travellers can conduct special guide programs to unknown, hidden, novel destinations in the country. Moreover, responsible authorities have the potential to introduce suitable rural destinations to local and foreign volunteer tourists and hold programs inviting them. Through volunteer tourism programs, foreign exchange can be increased. As well as developing the way of living of the rural community, and developing the country and region.

The solo travellers should be given exceptional safety. They mostly choose hidden, isolated places as destinations. The study shows that they have faced various dangerous incidents there. Therefore, destination managers should enhance safety measures in risky and non-risky areas. Emergency support systems, clear trail marking without spoiling the authenticity, and reliable communication networks. It also promotes safe but adventurous experiences such as guided solo trekking. It allows for low-risk but thrill-novelty seeking. Solo camping, hiking, and road trips can be quickly promoted

in this way.

An underlying psychological impact of solo travelling and content development was revealed through respondent feedback. Accordingly, for people in a situation of distress or trauma, solo travelling and content development can be introduced as something that creates relaxation and mental satisfaction. Through this, there is an opportunity to use experienced solo travellers to create promotions on self-development, confidence, and mental relaxation. Such programs are promoted as wellness-focused, emotional rejuvenating journeys, and market the destination differently. It will help improve self-development, decision-making skills, introspection or self-reflection, problem-solving skills, and many others.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It is valuable to analyse which destination types are suitable for solo travel. The environmental impact of solo travel over group travel, and how solo travel content development can influence new travel decision-making are specific potential research areas. Understanding the potential negative impacts of exposure to hidden location content development is invaluable.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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APPENDIX

Destination Choice And The Behavioural Patterns of Solo Travel Content Creators in Sri Lanka

Objectives of the study

1. To identify the preferences of travel destinations of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka.
2. To identify the travel behaviour stages of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka.

Reference information

Date of the interview		Place of interview	Online Zoom Meeting	Protocol No	
Starting time		Ending time		Duration of the interview	

Introduction

I am pursuing a BSc. Hons in Tourism Management degree from the Department of Tourism Management, Faculty of Management Studies at the University of Sabaragamuwa, Sri Lanka, and doing this study to fulfil the degree partially.

Purpose of the interview

This semi-structured interview is conducted on "Destination Choice and the Behavioural Patterns of Solo Travel Content Creators In Sri Lanka" to obtain the required data. Here, the researcher will briefly get the information required for the main objectives to identify the motivations affected to create the solo travel experience as content by the Sri Lankan

domestic solo travellers, to identify why domestic solo travellers in Sri Lanka develop the solo travel experience as a content and regarding the solo travel cycle. Roughly, the travel experience of solo travel content creators in Sri Lanka is comprehensively studied in this study.

Permission to record

I want to record the interview on a tape with your permission. This will enable me to listen carefully instead of taking notes. If necessary, I will also take additional notes to remind myself of key points. Are you happy if I record the interview?

Background Questions

Date:

Respondent Name:

Age of the respondent:

Marital Status:

Position of the respondents:

Facebook page name of the respondent:

YouTube channel name of the respondent:

Instagram name of the respondent:

Main Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself?
2. What internal factors or personal interests drive you to continue solo travelling?
3. Can you describe what motivated you to start creating solo travel content in Sri Lanka?
4. How do these motivations shape the destinations you choose to visit?
5. What are the destination types you choose to travel solo?

6. How do you gather information and resources about your travel destination before embarking on a trip?
7. What is your opinion on travelling solo? Do you hope to proceed with solo travelling or not?
8. What are the reasons for whether solo travelling will proceed?