

# The psychological and cultural characteristics of the traveler

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**Abstract:** Travelling is a part of our life and history tells us that this isn't something new. However, we wonder where this human desire comes from and why there are so many differences between people when it comes to travelling. This research tried to answer the question *What makes people travel?* We launched the hypotheses according to which our tourist choices are influenced by a series of stable personality traits and cultural values. The study involved 137 people from 42 countries and it has been made by completing an online survey with two scales, one for the measurement of the personality traits (the Big Five Inventory) and another one for the measurement of the cultural values at an individual level (the CVSCALE), along with a series of demographics and questions about travel frequency and choices. The regression analysis revealed that the world-wide travel frequency is predicted by the low level of uncertainty avoidance while the frequency of travels within the country of residence were predicted by the high levels of extraversion and collectivism. We believe that the results of this research have significant implications for the tourism industry and further research could confirm this statement by creating and testing products that combine the stable features of potential customers with the tourism potential of the area.

**Keywords:** traveler profile, psychological traits, cultural values, personality factors, tourism industry.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The World Tourism Organization defines tourism as a form of movement of people to places that are different from their daily living environment and a phenomenon that is happening at a social, cultural and economic level for personal or professional purposes. The people that are moving from one place to another are called visitors and they classify in two categories – tourists (spending more than 24 hours in one place) or excursionists (that are only visiting a place for one day) [1].

The definition of travelling tells us that that traveling is not something related to the modern world as people had always moved from one place to another in order to be able to survive. With the time passing, traveling has become a way to satisfy other needs but the basic survival ones, needs that are situated in the upper side of the Maslow's hierarchy pyramid [2] such as social belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization.

Why do people travel? Accordingly to the behavior motivation theory written by Deci and Ryan in 1985 [3], people have two motivational insights that might influence someone's leisure behavior. First reason is the change in daily routine and a way of stress management, it's a way of escaping real life events and problems that might appear in both personal challenges and interpersonal interactions such as someone's family problems or co-workers. The second motivational factor that can influence our leisure behavior is our wish and psychological tendency to reward ourselves for all the work and stress we manage in our daily lives by participating in leisure activities. This theory is telling us that our leisure travelling motivation is linked to the benefits we get afterwards: personal rewarding and routine breaking [4] where the individual experiences were the starting point of psychology.

## 1.1 Why do people travel?

Motivation is one of the individual factors that can have a major impact on someone's leisure and travel choices. Tourism Motivation and Expectation Formation Model (Juergen Gnoth [5]) claims that our needs turn into motivation when they interact with context/situations and the value system. This relationship influences a potential tourist perception and forms expectations and attitudes towards the object or experience. Both expectations and attitudes are influenced by the individual's dominant emotions and fulfilling them is a way of validating the personal value system. The theory distinguishes between reason, motivation, expectations and values and explains why satisfying our need to travel can be so fulfilling – because it puts our actions in line with our values [5].

Previous studies discovered that the intention to travel can be explained by an individual's internal values. Li and Cai (2012) [6] studied the relationship between personal values, behavioral intention and travel motivation and besides internal values being a good predictor to behavioral intention, they also discovered some of the factors that contribute to one's motivation to travel such as luxury experiences, self-development, novelty and knowledge, exciting new experiences, the feeling of escape and relationship strengthening [6].

In recent studies that examine the psychological factors linked to foreign experiences of people, most of the research focuses on the impact of depth of the experiences on the traveller and less research has approached the role of breadth of foreign experiences [7]. Another characteristic in globe-trotters might be the generalized trust. A meta-analysis by J. Cao et al. [7] looked at five studies that measured the relationship between breadth and depth of foreign experiences and the generalized trust. The results showed that breadth, more than depth is a predictor of trust [8]. They also took into consideration demographic and personality factors by using the Big Five personality test [9]. Personality factors associated with trust were a high level of extraversion and agreeableness and a low level of neuroticism [7]. Culture is a specific model of learned behaviors, rules, ideas and practices socially transmitted that occurs due within-group similarities and between-group differences that can significantly influence an individual's personality [10]. Although there are more cultural theories that have tried to define and identify the cultural characteristics of a group of people, the Hofstede's national cultural values dimensions has the best research support in time and different fields. Other cultural models are: Schwartz's Cultural Value Orientations (2006), Steenkamp's National-Cultural Dimensions (2001) and Inglehart's World Values (2000) [11]. Geert Hofstede defined culture as a collective mind programming that exemplifies the members of one group or community to the other and identified six elements of national cultures: Power distance, Collectivism, Masculinity, Long Term Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance [12]. Previous studies showed us that there is a link between consumer decision-making and culture [13], a relationship that can serve to the understanding of tourist behavior. One of the five dimensions that can influence international travel choices is the uncertainty avoidance because of the decreased risk tolerance characteristic that might bring increased concerns for travellers and be a predictor for a low number of international trips [14].

## 1.2 Conceptual framework

### 1.2.1 The traveler

According to the WTO (World Tourism Organization) traveling is an activity performed by travelers. A traveler is a person who is moving from one geographic location to another for different purposes and duration. There is more than one type of traveler and the most well-known classification distinguishes tourists and excursionists. A tourist is someone travelling to a destination outside his/hers daily living environment for more than a day and less than a year with a purpose that might include leisure, business or other personal purpose and do not include being employed in the place visited. A tourist (also known as visitor) can be also classified by the place they travel – domestic (traveling in their own country), inbound (traveling to a different country by non-residents) and outbound (traveling outside the country of residence). An excursionist or same-day visitor is someone traveling for a short period of time that does not include an overnight stay [1].

### 1.2.2 Personality traits

Modern psychology defines personality as an individual pattern of emotions, thoughts and behaviors which characterizes the way a person interacts with the environment [15] and the most well-known classifications are those of Hans Eysenck, who identified two personality components – introversion/extraversion and emotional stability/instability (also called neuroticism) [16], but especially Goldberg who formulated for the first time (even though the concepts were previously mentioned by researchers) the 'Big Five' theory which claims that there are five types of traits that can shape a person's

personality [17]. These dimensions are called openness to experience (focused on traits like being imaginative, insightful and having vast interests), conscientiousness (reflects the ability of a person to be organized), extraversion (is the dimension that defines a talkative, assertive, full of energy person), agreeableness (refers to traits such as kind, affectionate and sympathetic) and neuroticism (reflects the emotional stability or the lack of it with traits such as moody, tense or anxious) (Srivastava, 2020) and have been the subject of many psychological studies that have succeeded in conceptualizing them and creating comprehensive measurement instruments [15]. One of the questionnaires for the measurement of the 'Big Five' personality traits is the BFI – Big Five Inventory that we will use in the present research. The Big Five Inventory was firstly developed by John, Donahue & Kentle in 1991 [18].

Previous research regarding the personality impact on tourist behavior mention that personality traits had been correlated with subjective well-being [19] and also travel satisfaction can be a consequence of different personality traits such as being easy-going and critical [20]. Another attempt to classify the types of tourists was to divide the tourists into 12 types of travel personalities by Gretzel et al [21] based on people's preferences regarding destinations and preferred activities. The 12 travel personalities are: *Culture Creature, Sight Seeker, and Family guy, City Slicker, Avid Athlete, Beach Bum, All Rounder, Gamer, Boater, History Buff, Trail Trekker and Shopping Shark*. The conclusions of this study are that this preference-based personality type can be used especially in marketing, for making travel recommendations [21].

### 1.2.3 Cultural dimensions

One of the most used models in cross-cultural research is its model of cultural dimensions developed by Geert Hofstede after studying a database about values that took place in more than 40 countries. Hofstede defined culture as a collective program specific to a group of people that is automatically installed in the minds of each member and gets to distinguish one category of people to another [12].

The dimensions that he identified were at first power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and femininity/masculinity and later, long-term/short-term orientation and indulgence/restraint. In this paper we will only operate with the first five dimensions of Hofstede's model due to the instruments related limits. Power distance is defined as the distribution of power in a society/group and it is related to the attitudes of people towards inequality, Uncertainty avoidance dimension measures the level of uncertainty people from a culture can tolerate, how uncomfortable they are in certain situations while individualism and collectivism are societal characteristics that reflect the group integration and cooperation of individuals. Masculinity and femininity refers to the values distribution between sexes. There have been identified values attributed more to women, more modest and caring, and values attributed more to men, which are more competitive and assertive. Long-Term Orientation reflected into societal characteristics can be associated with values like perseverance, patience, thrift and the sense of shame. It has been integrated into the model later on after being associated with Confucian practices and values [22].

### 1.3 Objectives and Hypothesis

According to the analyzed studies, both cultural values [23] and personality traits [24] can influence the choices made by a person and can make him/her adopt different behaviors depending on the context. Thus, this research aims to investigate how tourist choices, especially the frequency of travel outside the country of residence and inside of it and the preferences for the type of tourism practiced are influenced by these individual factors related to personality and culture.

The general objective of the research is to establish a relationship between the frequency of travel made by a person and his cultural values with personality factors. A specific objective is the identification of the cultural dimensions that are highly correlated to an increased travel frequency outside the country of residence (variable number of countries visited) and inside their country of residence (variable approximate number of the trips someone does during a year). Another specific objective of this research is to discover which of the big five personality factors best predict the travel frequency (both inside and outside the country) and the preferred tourism type.

The objective of the study is to answer the research question 'How does cultural values and personality traits influence our travel frequency and choices?' and have been formulated following the analysis of previous studies that operate with the concepts approached.

Previous studies regarding travel behavior revealed that travel related behavioral intention is influenced by internal values of someone [6] and that consumer decision making can be shaped by cultural values [23]. This creates the hypothesis according to which tourism preferences are influenced by a person's cultural values. Regarding personality, multiple studies have tried to classify tourists into different categories according to different criteria but only a few address how

personality can shape how people choose to travel and how often they do so. Beside Plog's allocentric and psychocentric, Gretzel, Mitsche, Hwang & Fesenmaier [21] discovered 12 tourist types by looking at their behavior while experiencing a new destination and looking at the roles assumed, preferred activities and choice of destination and Dev Jani who researched how these types of travelers can be associated with the five personality factors [25]. The results were significant and lead to a categorization of the travel personalities based on the level of openness (high openness – athlete, history buff, shopping boater), conscientiousness (high score for shopping and family travel personalities), extraversion (high level of extraversion for trail trekker and all travel personalities), agreeableness (high agreeableness scores for family and boater) and neuroticism (low for family and all travel personalities) [25]. However, the study does not show how personality factors affect the frequency of travel in the country and abroad, nor does it take into account cultural differences, the study being conducted on the inhabitants of a single country but shows us that the BIG Five personality factors are relevant in the study of tourism preferences.

Thus, we can conclude that a study that investigates the interaction between personality factors, cultural values, traveling frequency inside and outside someone's home country and tourist preferences is useful but still has a basis built on previous studies that allows the formulation of research hypotheses, as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Openness to experience is positively correlated with traveling to foreign countries frequency.

*Hypothesis 2:* Extraversion is positively correlated with traveling to foreign countries frequency.

*Hypothesis 3:* The individual level of Individualism is positively correlated with traveling to foreign countries frequency.

*Hypothesis 4:* The Uncertainty Avoidance individual scores are negatively correlated with traveling frequency.

For the travel frequency inside the resident country we will conduct an exploratory analysis as well as for the other cultural values (Long-Term Orientation, Masculinity and Power Distance) and personality factors (Neuroticism, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research we used a cross-sectional correlational design that aims to explore the relationship between personality traits, individual cultural values and the frequency of travel outside the country and inside it by a person. The data collection took place online, on social-media. Each participant voluntarily chose to be part of the sample of this research. To encourage participation in the study we offered, by drawing lots, the book 'Flights' written by the 2018 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature Olga Tokarczuk. The participants of this study were 137 people from 42 countries aged between 18 and 72 with the mean age of 28.18.

For the measurement of data relevant to the researched variables, we chose two psychological scales for measuring personality traits: The Big Five Inventory, a scale that has 44 items, 16 of them reversed, a version freely available to use for scientific research [18] and for determining individual cultural values, the CVSCALE, with 40 items, 8 for each of the five cultural dimension [26]. In addition, we asked the participants questions about their tourism preferences - the number of countries visited, the number of trips made within their residence country during a year, the preferred type of tourism and who they travel with most of the time. The data collection was performed exclusively in a random online environment. The scales required for data collection have been transcribed in a Google Form accessible to anyone. The link of this form was distributed on various social media platforms (Reddit, Instagram) or sites dedicated to the international exchange of research (Survey Circle) but especially through the Facebook platform that gave us access to a large number of people around the world through its groups.

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## 3. RESULTS

In the demographic questions we asked the people from the sample where they were born, not only where they live and we discovered that 37 people (approximately 27%) are living abroad. Regarding the sex of the people who participated in the study, there were 88 women (64.2%), 48 men (35%) and one non-binary person (0.7%). For the correlation analysis

(Table 1) we observed some very interesting scores for our research. Firstly, we can see that regarding the Big Five Personality Factors, the number of countries visited (travel frequency outside the country) is positively correlated with extraversion ( $r=0.202, p<0.01$ ) (*H2 confirmed*), and conscientiousness ( $r=0.205, p<0.01$ ) and negatively correlated with neuroticism ( $r=-0.172, p<0.05$ ). The frequency of trips taken inside the resident country is positively correlated with extraversion ( $r=0.238, p<0.01$ ) and openness to experience ( $r=0.174, p<0.05$ ). Looking at the cultural values, we can see that the travel frequency outside the country is negatively correlated with uncertainty avoidance ( $r=-0.219, p<0.01$ ) (*H4 confirmed*), collectivism ( $r=-0.142, p<0.05$ ) (*H3 confirmed*) and Masculinity ( $r=-0.161, p<0.05$ ) and the travel frequency inside the country is positively correlated with collectivism ( $r=0.182, p<0.05$ ). As we can observe, the only hypothesis that have not been confirmed is the H1 that positively correlated openness to experience with travel the number of countries visited but we have discovered new statistical significant correlations between the number of countries visited and neuroticism (negative correlation), conscientiousness and masculinity (negative correlation). Also, even though the correlation analysis for internal travel frequency was exploratory, the results are relevant for our topic showing the main differences between travel preferences regarding the destination.

**TABLE I: CORRELATIONS FOR THE STUDY VARIABLES**

	Number countries visited	Number of trips within the residence country/year
Extraversion	.202**	.218**
Agreeableness	.017	.032
Conscientiousness	.205**	.000
Neuroticism	-.172*	-.121
Openness to Experience	.140	.174*
Power Distance	-.055	-.035
Uncertainty Avoidance	-.219**	-.006
Collectivism	-.142*	.182*
Long-Term Orientation	.013	-.065
Masculinity	-.161*	.021

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

To explore the extent to which personality traits and cultural values predict frequent travel within the country of residence and abroad, we realized two linear regression analysis where the dependent variables were the number of countries visited by someone and the frequency of trips taken within a year in the country of residence.

For the first linear regression analysis we used the dependent variable number of countries visited and the independent variables extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, masculinity and long term orientation. The results (Table 2) of the regression suggested that all the independent variables explained 16% of the variance,  $R^2=0.161, F(10,126)=2.421, p=0.11$ . The only independent variable that significantly predicted the number of countries someone travels to is the uncertainty avoidance dimension ( $\beta=3.055, t=-2.043, p=0.043$ ) confirming H4.

**TABLE 2: RESULTS OF THE LINIAR REGRESSION FOR THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES VISITED**

	B	SD	$\beta$	t.	p.
(Constant)	20.757	13.767		1.508	.134
Extraversion	1.953	1.452	.123	1.345	.181
Agreeableness	-1.683	2.116	-.083	-.795	.428
Conscientiousness	3.039	2.057	.152	1.477	.142
Neuroticism	-1.778	1.480	-.114	-1.201	.232
Openness	1.483	1.997	.066	.742	.459
Power Distance	-.221	1.454	-.014	-.152	.879
Uncertainty Avoidance	-3.055	1.496	-.181	-2.043	.043
Collectivism	-1.770	1.406	-.118	-1.259	.210
Long Term Orientation	.518	1.986	.025	.261	.795
Masculinity	-1.721	1.230	-.126	-1.399	.164

- a. Dependent Variable: Number of countries visited
- b. R square=0.161; F(10, 126)=2.421

**TABLE 3: RESULTS OF THE LINIAR REGRESSION WITHIN THE COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE**

	<b>B</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t.</b>	<b>p.</b>
(Constant)	1.186	.692		1.713	.089
Extraversion	.162	.073	.207	2.220	.028
Agreeableness	-.126	.106	-.126	-1.187	.237
Conscientiousness	-.073	.103	-.074	-.704	.483
Neuroticism	-.086	.074	-.111	-1.154	.250
Openness	.149	.100	.135	1.484	.140
Power Distance	-.057	.073	-.073	-.774	.440
Uncertainty Avoidance	.040	.075	.048	.528	.598
Collectivism	.170	.071	.229	2.399	.018
Long Term Orientation	-.150	.100	-.144	-1.498	.137
Masculinity	-.016	.062	-.024	-.261	.794

The second linear regression used the frequency of traveling inside the country of residence/year as a dependent variable and the same independent variables as for the first regression. The results (Table 3) of the regression suggested that all the independent variables explained approximately 13% of the variance,  $R^2=.131$ ,  $F(10,126)=1.900$ ,  $p=0.051$ . The independent variables that significantly predicted the frequency of trips within the country/year are extraversion ( $\beta=0.162$ ,  $t=2.220$ ,  $p=0.028$ ), and collectivism ( $\beta=0.170$ ,  $t=2.399$ ,  $p=0.018$ ).

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study aimed to make a profile of the world-wide traveler in terms of stable psychological characteristics as the personality traits and cultural values. The initial hypotheses were formulated based on the previous research regarding the travel industry consumer and, as we discussed it previously in the first chapter, we expected the globetrotter to be an extraverted, open to experience, individualist person with a low level of uncertainty avoidance.

Even if we do not have a complete portrait of the globe-trotter, the results show us that a significant feature of people who travel a lot outside the country of residence is a negative score of Uncertainty Avoidance. This was characterized by Hofstede as risk-taking, lack of discomfort in unfamiliar situations and acceptance of change [22]. Interesting are also the scores obtained in the regression analysis for trips made within the country of residence that were designed for exploratory purposes. The characteristics of internal tourism travelers are extraversion and collectivism. Extraversion could have been considered a predictable characteristic in travelers by definition, being usually found in sociable and friendly people. Collectivism is a characteristic of societies that capitalize on group membership and obedient behavior [22]. However, another characteristic of collectivist people / societies is patriotism and this could be an explanation for the tendency of people to travel more inside their country and not outside of it. For the tourism industry this might indicate that some features of the products might be the flexibility (of dates, rooms, amenities, even locations) and the novelty (as in always coming up with something new for their clients in order to keep them interested). Regarding domestic tourism, the results of the study show that it is mostly practiced by extroverted people who identify with collectivist values. This is an interesting profile of the travelers because it captures a category of people who identify with the country they live in and seek to know their own culture while socializing and interacting with their peers. Patriotism and a sense of belonging to the group are what encourage people to take the initiative to integrate even deeper into the values of the country [22]. Regarding the opportunities for the development of domestic tourism taking into account these results, the business should be developed to offer cultural experiences and the authenticity of the region (conserving the original houses, providing traditional food etc.). At the same time, community activities (like crafts workshops, traditional gatherings etc.) should not be ignored but even promoted because they could bring people together to get to know and interact with each other.

The results of this research showed us the world-wide traveler is more unpredictable than we thought. These results open plenty of opportunities for the tourism industry that might use these stable traits of the people to build and promote products that might never get off the market. Even though this research has its limits and cannot be generalized to each and every country or region of the world, the future research might give us a closer image on how these results are useful for the future of tourism.

## 5. LIMITS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Even though we tried to attract as many participants as possible from all over the world, this research has its limits. Firstly, the number of participants even if it's consistent, might not be representative for the entire population. Moreover, the cultural values are usually measured at a national level and because of the small sample of participants, we couldn't provide a representative number of participants for each country so we used a scale constructed to measure each of the cultural dimensions at an individual level [26]. The instruments are standardized but if you take a closer look to the CVSCALE that measures the cultural values at an individual level, we observe that there are only five and not six cultural dimensions and a scale for indulgence is missing. One last limit of this study that we are aware of is the exclusive data collection via social media which might limit the access to the survey for the people all over the world that are not using Facebook, Instagram or Reddit.

Further research could aim at replicating the study at the national level both to see how the national cultural index juggles at the individual level and to add external validity to the results but also to create a domestic tourism strategy based on the stable traits of the travelers. Moreover, tourism providers could create products designed to meet the stable needs of travelers and test how current products are prone to be stable over time based on the identified characteristics of those who consume them.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Traveling is not a contemporary trend but a way of satisfying social, self-esteem and self-actualization needs of the human being. The overall objective of this research is to outline a profile of the traveller by identifying stable traits that are related to personality and individual cultural values.

This paper aimed to investigate what are the stable characteristics of individuals that could predict the need for wanderlust. We hypothesized that the personality dimensions related to an increased world-wide travel frequency are extraversion and openness to experience and individualism and a low level of uncertainty avoidance in terms of cultural values. The data collection took place online through social networks by inviting people from all over the world to complete a survey containing the Big Five Inventory, the CVSCALE and a series of demographic data related to the frequency of travel in the country and abroad, preferred type of tourism, partner(s). We also wanted to explore domestic tourism and what are the features of those who choose to practice it often.

The sample included 137 people from 42 countries and the results of the correlation analysis showed significant scores of extraversion, conscientiousness and a low level of neuroticism, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and masculinity for people who travelled frequently abroad and significant positive correlations regarding extraversion, openness to experience and collectivism for the domestic travellers. The linear regression analysis revealed that the only variable that could significantly predict travel frequency outside the country of residence is a low level of uncertainty avoidance and for the people often practicing domestic tourism, the traits that predicted the frequency of their trips were extraversion and collectivism. The limits of this research consists of the number of participants, the impossibility to extrapolate the results for the international tourism sector and other limits related to the measuring instruments and data collection.

These results are important for the development of sustainable tourism by taking into consideration the stable traits of the customers. The field of tourism psychology is still at the beginning of the road so that the profile of the traveller remains available for improvements.

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