

UNDERSTANDING THE GROUP TRAVEL MOTIVATION WITH NON-FAMILY COMPANIONS OF MIDDLE-AGED TRAVELERS

Huiwen Mai

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

Jing Liu

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

Shuo Wang

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau

INTRODUCTION

Mental health, as an important part of people's health, has been paid more attention to by society (World Health Organization, 2022). Compared with other groups, the middle-aged "sandwich generation" are more stressed and conflicted in various aspects, such as the pension of parents, the rearing of children, job promotion, and so on (Eldh and Carlsson, 2011; Lallukka et al., 2010; Oprea and Kalmijn, 2012). Therefore, whether to maintain mental health or improve their situation, middle-aged people need a medium and a way to release these pressures and relieve conflicts. Although the role of participation in leisure tourism activities in satisfying psychological, educational, social, physical, relaxation, and aesthetic needs has been confirmed by past studies (Lu, 2011), it is not easy for middle-aged people to travel with their families, since middle-aged people with families often need to play the role of "caregiver" in the family. For middle-aged people, the boundary between leisure and housework is blurred (Lugosi et al., 2016). Therefore, when middle-aged travelers travel with non-family companions, they may be more able to rest and relax because they are no longer "family caregivers" but simply themselves.

According to life cycle theory, each stage of a person's life is associated with a different social role and value system. As a person ages, his attitudes, values, and belief systems, as well as his physical condition of him, change and influence his behavior, including consumer behavior (Chen and Shoemaker, 2014). Although previous studies on the motivations, experiences, and behavioral intentions of different types of tourists have been paid

attention to in the field of tourism, such as senior tourists (Hwang and Lee, 2019), young tourists (Jiang and Hong, 2021; Kerr et al., 2021; Xu and Tavitiyaman, 2018) and family tourists (Chen et al., 2022), middle-aged tourists have received very little attention. Middle age is often a demographic indicator in other tourism studies (Funsten et al., 2022; Rejón-Guardia et al., 2018). In the only studies on middle-aged travelers, they are usually not the focus of the study, but the control group of young or old travelers (Heimtun and Morgan, 2012). In addition, there is still a lack of consensus on the dimensions of travel motivation, as these dimensions vary according to different destinations and the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists (Pereira et al., 2019). The framework of motivation proposed in the past cannot describe the middle-aged group very well. Therefore, sorting out the framework of group travel motivation with non-family companions of middle-aged travelers is necessary. For the definition of middle-aged people, there are generally two types of opinions, one is to define the range of middle-aged according to age (Esiyok et al., 2018; Han and Hwang, 2015; Knutson et al., 2006; Lu, 2011), the other is to define the range of middle-aged according to the state of life (Noller et al., 2001). The middle-aged tourists discussed in this study are those aged between 35 and 60 who are married with children and have traveled with non-family members in a group. Based on this, this paper proposes the following research questions: (i) What are the group travel motivation with non-family companions of middle-aged travelers? (ii) What types do these motivations fall into? (iii) What factors affect these motivations?

METHOD

In view of the above research questions, the qualitative method was adopted in this study. Specifically, a semi-structured interview was conducted with those middle-aged Chinese, aged 35-60, married and with children, who had ever traveled with non-family companions in a group by means of purposive sampling. The interviews were conducted one-to-one by an experienced member of the research team. All interviews were conducted online from October 2022 to November 2022. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes and participants were interviewed according to the interview guide (the interview guide and the interview process were shown in the Appendix).

The interview data were sorted into independent text interview records according to

Participant No., and the coding work was started. Thematic analysis was used in this study (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Specifically, each interview transcript was open coding independently by two different researchers, who read the transcript several times to identify key themes. The emerging topics are then grouped into interrelated topics by copying, re-organizing, and comparing thematic categories. Finally, these contents were transferred to a third researcher for coding collation and information saturation check, thus facilitating researcher triangulation which balances subjective research interpretations (Farmaki et al., 2021). Data saturation was reached at 18 participants where no new information or additional insights were observed in the data. The profile of the participants was shown in the Appendix.

FINDINGS

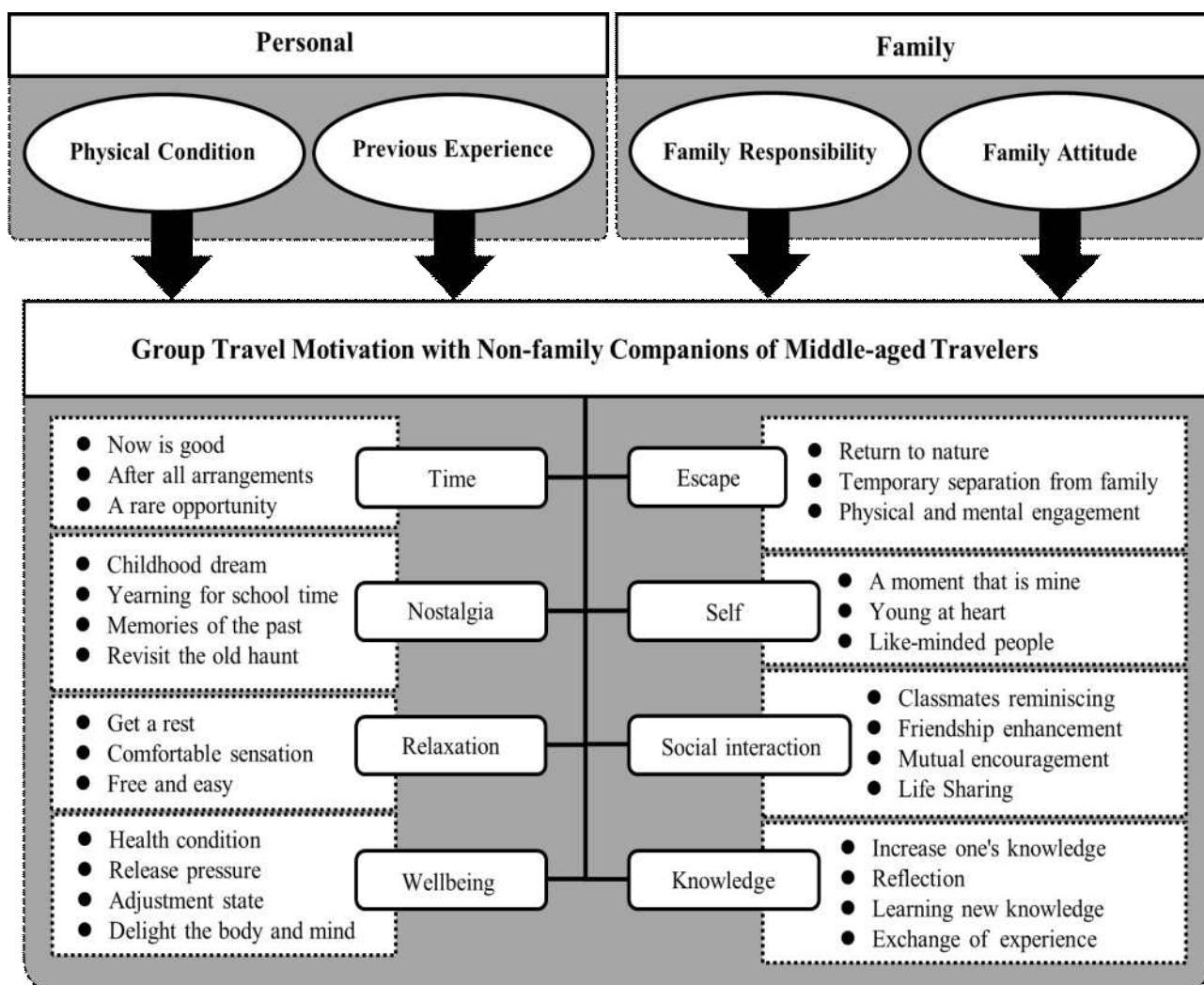


Figure 1. The framework of group travel motivation with non-family companions of middle-aged travelers

By analyzing the coding data, as shown in Figure 1, we have sorted out the framework of group travel motivation with non-family companions of middle-aged travelers. This framework shows nine types and four influencing factors of group travel motivation with non-family companions of middle-aged travelers. The eight motivation types are time, nostalgia, relaxation, well-being, escape, self, social interaction, and knowledge. The four influencing factors can be divided into personal and family aspects. The personal aspects include physical conditions and previous experience, while the family aspects include the fulfillment of family responsibilities and family attitudes. Overall, from the results of the interviews, the eight aspects of motivation types answered and what types of motivations middle-aged travelers have for traveling with non-family companions, while the four influences from the personal and family aspects answered what factors might be influencing middle-aged travelers' motivations for traveling with non-family companions.

CONCLUSION

Travel motivation has been valued by scholars in the field of tourism because of its critical influence on the actual travel decisions of tourists (Page and Hall, 2003). However, in the current leisure tourism literature, the travel motivation and consumption behavior of older adults has been studied much more than that of middle-aged adults (Dashper et al., 2021). Although middle-aged and older adults are two distinct groups, the lack of consensus in the academic community on the definition of middle-aged and older adults has led to some overlap in the delineation of these two groups, which has affected the accuracy of the research results. By combing through previous literature, this study defines middle-aged travelers. And focuses on the group of married and child-bearing middle-aged travelers aged 35 to 60, filling a research gap in the study of middle-aged tourists' motivation in tourism. Using qualitative research methods, this study investigates the motivations for traveling in groups with non-family companions through a semi-structured interview with middle-aged tourists and proposes a related model. The proposed framework of group travel motivation with

non-family companions of middle-aged travelers not only enriches the related research on travel motivation. It also provides travel companies and marketers with new ideas for tourism products and service designs to better capture the needs of the middle-aged traveler market.

Firstly, different from senior tourists and young tourists, time is the most precious resource for middle-aged travelers. Middle-aged travelers would pay more attention to the efficiency of tourism, and they hope to get the maximum and best leisure experience in a limited time. To better fit the needs of middle-aged travelers seeking efficiency and comfort, travel companies and marketers are advised to offer packages to middle-aged travelers that can be privately customized with fully managed travel products. Secondly, in the motivation dimension of self, middle-aged travelers often emphasize the importance of like-minded companions for travel. Thirdly, 'Free and easy' is the most frequently mentioned keyword when middle-aged travelers talk about why they choose to travel with non-family companions. Finally, the choice of travel companions of middle-aged travelers has obvious characteristics of life stage. Middle-aged travelers are more likely to travel with their families before their children can live on their own. When children are able to live independently, they are more likely to travel with non-family companions, such as friends and classmates.

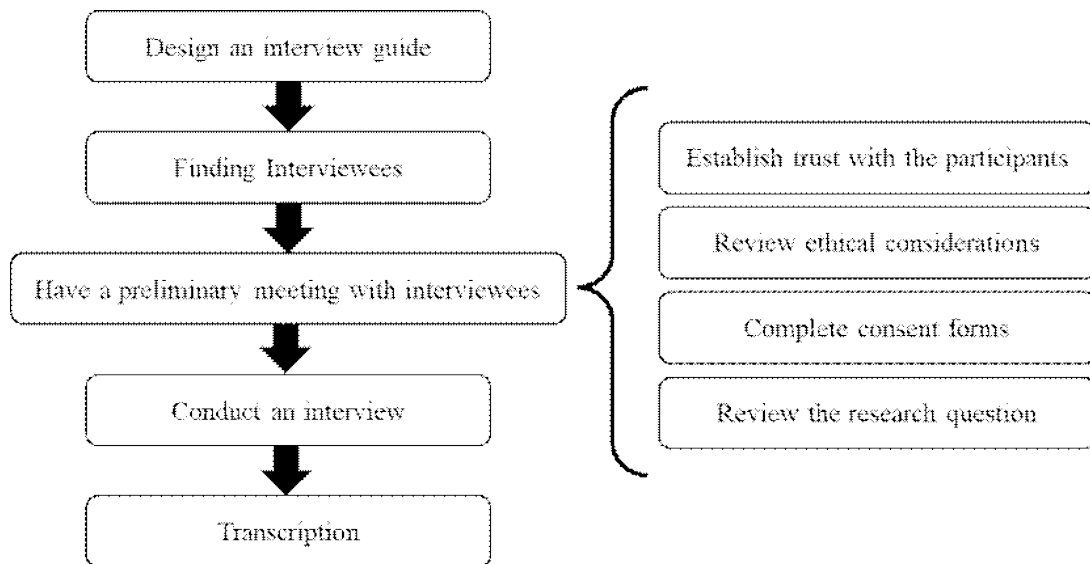
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Process of Interview



Appendix 2: Interview Guide (English version)

What is the "travel" in question?

- In this context, "travel" refers specifically to an overnight experience (at least two days and one night, no limit).
- The "travel" can be a trip to another place or a trip to the same city (e.g., a 2-day, 1-night hot spring tour), as long as you stay overnight.
- Is a personal leisure travel experience, excluding travel arranged by the company, such as Corporate Tours, etc.

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- 1 Please recall and describe a time when you traveled with non-family companions in a group after you got married and had children.
 - *Where did you go? How many people in all? How long is the travel?*
 - (* **Non-family companions** can be classmates, colleagues, peers, friends, etc. "They" is used to refer to non-family travel companions.)
 - 2 What do you think it was like to travel with them?
 - *Do you prefer to travel with them or with your family?*
 - Can you be specific about how these feelings differ?*
 - 3 Did you encounter any difficulties or obstacles in making plans to travel with them? How did you solve these problems?
 - 4 When you think back to your travel experiences with them, what impresses you most?
 - 5 How do you feel about yourself when you travel with them?
 - 6 What do you think you gained from that travel with them?
 - *Are these things important to you? How important is it?*
 - 7 How did that travel with them affect your life?
 - *What changes have they brought?*
 - *What are your thoughts? How has it affected the way you see yourself and the world?*
 - 8 Please comment on the travel with them.
 - *Does it meet your expectations? Is there any satisfaction or regret?*
 - 9 What are your expectations for future travels with them?
 - *Under what circumstances would you travel with them again?*
 - Would you go to the same place again?*
 - *Would you consider taking your family (such as parents/children) again?*
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Appendix 3: The Profile of The Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Location	Degree of Education	Occupation
01-Xian	F	49	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Bachelor's degree	Corporate admin director
02-Ming	M	49	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Bachelor's degree	Civil servant
03-Ping	F	48	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Junior college graduate	Corporate clerk
04-Hua	F	44	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Junior college graduate	Corporate clerk
05-Feng	F	36	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Junior college graduate	Corporate clerk
06-Jing	M	49	Zhongshan, Guangdong	Bachelor's degree	Government staff
07-Xu	F	38	Huizhou, Guangdong	Bachelor's degree	Middle school teacher
08-Quan	M	49	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Bachelor's degree	Government staff
09-Xiang	M	42	Hefei, Anhui	Doctorate	University professor
10-Qian	F	50	Fuyang, Anhui	Bachelor's degree	Kindergarten teacher
11-Li	F	51	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Technical school graduate	Hospital staff
12-Dong	M	56	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Bachelor's degree	Middle school principal
13-Fang	F	48	Suzhou, Jiangsu	Junior college graduate	Corporate staff
14-Chen	M	40	Shanghai	Master's degree	Teacher
15-Yan	F	50	Jinzhou, Liaoning	Bachelor's degree	Business Manager
16-Wang	M	52	Tianjin	Bachelor's degree	Business Manager
17-Fan	F	51	Xuchang, Henan	Bachelor's degree	Government staff
18-Min	M	46	Zhengzhou, Henan	Junior college graduate	Government staff