

Understanding Tourist Behavior through Psychological Theories : A Systematic Literature Review

Memahami Perilaku Wisatawan melalui Teori Psikologi : Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis

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Abstract

Although research on tourist behavior has expanded significantly, studies integrating various psychological determinants into a comprehensive framework remain limited and fragmented, and the lack of research combining bibliometric analysis with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach has resulted in an incomplete holistic understanding of research trends and key influencing factors. Therefore, this study aims to synthesize the main psychological determinants influencing tourist behavior while identifying publication trends and scholarly contributions in this field. This study employs an SLR approach using the PRISMA framework and the Scopus database, analyzing 50 reputable journal articles published between 2010 and 2025, complemented by bibliometric analysis to examine publication trends, citation impact, and scientific contributions. The findings reveal that tourist behavior is influenced by key psychological factors, including cognitive evaluation, emotional engagement, destination image, social influence, travel motivation, risk perception, and digital media exposure, along with a significant increase in academic interest reflected in an annual publication growth rate of 31.01% and an average of 104.21 citations per document. Emotional experiences, personal motivation, and social interactions emerge as dominant factors influencing travel intention and destination loyalty. Overall, this study highlights the importance of integrating psychological perspectives into tourism research, contributing theoretically by synthesizing previously fragmented literature and offering practical implications for industry stakeholders in designing more engaging, personalized, and sustainable tourism experiences.

Keywords: tourist behavior; tourism psychology; travel motivation; destination image; travel intention

Abstrak

Meskipun penelitian mengenai perilaku wisatawan telah berkembang pesat, kajian yang mengintegrasikan berbagai determinan psikologis dalam satu kerangka komprehensif masih terbatas dan cenderung terfragmentasi, serta minimnya studi yang mengombinasikan analisis bibliometrik dengan pendekatan Systematic Literature Review (SLR) menyebabkan kurangnya pemahaman holistik terkait tren dan faktor utama yang memengaruhi perilaku wisatawan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mensintesis determinan psikologis utama yang memengaruhi perilaku wisatawan sekaligus mengidentifikasi tren publikasi dan kontribusi ilmiah dalam bidang tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan SLR dengan kerangka PRISMA dan basis data Scopus, dengan menganalisis 50 artikel jurnal bereputasi yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2010 hingga 2025, serta dilengkapi dengan analisis bibliometrik untuk mengkaji tren publikasi, dampak sitasi, dan kontribusi ilmiah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perilaku wisatawan dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor psikologis utama seperti evaluasi kognitif, keterlibatan emosional, citra destinasi, pengaruh sosial, motivasi perjalanan, persepsi risiko, dan paparan media digital, serta adanya peningkatan signifikan dalam minat akademik yang tercermin dari pertumbuhan publikasi tahunan sebesar 31,01% dan rata-rata 104,21 sitasi per dokumen. Pengalaman emosional, motivasi personal, dan interaksi sosial menjadi faktor dominan dalam memengaruhi niat berwisata dan loyalitas terhadap destinasi. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya integrasi perspektif psikologis dalam studi pariwisata, memberikan kontribusi teoretis melalui sintesis literatur yang sebelumnya terfragmentasi, serta menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi pelaku industri dalam merancang pengalaman wisata yang lebih menarik, personal, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: perilaku wisatawan; psikologi pariwisata; motivasi perjalanan; citra destinasi; niat berwisata

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has evolved into one of the most dynamic and multidimensional sectors in the contemporary global economy, expanding far beyond recreational travel to encompass social, cultural, technological, and psychological dimensions that profoundly shape tourist decision-making (He et al., 2026). Travelers today seek not merely physical destinations but meaningful experiences reflecting their identities and personal aspirations a shift that demands interdisciplinary frameworks, particularly psychological ones, to adequately explain tourist behavior (Lv et al., 2025). Psychological determinants such as perceived value, emotional engagement, and cognitive evaluation have been widely recognized as central drivers of tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Huang et al., 2025). Studies consistently demonstrate that tourists evaluate destinations through subjective perceptions rather than objective attributes alone, with emotional attachment and perceived value emerging as stronger predictors of revisit intention than destination infrastructure (Kim, 2026). These findings challenge traditional rational-choice models of tourism behavior and underscore the primacy of psychological experience in shaping travel outcomes (X. Zhang et al., 2026).

Two theoretical frameworks have dominated this psychological turn in tourism research. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains travel intentions through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, while Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes intrinsic motivations autonomy, competence, and relatedness — as drivers of meaningful travel experiences (Suhud et al., 2025). Although both frameworks offer valuable explanatory power, they operate at different levels of analysis: TPB focuses primarily on pre-travel decision-making, while SDT better captures the experiential and motivational dimensions of travel itself. Critically, neither framework adequately addresses the growing influence of digital environments on tourist psychology (Suhud et al., 2025). The rise of digital platforms, social media, and live-streaming tourism content has introduced a new layer of psychological mediation one in which tourist perceptions and expectations are shaped well before physical travel occurs (Hu et al., 2026). For instance, This contrasts sharply with earlier models that positioned destination experience as the primary psychological trigger. Moreover, emotional memories formed during travel including excitement, nostalgia, and enjoyment persist beyond the trip and continue to influence future decisions through place attachment and destination loyalty (Qiao et al., 2026). Together, these findings suggest that tourist behavior must be understood as a continuous psychological cycle, not a discrete decision event (Pham & Le Phuong Giao, 2026).

Sustainability has further complicated this picture. While psychological factors such as environmental awareness and ecological values are linked to pro-environmental tourist behavior (Yang & Chen, 2025). The

relationship is neither direct nor universal. Studies show that tourists with high environmental awareness do not consistently translate attitudes into responsible behavior a gap explained, in part, by the absence of integrative models connecting motivation, emotion, and sustainability values (Yang & Chen, 2025). Research on identity and self-expression through tourism (Bu et al., 2025). and on risk perception during travel crises (Abror et al., 2025) tends to operate within isolated theoretical silos rather than contributing to a unified psychological framework.

This conceptual fragmentation represents the central problem motivating the present study. Despite substantial empirical growth evidenced by a 31.01% annual increase in tourism psychology publications the field lacks an integrative synthesis that connects its core psychological constructs: motivation, emotion, cognition, identity, and environmental responsibility (Eccarius et al., 2026). Without such synthesis, researchers and practitioners struggle to identify which psychological variables most consistently drive tourist behavior across diverse contexts and cultures (Tang et al., 2026).

This study addresses this gap through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA framework, drawing on 50 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025. Rather than examining isolated constructs, this research aims to map the dominant psychological theories applied across tourism contexts, critically compare their explanatory scope, and identify directions for more integrative theoretical development. The background of a study should clearly articulate the research gap by identifying inconsistencies, limitations, or unexplored areas in previous studies, thereby highlighting what has not yet been addressed in the existing literature. By demonstrating how prior research remains fragmented, lacks integration, or fails to capture emerging dimensions of the phenomenon, the background establishes the significance and urgency of the current study, positioning it as a necessary contribution to advancing theoretical understanding and practical application within the field. The findings are intended to contribute both to theoretical consolidation in tourism psychology and to practical guidance for designing emotionally engaging and sustainable tourism experiences.

METHOD

In the methodological framework, this study not only employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA protocol but also integrates advanced bibliometric tools, namely VOSviewer and Biblioshiny, to enhance the depth and rigor of the analysis. VOSviewer is utilized to construct and visualize bibliometric networks, including co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence, and citation relationships, allowing for the identification of dominant research clusters and thematic patterns within tourism psychology. Meanwhile, Biblioshiny, as a web-interface of the Bibliometrix R-package, is used to perform comprehensive

statistical analyses of the bibliographic data, such as publication trends, citation metrics, and collaboration structures. The combination of these tools enables a more systematic, transparent, and data-driven exploration of the

literature, ensuring that the synthesis is not only descriptive but also analytically robust in mapping the intellectual structure and evolution of research on tourist behavior

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Details
Inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2026. 2. Articles written in English. 3. Studies explicitly examining tourist behavior and/or psychological determinants within tourism contexts
Exclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conference papers, book chapters, editorials and gray literature. 2. Articles that do not examine examining tourist behavior, travel psychology, or destination decision-making

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the search process to minimize selection bias and ensure thematic consistency across the final dataset. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2025, written in English, and employed empirical research designs whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method. Crucially, each article had to explicitly examine psychological determinants of tourist behavior, such as travel motivation, emotional engagement, destination image, risk perception, or behavioral intention

within tourism contexts. Publications that did not meet this thematic focus including conference papers, book chapters, editorials, and gray literature were systematically excluded. Conceptual or theoretical-only papers, despite their academic value, were also excluded as they lack the empirical grounding necessary for behavioral synthesis. These criteria collectively ensured that the final sample reflected a coherent and empirically robust body of literature on tourism psychology.

Table 2. PRISMA flowchart – study selection process.

Phase	Step	Records (n)
Identification	Records identified through Scopus keyword search	404
	Records removed after year filter (2010–2025 only)	92
	Records removed after document type filter (journals only)	67
	Records removed after language filter (English only)	31
Screening	Records screened based on title and abstract	214
	Records excluded (not relevant to tourist behavior/psychology)	89
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	125
	Full-text articles excluded:	
	— No empirical data	18
	— Conceptual/theoretical only	22
	— Insufficient focus on psychological constructs	35
	Total excluded at full-text stage	75
Included	Studies included in the final review	50

The literature selection process in this study followed a systematic PRISMA-based approach consisting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. In the identification phase, a total of 404 records were retrieved through a Scopus keyword search, from which 92 records were removed based on the publication year filter (2010–2025), 67 were excluded due to document type (non-journal articles), and 31 were eliminated based on language (non-English). During the screening stage, 214 records were

assessed based on their titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 89 articles that were not relevant to tourist behavior or psychological aspects. In the eligibility phase, 125 full-text articles were further evaluated, with 75 articles excluded for the following reasons: 18 lacked empirical data, 22 were purely conceptual or theoretical, and 35 did not sufficiently focus on psychological constructs. Ultimately, 50 studies met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the final review for analysis.

Table 3. Summary of Bibliometric Data.

Category	Description	Results
Main Information	Timespan	2010–2025
	Total Documents	50
	Annual Growth Rate (%)	31.01
	Average Citations per Document	104.21
Document Contents	Keywords Plus (EN)	196
	Author’s Keywords (DE)	182
Authors and Collaboration	Total Authors	102
	Co-authors per Document	6.17
Document Types	Articles	50
Category	Description	Results
Main Information	Timespan	2010–2025
	Total Documents	50

The bibliometric profile of the selected studies indicates a growing and collaborative research field within the 2010–2025 timespan, comprising a total of 50 journal articles. The dataset demonstrates a high annual growth rate of 31.01%, reflecting increasing scholarly interest in the topic. On average, each document received 104.21 citations, suggesting strong academic impact and relevance. In terms of content, the studies include 196 Keywords Plus and 182

author-defined keywords, highlighting the diversity and richness of thematic coverage. The authorship pattern reveals a total of 102 contributing authors, with an average of 6.17 co-authors per document, indicating a high level of research collaboration. All included documents are categorized as journal articles, ensuring consistency in publication type and academic rigor across the dataset.

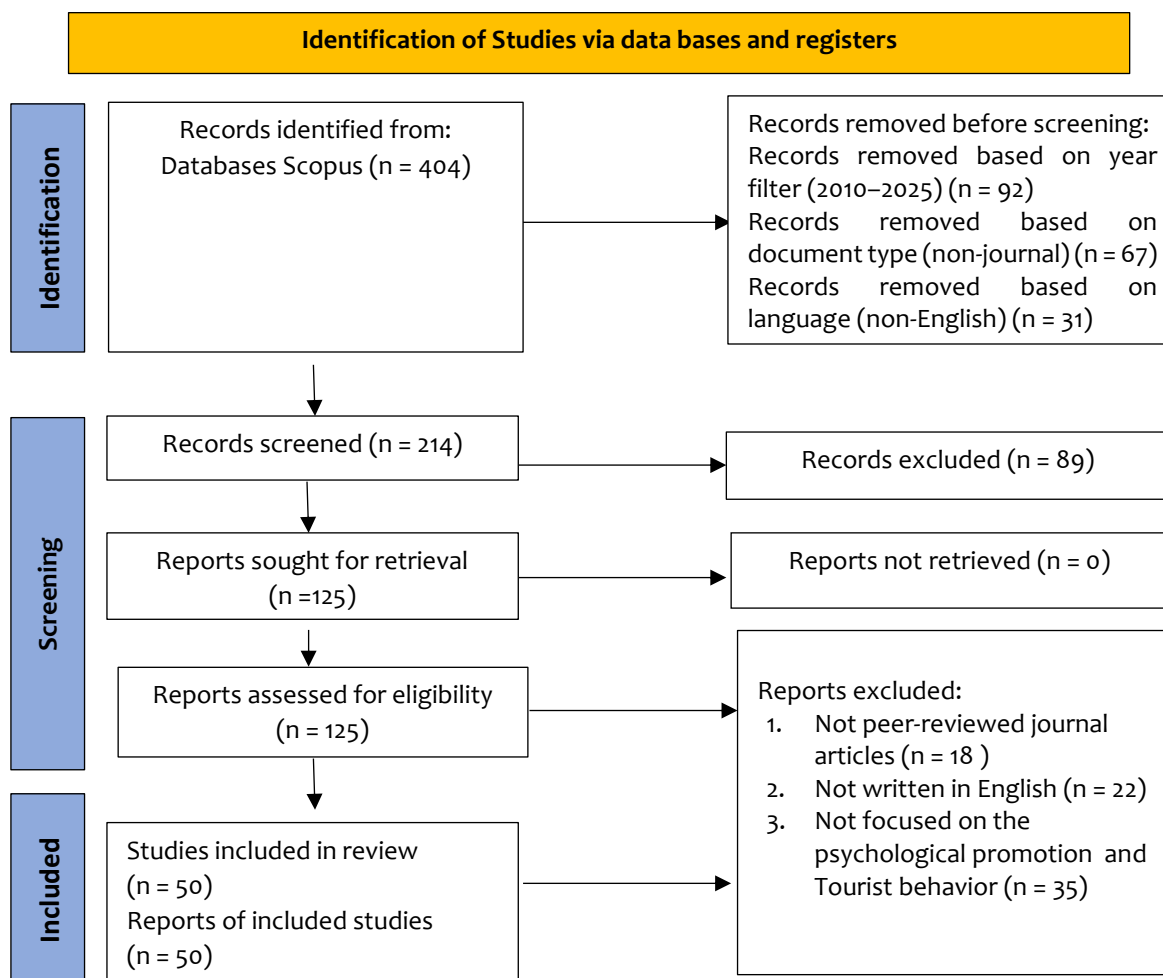


Figure 1. Article Selection

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on psychological factors influencing tourist behavior has evolved from a relatively fragmented area of inquiry into a more integrated and theoretically grounded field of study. The growing body of literature reflects increased academic attention to the complex cognitive, emotional, and social processes that shape how tourists make decisions, experience destinations, and evaluate their travel outcomes. This expansion is marked by the application of diverse psychological frameworks such as motivation

theory, perception theory, and decision-making models to better understand patterns of tourist behavior. Furthermore, accumulated empirical evidence highlights key determinants, including motivation, attitudes, risk perception, cultural values, and past experiences that influence tourist preferences and satisfaction. The recent surge in scholarly publications also signals a rising recognition of the importance of understanding tourist behavior not only for advancing theoretical development but also for informing sustainable tourism practices, destination management, and policy-making.

Publication Trends

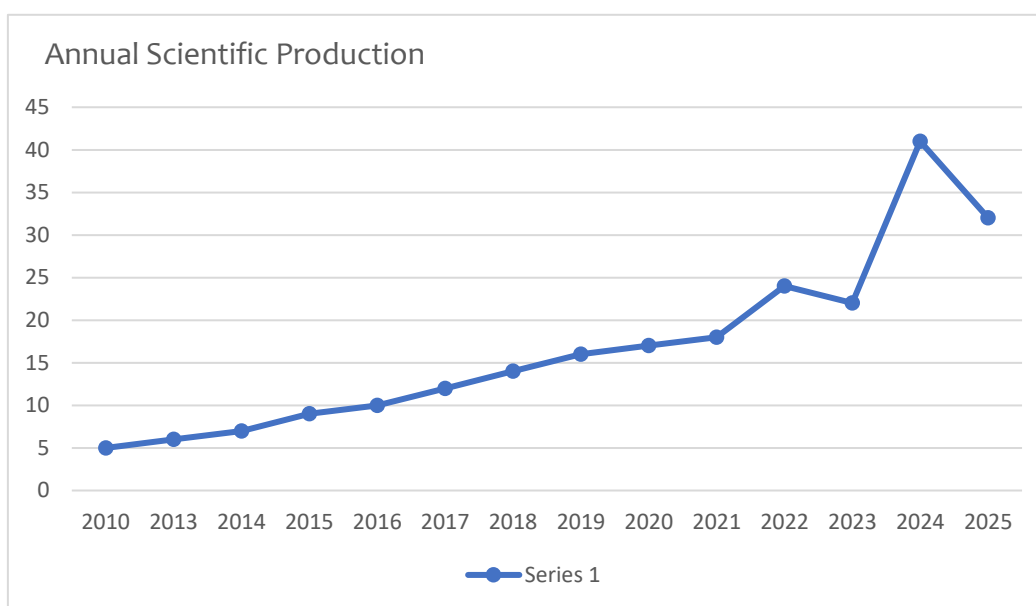


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production Graph.

The annual scientific production of publications from 2010 to 2025. Overall, the trend shows a steady increase in the number of studies over time, indicating growing academic interest in the research area. The number of publications began at approximately five documents in 2010 and gradually increased each year, reaching around 18 publications by 2021. A notable rise occurred in 2022, when the number of

publications increased to about 24, although a slight decline appeared in 2023. The most significant growth was observed in 2024, when publications sharply increased to more than 40 documents, representing the peak of scientific output during the observed period. Although there was a moderate decrease in 2025, the number of publications remained relatively high compared to previous years.

Citation Impact

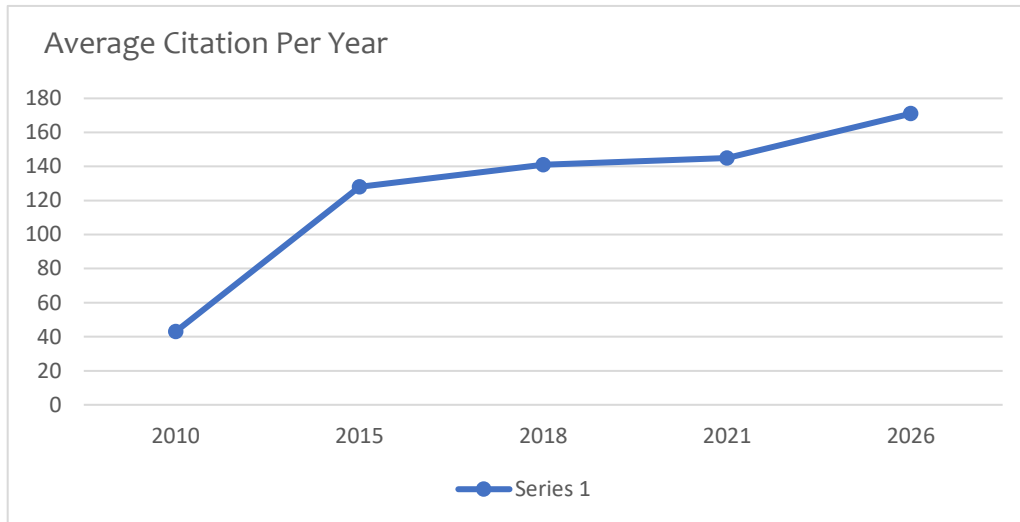


Figure 3. Average Article Citations per Year.

The figure presents the average citation per year of the publications over time. Overall, the trend shows a consistent increase in citation impact, indicating that the studies in this field have gained greater academic recognition over the years. In 2010, the average citation per year was relatively low, at around 43 citations. However, a significant increase occurred by 2015, when the average citations rose

sharply to approximately 128. The upward trend continued gradually in the following years, reaching around 140 citations in 2018 and about 145 citations in 2021. The highest level of citation impact appears in 2026, with the average citation reaching approximately 170. This pattern suggests that research in this area has become increasingly influential and widely referenced in the academic literature over time.

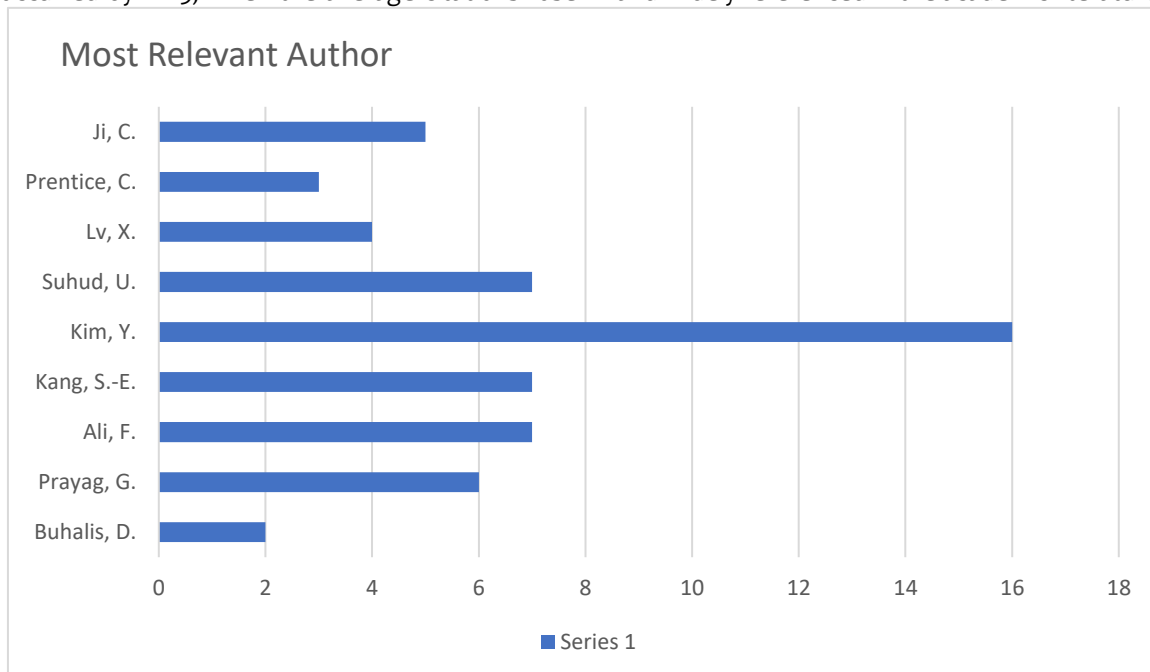


Figure 4. Most Productive Authors.

The figure illustrates the most relevant authors based on their publication contributions within the dataset. Among the listed scholars, Kim, Y. appears as the most productive author, contributing the highest number of publications with approximately 16 documents. This is followed by Ali, F., Kang, S.-E., and Suhud, U., each contributing around seven publications, indicating their strong involvement in the research field. Prayag, G. also

demonstrates a notable contribution with about six publications, while Ji, C. contributed approximately five documents. Other authors such as Lv, X. and Prentice, C. contributed around four and three publications respectively. Meanwhile, Buhalis, D. shows the smallest number of publications among the listed authors, with about two documents.

Density visualization

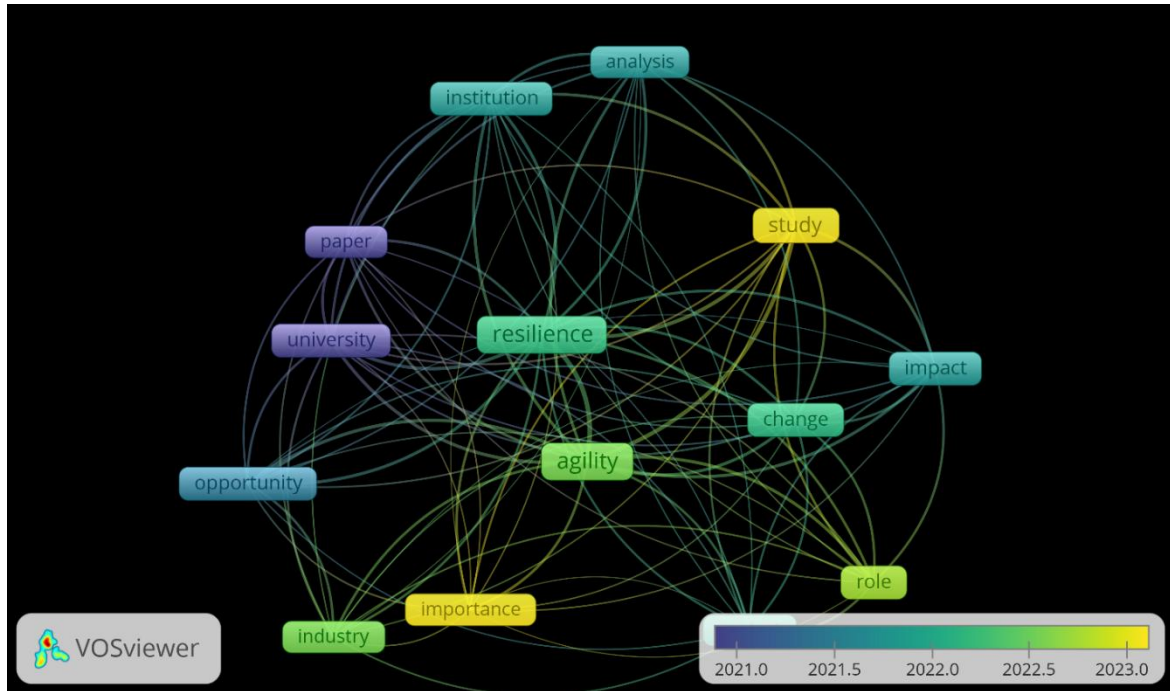


Figure 5. Co-occurrence Network Visualization.

Thematic evolution and research progression

Word cloud representation

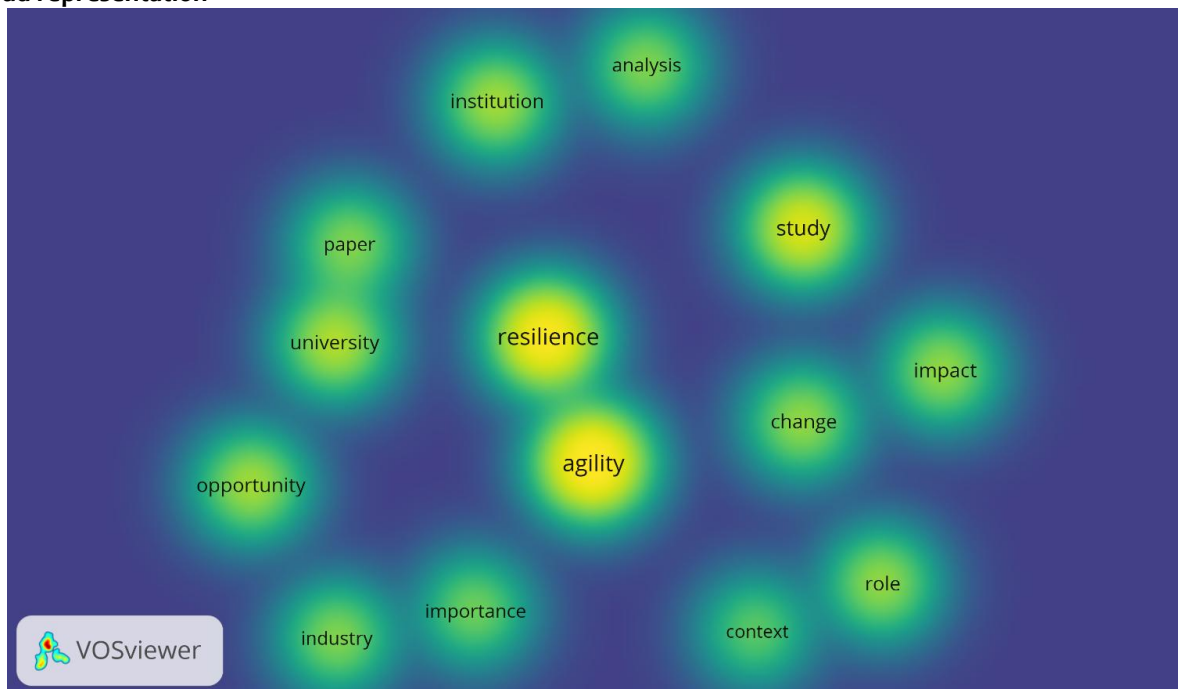


Figure 6. Co-occurrence Density Map

The results section presents the findings derived from the systematic review and bibliometric analysis of the selected literature. Following the PRISMA-based screening process, a total of 50 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2025 were included in the final dataset. These studies were analyzed to identify publication trends, authorship patterns, keyword distribution, and the dominant

psychological themes influencing tourist behavior. The analysis provides an overview of the development of research in tourism psychology and highlights the major factors that shape tourists' perceptions, motivations, and decision-making processes within contemporary tourism contexts.



Figure 8. Word Cloud Representation.

Psychological Determinants of Tourist Decision-Making

Tourist decision-making has increasingly been recognized as a complex psychological process rather than a purely rational evaluation of destination attributes (Abror et al., 2025). Traditional tourism models often assumed that travelers simply compare prices, accessibility, and attractions before making travel choices (Eccarius et al., 2026). However, contemporary research demonstrates that tourism decisions involve intricate psychological processes that combine cognition, emotion, personal motivations, and social influences (Tang et al., 2026). These psychological elements shape how individuals perceive destinations, evaluate travel opportunities, and ultimately decide whether to engage in tourism activities (Yoon & Wang, 2025).

One of the central arguments in tourism psychology is that travel decisions are strongly influenced by internal cognitive evaluations (Qiu et al., 2026). Tourists tend to construct mental images of destinations based on information they receive from various sources such as advertisements, social media content, travel reviews, and personal recommendations (Chen & Chen, 2026). These mental representations significantly influence how tourists interpret the attractiveness of destinations. When a destination is perceived as exciting, safe, and culturally appealing, individuals are more likely to develop strong intentions to visit (Gomez-Camara et al., 2026).

Psychological theories have provided important frameworks for explaining how these evaluations translate into behavioral intentions (Wu et al., 2025). The Theory of Planned Behavior, for instance, suggests that individual behavior is shaped by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Yan et al., 2026). Within the tourism context, attitudes reflect tourists' positive or negative evaluations of traveling to a

particular destination, while subjective norms represent the perceived expectations of friends, family members, or social communities regarding travel decisions (Qiao et al., 2026). Perceived behavioral control refers to the individual's belief about their ability to successfully undertake the trip (Kang, 2026).

In addition to the Theory of Planned Behavior, Self-Determination Theory has also been widely used to explain tourist motivations (Yu & Wong, 2026). This theory emphasizes that individuals engage in activities that satisfy their fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (R. Liu et al., 2026). Tourism often fulfills these needs by allowing individuals to explore new environments independently, develop personal skills, and connect with others (Tao et al., 2026). As a result, tourism becomes a meaningful activity that satisfies deeper psychological motivations beyond simple leisure consumption.

Motivation plays a particularly significant role in shaping tourist decision-making processes. Individuals travel for a wide variety of reasons, including relaxation, adventure, cultural exploration, social bonding, and personal self-discovery (Tran, 2026). These motivations often reflect deeper psychological needs such as escape from routine, search for novelty, or desire for personal enrichment (Mulcahy et al., 2026). Consequently, the decision to travel is not only influenced by external destination characteristics but also by internal psychological desires that shape individuals' travel preferences (Kucukergin & Kiliclar, 2025).

Another important psychological determinant involves the role of expectations in shaping travel intentions (Şengel et al., 2025). Tourists typically form expectations about their travel experiences long before the actual trip occurs. These expectations are shaped by promotional

materials, travel narratives, and the experiences of other travelers (S. Zhang & Kim, 2026). When expectations are highly positive, individuals may develop strong intentions to visit the destination in order to fulfill these anticipated experiences (Ravichandran et al., 2026).

Previous travel experiences also exert a strong influence on future travel decisions (Xu & Zeng, 2026). Tourists who have experienced satisfying trips often develop emotional attachments to destinations that encourage repeat visitation (H. Wang et al., 2025). Positive memories associated with travel experiences can strengthen attitudes toward a destination and increase the likelihood of returning in the future. Conversely, negative experiences can reduce trust in a destination and discourage repeat travel (Paul & Roy, 2026).

The role of memory in tourism behavior extends beyond simple recollection of past experiences (Rahimian et al., 2025). Emotional memories often become embedded within individuals' cognitive frameworks and influence how they interpret future travel opportunities (Khan et al., 2025). For instance, tourists who associate a destination with relaxation, happiness, or cultural enrichment are more likely to revisit that destination or recommend it to others. Memory activation therefore becomes a critical psychological mechanism influencing tourism decision-making (Han et al., 2026).

In contemporary tourism environments, technological advancements have significantly transformed how tourists form these memories and expectations (Gajić et al., 2025). Digital technologies such as social media platforms, online travel communities, and travel-sharing applications provide continuous exposure to travel-related information (L. Wang et al., 2025). These digital environments shape tourists' perceptions of destinations by presenting visually appealing images, personal travel stories, and immersive narratives.

The influence of digital media on tourism decision-making is particularly evident in the growing popularity of travel-related video content and live-streaming platforms (Kaur et al., 2026). Such content allows potential tourists to observe real-time experiences at destinations, creating a sense of virtual participation (S. Wang, 2026). This immersive exposure can generate emotional engagement and stimulate curiosity about the destination. As a result, tourists may develop strong intentions to visit locations they have only encountered through digital media (Zheng et al., 2026).

Another psychological factor influencing tourist decision-making is the formation of destination image (J. Zhang et al., 2026). Destination image refers to the overall perception that individuals hold regarding a particular travel location (Al Arif et al., 2026). This perception is shaped by cognitive beliefs about the destination's attributes as well as emotional responses toward the destination (Su et al., 2026). A positive destination image often leads to stronger travel intentions and higher levels of tourist satisfaction (Alqraini & Alasim, 2026).

Social influence also plays a crucial role in shaping travel decisions (F. Zhang et al., 2025). Individuals rarely make travel decisions in isolation; instead, they are often influenced by the opinions, experiences, and recommendations of others (Rajput & Gandhi, 2025). Friends, family members, and online communities frequently provide information and advice that shapes travel preferences. These social influences can reinforce positive perceptions of destinations or discourage travel to locations perceived as undesirable (He et al., 2026).

Cultural background further contributes to differences in tourism decision-making processes (Huang et al., 2025; Lv et al., 2025). Tourists from different cultural contexts may prioritize different aspects of travel experiences, such as cultural authenticity, religious compatibility, or family-oriented activities (Kim, 2026). Cultural values therefore influence how individuals evaluate destinations and determine whether those destinations align with their personal beliefs and expectations (Huang et al., 2025).

Perceived accessibility is another critical psychological factor influencing tourist decisions (X. Zhang et al., 2026). Accessibility includes not only physical accessibility, such as transportation infrastructure, but also psychological perceptions of ease and convenience. Tourists are more likely to visit destinations that they perceive as easy to reach, comfortable to navigate, and accommodating to their specific needs (Suhud et al., 2025).

Service quality perceptions also contribute significantly to travel decision-making (Hu et al., 2026). When tourists believe that a destination provides high-quality services, including hospitality, safety, and customer support, they are more likely to consider visiting the location (Pham & Le Phuong Giao, 2026). Positive service expectations create confidence in the travel experience, reducing uncertainty and strengthening behavioral intentions (Yang & Chen, 2025).

Risk perception represents another important psychological dimension affecting tourism behavior (Bu et al., 2025). Travel decisions often involve uncertainty regarding safety, health risks, financial costs, or unfamiliar cultural environments (Abror et al., 2025). Tourists frequently evaluate these risks before deciding whether to travel to a particular destination. High levels of perceived risk may discourage travel intentions or lead tourists to seek safer alternatives (Eccarius et al., 2026).

Psychological theories such as Protection Motivation Theory provide valuable insights into how individuals respond to perceived risks (Tang et al., 2026). According to this theory, individuals evaluate both the severity of potential threats and their ability to cope with those threats (Yoon & Wang, 2025). In tourism contexts, travelers may assess the likelihood of encountering safety hazards and determine whether precautionary measures can adequately mitigate those risks (Qiu et al., 2026).

The perception of risk is particularly significant during periods of global uncertainty such as health crises, political instability, or environmental disasters (Chen & Chen,

2026). During such times, tourists become more cautious in their travel decisions and may prioritize destinations perceived as safe and stable (Qu et al., 2026). Effective risk communication and safety management strategies, therefore, become essential for maintaining tourist confidence (Gomez-Camara et al., 2026).

Emotional and Experiential Dimensions of Tourism

The emotional and experiential dimensions of tourism represent one of the most significant perspectives in understanding contemporary tourist behavior (Wu et al., 2025). Tourism is not simply a physical activity that involves traveling from one location to another, but rather a complex psychological experience that engages individuals' emotions, perceptions, and personal meanings (Yan et al., 2026). Modern tourism research increasingly emphasizes that emotional responses play a central role in shaping how tourists interpret their experiences, evaluate destinations, and develop long-term memories associated with travel (Qiao et al., 2026).

Tourism experiences are inherently emotional because they often involve novel environments, unique cultural encounters, and moments of personal discovery (Kang, 2026). When individuals travel, they encounter unfamiliar landscapes, traditions, and social interactions that stimulate emotional reactions such as excitement, curiosity, and wonder (Yu & Wong, 2026). These emotional responses contribute to the overall perception of travel as an enriching and memorable experience. As a result, emotions become an essential element that shapes tourists' evaluations of their journeys (R. Liu et al., 2026).

Positive emotional experiences are particularly influential in determining tourists' satisfaction levels. When tourists feel joy, relaxation, or excitement during their travel activities, they are more likely to evaluate their experiences positively (Tao et al., 2026). Emotional satisfaction strengthens overall travel satisfaction and enhances tourists' perceptions of the destination. In many cases, tourists do not merely evaluate destinations based on objective attributes such as facilities or infrastructure but rather based on how those destinations make them feel emotionally (Tran, 2026).

The emotional engagement experienced during tourism activities often leads to deeper psychological connections with destinations (Kucukergin & Kiliclar, 2025). Tourists who experience strong emotional responses tend to develop lasting impressions of the places they visit (Şengel et al., 2025). These emotional impressions influence future behavioral intentions, including the desire to revisit the destination or recommend it to others. Consequently, emotional experiences become powerful drivers of tourist loyalty and long-term engagement with destinations (S. Zhang & Kim, 2026).

Another important emotional dimension of tourism involves the development of place attachment. Place attachment refers to the psychological bond that individuals form with specific locations through meaningful experiences and personal memories (Ravichandran et al., 2026). This bond emerges when tourists develop emotional connections with

the physical environment, cultural atmosphere, or social interactions they encounter during their travels (W. Liu et al., 2026). Over time, these connections transform destinations from mere geographic locations into places that hold personal significance (Xu & Zeng, 2026).

The formation of place attachment often occurs through repeated visits or particularly memorable experiences (H. Wang et al., 2025). Tourists who spend extended time in a destination or participate in culturally immersive activities may develop strong emotional ties to the place (Paul & Roy, 2026). These attachments influence how individuals perceive and evaluate the destination in the future. Once such emotional bonds are established, tourists are more likely to return to the same location and maintain a sense of belonging to that place (Khan et al., 2025).

Tourism experiences also contribute significantly to individuals' psychological well-being. Many people travel specifically to escape from daily routines, work-related stress, and urban pressures (Jia et al., 2026). Tourism provides opportunities for relaxation, reflection, and emotional rejuvenation (Rahimian et al., 2025). Activities such as visiting natural landscapes, exploring cultural heritage sites, or participating in recreational adventures allow individuals to temporarily detach from everyday responsibilities (Han et al., 2026).

Nature-based tourism experiences are particularly associated with psychological restoration. Exposure to natural environments such as mountains, forests, oceans, and rural landscapes often generates feelings of tranquility and emotional balance (Gajić et al., 2025). These environments help individuals recover from mental fatigue and restore cognitive functioning (L. Wang et al., 2025). As a result, tourism experiences in natural settings can play an important role in enhancing emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction (Kaur et al., 2026).

Adventure tourism also contributes to emotional fulfillment by providing opportunities for excitement and personal achievement (S. Wang, 2026). Activities such as hiking, diving, skiing, or exploring remote destinations challenge individuals both physically and mentally (Zheng et al., 2026). Successfully completing such activities often generates feelings of accomplishment and self-confidence. These emotional rewards strengthen tourists' perceptions of travel as a meaningful and transformative experience (J. Zhang et al., 2026).

Cultural tourism experiences further enrich the emotional dimension of travel by allowing tourists to engage with diverse traditions, histories, and artistic expressions (Al Arif et al., 2026). Encounters with local communities, participation in cultural festivals, and exploration of historical heritage sites create opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural interactions (Su et al., 2026). These experiences often evoke emotional responses such as admiration, curiosity, and cultural appreciation (Algraini & Alasim, 2026).

Another important aspect of tourism experiences involves the role of storytelling and narrative construction (F. Zhang et al., 2025). Tourists frequently interpret their travel

experiences through personal narratives that give meaning to their journeys (Rajput & Gandhi, 2025). These narratives help individuals organize their memories and reflect on the significance of their travel experiences. By sharing these stories with others, tourists reinforce the emotional value of their journeys (Teh et al., 2023).

The rise of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed how tourists share and construct these narratives (He et al., 2026). Social media platforms enable travelers to document their experiences through photographs, videos, and personal reflections (Lv et al., 2025). Sharing travel experiences online allows tourists to relive emotional moments while also presenting their identities and lifestyles to broader audiences (Huang et al., 2025).

This phenomenon highlights the relationship between tourism experiences and identity construction (Kim, 2026). Travel often provides individuals with opportunities to explore new roles, express personal values, and redefine their sense of self (X. Zhang et al., 2026). For many travelers, tourism becomes a platform for self-expression and personal development (Suhud et al., 2025). By engaging in travel experiences, individuals may discover new interests, challenge their perspectives, and expand their understanding of the world (Pham & Le Phuong Giao, 2026).

Identity construction through tourism is also closely connected to the concept of self-presentation. Many tourists intentionally choose destinations and activities that reflect their personal identities or aspirations (Yang & Chen, 2025). For example, individuals interested in environmental sustainability may participate in eco-tourism experiences, while those seeking adventure may pursue extreme sports tourism (Bu et al., 2025). These choices allow tourists to express aspects of their identities through their travel behaviors (Abror et al., 2025).

Another emotional dimension of tourism involves nostalgia. Nostalgia-driven tourism occurs when individuals travel to locations associated with meaningful past experiences (Eccarius et al., 2026). These may include childhood vacation destinations, historical landmarks connected to personal memories, or cultural heritage sites that evoke collective historical narratives (Tang et al., 2026). Nostalgia motivates tourists to reconnect with the past and relive emotionally significant moments (Yoon & Wang, 2025).

The emotional power of nostalgia often strengthens tourists' attachment to destinations and cultural traditions (Qiu et al., 2026). When tourists revisit places associated with cherished memories, they experience feelings of comfort, familiarity, and emotional continuity (Chen & Chen, 2026). These experiences reinforce the emotional significance of travel and encourage repeated visitation (Qu et al., 2026).

Emotions also play an important role in shaping how tourists evaluate the authenticity of their travel experiences (Gomez-Camara et al., 2026). Tourists often seek experiences that feel genuine and emotionally meaningful rather than artificial or overly commercialized (Wu et al., 2025). Authentic experiences allow tourists to develop deeper emotional

connections with destinations and local cultures (Yan et al., 2026).

Furthermore, emotional responses during travel frequently influence tourists' social interactions with others (Qiao et al., 2026). Tourism often involves shared experiences with travel companions, local residents, or fellow travelers. These interactions can create emotional bonds and memorable moments that enhance the overall travel experience (Kang, 2026). Social connections formed during travel may even develop into long-term friendships or cross-cultural relationships (Yu & Wong, 2026).

Emotional engagement also influences tourists' willingness to recommend destinations to others (R. Liu et al., 2026). When travelers experience strong positive emotions during their trips, they often become enthusiastic promoters of the destination (Handayani et al., 2024). They may share their experiences through storytelling, social media posts, or personal recommendations (Tao et al., 2026). This emotional advocacy plays a crucial role in shaping the reputation and attractiveness of tourism destinations (Tran, 2026).

Sustainability and Socially Responsible Tourist Behavior

One of the major themes emerging in the tourism literature is the growing attention to sustainability and socially responsible tourist behavior (Mulcahy et al., 2026). Global environmental changes, increasing awareness of the climate crisis, and the negative impacts of mass tourism have encouraged researchers to reconsider how tourist behavior is formed and how it can be directed toward more sustainable practices (Kucukergin & Kiliçlar, 2025). In this context, tourism is no longer viewed merely as a recreational activity but also as a social space that influences natural environments, local economies, and relationships between visitors and host communities (Şengel et al., 2025). Therefore, research on responsible tourist behavior has become increasingly important in promoting sustainable tourism development and ensuring that tourism activities contribute positively to environmental preservation and social well-being (S. Zhang & Kim, 2026).

Many studies indicate that tourists' pro-environmental behavior is strongly influenced by psychological factors related to environmental values and awareness (Ravichandran et al., 2026). Individuals who possess strong ecological values tend to demonstrate greater concern for environmental sustainability during their travels (W. Liu et al., 2026). Awareness of environmental degradation, climate change, and the importance of nature conservation can encourage tourists to behave more responsibly in their tourism activities (Xu & Zeng, 2026). For example, tourists with high ecological awareness are more likely to reduce the use of single-use plastics, choose environmentally friendly transportation options, and support tourism destinations that implement sustainable practices (H. Wang et al., 2025). Moral considerations regarding responsibility toward nature also play a crucial role in shaping individuals' commitment to minimizing the negative

environmental impacts of tourism activities (Paul & Roy, 2026).

In addition to environmental values and attitudes, psychological concepts such as environmental mindfulness and sustainability awareness play important roles in tourists' decision-making processes (Khan et al., 2025). Environmental mindfulness refers to an individual's conscious attention to the consequences of their choices during travel (Jia et al., 2026). Tourists who demonstrate a high level of mindfulness tend to carefully consider the social and ecological impacts of their tourism activities (Rahimian et al., 2025). This awareness is often reflected in their preferences for destinations that promote environmental conservation, sustainable nature-based tourism activities, and tourism experiences that positively involve local communities (Han et al., 2026).

Social and institutional factors also contribute significantly to shaping sustainable tourism behavior (Gajić et al., 2025). Information provided by tourism institutions, governments, and environmental organizations can influence tourists' perceptions of the credibility of a destination (L. Wang et al., 2025). Sustainability certifications, eco-labels, and environmental policy signals often serve as important indicators that help tourists evaluate the extent to which a destination or tourism service is committed to environmentally responsible practices (Kaur et al., 2026). When tourists perceive a destination as having a strong reputation for environmental protection, they are more likely to trust the destination and support sustainable tourism practices through their consumption choices (S. Wang, 2026).

Another dimension of socially responsible tourism concerns ethical relationships between tourists and host communities in tourism destinations (Zheng et al., 2026). Interactions between tourists and local residents have important implications for cultural perceptions, social relationships, and the long-term social sustainability of destinations (J. Zhang et al., 2026). Responsible tourists typically demonstrate respect for local traditions, cultural values, and community practices. They also tend to avoid behaviors that may exploit or damage local cultures. By maintaining mutual respect, the relationship between tourists and host communities can develop into a mutually beneficial interaction, ultimately strengthening the social sustainability of tourism destinations (Al Arif et al., 2026).

Tourism experiences themselves can also serve as an important mechanism for strengthening environmental awareness and social responsibility among tourists. Numerous studies suggest that environmental interpretation activities, educational programs in conservation areas, and eco-tourism experiences can enhance tourists' understanding of environmental protection and cultural preservation (Su et al., 2026). Through historical storytelling, cultural interpretation, and activities that directly involve tourists in conservation practices, tourism experiences can shape new perspectives on the relationship between

humans, nature, and local communities (Alqraini & Alasim, 2026). In this way, tourism functions not only as a form of recreation but also as a learning platform that fosters sustainability values and encourages responsible tourist behavior (F. Zhang et al., 2025).

The findings suggest that tourist behavior is best understood as a multi-layered psychological process where cognition, emotion, and social context interact dynamically. While the field has made significant progress in identifying key determinants, it remains theoretically concentrated and somewhat repetitive. The dominance of a few core constructs indicates the need for theoretical diversification and deeper integration across disciplines.

Future research should move beyond descriptive models toward causal and integrative frameworks, particularly by incorporating emerging perspectives such as digital psychology, behavioral economics, and identity theory. This shift is essential for advancing both theoretical contributions and practical relevance in an increasingly complex tourism landscape.

Research on psychological factors influencing tourist behavior has progressively matured into a more theoretically grounded domain; however, it remains partially fragmented due to the coexistence of converging and conflicting perspectives across studies. While the literature consistently recognizes the central role of cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, deeper analysis reveals that dominant frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) tend to privilege rational evaluation and intrinsic motivation as the primary determinants of behavioral intention, emphasizing constructs such as attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and psychological needs. In contrast, a growing body of experiential research challenges this rational dominance by demonstrating that affective responses such as emotions, nostalgia, and place attachment can exert a stronger and more immediate influence on tourist decision-making, often overriding pre-formed intentions, particularly in digitally mediated environments where social media exposure triggers spontaneous desire and emotional engagement.

The literature on risk perception introduces additional theoretical tension, as some studies conceptualize risk as a deterrent that suppresses travel intention, while others frame it as a source of excitement and novelty, especially within adventure tourism, thereby positioning risk as a dual construct that functions either as a perceived threat or as psychological stimulation depending on individual differences and situational contexts. Taken together, these inconsistencies underscore the limitations of single-theory explanations and highlight the necessity of adopting a synthesized, multi-layered framework that integrates cognitive, affective, motivational, and contextual dimensions to more comprehensively capture the complexity of tourist behavior

Table 4. Integrates Multiple Theoretical Perspectives into a Unified Explanation:

Theory	Contribution	Limitation	Integration Role
TPB	Explains intention formation	Overly rational	Forms a cognitive base
SDT	Explains intrinsic motivation	Ignores social/digital context	Drives internal needs
Experiential Theory	Explains emotional engagement	Lacks predictive structure	Explains affective dominance
Protection Motivation Theory	Explains risk behavior	Context-dependent	Adds risk evaluation
Digital/Social Theory	Explains external influence	Fragmented	Connects the modern tourism context

Table 5. Research Gap

Research gap	Existing findings	Future research direction
Limited integration between psychological determinants, emotional experiences, and sustainability behavior in tourism studies	Previous studies tend to examine tourist decision-making, emotional experiences, and sustainable behavior as separate research domains. Psychological factors such as attitudes, motivations, and perceived behavioral control are widely studied in travel decisions, while emotional experiences and sustainability awareness are often analyzed independently.	Future research should develop integrative models that combine psychological determinants, emotional experiences, and sustainability values in order to better understand how these factors simultaneously influence tourist behavior and destination choice.
Insufficient longitudinal studies examining how tourism experiences shape long-term attitudes and behaviors	Many tourism studies rely on cross-sectional data that capture tourists' perceptions and behaviors at a single point in time. While research shows that positive experiences and emotional engagement influence satisfaction and revisit intentions, little is known about how tourism experiences influence long-term behavioral changes such as environmental awareness or sustainable lifestyle choices.	Future studies should employ longitudinal research designs to examine how tourism experiences influence tourists' attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns over time, particularly in relation to sustainable tourism and environmental responsibility.
Limited understanding of the role of digital tourism environments in shaping psychological and emotional responses	Existing research acknowledges the influence of digital platforms such as social media, travel blogs, and live-stream tourism in shaping travel intentions and destination images. However, the psychological mechanisms through which digital tourism content influences emotional engagement, risk perception, and sustainable decision-making remain underexplored.	Future research should investigate the psychological and emotional effects of digital tourism environments, including immersive media, virtual tourism, and AI-driven travel recommendations, to better understand how digital technologies shape tourists' perceptions, decision-making, and sustainability awareness.

CONCLUSION

Tourist behavior is not merely a function of isolated variables but emerges from the dynamic interaction between cognitive evaluations, emotional engagement, and socially mediated influences, particularly within digitally mediated environments; thus, it reflects a complex, non-linear, and context-dependent process. Theoretically, this study contributes by synthesizing fragmented tourism psychology literature into an integrated framework that positions emotion, perception, and social influence as interdependent constructs, while also extending existing models by identifying digital media as a structural mechanism shaping destination image, emotional responses, and risk perception,

thereby bridging classical psychological theories with contemporary digital contexts. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that tourism stakeholders should move beyond functional promotion toward experience-centric strategies by designing emotionally engaging experiences, leveraging user-generated content, utilizing digital storytelling, and managing perceived risk through transparent and credible communication in highly connected environments. For future research, it is recommended to develop longitudinal and cross-cultural empirical models that examine interaction effects among key psychological constructs particularly the emotion risk motivation nexus while also incorporating emerging perspectives such as digital behavior analytics, identity

construction, and the attitude behavior gap in sustainable tourism, in order to advance the field toward more predictive, causal, and theory-building approaches.

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