

Article

Exploring Tourist Motivations: Mixed-Methods Insights for Destination Management

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Abstract

This study explores tourist motivations through a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative coding of open-ended responses with quantitative network analysis. By examining why vacationing is important, we identified eight motivation categories including Physical & Mental Renewal, Social Bonding, and Novelty & Adventure. Network analysis revealed significant co-occurrence patterns between motivations, challenging traditional push–pull frameworks by demonstrating that travelers simultaneously hold multiple, sometimes paradoxical desires. Demographic comparisons showed that women emphasize relaxation and rejuvenation, while men prioritize novelty and exploration. Age-related differences revealed younger travelers seek adventure and personal growth, while middle-aged participants valued family time and relaxation. Our findings demonstrate how tourist motivations function as interconnected constellations rather than isolated factors. By highlighting tensions such as comfort versus sustainability, digital detox versus connectivity, and novelty versus familiarity, the study illustrates how motivational paradoxes can inform destination management strategies. These results offer practical guidance for DMOs, particularly in contexts of overtourism where repositioning is needed, and for new destinations seeking to differentiate themselves in a competitive global market. Framing motivations within these broader transformations—post-pandemic regeneration, sustainability debates, and digital lifestyle shifts—enhances the relevance of our contribution to both scholarship and practice.

Keywords: tourist motivation; mixed-methods research; network analysis



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1. Introduction

Tourist motivation has been a focus in tourism research for a long time. Researchers seek to understand the many reasons why people travel and the psychological, social and environmental factors that influence those decisions. In practice, this knowledge goes beyond academic theory and directly impacts how destinations are marketed, how products are developed and how sustainable tourism can be promoted. As travel patterns continue to evolve—shaped by the rapid growth of digital platforms, changing social norms and climate change—there is a clear need for a holistic approach that captures all the underlying motivations of tourists. A lot of research has been performed on why people travel, often

referencing the well-known push–pull paradigm. “Push” factors are internal drivers—rest, novelty, self actualization—while “pull” factors are external attributes that draw people to a place—cultural or natural attractions. Although these frameworks are still influential, contemporary research suggests that motivations can be dynamic, overlapping and change throughout the trip lifecycle. A visitor may initially want cultural enrichment but also family bonding and digital disconnection, so one trip can meet several psychological and relational needs at the same time. Against this backdrop, understanding how different demographic groups—by age or gender—rank these multiple motivations has become more important. Younger travelers might put adventure or self discovery first, while middle-aged travelers might prioritize shared experiences or stress relief.

In this article, we explicitly pose four research questions. RQ1: What motivational categories emerge from tourists’ own open-ended narratives about vacationing? RQ2: How do these motivations cluster and co-occur when analyzed through network-based methods? RQ3: How do demographic variables such as age and gender shape the prevalence and structure of these motivational constellations? RQ4: How can these findings inform destination management strategies, especially in contexts facing overtourism, destination repositioning, or the emergence of new markets?

This article contributes to the current debate on tourist motivation by using a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative insight with quantitative rigor. We use an inductive three-tier coding process to categorize participants’ open-ended responses to the question, “Why is vacationing important to you?” This approach honors the words and experiences of the travelers themselves, allowing themes to emerge directly from participant narratives rather than from preconceived categories. By systematically organizing these coded responses into subcategories and broader motivational domains, we gain a detailed map of how people conceptualize and prioritize travel. Furthermore, we incorporate a network analysis to illuminate how different motivational elements overlap and cluster. While factor-based models have long illustrated that motivations can be grouped under broad headings (e.g., relaxation, novelty, social bonding), network analysis makes it possible to see how those headings are interlinked within participants’ actual statements. Such visualization and co-occurrence metrics help clarify not only which motivations exist but also how they interact. For example, stress relief may frequently co-occur with family bonding, suggesting that for many travelers, rest and relational quality time are inseparable goals. To enrich our understanding of how demographic factors shape these motivational structures, we assess age- and gender-based variations in the data, using post-stratification weights to correct sampling imbalances. This step helps ensure that findings about prevalence rates and co-occurrence patterns approximate the larger population more accurately. Finally, we evaluate how these motivations align with key travel outcomes, such as satisfaction, recommendation likelihood, and return intention, thereby connecting individual motives to broader tourism behaviors.

By formulating the research in this structured way, the study not only advances theoretical debates about the fluidity of motivations but also positions its findings within the wider challenges of destination management. This includes reconciling paradoxes such as comfort versus sustainability, novelty versus familiarity, and digital detox versus connectivity, all of which carry direct consequences for marketing strategies, product design, and policy-making in international tourism (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tufft et al., 2024).

Overall, this study makes three main contributions. First, it underscores the value of an inductive coding procedure that can capture subtle, context-specific motivations. Secondly, it applies network analysis to get beyond discrete categories, to see how motivations cluster together that can either reinforce or counterbalance each other. Thirdly it looks at demographic differences in motivation to contribute to wider debates about whether and

how age and gender shape the pursuit of rest, novelty, cultural exploration or interpersonal connection. By recognizing that tourists' motivations rarely exist in isolation, industry stakeholders can create products that respond to multiple motivations in one trip, so travelers can have relaxation and authentic experiences in one go.

2. Literature Review

Tourist motivation has been a major theme in tourism research for decades with multiple frameworks and empirical studies examining what motivates individuals to travel (Dann, 1981; Gnoth, 1997; J. Chen & Zhou, 2020). Traditional theories focus on personal or psychological needs—relaxation, belonging, growth—and also acknowledge that external environmental and cultural factors have a big impact. This section provides an overview of the key theoretical foundations, emerging issues and methodological advancements in tourist motivation research and how these inform and contrast with the mixed-methods, network-oriented approach used in this study.

2.1. Foundational Theoretical Frameworks

One long-standing paradigm is the push–pull framework which distinguishes internal forces (push) from external, destination-specific features (pull) in explaining why people travel (Jang & Cai, 2002; Uysal et al., 2008; Prayag et al., 2017; Soldatenko et al., 2023). Push factors include a wide range of internal motivations such as rest, novelty or self-discovery while pull factors revolve around tangible or perceived attributes—scenic landscapes, local culture or safe environment (Lin et al., 2007; Antón et al., 2014). This dual perspective provides a structured way to integrate psychological needs with the objective qualities of a destination. However, critics argue that push–pull models can overlook how motivations evolve before, during and even after a trip (L. Su et al., 2018). An often-cited approach to understanding motivation uses human needs theories which prominently feature Maslow's hierarchy of needs (S. Huang & Hsu, 2009; Hsu et al., 2010). When applying Maslow's theory, researchers suggest that tourists first focus on basic needs like safety and physiological comfort before working towards self-actualization according to Šimková and Holznér (2014) and Tasci and Ko (2017). This methodology explains why some traveler groups like families with young children focus on safety and relaxation while different segments seek cultural experiences. Research work by Khoo-Lattimore et al. (2018) along with Wu et al. (2021) supports this argument. Researchers have raised questions about the universal application of Maslow's stages because of cultural differences and diverse social norms (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). Social belonging takes precedence over individualistic self-realization in collectivist cultures while individualistic societies place higher value on achievements and new experiences.

2.2. Cultural and Demographic Influences

Culture largely shapes why people travel (Richards, 2018; Gek-Siang et al., 2020; Douglas et al., 2024). For example, tourists from communities that value family often have different reasons for traveling compared to people from more individualistic backgrounds (Cahyanto et al., 2016). Some focus on family and heritage, while others chase personal freedom and adventure (Matiza, 2022). Plus, global changes like currency swings, political issues, or visa rules can change what people think are must-see places (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014). Researchers stress that studying these motivations can show how they stay the same or change with the times. Besides culture, factors like age and gender are also worth noting (Alén et al., 2016; Albayrak & Caber, 2018; Fieger et al., 2017). Younger travelers often look for adventure, personal growth, and social approval, wanting new experiences and connections (Rita et al., 2018). In contrast, those in middle age usually prioritize family

time or a break from work, focusing on relaxation and bonding (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008). When comparing genders, some studies find that women care more about emotional well-being and social ties, while men often seek thrills or new experiences (Gülmez et al., 2025). Other research suggests these differences are not as strong when you consider cultural or situational factors (Grimm & Needham, 2012). Women are influenced more by cultural experiences and relationships in their travel choices, while men lean toward adventure and relaxation (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008). Research from many years ago already pointed out that men tend to prefer novelty and adventurous activities more than women do (Mieczkowski, 1990; Uysal et al., 1996).

Recent studies also emphasize how demographic distinctions interact with broader international trends. For instance, destinations struggling with overtourism are urged to use demographic segmentation (age, gender, cultural background) to redistribute flows and design alternative experiences (Oklevik et al., 2019; Sibrijns & Vanneste, 2021). At the same time, new destinations emerging on the global tourism map face different challenges: they often try to avoid a homogenized image by highlighting novelty, authenticity, or cultural differentiation (Capocchi et al., 2019; Szromek et al., 2019). These strategic concerns show how demographic and cultural findings can be operationalized within destination repositioning and diversification debates.

2.3. Technological and Environmental Developments

Recent changes in digital technology have opened up new questions about what drives people to travel (Egger et al., 2020; Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016; X. Liu et al., 2020; Sreen et al., 2023). On one hand, social media and online groups help travelers find unique spots and connect with others who have similar interests, boosting their curiosity and creating new attractions that were harder to access before (Edwards et al., 2017). On the other hand, some people are looking for “digital detox” trips to escape from their always-on lifestyles (Y. Liu & Hu, 2021). This shows that technology can help us find new experiences but can also be a reason to step back, making things more complicated than older theories suggested about travel motivation (Li et al., 2020). At the same time, more travelers are considering sustainability and environmental issues as important factors (M. Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2024). Trends like ecotourism and community-based travel show a growing interest in places that match their eco-friendly values (Wang et al., 2014). Some travelers are even factoring in their carbon footprints or wildlife conservation efforts more than those who simply focus on adventure or cost (Khalilzadeh et al., 2024). But there is still a push–pull situation between making profits and sticking to sustainable practices, which can be a challenge for destinations trying to satisfy both travelers and environmental needs (M. Carvache-Franco et al., 2022). As a result, the goals tied to sustainability can sometimes clash with other needs, like convenience and saving money, which traditional models do not always fully explain.

From a strategic standpoint, these developments also highlight tensions that DMOs and policymakers must manage. For example, the simultaneous demand for high-quality connectivity and authentic “digital detox” experiences forces destinations to design tiered service offers. Similarly, the desire for both convenience and sustainability illustrates the paradoxical expectations that destinations—particularly those undergoing regeneration after crises—must reconcile. By situating technological and environmental drivers within this strategic context, motivation research can speak directly to current international debates on tourism transformation.

2.4. Health and Wellness Dimensions

Health and wellness considerations have steadily moved from niche markets (e.g., spa or medical tourism) to mainstream motivators (Coffey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; J. Chen & Zhou, 2020). Many travelers now seek stress reduction, mental restoration, or lifestyle improvements (Smith, 2023). A qualitative study conducted among domestic tourists in Jordan (N = 232) examined tourism experiences, travel motivations, and travel lifestyle preferences. The findings confirmed that the primary motivating factors behind domestic tourism experiences were those positively affecting tourists' well-being, namely recreation, relaxation, escape from daily routines, rejuvenation, and enjoyment (Allan, 2025). Major health events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have reinforced the importance of safety and well-being, with concerns over hygiene, social distancing, and personal security shaping travel decisions (Aebli et al., 2021; Orîndaru et al., 2021). Destinations that can credibly promise safe yet enriching experiences may gain a competitive advantage (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

2.5. Evolving Methodologies

Methodological approaches to tourist motivation have matured alongside these theoretical and topical expansions (Kozak, 2015). Early reliance on quantitative measures—through factor analysis or structural equation modeling—provided foundational insights into shared motivational dimensions and allowed robust hypothesis testing (Albayrak & Caber, 2018). Nevertheless, purely quantitative designs risk missing the personalized narratives or situational nuances that shape why individuals travel (Hsu et al., 2010). In recognition of these complexities, qualitative and mixed-method designs have grown in popularity, incorporating open-ended interviews, focus groups, or textual analysis to reveal subtler dimensions (Grimm & Needham, 2012). Network analysis and other computational techniques add a new dimension to motivation research (Khalilzadeh et al., 2024). Instead of viewing motivations as isolated factors or purely hierarchical constructs, network-based methods treat them as nodes that may cluster, overlap, or generate unexpected patterns of co-occurrence. This approach has proven especially useful in identifying how motivations connect across different demographic or cultural subgroups and in illustrating that many travelers hold multiple motivations simultaneously (Sun et al., 2024).

Many studies show that understanding motivation can help to improve areas like marketing and planning (Prayag et al., 2017; Rita et al., 2018; Vujičić et al., 2020; Kyriakaki & Kleinaki, 2022). Destinations often tailor their marketing based on factors like age, culture, or specific reasons people travel, such as wanting to relax, go on an adventure, or focus on wellness (Antón et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2018). However, it can be challenging to balance money-making goals with ethical or environmental concerns. For example, a place might market itself as eco-friendly or community-focused (Lai & Nepal, 2006), but the lure of mass tourism and the money it brings can muddle those ideals (M. Carvache-Franco et al., 2022). There is also an ongoing discussion about how stable people's motivations are in such a fast-changing world. Events like crises (Aebli et al., 2021), new technology (Egger et al., 2020), and changes in travel rules can really alter what people want. Folks might shift from wanting new experiences to prioritizing health, or from wanting to be social to enjoying some alone time, based on what's happening around them. Because of this, researchers are pushing for more flexible approaches that can adapt to these changes over time (Sreen et al., 2023).

Building on these foundations, the current study explicitly addresses the call for contextualized and flexible frameworks. By combining inductive qualitative coding with quantitative network analysis, we not only capture emergent categories but also examine how paradoxical motivations—such as novelty and familiarity, sustainability and comfort—

manifest across demographic groups (Mariani & Baggio, 2020; Blomstervik & Olsen, 2024). Importantly, this methodological choice also allows us to translate findings into actionable insights for DMOs, overtourism destinations seeking regeneration, and emerging destinations aiming to differentiate their market positions (Balletto et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Sampling

Data were collected through a web-based survey administered by a marketing firm adhering to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in October 2024. Of the 3960 potential respondents initially contacted, 604 provided detailed open-ended responses. In Hungary, where the retirement age for men is 65 and health status typically declines significantly thereafter, our study's travel-related criteria significantly limited participation among older adults. Only 17 individuals over 65 qualified for our sample, as the requirements for frequent or recent vacation experiences excluded many in this demographic. This sampling constraint prevents us from drawing generalizable conclusions about older traveler populations. The situation was further compounded by our recruitment strategy through an online marketing firm, which prioritized participants with substantial international travel experience within the past two years to ensure rich, recent vacation memories—a criterion that inadvertently reduced the representation of older individuals in our final sample. All analyses were executed using R Studio 2024.12.0 Build 467 with R-4.4.2 on Windows.

3.2. Qualitative Coding Procedure

An inductive three-tier coding framework was implemented to analyze responses to the question “Why is vacationing important to you?” In Tier 1, three trained coders grouped raw statements into broad themes, avoiding predefined categories to allow patterns to emerge naturally. In Tier 2, similar ideas were merged into 38 subcategories (e.g., “Stress Relief,” “Family Time,” “Discovering New Places”). Finally, in Tier 3, these subcategories were combined into eight broader categories, such as Physical & Mental Renewal, Social Bonding, and Novelty & Adventure. Intercoder reliability metrics (e.g., Krippendorff's alpha, Cohen's kappa) were collected to assess consistency.

The unweighted sample deviated from known population distributions for age and gender. A post-stratification weighting scheme was therefore applied to approximate broader demographic proportions. Because no participants in the 65+ group provided full responses, that category was assigned a weight of zero to avoid distorting the sample. By applying these weights, subsequent analyses (e.g., prevalence estimates, co-occurrences, and network metrics) more reliably mirror a general population profile.

Following the final coding, each participant's open-ended response was translated into eight binary indicators denoting presence or absence of the main motivational categories (e.g., “Social Bonding,” “Cultural Exploration”). We then examined three outcome variables related to participants' travel behaviors: Satisfaction Dependency (from 1 = self-driven satisfaction to 5 = externally influenced satisfaction), Recommendation Likelihood (from 1 = never recommend to 5 = always recommend), Return Intention (from 1 = never revisit to 5 = always revisit).

We used linear regressions to assess whether mentioning a particular motivational category predicted higher or lower scores on these outcomes. Secondary analyses explored the relationship between motivations and the number of vacation days taken domestically or abroad, testing whether participants mentioning certain categories (e.g., “Escaping Routine,” “Nature Immersion”) also reported longer or more frequent vacations.

3.3. Data Analysis

After coding and weighting, we conducted a two-pronged analytical strategy that integrated quantitative metrics with qualitative validation:

Weighted prevalence estimates were calculated for each subcategory to detect potential differences by age or gender. For instance, we compared whether younger participants were more prone to mention novelty, or whether women emphasized rest and relaxation more than men. The results were visualized in frequency plots to highlight notable demographic shifts.

To examine how different motivations cluster, we transformed the coded data into an adjacency matrix, where each node represented a motivational subcategory and edges represented participants who mentioned both subcategories in the same response. We then applied modularity-based clustering and measured edge weights to identify strongly linked motivations. Metrics such as network density and clustering coefficients were computed for the dataset overall and for subgroups (e.g., male vs. female, younger vs. older). These computations clarified which motivations frequently co-occur, indicating that travelers view them as intertwined (e.g., “Stress Relief” often appearing with “Family Time”).

To maintain a participant-centered perspective, we retained selected verbatim quotes to demonstrate how coded motivations manifest in real-world statements. For instance, individuals who mentioned “escaping the daily grind” often offered spontaneous remarks about “freedom from chores,” linking these elements in ways consistent with the quantitative co-occurrence data.

All survey procedures complied with GDPR regulations, ensuring participants provided informed consent and that data remained de-identified before analysis. This multifaceted methodology aims to capture the complexity of tourist motivation by honoring the nuance of open-ended responses while employing rigorous quantitative tools to identify patterns and test relationships. In the following sections, we detail the empirical results of these analyses and discuss how demographic factors shape the ways travelers articulate their reasons for vacationing.

4. Results

This section provides an integrated account of tourist motivations identified through a mixed-method design that combines quantitative techniques, including network metrics and co-occurrence frequencies, with qualitative narrative illustrations. Subsequent subsections examine demographic differences, modularity analyses, co-occurrence patterns, network metrics, and selected regression results.

4.1. Sample Coding Table

An illustrative coding table was created to connect raw responses with the refined categories and subcategories (Table 1).

4.2. Refined Categories and Subcategories

Analysis of the first-tier codes led to the grouping of overlapping themes into 38 subcategories. These subcategories were then merged into eight broader categories, including Physical & Mental Renewal, Escaping Routine, Cultural Exploration, Novelty & Adventure, Social Bonding, Nature Immersion, Comfort & Care, and Barriers & Constraints. Each category draws on recurrent elements identified in participants’ open-ended responses. Physical & Mental Renewal, for example, combines themes of rest, stress relief, and energy recharge, while Social Bonding encompasses family time and partner bonding (Table 2).

Table 1. Sample Coding Table.

Category	Subcategory	Theme	Sample Original Response
Physical & Mental Renewal	Stress Relief	Relaxation, Reducing mental strain	I need vacations to get rid of the stress that builds up during workdays.
Social Bonding	Family Time	Quality time with children and spouse	Spending time with family and sharing experiences is what makes vacations meaningful.
Novelty & Adventure	Discovering New Places	Exploration of unknown environments	Exploring new cities and landscapes is the best part of traveling for me.
Comfort & Care	No Chores	Freedom from housework	The best thing is not having to clean or cook; I can just enjoy myself.

Table 2. List of 8 Main Categories and 38 Subcategories.

Category	Subcategories
Physical & Mental Renewal	Rest, Stress Relief, Energy Recharge, Preventing Burnout, Peace/Tranquility
Escaping Routine	Breaking Daily Grind, Escaping Monotony, Environment Change, System Reset, Breaking Habits
Cultural Exploration	Local Customs, Gastronomy, Historical Sites, Architecture, Learning New Cultures
Novelty & Adventure	Discovering New Places, Adventure, Learning and Exploration, Unknown Landscapes, Broadening Horizons
Social Bonding	Family Time, Partner Bonding, Shared Experiences, Meeting New People, Quality Time
Nature Immersion	Landscape Appreciation, Fresh Air/Climate, Nature Immersion, Water Experiences (Sea/Lakes)
Comfort & Care	Being Served, No Chores, Accommodation Quality, Carefree Time
Barriers & Constraints	Financial Barriers, Time Restrictions, Work Obligations, Family Responsibilities, Health Limitations

4.3. Overview of Tourist Motivation Categories and Subcategories

Physical & Mental Renewal reflects participants’ needs for rest and tranquility. Social Bonding addresses the aim of spending time with partners, children, and friends. Novelty & Adventure highlights exploration and the desire to discover unfamiliar places. Cultural Exploration focuses on immersion in local customs and heritage. Escaping Routine brings together motivations related to breaking free from everyday constraints. Nature Immersion addresses the importance of landscapes, climate, and water-based activities. Comfort & Care covers relief from chores and housekeeping. Barriers & Constraints captures financial, time-related, and health-related restrictions.

4.4. Prevalence of Motivations

A weighted prevalence analysis identified demographic differences in the frequency with which participants discussed certain subcategories. Gender comparisons revealed that women referred more often to rest-oriented motivations such as stress relief and energy recharge, whereas men were more inclined to mention elements of novelty and exploring new environments. Age-based comparisons showed that younger participants (0–24) were more likely to emphasize adventure and horizon-broadening, while middle-aged participants (25–44 and 45–64) highlighted family time, shared experiences, and energy renewal. These observations appear on Figure 1, which illustrates subcategory prevalence by age and gender and shows that motivations often shift along life-stage lines.

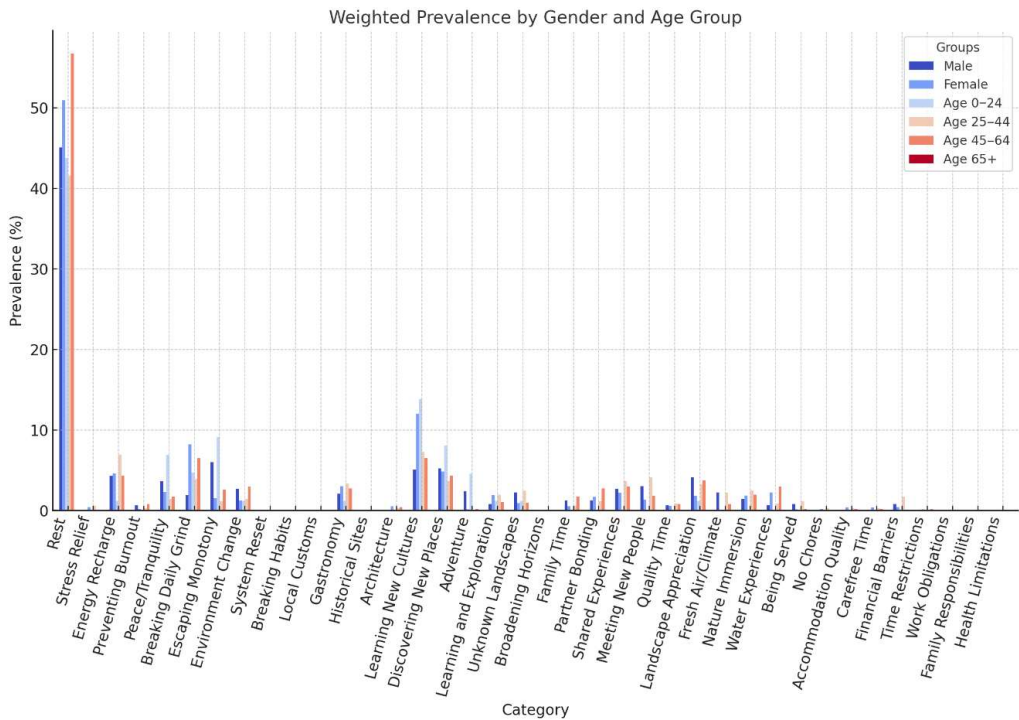


Figure 1. Prevalence of Selected Subcategories by Gender and Age Group.

4.5. Modularity Analysis

Hierarchical clustering yielded three major clusters: Rejuvenation, Social Bonding, and Exploration & Novelty. The Rejuvenation cluster centers on rest-oriented themes, while Social Bonding addresses relational motivations, and Exploration & Novelty emphasizes experiences involving travel and discovery. Table 3 shows the subcategories that define each of these clusters.

Table 3. Modularity Clusters.

Cluster	Included Subcategories
Rejuvenation	Stress Relief, Energy Recharge, Preventing Burnout
Social Bonding	Family Time, Partner Bonding, Shared Experiences
Exploration and Novelty	Adventure, Discovering New Places, Broadening Horizons

4.6. Edge-Weight Analysis

An edge-weight analysis further examined how frequently particular subcategories were mentioned in tandem. Higher weights indicated stronger co-occurrences. Stress

Relief and Energy Recharge co-occurred at a high rate (weight of 0.78), suggesting that participants see them as related motivations. Family Time and Shared Experiences also clustered tightly, as did Adventure and Discovering New Places. Table 4 details the highest co-occurrence pairs, reinforcing the patterns that emerged from the modularity analysis.

Table 4. Highest-Weight Edges.

Edge	Weight
Stress Relief & Energy Recharge	0.78
Family Time & Shared Experiences	0.65
Adventure & Discovering New Places	0.6

4.7. Narrative Validation

Statements from participants corroborate these quantitative findings. One participant noted that vacations help them “escape daily pressures and rebuild mental energy,” illustrating how relaxation and stress relief connect in an individual’s perspective. Another reflected that “shared experiences with family are what make a trip meaningful,” capturing the Social Bonding dimension. Participants who emphasized Novelty & Adventure frequently described “a broader view of the world” or “expanding personal horizons,” aligning with the strong link between exploration and personal growth.

4.8. Subgroup Comparisons

Gender-based comparisons showed that women tended to give more attention to rejuvenation and care, while men prioritized exploratory and novelty-driven themes. Age-based comparisons confirmed that younger respondents placed higher value on adventure and exploration, while those in the middle-aged groups underlined family time and relaxation. Analyses of domestic and foreign vacation days revealed that participants who cited escaping routine, novelty, or nature reported longer and possibly more frequent vacations than those citing barriers or comfort-focused motivations. This suggests that travelers drawn to novelty or adventure may devote more time and resources to trips, while those emphasizing constraints or care-centered aims may take shorter breaks.

4.9. Co-Occurrence Patterns

Pairwise, triplet, and quadruplet co-occurrences were considered to see how participants grouped themes in their actual statements. Rest-related subcategories such as Relaxation, Recharging, and Rest tended to appear frequently together, and were also linked with broader motivations like exploration. Breaking away from the daily grind was mentioned in conjunction with no cooking or cleaning, reflecting a desire to escape routine tasks at home. The results are shown on Figure 2.

4.10. Network Metrics

Network metrics reveal additional demographic distinctions. Figure 3 outlines how density and clustering coefficients differ across subgroups. Females showed tighter connections among rest-oriented subcategories, males exhibited a more expansive set of links to novelty-related themes, and older respondents displayed higher overall network density. Younger participants displayed fewer edges, suggesting a narrower set of priorities or less overlap among them. These findings hint that motivations may become more multifaceted with age, especially in the presence of work stress or family responsibilities.

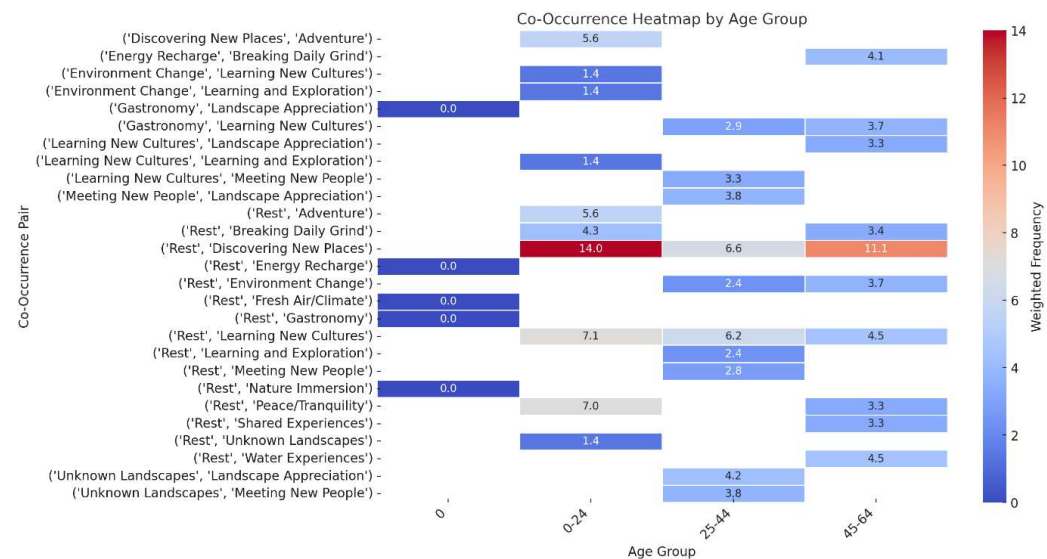


Figure 2. Co-occurrence Frequencies.

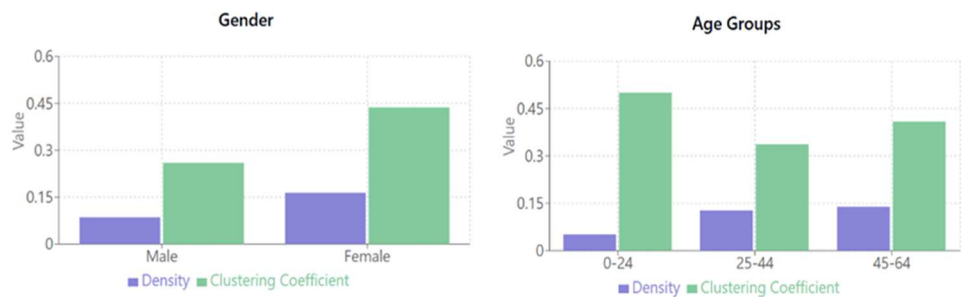


Figure 3. Weighted network metrics by Gender and Age.

4.11. Additional Regression Results

A series of linear regressions used the eight main categories as predictors for Satisfaction Dependency, Recommendation Likelihood, and Return Intention. The results showed low explanatory power (R-squared values below 0.02) when the categories were considered individually, suggesting that motivations alone do not explain all variability in these outcomes. For instance, Comfort & Care featured positive relationships with satisfaction and repeat visitation, but adding multiple motivation categories to the models did not meaningfully raise R-squared values.

Participants may prioritize rest, novelty, cultural experiences, or bonding activities, and they regularly combine multiple motivations for a single trip. The network analyses clarify the intensities of these connections and suggest that factors such as age and gender shape the intricacy of motivational structures. Co-occurrence data and direct participant narratives reinforce the idea that travel motivations rarely hinge on a single reason. Instead, rest, novelty, cultural interest, and social needs become intertwined.

5. Discussion

This study set out to uncover how tourists articulate and interconnect their motives for travel, and the results indicate that motivations are simultaneously diverse and intertwined. Physical & Mental Renewal, Social Bonding, and Novelty & Adventure emerged as prominent categories across demographic segments. While previous work on tourist motivation (Al Ansaari, 2019; Veerasoontorn & Beise-Zee, 2010; D. N. Su et al., 2020; Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015) often treated these drivers as discrete push or pull factors, our findings show that travelers regularly combine them, sometimes within the same statement. This

multidimensionality echoes the notion that motivations are rarely static or singular; instead, they morph in response to personal, social, and situational factors.

The discovered patterns reaffirm some classic approaches. Internal drives to rest or escape stress (push factors) and external attributes such as new environments (pull factors) remain highly relevant (Dann, 1981; Jang & Cai, 2002). Participants' emphasis on relaxation, family connection, and novelty resonates with push–pull logic (L. J. Chen & Chen, 2015; Wen & Huang, 2019). However, the frequent co-occurrence of different motives suggests that conventional, factor-based motivational models can underestimate the degree of overlap among rest, bonding, and exploration. Further, demographic influences—particularly age and gender—support established distinctions in travelers' priorities (Alén et al., 2016). Yet, our data reveal nuances that challenge neat generalizations, such as middle-aged participants citing both rest-oriented themes and novel experiences, or younger travelers seeking social belonging alongside adventure.

One notable outcome concerns the regression models. Although several motivational categories showed positive associations with satisfaction, recommendation likelihood, or return intention, the explanatory power of these models remained low ($R^2 < 0.02$). This finding suggests that motivations, while important, are insufficient as stand-alone predictors of behavioral outcomes. Theoretically, this aligns with network-oriented perspectives that view motivations as interdependent rather than linear drivers. Practically, it implies that DMOs and marketers must consider situational moderators—such as trip quality, group dynamics, or resource constraints—when designing strategies. Segmenting solely by motivation risks overlooking the contextual contingencies that shape whether a trip becomes satisfying or recommendable.

The practical relevance of our findings can be deepened by linking them explicitly to destination management strategies. For destinations struggling with overtourism, the coexistence of contradictory motives—comfort vs. sustainability, novelty vs. familiarity—offers a tool for repositioning. For instance, spreading visitor flows into less congested areas can address novelty-seeking demands while also relieving stress on core attractions. For emerging destinations, demographic distinctions in priorities (e.g., women emphasizing wellness and bonding, younger travelers valuing novelty and adventure) provide guidance on how to differentiate new market identities without defaulting to homogenized “sun, sea, and sand” branding. Additionally, the observed connections between relaxation and bonding suggest that family-oriented packages should integrate rest facilities with opportunities for shared experiences. For DMOs, this translates into product designs that blend paradoxical expectations rather than privileging one.

International trends further contextualize these implications. Post-COVID regeneration strategies must address heightened demand for wellness and safety, while simultaneously appealing to desires for exploration and cultural connection (Y. T. Huang et al., 2022; González-Sánchez et al., 2023). Digital detox tourism represents another growing niche: our findings show that the wish to disconnect is tied to distance and novelty rather than explicitly to technology use, which challenges simplistic “unplugged” marketing (Hassan et al., 2022). Finally, sustainability debates intersect with convenience demands: tourists may seek eco-friendly products but also emphasize being served and cared for. This paradox signals that destinations need to provide tiered experiences, where sustainable options are available without sacrificing comfort, and where messaging avoids greenwashing but acknowledges practical constraints (Arenas-Escaso et al., 2024; Anandpara et al., 2024).

One critical insight emerging from the data is the plurality of tensions and paradoxes in tourist motivations. Although the original analysis flagged broad contradictions—comfort vs. sustainability, digital detox vs. connectivity, novelty vs. familiarity—the open-ended responses reveal how deeply entrenched these paradoxes can be. Traditional push–pull

paradigms help us categorize motivations broadly, but they struggle to account for the coexistence of opposing desires in a single trip.

5.1. *Comfort vs. Sustainability*

Many respondents voiced a desire to experience natural environments and a sense of oneness with nature. One participant wrote:

“Primarily serves the purpose of disconnecting, which I find in nature. Given that I’ve been hiking since childhood, physical exercise doubly serves my good, both mentally and physically. [...] Silence, calm, and peace are needed to be able to stand my ground in everyday life again and again.”

Yet other travelers highlighted the importance of convenience and chore-free stays. One respondent noted:

“We escape the daily grind. It’s nice to vacation for convenience too, as I don’t have to cook or clean; I get served. It recharges me mentally and spiritually.”

Catering to these divergent demands can lead to greenwashing—where eco-friendly rhetoric is marketed but not fully realized—or to infrastructural developments that undermine local ecosystems. If major tourism players prioritize cost savings and high-volume comfort, critical voices point out that local environments or smaller-scale operators may be sidelined (W. Carvache-Franco et al., 2020). This raises broader questions: Are travelers complicit in unsustainable practices when they choose convenience over conservation? Or do these contradictory demands reflect structural constraints, such as the lack of affordable, genuinely eco-focused options?

5.2. *Digital Detox vs. Connectivity*

Many respondents discussed the desire to disconnect from everyday pressures, but did not explicitly frame it in terms of phone usage or “digital detox.” Instead, several mentioned that leaving home or traveling far is the only way they can truly switch off from work. One participant stated:

“When I’m on vacation but not traveling, I simply can’t stop thinking about work, and my mind keeps racing. Traveling, however, completely switches me off, making me forget about everyday life, work, and tasks.”

Another respondent underscored that distance is a practical shield from intrusion, saying:

“The destination is usually outside the EU, so they can’t reach me in any form. That’s the most important thing to truly relax.”

Far from being superficial quirks, these remarks suggest a broader tension between escaping routine responsibilities and remaining reachable in a hyper-connected world. Destinations thus face an uneasy balancing act between providing robust connectivity for travelers who still need online services, and marketing experiences that promise a meaningful break from electronic routines (Egger et al., 2020). Critically, one might question whether partial “unplug” offerings simply cater to consumer desire for carefully managed disconnection while reinforcing underlying digital dependencies that shape modern travel.

5.3. *Novelty vs. Familiarity*

Travelers frequently expressed enthusiasm for exploring new places, but some also emphasized that they are perfectly content at home, or even dislike aspects of travel. One participant extolled novelty, saying:

“Vacation is important to me because I gain many new experiences, can get to know new landscapes, new people, that’s why it’s good.”

Yet another expressed the comfort dimension:

“I can relax at home just as well. I don’t like crowds.”

This ambivalence may thus move the conversation away from more holistic discussions on cultural authenticity, the commodification of local heritage or the homogenization of worldwide travel (Richards, 2018; Douglas et al., 2024). A more pointed critique here questions whether tourism companies present sanitized forms of “exotic” offerings to quench tourists’ thirst for something new without exposing them to deeper cultural realities and thus diluting the authenticity that travelers say they long for.

Taken together, these paradoxes suggest that destination managers should not expect to resolve contradictions outright but rather to manage them pragmatically. For example, overtourism destinations can introduce rotational programs that alternate between high-comfort and eco-focused products, while emerging destinations can exploit the novelty–familiarity tension by offering both “first-time discovery” packages and repeat-visitor familiarity programs. Such practical recommendations move beyond descriptive findings and demonstrate how motivational constellations can be operationalized into destination-level strategies.

Threaded through these conflicts is a familiar theme about access to resources—material, technological and institutional—that can either alleviate or exacerbate stresses. Whereas larger companies can often skirt genuine sustainability with token “green” offerings, small destinations without the money or the infrastructure may well struggle to meet the needs of travelers seeking both fabulous amenities and sustainable lodgings. Recognizing these realistic constraints is essential for both DMOs and lawmakers. Where resources and knowhow are scarce, plans may outline stepwise solutions: for example, like supporting local businesses to adopt energy-saving technologies or creating buffer “digital-free” zones without completely reconfiguring the connectivity of the entire destination. Although not as structural as topdown transformations, such approaches demonstrate a pragmatic acknowledgment of navigating conflicting traveler necessities in the real world.

5.4. Reconciling Multiple Motives and the Role of Context

While our findings suggest that tourists do pursue multiple aims, the limited explanatory power of motivations as a predictor of satisfaction nevertheless highlights the role of context- and situation-specific determinants. A visitor might set out for relaxation but appraise the trip as a whole on the nature of interrelational moments, impromptu discoveries or the nature of environmental strains. This fluid dynamic makes it harder to assume that motivations directly dictate satisfaction. Rather, motivations may intersect with on-the-ground conditions—weather, travel delays or group dynamics—to produce complex results.

Additionally, limitations (especially financial) can inhibit travelers from actualizing their professed priorities (Rozynek et al., 2022). Even people passionate about ecological stewardship or wide-ranging explorations will choose cheaper, more available or less “green” options when prices become out of reach. From a critical point of view, those conditions expose inequalities in who can afford to travel ethically or to pay for niche experiences like “boutique ecotourism.” Without more significant structural changes—like policy incentives for sustainable operators or more public funding for local tourism upgrades—some motives are more poster than practical.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrated that tourist motivations are best conceptualized not as isolated drivers of behavior, but as complex motivational constellations. Tourists situate their holiday intentions as combinations of disparate psychological connections and concern for

others. On the same holiday trip, they conjoin relaxation, escape, bonding, and novelty with concern for self, others, and collective society. The analysis extended classical frameworks in tourism that focused on dichotomies including push–pull or need theories to summarize and differentiate the motivations, since it found evidence of relaxation being associated with adventure and bonding, with paradoxes created between technology–detox, sustainability–pampering, and novelty–familiarity. The use of a mixed-method design, specifically the three-stage coding approach, the inclusion of network analysis, and the reiteration of quantitative results, clearly showed that motivations very much need to be captured as constellations. By using only quantitative tools, researchers may aggregate meanings due to a singular focus on well-studied dimensions. By adding open-ended qualitative input, the results reveal the various nuances that may exist with emergent elements that do not align with pre-set themes. Thus, the results, with a focus on contrasting quantitative metrics that reflect an essential part of motivation to exercise six reasons relevant to motivation, have to acknowledge through inductive and participant-centric means that all 48 items play an important part in describing tourist motivations. Motivations are linked to each other and exist in concurrent combinations. For practitioners, the evidence that tourists enter several paradoxical states of mind concurrently may release them from the pressure of delivering a clear single value addition to the tourist but rather help them to develop products, marketing messages, or practical implementation strategies that accommodate relaxation as well as novelty and bonding. They suggest that by combining these elements in the same product or travel experience, tourists may experience greater satisfaction and enjoyment. However, the observed paradoxes of technology use and sustainability clearly indicate that messaging and programmatic delivery have to carefully consider these two motivational constellations.

These insights carry significant implications for destination management. For destinations challenged by overtourism, the coexistence of relaxation, novelty, and bonding motives suggests the need to diversify offerings spatially and temporally, thereby dispersing flows and reducing pressure on iconic sites. For emerging destinations, findings on novelty versus familiarity highlight opportunities to construct differentiated images that avoid homogenized branding while still accommodating visitors who seek comfort. For DMOs more generally, the co-occurrence of sustainability and convenience motives calls for product strategies that do not treat these as mutually exclusive, but rather integrate eco-conscious choices into comfortable and accessible experiences. By explicitly connecting motivational paradoxes to strategic options, this study provides a roadmap for stakeholders navigating complex market demands.

Future research could build on this methodological framework by tracking how motivation networks shift over time or across varied cultural contexts. Longitudinal designs might reveal how factors such as global crises, technological breakthroughs, or evolving social norms alter the configuration of travel motivations. Such future-oriented work would also help clarify how structural shocks—pandemics, climate change, or economic downturns—reshape motivational constellations and test the resilience of destination strategies (Seabra & Bhatt, 2022; Tasnim et al., 2023). These avenues of inquiry would not only advance theoretical debates on the fluidity of push–pull dynamics but also guide more adaptive industry responses to the evolving nature of tourist expectations.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides a multifaceted perspective on tourist motivations, several limitations shape its interpretation and point to avenues for future research. First, the absence of participants aged 65 and above limits insights into how motivations might evolve or intensify in later life. Seniors often place heightened emphasis on health, heritage,

and extended multi-generational travel, so targeted recruitment of this demographic would clarify whether and how motivational structures differ at older ages.

Second, the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported, open-ended data restrict the ability to observe motivational shifts as individuals move through different travel phases. Researchers might address this by employing longitudinal or experimental approaches—such as traveler diaries pre-, mid-, and post-trip—to capture how unexpected events, environmental shifts, or interpersonal dynamics reshape initial motives.

Third, while the study sought demographic variety, the specific cultural and geographical context of the sample inevitably narrows its generalizability. Variations in social norms, economic conditions, and collective versus individualist orientations could all alter the ways motivations cluster or co-occur. This underscores the value of cross-cultural or comparative studies that integrate local factors more explicitly. Additionally, participants' references to sustainability, digital engagement, and comfort often proved highly subjective; in destinations where infrastructure or resource constraints differ substantially, these motivations might take on different forms or priorities.

Moving forward, scholars could expand the network analysis framework to incorporate destination attributes, personality traits, or macro-level factors (e.g., economic downturns, public health emergencies). Such multifactor models would illuminate how external and internal drivers interact to shape travel choices. By investigating these possibilities—especially through more inclusive samples and longitudinal tracking—future work can deepen theoretical understanding and help practitioners design tourism experiences that meet the complex and evolving motivations of diverse traveler segments.

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