

Understanding Solo Travel

Proposal for Computational Research Paper

The role and importance of travel journals, books and guides can be traced for centuries. From “The Travels of Marco Polo” to Elizabeth Gilbert’s “Eat, Pray, Love”, accounts and observation of the world travel is consumed by readers to be informed and inspired. With widespread use of internet, the power of travel literature has transcended print media to include online blogs, forums and review sites open to anyone who is dedicated enough to share their experience. This forms a rich database ideas and opinions that can be used to further understand and explore what motivates a traveler, how they travel and what they gain from the travel. As researchers, Claster, Pardo and Cooper point out, “assessing and measuring the sentiment accumulated in the vast store of blogs, online publications, social network media and micro-blogs can thus yield tangible and actionable information for business, marketing, social sciences, and government.” (Claster et al. 83).

In US alone, leisure travel cost \$761.7 billion dollars in 2018 (“U.S. Travel Answer Sheet.” 2019). Popular reasons include visiting friends and family, learn about and explore a new place or to take a break from daily life. There is a growing creed of solo travelers who embrace short term or long-term travel for adventure, hobby, seeking oneself, relaxing, meeting new people not just being in a new place, etc. Google Trends search reveals the following growth in search for solo travel over the last five years.

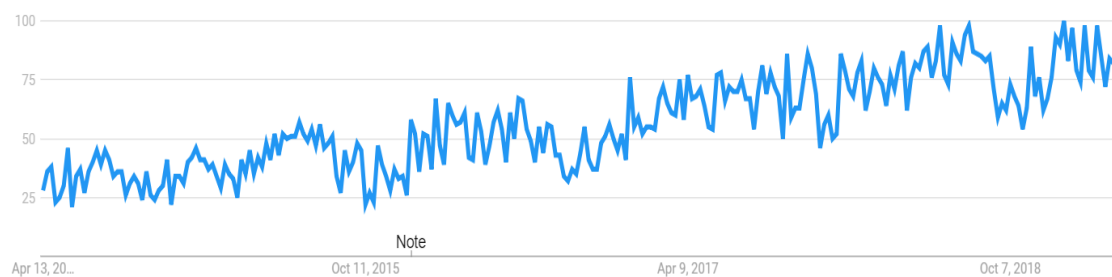


Figure 1 Google Trends - 5 year, worldwide trend for search term "solo travel"

What attributes to the growing interest in solo travel? According to Solo Traveler World statistics, “59% said they want to see more of the world and they're not willing to wait for others yet 54% of respondents like group travel at least some of the time” (“Solo Travel Statistics”, 2019).

The goal of this paper is to use information about where solo travelers visit, what activities do they engage in and the sentiment analysis of their experience to analyze how much of solo travel is actually alone? By exploring this set of data, it is possible to gain additional insight into human social needs and its transformation with changing times. The theoretical underpinning that forms the basis of this research is that rising solo travel is not at odds with the known adage, “Man [or woman] is a social animal” and that solo travel is just a way to cope with loneliness of the everyday life.

The primary data for this research will be scraped from Twitter using #solotravel and #solotraveller. To observe the change over time, if any, this will be collected over two time periods from 2013-2015 and 2017-2019. The first computational element is to collect the available social media data. The next step would be to clean the data to discard any irrelevant information and tweets. A subset of data will also be created for twitter handles that have high frequency of posts to track one person's activities to gain a deeper understanding on how often one is alone while travelling. The data will be analyzed using text analysis tools such as clustering and sentiment analysis. Python will be used to write the program to collect and analyze the data.

References

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