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Exploring the determinants of solo female travel intention among millennials: a comparative study from rural and urban perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the factors that impact the solo travel intentions of millennial women in rural and urban areas. By exploring these factors, this research also sheds light on the similarities and differences in travel behaviors and motivations of women in different geographical contexts within India.

Keywords Tourist intention, Millennial women traveler, India, PLS-SEM

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In the current era, tourism has emerged as the most significant and rapidly growing industry contributing to the nation's economic development (Juliana *et al.*, 2023). The progress in the tourism industry has significantly increased, mostly due to the increasing interest in solo travel, especially among women, as they were more interested in independent travel adventures (Ghadban *et al.*, 2023). Single tourists have greater flexibility toward experiencing various activities at tourist destinations and fully discover such beautiful sceneries, ultimately feeling greater satisfaction and more intent to visit than married tourists (Nguyen Viet *et al.*, 2020). In addition, Mousa *et al.* (2023) state that female travelers are a valuable community for the tourism industry. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the voices of women travelers as this helps to enhance their current situation and ensure the efficient management and operation of tourism facilities.

Despite this substantial progress, solo travel is a relatively under-researched tourism segment and minimal research has considered the experiences of female travelers (Hosseini *et al.*, 2022). Earlier research mainly focused on tourists' risk perception (Carballo *et al.*, 2022)

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and halal tourist attractions (Juliana *et al.*, 2023). However, no earlier research compared rural-urban among solo travel intentions of millennial women in India. In addition, several studies have been conducted on solo travelers' intentions among Muslim tourists (Juliana *et al.*, 2023; Mousa *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, to date, no study has empirically investigated the solo traveling intention of Indian women. Accordingly, this article examines the factors affecting the tourists' intention to continue solo traveling with millennial Indian women. Therefore, the author formulated a robust conceptual framework directing the solo female travel intention to fill these gaps in the previous knowledge. The following questions have been formulated to align with the purpose of this study:

RQ1. How do self-empowerment, memorable tourism experience, perceived risk, hedonic motivation and destination image influence tourist intention to continue solo traveling among urban and rural regions?

This research significantly contributes to the tourism literature in several ways. First, the present research focuses on the travel intentions of millennial women, which facilitates women's exploration of diverse places, discovery of novel experiences, acquisition of new knowledge and development of understanding of various perspectives and lifestyles across the world. Second, the authors contribute to the traveling literature by responding Wang *et al.* (2023) calls for more studies on the comparisons between different groups of female travelers in diverse nations. Thus, the current article examines the factors that predict females' intention to participate in solo travel. Third, as Hosseini *et al.* (2022) recommended in their study, more research is required on different aspects of solo women traveling in different regions. As per Juliana *et al.* (2023), females born between 1981 and 1996 are considered millennials. By conducting in-depth research in this domain, destination managers can enhance their decision-making processes for promoting and developing destinations for a particular group of travelers.

Finally, the study provides fruitful insights into the traveling industry by addressing the impact of females traveling separately in urban and rural regions. These insights can serve as a foundation for further research and academic discourse, helping to advance the understanding of solo travel and its implications for society, gender roles and tourism development. This, in turn, promotes a knowledge-driven approach to the tourism industry, encouraging evidence-based decision-making and fostering continuous improvement. Likewise, this research has the potential to positively impact society by empowering millennial women, bridging knowledge gaps, providing insights for destination development and advancing the tourism literature. By understanding the factors that influence solo female travel intentions, stakeholders can work toward creating more inclusive, sustainable and meaningful travel experiences for women, leading to a more connected and culturally enriched society.

The manuscript is arranged in the following ways. Section 2 contains a literature review and the research hypothesis. In addition, the Sections 3 and 4 encompasses the research methodology, data analysis and the results of this study. The Sections 5 and 6 includes the discussion, implication, conclusions and further research directions of the present study.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 Solo traveling

Solo women's travel has been broadly addressed in tourism literature since the mid-1990s (Hosseini *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, Bianchi (2022) describes solo travelers as taking their journey independently. They also exhibited that engaging in solo travel among females fostered empowerment and independence effectively and eliminated excessive dependence or control over their families. Solo travelers are progressively emerging as a significant segment within the rapidly growing global tourism market (Hosseini *et al.*, 2022),

specifically among female millennials. Regarding millennial characteristics, Indian millennials stand out as the group that demonstrates a willingness to spend more on traveling. As per Anubha and Shome (2021), approximately 27% of the global population comprises millennials, which are 7.4 billion people. Furthermore, the study of Juliana *et al.* (2023) reported that individuals belonging to the millennial generation exhibit attributes of being at their productive age and displaying practical decision-making abilities. Therefore, this study investigates the tourist experience of female millennials in both rural and urban settings separately by considering five determinants, i.e. self-empowerment (Ghadban *et al.*, 2023); memorable tourism experience (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2022), perceived risk (Şengel *et al.*, 2022); hedonic motivation (Zhou *et al.*, 2023); destination image (Juliana *et al.*, 2023) affect their traveling intention. Furthermore, Nguyen Viet *et al.* (2020) claimed that developing nations are trying to enhance and broaden their tourism offerings to attract international travelers. Contextually, the significant presence of women within India's growing demographic represents a promising market with an untapped area, offering fruitful opportunities. Thus, it is crucial to enhance the representation of Indian females in the tourism and travel landscape.

2.2 Hypothesis development

2.2.1 Self-empowerment. Self-empowerment refers to taking control of one's life, decisions and actions to build confidence, achieve personal goals and improve one's overall well-being. Solo female travelers seek thrilling experiences and opportunities for social engagement, knowledge acquisition and self-discovery; they aim to challenge themselves and attain a sense of independence (Vij *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, as women have gained increasing empowerment and equal access to education, health care, travel opportunities, employment and political engagement, they have shifted their perspectives, recognizing women's significant influence in determining their status (Mousa *et al.*, 2023). Ghadban *et al.* (2023) describe a conceptual framework and find that self-empowerment is the motivational factor of solo female traveling intention. To this end, we posit that:

H1. Self-empowerment significantly influences tourists' intention to continue solo traveling.

2.2.2 Memorable tourism experience. A memorable tourism experience refers to a travel encounter or adventure that leaves a lasting and positive impression on an individual or group of travelers. When individuals travel to destinations that offer them novel experiences, such as exposure to a different culture, they tend to feel a sense of fulfillment and develop a desire to revisit those destinations (Nguyen Viet *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, Brochado *et al.* (2022) surveyed 1,003 Portuguese tourists and exhibited that they often believe in their past travel experiences when making travel decisions. They also reported that memorable tourism experiences substantially influence the intention to recommend. Notably, Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2022) studied the components of a memorable tourism experience, i.e. refreshment, hedonism, novelty, engagement, knowledge, local culture and meaningfulness and found that it substantially influences visit intention. Hence, the current study hypothesizes that:

H2. Memorable tourism experiences significantly influence tourists' intention to continue solo traveling.

2.2.3 Perceived risk. Perceived risk is the phenomenon that creates dissatisfaction among tourists on visiting their destination (Carballo *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, Mousa *et al.* (2023) and Hosseini *et al.* (2022) describe that harassment is a genuine concern for women in the

hospitality and tourism sector. Contextually, Gupta *et al.* (2023) and Ye *et al.* (2023) found that the perceived risk of contracting COVID-19 might reduce individuals from engaging in planned travel activity. Accordingly, Yeoman (2023) reported that the research affirmed that individuals with a more potent risk perception were more inclined to avoid traveling in India. Contextually, Şengel *et al.* (2022) and Sujood *et al.* (2023) reveal that perceived risk has a negative impact on travel intentions. Hence, this study hypothesizes that:

H3. Perceived risks significantly influence tourists' intention to continue solo traveling.

2.2.4 Hedonic motivation. Hedonic motivation is driven by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and it plays a significant role in shaping human behavior and decision-making. When tourists have a delightful experience at a tourist destination, their satisfaction with the place will likely increase their intention to visit (Nguyen Viet *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, Sujood *et al.* (2023) also determined that unique experiences and interpersonal connections inspired solo travelers. Furthermore, Shi *et al.* (2022) reveal a direct association between brand authenticity and tourist delight with destinations and this satisfaction directly influences tourists' intention to revisit. Contextually, Zhou *et al.* (2023) demonstrated the positive impact of hedonic motivation on tourists' behavioral intentions. Based on these notions, we posit that:

H4. Hedonic motivation significantly influences tourists' intention to continue solo traveling.

2.2.5 Destination image. Destination image refers to individuals' or potential tourists' mental perception or impression about a specific travel destination. Similarly, the destination image psychologically represents a person's emotions, knowledge and perceptions about destinations (Juliana *et al.*, 2023). Tourism destinations with robust brand equity and genuine brand identity can successfully achieve brand discrepancy and acquire the highly competitive landscape of tourism destinations (Shi *et al.*, 2022). In addition, Nguyen Viet *et al.* (2020) argued that tourist destinations famous for their natural environments enjoy numerous advantages in satisfying and retaining tourists. The research directed by Juliana *et al.* (2023) reveals an insignificant association between destination image and visiting intention in a tourism destination. Hence, the following hypothesis is framed:

H5. Destination image significantly influences tourists' intention to continue solo traveling.

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework containing eight hypotheses (*H1–H8*) that investigate the connections between variables: self-empowerment, memorable tourism experiences, perceived risk, hedonic motivation and destination image and control variables such as age, education and income. This model focuses on assessing how solo female tourists' intentions are shaped, particularly within the context of India.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Instrument development

The current article adopted all measurement items from previous literature (refer to Appendix Table A1). For measuring self-empowerment, the scale was adapted from Bagheri *et al.* (2023) and memorable tourism experience (Tiwari *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, Nguyen Viet *et al.* (2020) items are adapted from perceived risk and the scale was used for measuring hedonic motivation items (Zhou *et al.*, 2023). Besides, four items of destination image are adopted through a scale developed by (Juliana *et al.*, 2023). Likewise, tourist intentions to

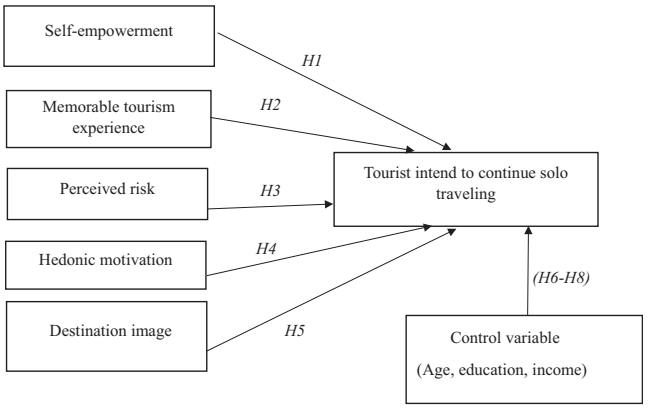


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

Sources: Author's elaboration

continue solo traveling items are adapted from the previously tested scale (Bianchi, 2022). Moreover, the authors considered the control variables such as age, education and income. Furthermore, the survey instrument contained 25 items, of which one each item was deleted from memorable tourism experience and perceived risk due to weak loadings; thus, 23 items were selected based on study R. Similarly, out of 25 items, two items were deleted from self-empowerment and one from perceived risk; therefore, at last, 22 items are selected for study U. Furthermore, the authors conducted a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with 39 female respondents. Then, the respondents were requested to assess the questionnaire's accuracy and the survey instrument's language. Afterward, the questionnaire was reviewed based on their opinions and suggestions. Two professors of tourism thoroughly tested it. Inspired by the study of Kumar *et al.* (2023a,b, c) and Rani and Kumar (2023), each latent construct is based on a "seven-point Likert" scale "where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree".

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The authors used a cross-sectional research design that involved gathering primary data through a quantitative approach. As a field of study, India is considered an appropriate setting for examining solo female travel intentions for several reasons. First, India is renowned for its ancient culture, rich heritage and many attractions; it is the world's seventh-largest nation (Nguyen and Hsu, 2022), where females often travel to learn about different cultures, languages and traditions, both within India and internationally. Second, the number of Indian national tourists in 2018 amounted to 26.29 million, compared to 23.94 million in 2017, indicating a growth rate of 9.8%, reflecting a heightened interest among Indians in traveling. Therefore, it is important to study the solo travel intentions of females in India to validate the study's conceptual model. Furthermore, the motivation for choosing millennials in India is that a significant portion of the country's population (approximately 440 million), accounting for 33%, live in urban cities (Anubha and Shome, 2021). In recent years, India has emerged as the largest millennial market globally, attracting international interest in Indian millennials (The Times of India, 2021). Therefore, the present article selects millennial females as a unit of analysis to validate the study's conceptual model.

Furthermore, the present article consists of two cross-sectional studies: Study R is based on rural and Study U is on urban female respondents residing in India. Accordingly, online and offline questionnaires were taken from females and used selection criteria at the survey initiation; "Have you ever solo traveled, whether domestically or internationally, at least once?." Those females who said "yes" were taken for data collection. A pilot survey ($N = 47$), comprising 26 urban females and 21 rural females, was carried out to validate the accuracy and construct reliability of survey questions. By incorporating their feedback, the authors made the required modifications, resulting in the formulation of the final questionnaire. The standardized questionnaires (with transparent, straightforward and easily comprehensible questions) were disseminated from January and March 2023 to the target respondents. Before conducting the survey, the authors and their team provided the participants with an overview of the study's background and gave surety for their data privacy. The data for the existing research was attained using purposive sampling (Juliana *et al.*, 2023). In study R (411) and U (397), respondents were found suitable for removing the missing value and recursive answers as there are 23 measurable items; as per Hair *et al.* (2011), the "10-times rule," this number of questionnaires would be substantial enough.

3.3 Common method bias

This research performed Herman's single-factor test to check the common method bias in the data. The findings revealed that the first factor accounted for only 31.16% of the variables. This value falls below the accepted threshold of 50%. These results suggest that the study is not significantly affected by common method variance, as confirmed by the findings of Kumar *et al.* (2024a, b, c).

4. Data analysis

The research model proposed in this study was analyzed using the partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. The main reason for applying PLS-SEM is that it deals with empirical data that include missing values, multicollinearity concerns, nonparametric tests or small sample sizes (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The sample consisted of 411 female respondents in rural regions, with (33.33%) females aged between 27 and 32 years and in total, 397 female respondents in the urban region, with (36.53%) females aged between 27 and 32 years. Furthermore, in rural regions, 54.99% are unmarried, 45.52% are salaried and 85.89% of respondents are post graduated. In urban regions, 51.13% are unmarried, 39.29% are salaried and 79.60% of respondents are post graduated. Most respondents in the rural region (98.54%) and (96.73%) in the urban region had traveled domestically. Furthermore, it was found that most respondents' 50.61% traveling frequency is more than one year in a rural region and 39.55% traveled within six months in the urban region. It indicates that urban females more frequently traveled than rural females. Table 1 exhibits the detailed respondents' demographic profiles.

4.2 Assessment of measurement loading

The measurement model conducts the confirmatory factor analysis to accept the validity and reliability of the constructs. Study R (Rural) and Study U (Urban) are confirmed by calculating each item's outer loading, shown in Table 2. Experts recommended that the value of Cronbach alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) may be higher than 0.7 and less than 0.95 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, the value of CA ranged between Study R (0.801–0.854)

Table 1.
Demographic profile

Respondents	$N = 411$ (%) Rural	$N = 397$ (%) Urban
	Age (years)	
27–32	137 (33.33)	145 (36.52)
32–37	172 (41.85)	134 (33.75)
37–42	102 (24.82)	118 (29.73)
	Education	
Up to 12th	14 (3.41)	19 (4.79)
Graduation	157 (38.20)	179 (45.09)
Post-graduation	182 (44.28)	118 (29.72)
Others	58 (14.11)	81 (20.40)
	Marital status	
Married	169 (41.12)	173 (43.58)
Unmarried	226 (54.99)	203 (51.13)
Widow/divorcee	16 (3.89)	21 (5.29)
	Geographical region	
Domestic	405 (98.54)	384 (96.73)
International	6 (1.46)	13 (3.27)

Respondents	$N = 411$ (%) Rural	$N = 397$ (%) Urban
	Occupation	
Student	11 (2.68)	13 (3.28)
Unemployed/homemaker	52 (12.65)	63 (15.87)
Self-employed/business	165 (40.15)	165 (41.56)
Salaried	183 (44.52)	156 (39.29)
	Time-frequency of visiting	
Up to 6 months	71 (17.27)	157 (39.55)
6 months to 1 year	132 (32.12)	141 (35.51)
More than 1 year	208 (50.61)	99 (24.94)
	Annual income (Rs.)	
Up to 2.5 lakh	17 (4.14)	19 (4.79)
2.5–5 lakhs	129 (31.39)	110 (27.71)
5–10 lakhs	156 (37.95)	156 (39.29)
Above 10 lakhs	109 (26.52)	112 (28.21)

Source: Survey data

Construct	Outer loadings		Cronbach's alpha		Composite reliability		Average variance extracted	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Self-empowerment (SEW)			0.801	0.807	0.881	0.885	0.712	0.719
SEW1	0.871	0.869						
SEW2	0.854	0.853						
SEW3	0.805	0.822						
Memorable tourism experience (MTE)			0.810	0.810	0.866	0.866	0.565	0.565
MTE1	0.765	0.766						
MTE2	0.699	0.702						
MTE3	0.784	0.781						
MTE4	0.695	0.703						
MTE5	0.808	0.802						
Perceived risk (PR)			0.806	0.728	0.806	0.845	0.585	0.646
PR1	0.633	0.794						
PR2	0.887	0.743						
PR3	0.755	0.870						
Hedonic motivation (HM)			0.854	0.841	0.854	0.879	0.596	0.652
HM1	0.796	0.904						
HM2	0.850	0.914						
HM3	0.695	0.770						
HM4	0.739	0.600						
Destination image (DI)			0.837	0.760	0.886	0.860	0.663	0.671
DI1	0.842	0.829						
DI2	0.914	0.807						
DI3	0.750	0.822						
DI4	0.738	–						
Tourist intention to continue solo traveling (TI)			0.814	0.813	0.878	0.877	0.643	0.641
TI1	0.723	0.750						
TI2	0.835	0.823						
TI3	0.806	0.787						
TI4	0.838	0.841						

Source: Software output

Table 2.
Results of measurement models

and Study U (0.728–0.841). Moreover, the values of CR lie between (0.806–0.886) for Study R and (0.845–0.885) for Study U, confirming the reliability and validity of the data.

As noted by Hair *et al.* (2011), all the study R's research constructs ranged (0.565–0.712) and Study U's (0.565–0.719), which infers that the items evaluated in the same constructs characterize beyond 50% of the variance of the constructs. Moreover, Hair *et al.* (2019); Kumar and Rani (2024) reported that discriminant validity between all construct values is below the proposed cut-off of 0.90 and fulfilled the convergent validity criterion (see Table 3).

4.3 Structural model assessment

The assessment of a structural model involves various statistical measures, including the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients (β) and *t*-statistics. These metrics collectively contribute to understanding the model's explanatory power, the strength of relationships between variables and the statistical significance of those relationships. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is a crucial indicator that reveals the proportion of variance in the dependent variable accounted for by the independent variables in the model. A higher R^2 signifies a stronger ability of the model to explain and predict the observed outcomes (Hair *et al.*, 2019). According to Study R ($R^2 = 0.562$) and Study U ($R^2 = 58.1\%$), self-empowerment, memorable tourism experience, perceived risk, hedonic motivation and destination image drive 56.2% and 58.1% of the variation in tourist intention to continue solo traveling. Likewise, the effect size of predictive ability (f^2) is specifically designed for PLS-SEM, and it gauges the predictive relevance of a particular endogenous construct in the model. It evaluates the proportion of variance explained in a dependent variable by a set of predictors. A high f^2 value implies that the latent variable in question is significantly influenced by the identified predictors, reinforcing the model's capacity to make meaningful predictions. Thus, in Table 4, the effect size of the predictive ability (f^2) of both (Study R and Study U) has a high predictive ability (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, path coefficients are tested using the bootstrapping technique (5,000 subsamples). In Table 4 and Figure 2, the Study R conclude that, hedonic motivation → tourist's intention to continue solo traveling has a higher impact ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$) than memorable tourism experience ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.001$) and self-empowerment ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the *H1*, *H2* and *H4*. Nevertheless, the perceived risk ($\beta = -0.019$, $p > 0.05$) and destination image ($\beta = 0.096$, $p > 0.05$) have negligible impact on tourist intention to continue solo traveling; accordingly, *H3* and *H5* are not supported.

Furthermore, the outcome of Study U reveals that destination image → tourist intention to continue solo traveling has a higher impact ($\beta = 0.334$, $p < 0.001$) than self-empowerment ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$) and memorable tourism experience ($\beta = 0.271$, $p < 0.001$) and hedonic motivation ($\beta = 0.124$, $p < 0.001$); confirming the *H1*, *H2*, *H4* and *H5*. However, the perceived risk ($\beta = -0.059$, $p > 0.05$) has a negligible impact on tourist intention to continue solo traveling; accordingly, *H3* is not supported (please refer to Figure 3). Moreover, the control variables, namely, age, education and income ($p > 0.005$), do not significantly influence the tourists' intention to continue solo traveling. Hence, *H6*, *H7* and *H8* are not supported.

4.4 Rural and urban differences

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirms or tests a pre-specified theoretical model that suggests how observed variables relate to latent factors. After validating the factors of female tourists' intention to continue solo traveling, an independent sample *t*-test was performed to verify whether there is a significant difference between rural and urban females. The independent samples *t*-test is a statistical method used to compare the means

Variables	Self-empowerment	Memorable tourism experience	Perceived risk	Hedonic motivation	Destination image	Tourist intention
Self-empowerment	*(0.844)*					
Memorable tourism experience	0.603	*(0.752)*				
Perceived risk	0.044	−0.048	*(0.765)*			
Hedonic motivation	0.718	0.541	−0.087	*(0.772)*		
Destination image	−0.033	−0.052	0.061	−0.099	*(0.814)*	
Tourist intention	0.656	0.613	−0.044	0.657	0.039	*(0.802)*
Discriminant validity–Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Study R)						
Self-empowerment						
Memorable tourism experience	0.730					
Perceived risk	0.120	0.084				
Hedonic motivation	0.882	0.620	0.110			
Destination image	0.070	0.099	0.140	0.130		
Tourist intention	0.794	0.729	0.055	0.790	0.081	
Correlation analysis and discriminant validity–Fornell–Larcker criterion (Study U)						
Self-empowerment	*(0.848)*					
Memorable tourism experience	0.593	*(0.752)*				
Perceived risk	0.046	−0.045	*(0.804)*			
Hedonic motivation	−0.041	−0.055	0.046	*(0.807)*		
Destination image	0.641	0.532	−0.006	−0.126	*(0.819)*	
Tourist intention	0.655	0.616	−0.054	0.053	0.648	*(0.801)*
Discriminant validity–Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Study U)						
Self-empowerment						
Memorable tourism experience	0.715					
Perceived risk	0.096	0.085				
Hedonic motivation	0.065	0.089	0.134			
Destination image	0.800	0.631	0.040	0.185		
Tourist intention	0.793	0.735	0.070	0.089	0.805	

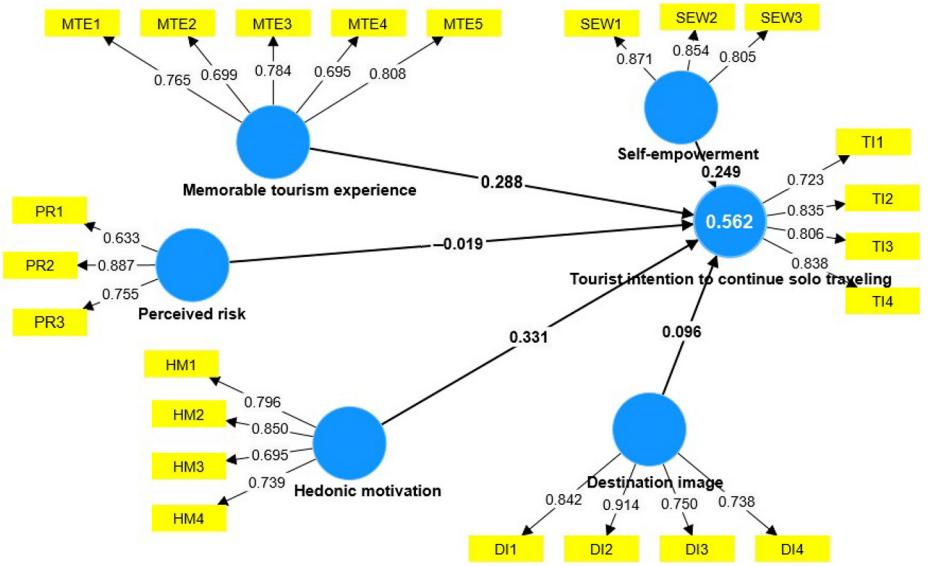
Note: Italic values in parentheses represent the square root of AVEs
Source: Software output

Table 3.
Correlation analysis and discriminant validity–Fornell–Larcker criterion (Study R)

Hypothesized path	Path coefficient		Difference (Study R– Study U)	f^2		t-value		Results	
	Rural	Urban		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
H1 Self-empowerment → tourist intention	0.249	0.287	−0.038	0.058	0.098	4.470***	6.133***	Supported	Supported
H2 Memorable tourism experience → tourist intention	0.288	0.271	0.017	0.115	0.107	7.202***	6.539***	Supported	Supported
H3 Perceived risk → tourist intention	−0.019	−0.059	−0.078	0.001	0.008	0.422	1.135	Not supported	Not supported
H4 Hedonic motivation → tourist intention	0.331	0.124	0.207	0.112	0.036	6.498***	2.042*	Supported	Supported
H5 Destination image → tourist intention	0.096	0.334	−0.238	0.021	0.146	1.878	7.283***	Not supported	Supported

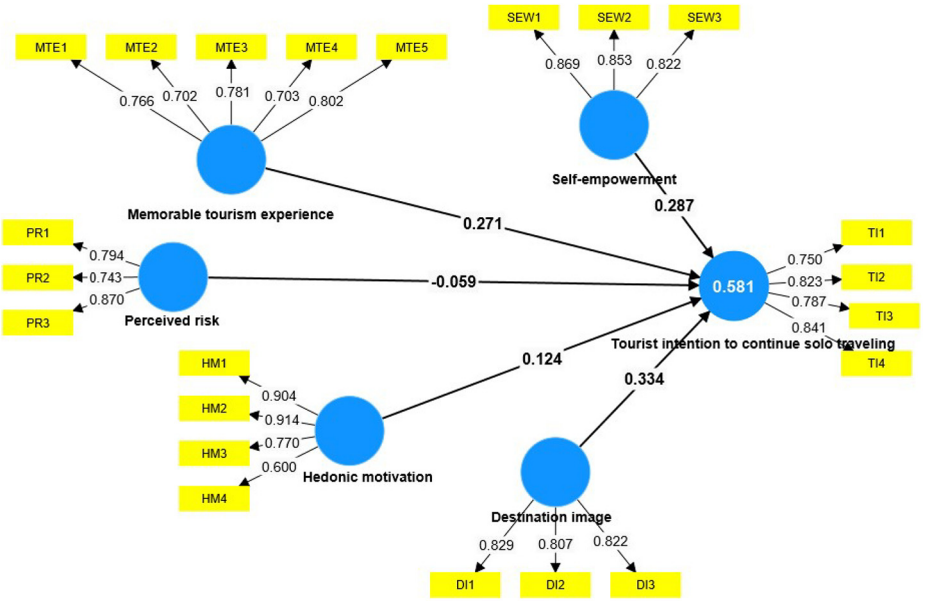
Note: Significance at $p < 0.05$*; ***$p < 0.001$
Source: Software output

Table 4.
Results of hypothesis testing (Studies R and U)



Source: Software output

Figure 2.
Path coefficient value (Study R)



Source: Software output

Figure 3.
Path coefficient value (Study U)

of two independent groups to determine if there is a significant difference between them. In comparing urban and rural female populations, we used the independent samples *t*-test to investigate whether a specific variable has statistically significant differences. The test results depict that rural and urban females significantly differ in hedonic motivation and destination image and other factors are insignificant (please refer to Table 5).

5. Discussion

In the present research, the authors examined various factors influencing the intention of solo female travelers in India's rural and urban regions. The findings indicate that self-empowerment significantly impacts the intention of solo female travelers in both rural and urban regions, which aligns with the outcomes of Ghadban *et al.* (2023). It suggested that solo female travelers can engage in social interaction, seek adventure, pursue educational opportunities, develop self-understanding, enhance self-esteem and achieve a sense of autonomy. The researchers also hypothesized a substantial association between memorable tourism experiences and tourists' intention to continue solo traveling in rural and urban areas, which is coherent with the outcomes of Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2022). It implies that memorable tourism experiences are selectively constructed based on tourism experiences that generate positive memories and delightful experiences, thereby fostering the formation of favorable recollections about the destination.

Notably, perceived risk has an insignificant impact on tourists' intention to continue solo traveling in India's urban and rural areas of India. It suggests that higher levels of risk perception, such as traffic accidents and crime risks (theft, robbery and pickpocketing), among urban and rural women reduce their intention to travel. These outcomes are aligned with previous studies of (Sujood *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the study reveals that hedonic motivation significantly influences tourists' intention to continue solo traveling in both regions. This observation aligns with the findings of Zhou *et al.* (2023), indicating that when women partake in enjoyable, exciting and entertaining activities during their travels, it positively influences their intent to revisit the destination. Finally, this study finding highlights a noteworthy connection between destination image and the tourist intention to continue solo traveling within urban regions. Remarkably, this association is found to be statistically significant.

Conversely, the results indicate an insignificant relationship between destination image and tourist intention to continue solo traveling in rural regions. This outcome aligns with the research by Juliana *et al.* (2023), who similarly observed that rural women may encounter difficulties in evaluating destination images due to the perceived inadequacy of tourism services. This shortfall in service quality can lead to a negative perception among solo female travelers. Consequently, these research findings offer valuable insights for tourism service providers. Understanding the distinct perceptions of women residing in urban and rural areas is crucial for tailoring services that meet the unique needs and expectations of solo female travelers in different settings. This nuanced understanding can aid in developing targeted strategies to enhance the overall tourism experience for women, contributing to a more inclusive and accommodating travel environment.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This article significantly enriches the existing literature on tourism by delving into multiple dimensions related to the solo travel intentions of millennial women born between 1981 and 1996 in India. First, it contributes by specifically focusing on the perspectives of rural and urban areas. Despite abundant research on millennial travelers, there has been a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the nuanced factors that shape the solo travel intentions of

Differences between rural and urban		Levene's test for equality of variances		*t*-test for equality of means						
									95% Confidence interval of the difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error diff.	Lower	Upper
Self-empowerment	Assuming equal variances	0.051	0.822	0.333	806	0.739	0.09980	0.29981	−0.48870	0.68830
Memorable tourism experience	Assuming equal variances	0.028	0.868	0.284	806	0.777	0.11311	0.39868	−0.66946	0.89568
Perceived risk	Assuming equal variances	0.102	0.749	0.365	806	0.715	0.07435	0.20382	−0.32571	0.47446
Hedonic motivation	Assuming equal variances	12.157	0.001	34.030	806	0.000	10.29158	0.30242	9.69796	10.88521
Destination image	Assuming equal variances	5.310	0.021	−19.976	806	0.000	−4.91592	0.24609	−5.39897	−4.43287
Tourist intention to continue solo travelling	Assuming equal variances	0.181	0.671	−0.130	806	0.897	0.04131	0.31799	−0.66549	0.58287

Source: Software output

Table 5.
Independent sample *t*-test

millennial women in India. The study carefully considers variables such as self-empowerment, memorable tourism experience, perceived risk, hedonic motivation and destination image, providing a comprehensive exploration into these factors' intricate interplay on millennial women's travel decisions. Second, the research addresses the evolving trend of solo travel within the broader tourism industry. While there is substantial literature on women and tourism in Western countries, represented by studies such as Vij *et al.* (2023), there is a notable dearth of research examining the solo travel intentions of Indian females. This study actively endeavors to bridge this gap, presenting a unique contribution to the literature by specifically investigating the factors influencing the solo travel intentions of Indian millennial women. Doing so sheds light on the distinct socio-cultural and contextual aspects that may influence travel preferences in both rural and urban contexts.

The theoretical background of this study is grounded in the broader frameworks of consumer behavior, tourism studies and gender studies. It draws on theories related to self-empowerment, memorable tourism experiences, perceived risk, hedonic motivation and destination image to establish a conceptual foundation. The study is situated within contemporary tourism trends, emphasizing the importance of understanding the preferences and intentions of millennial women, who constitute a significant and dynamic segment of the travel market. By providing insights into these specific factors, the article contributes to academic knowledge and the practical development of the tourism sector. The findings have the potential to guide industry stakeholders in tailoring their offerings to attract and meet the diverse travel preferences of millennial women in India, thereby fostering growth and innovation in the tourism sector.

5.2 Practical implications

The current research findings yield valuable practical implications for hospitality and tourism organizations aiming to gain deeper insights into the travel intentions of solo females in rural and urban contexts. Drawing from the empirical outcomes, the authors propose four strategic measures to enhance the intention of solo female travelers by addressing the challenges often encountered by women during their journeys. First and foremost, the study recommends that tourism service providers bolster their financial viability by tailoring services to meet female travelers' specific requirements and preferences. This involves creating enjoyable and enriching experiences that cater to the needs of solo female travelers and encourage a continuous intention to travel solo. Despite the insignificance of destination image on rural female intentions, the study highlights the importance for travel practitioners to establish a distinctive and positive cultural image. This involves incorporating rich heritage, local traditions and authentic experiences that may resonate with rural women, inspiring them to undertake journeys more frequently and contributing to increased female participation in travel activities. The study highlights the substantial impact of memorable tourism experiences and hedonic motivation on the intention of urban and rural females to continue traveling solo, emphasizing the importance of crafting experiences that resonate positively with women's travel aspirations.

Second, the study sheds light on the heightened concern among female travelers about their identity and social roles beyond their homes. Consequently, there is an emphasis on the importance of training programs to empower female travelers. Travel planners and destination marketing organizations are encouraged to offer empowerment workshops designed for solo female travelers, emphasizing rural regions. This strategic focus recognizes that urban females may already have more freedom and greater cultural exposure. By tailoring empowerment initiatives to rural women's unique needs and

challenges, this approach aims to inspire increased female engagement in travel activities, recognizing and addressing the specific socio-cultural dynamics in different settings. That contributes to achieving the objectives set by the United Nations World Tourism Organization to promote tourism inclusivity that empowers women and contributes to advancing gender equality (UNWTO, 2019). Finally, the governments need a proactive framework to continuously monitor the issues or challenges faced by travelers, such as unexpected events and crises (Qezelbash *et al.*, 2023), as the outcomes exhibited that perceived risk negatively impacts rural and urban female traveling intention. Finally, the outcomes of this research will be helpful for tourism managers; they will attain a better comprehension of the particular segment of millennial women travelers and be able to develop adaptive marketing strategies to target and cater to their needs effectively. This article will contribute to the growth of the tourism industry by providing insights that can be used to attract and satisfy the travel preferences of millennial women in India and outside the countries.

5.3 Limitations

The present research is open to limitations. First, this study focused solely on millennial women groups aged 27–42 years in India, which limits the generalizability of the findings to individuals outside this age range. Future researchers can include a more diverse population, encompassing individuals from different gender groups and cultural contexts. Second, the study depended on self-reported cross-sectional measures and made causal inferences. Future research could consider longitudinal and experimental studies to understand better how shifts in women's attitudes align with subsequent changes in their intentions to visit specific sites. Finally, to enhance the scope of the study, additional factors such as religiosity, experiential marketing, etc., can contribute valuable insights. Doing so can achieve a broader understanding of the topic and make the findings more widely applicable.

6. Conclusion

The study significantly contributed to the earlier literature on female travelers' observation by delivering valuable insights into the unique perspectives and intentions of solo female travelers in India. The findings revealed that women had a stronger preference for domestic travel over international travel in both studies. In addition, the impact of destination image on women's travel intention varied between Study U and Study R. In Study U, destination image, which involved natural wonders, good tourism services, motivating cultural attractions, different customs, rites and ways of life, had a significant effect. However, in Study R, the destination image was insignificant. This difference can be attributed to the challenges faced by rural women in accessing quality tourism services, which led to negative perceptions influencing their intention to visit.

On the other hand, both studies have consistently demonstrated that factors associated with perceived risk, such as concerns about food safety, apprehensions regarding crime (including theft, robbery and pickpocketing) and the fear of traffic accidents, exert a negative influence on women's intentions to continue traveling solo. These findings highlight the importance of addressing these specific concerns to positively impact women's travel intentions. Consequently, government initiatives and awareness campaigns can be pivotal in effectively managing and mitigating risks, ensuring proper security measures and ultimately fostering trust among solo women travelers. In essence, this research serves as an initial step in establishing a comprehensive knowledge base, providing a foundation for

future researchers to delve into the intricacies of women's tourist intentions to continue solo traveling in developed and developing countries.

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Appendix

Table A1. Instrument statements and reliability (study urban and rural)

Constructs	Item code	Instruments	Mean value		Std. dev		α	
			Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Self-empowerment	SEW1	Accomplish a sense of autonomy	4.63	4.61	1.46	1.47	0.801	0.807
	SEW2	Solo traveling builds self-esteem	4.40	4.34	1.72	1.73		
	SEW3	Helps in generating unique talents	4.56	4.53	1.80	1.82		
Memorable tourism experience	MTE1	Delightful experience	4.26	4.24	1.44	1.42	0.810	0.810
	MTE2	Unforgettable Memories	3.09	3.08	1.60	1.60		
	MTE3	Felt revitalized after traveling	4.08	4.03	1.46	1.43		
	MTE4	Helps in generating self-realization	3.16	3.13	1.45	1.44		
	MTE5	Closely experience the local culture	4.05	4.03	1.57	1.58		
Perceived risk	PR1	Food safety issues during traveling	1.95	1.93	1.06	1.05	0.806	0.728
	PR2	Issues regarding Crime (theft, robbery and pickpockets) during traveling	2.08	2.04	1.11	1.12		
	PR3	Traffic accidents in traveling	2.20	2.19	1.40	1.42		
Hedonic motivation	HM1	Engaging in exciting and entertaining activities	5.14	2.55	1.48	1.14	0.854	0.841
	HM2	A delightful feeling that fascinates the minds	5.32	2.64	1.66	1.15		
	HM3	Relaxing feeling	5.67	2.57	1.64	1.34		
	HM4	Enjoyable sensation	4.66	2.73	1.43	0.72		
Destination image	DI1	The attraction of natural wonders	2.51	4.65	1.13	1.39	0.837	0.760
	DI2	Good tourism services	2.62	5.43	1.12	1.34		
	DI3	Motivating cultural attraction	2.52	5.22	1.34	1.38		
	DI4	Different customs, rites, and ways of life	2.73	–	0.73	–		
Tourist intention to continue solo traveling	TI1	Desire to travel alone	5.04	5.03	1.36	1.34	0.814	0.813
	TI2	Willing to invest money and time	5.13	5.14	1.46	1.41		
	TI3	Wish to do the exciting things	4.44	4.47	1.47	1.42		
	TI4	Desire to discover new and diverse destinations	5.03	5.05	1.38	1.38		

Source: Created by authors