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SELF-REPRESENTATION OF SOLO TRAVELLERS

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School of Hotel and Tourism Management

Self-Representation of Solo Travellers

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

July 2025

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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Thivyaashani Sivasubramaniam

ABSTRACT

Human thinking is diverse, and desires vary. These desires open the path for new market segments in the tourism industry. Linking travelling goals to travellers' interests creates an avenue for different types of tourism, amongst which solo tourism has been identified as an emerging tourism trend in leading online travel guides, websites and blogs.

The purposes of travelling are general to all types of travellers, except for those who are looking for specific travel outcomes, such as solo travellers. Previous studies on solo tourism have largely focused on the reasons, motivations and constraints related to solo travel, with most scholars identifying transformative experience as the main reason for solo travelling. However, how such a transformative experience can be formed via solo travel remains largely unknown. To fill this gap, this study attempts to address the following questions: How do solo travellers define themselves? Does solo travel change their self-representation? Which critical moments may trigger solo travellers to change their self-representation? How do solo travellers adhere to the changes in their self-representation? By situating solo travel in the context of liminality, this study aims to explore the mechanism of the changes that solo travel brings to a solo traveller's self-representation.

Interviews were conducted in China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Thailand from June 2023 to June 2024. Experience-based snowballing and sampling criterion strategies were used to select the sample. Given that this study specifically focuses on solo travellers, the snowball sampling technique was adopted to recruit several 'information-rich' participants (Patton, 2002). This approach is particularly useful in improving the richness of the data, a feat that cannot be achieved using other sampling techniques, such as convenience sampling (Saunders et al., 2011). Location was considered a crucial factor during the participant selection. The selected sites were spacious, less crowded and offered a tranquil environment for travellers, thus allowing the researcher to approach potential solo travellers without disrupting their

journey. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher checked whether the selected travellers satisfied the criteria, the most important of which is whether these travellers had travelled alone at least once. The participants were also asked to recommend other solo travellers they knew. The interviews were conducted in-person and online depending on the preference of the participants. The online interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and other online platforms. Given that this study was guided by the principles of phenomenology, following Englander (2012), experience was used the sampling unit and unit of analysis instead of the number of participants. After considering ethical implications, the sample size was limited to 40 participants due to data saturation, and pluralism analysis techniques, including exisitential phenomenological and thematic analyses, were used to analyse the data.

This study offers a clear understanding of how solo travellers represent themselves during their travel and demonstrates that travelling alone leads to meaningful positive changes in travellers' self-representation, particularly with regards to their self-transformation. During the transitional phase, when travellers venture outside their comfort zones and face significant challenges during their solo travels, they often develop a newfound sense of self. Nonetheless, the degree to which these changes are internalised by solo travellers is contingent on their unique inclinations.

This study also fills some gaps in empirical understanding and offers theoretical and practical implications. By situating the theory of liminality, the study emphasised how solo travellers adjusted their self-representation before and after significant moments encountered during their journeys. Based on their travel experiences and expectations, the study also proposed managerial implications for the relevant stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry.

Keywords: Solo Travellers, Self-Representation, Liminality, Solo Tourism

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Sincerely,

Miss Thivyaashani Sivasubrmaniam

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

All of us are born human, and have to survive the ups and downs in our life. In doing so, we must reflect on the wonder of being human. Even though people are distinguished by demographic, geographical, behavioural, and psychological factors, one thing is common to all: that is the human 'life cycle', namely, as the foetus in the womb, as an infant, toddler, child, adolescent, adult and an older person. During all these stages, people play unique roles and live their lives based on their wants and desires.

Many things differ from person to person, and among these is an individual's attitudes toward tourism and travelling. The purpose of travelling will change based on an individual's needs and wants, and internal and external factors may determine this purpose. Since human thinking is diverse and desires vary, these desires open the path for new market segments in the tourism industry. Linking both travelling goals and travellers' personal interests creates an avenue for different types of tourism.

Among the many types of tourism existing currently, 'solo tourism', seems to be a popular tourism trend, based on leading online travel guides, websites and blogs. In 2022, the Lonely Planet mentioned in its publication that solo tourism is the fastest growing industry, and a recent survey indicated that of the total number of travellers, 67% of those who booked hotels for their holidays, were identified as solo travellers (Tomas & Mura, 2019). The scholar Mccarthy (2016) also pointed out that solo travel is rising. No matter what gender, both men and women are equally interested in solo travelling (Seow & Brown, 2020). The studies done from 2015 to 2018 state that solo tourism has increased by 42% (Karantzavelou, 2018); that 76% of travellers are interested in solo tourism (Klook, 2019); and that 18% of tourists are recorded as solo travellers (Travel port, 2019; Yang, 2020).

The data records from Booking.com, a leading Dutch travel agency, highlighted that the percentage of solo travellers in pre-pandemic times was only 14%. However, this percentage almost doubled in mid-2021 to 23%. The trend data collected from Google stated that the search for solo travel has now increased to 76%. Pinterest has reported a nearly 35% increase in the number of women saving articles related to solo tourism (2021). Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, people became interested in travelling alone as a method of reducing stress. Technological advances, growth in knowledge dissemination, women's empowerment, increased ageing population, and social media usage are causing changes in socio-demographics. Along with these socio-demographic changes, the structural changes in society, for instance, increase in educational levels, decreasing numbers of marriages, streamlining family size, and lifestyle changes, all lead to differences in the travel choice of being alone. These are also seen as fundamental reasons for the increased demand for solo travelling (Leith, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020).

As a result, this niche market has become a trendier market segment in the present scenario. For instance, to make a strong argument, the following figure, 1.1, illustrates that the number of Google searches for solo tourism in the last ten years increased constantly from 2012 to 2022. A famous quote extracted from solo tourism websites and blogs relates to the same situation: "*I always wonder why birds stay in the same place when they can fly anywhere on earth. Then I asked myself the same question*" (Yahya, 2019, p. 3).

Therefore, solo tourism is unique; studying it with solo travellers' self-representation will provide an in-depth understanding of how solo travellers express themselves and how solo travel changes their lives.

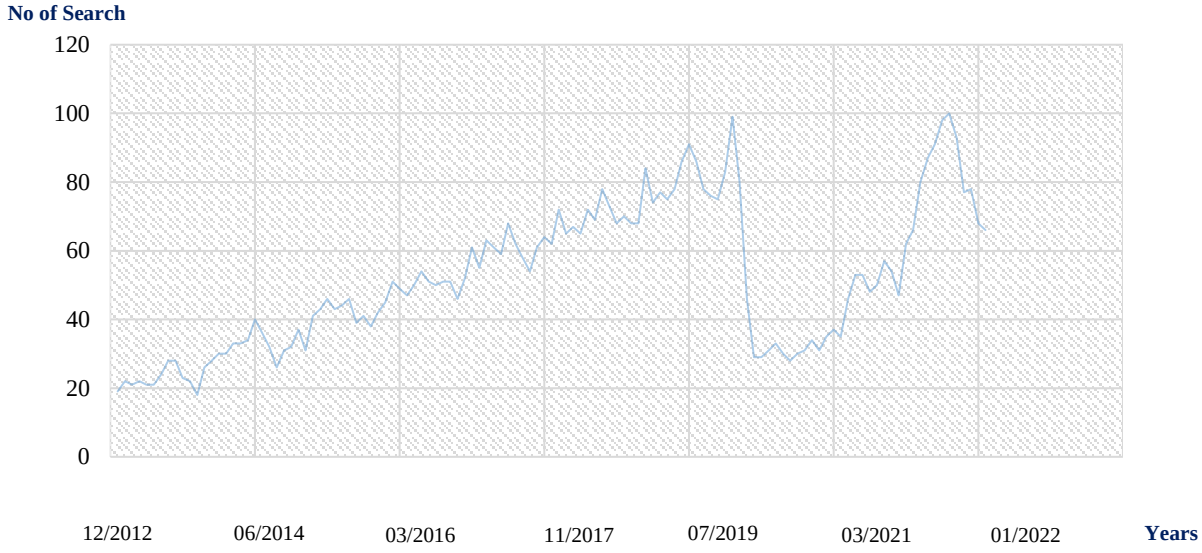


Figure 1.1 Interest overtime in Solo Travel Worldwide Google Queries

(Source: Google Trends)

Concurrently, solo tourism contributes to personal human wellbeing because travelling alone also allows individuals to develop autonomy and maturity, increase their self-assuredness and self-esteem, improve their decision-making skills, and generate confidence to tackle new and different sensations and feelings (Carels, Vila & Brea, 2022).

Therefore, solo tourism is an exciting topic and recognised as a vital facet and treated as a tool of identity in tourism, and this is associated with travellers'self and called 'representation'. The beauty of this term reflects the actual nature of its content. It is used in multiple streams to study various phenomena in academia, in such streams as sociology, psychology, neurology, and digitalism. These exciting facts about solo tourism led the current researcher to inquire into solo travellers and their representations at different stages of their journeys.

Self-representation is about a person's communication of self, and it is closely related to behaviour (Larsen, Lawson & Todd, 2009). The self-representational study is related to discovering the behavioural changes of the consumer. From a consumer behavioural

perspective, it is treated as a tool for understanding changing human lifestyles, and is considered as a basis for fulfilling customers' needs and wants (Dixit, 2022). Furthermore, the scholars Engel and Miniard (1986) defined consumer behaviour as "*the activities directly involved in obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services, including decision processes that precede and follow these actions*"(p. 76). Meanwhile, comprehensive knowledge of consumer behaviour supports marketers in implementing appropriate marketing and promotional activities to move towards a more sustainable future. Researchers on tourism use the term 'consumer behaviour' to describe 'traveller behaviour' or 'tourist behaviour' (Scott et al., 2014). Therefore, fulfilling the expectations of a traveller or tourist sustainably will lead to a sustainable future for the tourism industry. Since solo tourism has been recognised as one type of tourism, discovering the solo travellers' self-representation remains vital to ensuring the prosperity of solo tourism, to explicating the connectivity between solo tourism and other types of tourism, and conferring benefits to the entire hospitality and tourism industry.

Subsuming all, the concept of self-representation in a solo tourism context would facilitate a study of the behavioural changes in solo travellers and provide some insights into the emerging market of solo tourism. The industry and this self-representation tool would also support an individual's wellbeing. For instance, when an individual start travelling alone, he or she identifies his or her hidden self, which may lead to self-transformation. When an individual travel alone, the environment and the events taking place in that particular period, called liminality, may lead to an identity shift in each self. This would evoke self-transformation in individuals (Polus & Carr, 2021), and this self-transformation may reflect in their self-representation. Therefore, this concept is evidence for them to establish a new self. Since solo travel is identified as one of the tourism trends, a study of solo travellers' self-representation will be an exciting, thought provoking and timely one.

There is a big difference between the individual's superficial view of another individual's life and a more profound view of how someone has carved an image of himself/herself through life experience. The profound view in the context of this study of a solo traveller's self-representation, also treated like a biography of a traveller, would support the industry and stakeholders to generate a sustainable future for the identified niche market. Since solo tourism is growing globally, the researcher has selected solo travellers without limiting them to any country or subject. The study will provide a comprehensive framework for tourism industry stakeholders in their bid to enhance this type of tourism.

1.2 Problem Statement

The study examines solo travellers' self-representation at different stages of travelling. In this study, self-representation is used to examine how solo travellers identify themselves, express themselves to others and finally, how they believe in themselves and their abilities. The study investigates the physical behaviour of solo travellers and is linked to their inner feelings and modes of thinking. The purpose of conducting this study is highlighted by the following empirical gaps.

Plenty of studies on solo tourism have covered motivations, obstacles, challenges and risks, involved in solo travel, and these studies have highlighted gender, culture, sex, and social influences on solo tourism. Hitherto, however, the manner in which solo travellers develop themselves at different travelling stages, that is, how they engage in self-representation, has received scant attention in the past literature. Except for the limited number of solo travel-related studies, as detailed in the background of the study, self-presentation has only been covered in the social, individual, neural and molecular streams of study.

Moreover, studies on solo travellers' self-representation will guide the stakeholders of the tourism industry to obtain more knowledge on tourists' behaviour, including, travellers'

expectations about their destinations, real-time experiences, and a list of risks and strategies to overcome such barriers, if they should arise. Expectations of travel and hospitality services and the status of the existing facilities, a list of new destinations discovered, a list of social media platforms which influence potential travellers' behaviour, and other such factors will help solo tourism obtain more benefits and develop itself as a sustainable industry. All this can be achieved by studying solo travellers' self-representation.

Indeed, a destination supports solo travellers to learn new things and handle certain uncertain critical moments by themselves. The confidence the traveller develops towards the destination is based on the expectations or experience related to the destination. Moreover, from a psychological perspective, a traveller generates self-confidence when he/she is very positive about their primary thought and more confident about the second thought, which is the so-called thought about the thought process (DeMarree, Brinol & Petty, 2014). From a solo traveller's point of view, if the expected destination dissatisfies him/her, then the impact would attenuate or reverse the positive thoughts on the destination. If not, it would happen vice versa. The power of a person's metacognitive control (*thoughts about one's mental processes*) can magnify, attenuate, or even reverse the impact of primary cognition on subsequent judgements and behaviour (DeMarree, Brinol & Petty, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, a solo traveller's articulation about self, including both physical and mental, is inevitable when discussing solo tourism. In line with the above discussion, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the empirical gaps in the research in order to bring novelty to solo travellers' self-representation.

In line with the systematic review (explained in Chapter Two) and a critical bibliometric review done by the scholars Carles, Vila and Brea (2022), it was observed that existing studies most often covered the travel reasons, motivations, constraints, and risks related to solo travel, and were studies comparing solo and non-solo travellers. For instance, the summary of reasons and motivations for solo travel were highlighted in the following significant list of items: these

were, *experience* (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang , 2020); *relaxation* (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang , 2020)*; Freedom & Flexibility*, *Independence* (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2009); *Social and Wellbeing* (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky, Gibson & Bell, 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang , 2020)*; Escape from all responsibilities* (all the scholars mentioned above and ; Stone & Nichol, 1999; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013); and *Self-motivation*, including self-identity, self-realisation, self-actualisation, self-conversion, self-confidence, self-control, self-recognition, and self-development. In line with the above studies, most of these motivations are also found in women-oriented solo tourism.

a. Solo travellers define themselves: Gap One

Diverse types of travellers exist in the world since the nature of each man and woman is radically different from one another. To make a stronger argument, the model developed by the scholar Plog (2001), was used to identify five types of travellers, namely, (i) allocentric (*a traveller who is very introverted but also involved in adventurous activities, is confident, curious, and most interested in travelling alone*); (ii) nearly allocentric (*some characteristics of both allocentric and mid-centric travellers*); (iii) mid-centric (*this traveller is very interested in cultural, ecological and historical tourism*); (iv) near psychocentric(*this type of traveller has the characteristics of both mid-centric and psychocentric travellers*) and (v) psychocentric

(*this type of traveller is identified as a pre-planner, schedule-maker and in general, a business traveller, interested in recreational activities and is a regular visitor to the destination*) under two major classifications, namely, allocentric/psychocentric and energy.

In contrast, scholars Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger (2008) identified four types of solo travellers, as (i) single solo travellers (*come and travel alone*); (ii) single group travellers (*come alone and travel as group*); (iii) collective solo (*who do not live alone but travel solo*); and (iv) collective solo (*travel along with their group*). From a naturalistic point of view, human beings have unique characteristics and capacities. For instance, if an individual desire to present his/her *actual self*, they present themselves as they are without any changes in native behaviour. In contrast, if an individual hides his/her native self from others because they value social interactions and need society to have the best impression of them, then that communication of self falls into an *ideal self*. The *social self* explains the manner in which an individual feels about how others see themselves, and finally, if individuals would like others to see themselves as the best they can be, then that representation is called the *ideal social self*.

Therefore, one thing is clear, that there are many types of solo travellers, the types vary based on the types of the self. From a psychological perspective, if a person thinks about his or her own mental processes, it would affect their behaviour. This process happens in the mind, and self-validation has not been focused on in any of the studies done in the solo travel research area. In this study, the researcher focused on the solo traveller who travelled alone without any companion and chose solo travel as an option. Considering all, in general, most tourists like to travel with companions. However, if a person desires to travel and also wants to spend time alone, in such a situation, studying that person's travel behaviour and studying how he expresses himself throughout travelling will yield new knowledge in this area. In short, how solo travellers identify themselves in the event of solo travel has still been under-researched in solo travel-based studies. In the context of self-transformation, an ongoing inquiry pertains to

how travellers recognise their self-transformation (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). Ateljevic and Doorne (2000) assert that individuals become more aware of their beliefs, feelings, and values when they engage in self-interactions. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in solo tourism, where travellers have significant opportunities for solitary reflection. As a result, the changes within an individual manifest through their experiences, personal growth, and evolving self-definitions (Teoh et al., 2021). Relating this to the current discourse, if solo travel is a driving factor in one's self-changes, it marks the initial step that significantly influences one's self-definition. Therefore, to fill this empirical gap, the current researcher attempts to find the association between different conceptions of the self and solo travellers.

b. The solo travel does changes in solo travellers' self-representation: Gap Two

In the solo travel-related literature, more than half of the studies dealt with the motivations for solo travel. Those studies researched the actual reasons for travellers choosing the solo option. A decision such as this, would bring attendant changes, no matter what that decision is. Therefore, this single decision will determine which type of traveller the above traveller would be. Indeed, the motives for solo choice, which were well studied in past research, portrayed the actual reasons behind solo travelling and explained the circumstances under which such a choice in travelling were made. However, those studies failed to explicate how solitary travellers are represented during their solo travels, and the psychological changes and paths of their self-representation during travel. These studies also paid scant attention to how they overcome several different and difficult situations by handling all of these situations themselves. If those scholars had included self-representation in their studies, their studies on solo travellers would have been more comprehensive. The main motive identified in the solo tourism literature was self-transformation. If so, as the initial self evolves, a new self-definition can affirm the changes that have occurred (*gap one*). To further explore the identified empirical

gap, it is essential to consider how solo travellers perceive their changes and how these changes are reflected in their self-representation. Consequently, this raises another empirical gap that needs to be addressed.

c. Critical events during solo travel lead to changes in how solo travellers represent themselves: Gap Three

On the other hand, the concept of self-representation is connected poorly with the subject of solo tourism and the solo traveller. Most existing studies provide an overview of solo travellers. However, this study is entirely novel in terms of beginning with how solo travellers reconstruct themselves through executing the process of self-representation. The story starts with a traveller and ends with a solo traveller. Before studying this subject in depth, understanding something about the self is essential, since human beings are different from one another. The concept of the 'self' started to gain scholarly attention from the 1950s onwards (Lehrer, 2012).

It is noteworthy here that the self-concept has always been constantly discussed and viewed in multiple ways, including in studies dealing with social, neural, and molecular mechanisms. Simple logic based on the theory of the 'looking glass self', states that if people believe in the perceptions that others have of themselves, then those people treat others' judgements as mirrors through which they can 'see' themselves (Cooley, 1902). If people act totally based on others' reviews, if people measure their values, worth, and behaviour based on other people's opinions, they will be careful to present themselves well to others and hide their natural characters. Ultimately, this connects with the concept of impression management. At the same time, if people believe in themselves, that points to a belief of oneself in oneself. This type of self does not care about others' perceptions or views. At the same time, in opposition to both these selves, if people evaluate themselves, based on their self-concept as well as on

what others think of them, and balance decisions on how to behave based on this evaluation, that belief in the self that gives rise to the above decision is called self-esteem.

Indeed, the concepts of presentation have flourished well in the areas of, *interpersonal behaviour and perception* (Schroeder, 1995; Min et al., 2011; Yee & Bailenson, 2009; Buckingham, 2009; Fiorot, 2018), *personality* (Demetriou et al., 2019), *cognitive dissonance* (Lee et al., 1999), *neuroscience* (Churchland, 2002), *tourism, digital and social media* (Jenson & Gilly, 2003; Hayami, 2006; Georges, 2009; Wong, 2012; Snider & McCarthy, 2012; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2013; Yang & Bradford-Brown, 2016; Hall & Caton, 2017; Khoshsabk, 2018; Schlosser, 2020; Aina & Ezeuduji, 2021; Serrano et al., 2021), *country presentation* (Nair et al., 2021), *culture* (Zhu et al., 2008; Thumim, 2017), *culture and neuroscience* (Zhu et al., 2008), *psychological behaviour* (Anderson et al., 2008; Zarghooni, 2007; Twomey & O'Reilly, 2017; Michikyan, 2020), *social behaviour* (Luery, 2013; Toth, 2014; Thagard & Wood, 2015), *gender and race* (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015; Alexis & McCurn, 2018; Sczesny & Kaufmann, 2018; Holmberg et al., 2018; Maria et al., 2021), *migration* (Olwig, 2018), *sports* (Smith & Sanderson, 2015) *stigmatised groups* (Naomi & Manuela, 2006; Duguay, 2019) and *digital games* (Serena et al., 2021).

However, the scholars named above use the presentation concept differently. For example, from a neuro perspective, the presentation concept is used to explain how the human brain functions when a human tries to sense items, listen to sounds, see a picture, or smell or touch objects. At the same time, studies in digital technology and games show how people select each particular game character and how far each game character influences their presentation. The direct usage of presentation is applied to people in terms of how people express their opinions and share images and videos on social media. Specifically, due to certain stigmas, people hide their real identities and express fake ones on social media due to their desire for positive social interactions. The migration-related study discusses how migrants

express their cultural values in their way of living in the countries to which they have migrated. Finally, the concept is applied to the country of relevance and how it promotes its image among tourists. It can be seen that there is a lack of attention to the concept of self-representation and that a misconception has always existed about the concept of self-presentation. Since these two concepts sound similar, the question can be asked whether the self-representation and self-presentation concepts are similar or different.

To answer this question, the scholar Hartmann (1956) defined the term self-representation as "*unconscious, precocious and conscious psychic representation of the body and mental self*" (p. 18-19). In short, it refers to persons' representations or beliefs about their abilities and also narrates a person's past experiences (Almaas, 1999). Presentation is part of the concept of self-representation, which is considered a person's object presentation online (Thagard & Wood, 2015). Most past literature covers self-presentation in different contexts related to the arts, culture, education, linguistics, medicine, nations, politics, religion, and sports. This is because self-presentation "*is a communication process relevant to social appearances, based on a broader disposition to social interactions and interpersonal ability so that one's attitude can be easily decoded and accepted by others*" (Laghi et al., 2011, p. 210). Ultimately, then, self-presentation becomes the creation of an impression. Further, this process of creating an impression is segregated into two major components: (i) impression motivation (individuals control the impression that others have of themselves) and (ii) impression construction (*individuals construct themselves to impress others*) (Fiorot, 2018).

Therefore, past studies have (a) indicated that self -presentation is considered as part of self-representation; (b) stated that the self-presentation concept was used to explain the activities people used to impress others; (c) explained the actions of people who try hard to engage in activities to enhance social interaction; (d) failed to connect the self-representation concept with the self; (e) examined how the process of self-representation and how people,

especially travellers, develop self-representation throughout their travel is yet to be studied; (f) stated that how travellers present themselves at different stages in their travel journey is still an under-researched area,(g) stated that the self-representation concept only covered an individual's presentation on social media and did not cover the whole concept of self-representation;(h) posited how critical events happening in a person's life will affect overall self-representation; (i) examined how if a person experiences a liminality experience, how it could reflect in that person's self -representation and finally (g) stated how self-representation is related to solo travellers and stated that the manner in which they represent themselves throughout their travel is yet to be studied.

As detailed above, self-representation is closely related to behaviour and thus, to social interactions. To achieve goals, some individuals believe that they need to make an adventure trip alone, and then start redefining themselves and others during social interactions. They integrate such ongoing experiences to form representations of their selves and others by a process linked to the psychoanalytical phenomenon of transference (Ewing, 1990). Therefore, to examine this phenomenon, the current researcher intends to seek an answer to the question as to how solo travellers represent themselves throughout their travel.

To clarify the concept of self-representation in the context of solo tourism and the concept of liminality, to identify the controlling variables is most vital. If a traveller visits a new destination alone, the environment, the local people's behaviour, the events that happen in the place, demographic factors and certain other factors would have an effect on the traveller and cause him/her to react. While each person has their boundaries and borders, to what extent do they adopt the new environment and move with other people?

Solo travellers recognise that their journeys lead to significant changes within themselves, which are reflected in their self-representation. If an individual's self-representation shifts before and after solo travel, it suggests that solo travel plays a role in this

transformation. However, it's essential to consider the triggering factors: When and how do solo travellers become aware of these changes? There must be pivotal moments that contribute to this process of self-transformation and shifts in representation. Supporting this idea, scholar Teoh and his team (2021) emphasised that transformation occurs when an individual faces challenges or critical moments that can alter their behaviour. This transformation may involve changes in perspective or behaviour (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

Continuing on, existing studies in the tourism context indicate that travellers may experience critical moments that can shift their initial perceptions, ultimately leading to self-transformation. These moments can arise from various experiences, such as encounters with *nature* (wildlife and scenic attractions), *opportunities for self-examination* (solitude, calmness, and awareness), *a sense of spontaneity and novelty*, *aesthetic experiences* (intense art and music), and *self-development activities* (physical challenges, overcoming limitations, and scientific discoveries) (Curtin, 2005; Farber & Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2009; Ulusoy, 2016; Kiirillova et al., 2017). However, there is still a need for a clearer understanding of the solo tourism context, specifically regarding the situations that play a significant role in the self-transformation of solo travellers and how their self-representation evolves before and after their solitary travels.

While travelling alone, a solo traveller's experiences can significantly impact their life and lead to considerable changes. However, there is insufficient evidence regarding the specific triggers that prompt solo travellers to alter their self-representation. By examining various aspects related to solo tourism and solo travellers, it remains to be studied what critical moments in solo travel inspire these changes and how individuals subsequently reflect these changes in their self-representation.

d. Construct the Solo Travellers' Self-representation model based on the theoretical lens of 'The Rites of Passage': Gap Four

The above information reveals the practical importance of studying solo tourism and solo travellers' self-representation. It is also necessary to validate the study's content; to do this, providing theoretical support to the study is vital. The ultimate purpose of the study is to discover how solo travellers represent themselves throughout their solo journey, including the pre, during and post-stages. The concept of 'The Rites of Passage', which was introduced by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1960, sheds some light on understanding the topic. According to this theory, a characteristic of a rites of a passage is called liminality. Scholars (1974) have defined it as "*any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life*" (p. 47), and it is a counter to daily living that potentially allows people to discover their true self (selves) (Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Whyte, 2004; Wickens, 2002; Graburn, 2002).

The basic theory explains three stages of identity change. Gennep (1960) proposed that identity transformation happens in three stages: separation, transition, and re-incorporation. In the separation stage, a person detaches from their previous identity. For solo travellers, this means being separated from their normal routine. In the transition stage, individuals find themselves in an intermediate state where they contemplate various possible identities for their future selves. A solo traveller, when travelling alone, comes across certain and uncertain events. In response to these events, each solo traveller attempts to manage each situation alone and identify their hidden skills (Hensel et al., 2014). The third stage is re-integration, which occurs when one reintegrates the changes and develops a new self, roles and status (Schouten, 1991). This theory is meant to interpret tourists' experience of a specific tourism moment and interconnects an individual self-changes with self-transformation.

These stages had only been explained in different research disciplines subjectively. Meanwhile, it is necessary to state clearly how an individual identifies different situations, how

those situations become a trigger to changing themselves, and how they would integrate those significant changes in their behaviour. At the same time, from a philosophical perspective, before integrating the new identity, each of them would go through a stage where they would decide to what extent they should 'cope' with the changes in self or what they should avoid. During solo travel, a traveller disassociates from known people and searches for new experiences from their solo journey. However, all these are yet to be studied in the context of solo tourism and solo travellers' self- representation. Besides, there are remaining gaps in the tourism literature related to liminality, such as what effect tourists have on each other as they interact socially, when one is in a liminal situation; and the role that liminal spaces play in creating liminal experiences. When a person travels alone, he or she may encounter different situations and experience many different things. That would help them identify the hidden skills or activities they were afraid to recognise or do before travelling. These changes in behaviour would reflect in their self-representation. Therefore, based on 'The Rites of Passage theory, and the self-identity point of view, the researcher intends to study solo travellers' self-representation.

By subsuming all, in line with the above argument, previous solo tourism research identified motivations, constraints, risks, and challenges to travel, and those areas added value to the literature by examining demographic, social and cultural changes. Solo tourism contributes to individual wellbeing, which fact strongly supports the growth of this form of tourism. Meanwhile, travelling alone stimulates self-confidence and shapes personality (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020). Personal wellbeing is crucial for all human beings. The term 'personal' is closely related to the term 'self'; and as

mentioned above, the self is unique to every human being. Moreover, the self is at the centre of every individual's personality development and is the basis for all self-processes, including self-construction, self-effecting and self-changing. Discovering the diverse selves of travellers, therefore, would support learning about the various behaviours of travellers and benefit all stakeholders and policymakers associated with the tourism industry. In line with the uncovered empirical gaps and to provide further insights into Chinese solo travellers, the current researcher has formed the following sub-questions.

1. How do solo travellers define themselves?
2. Does solo travel bring changes in solo travellers' self-representation?
3. What critical moments may trigger solo travellers to make changes in their self-representation?
4. How do solo travellers adhere to the changes in their self-representation?

Consequently, the main aim of this study is to examine how solo travellers narrate themselves during the different stages in their solo travel.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study aims to examine the relationship between solo travel and self-representation. Since the tourism and hospitality industry is customer-centric, knowing everything that can be known about the tourist is essential, and this is possible when understanding the primary forms that behavioural changes can take. Therefore, a study on self-representation is vital. Moreover, a behavioural change is noteworthy when an individual express himself/herself. Self-expression is the so-called representation of the self, and this will involve an expression of the sense of oneself (*one's self-concept, that is, beliefs, knowledge and thoughts about the self*),

presentation of the self (*representation of oneself to others*) and self-esteem (*self-appraisal and self-monitoring*). Thus, performing this study on solo travellers' representation will aid in identifying and recognising the type of travellers who are part of the industry and the growth and development of this kind of tourism. The following section outlines the expected contributions of the current study, including both theoritical and practical.

1.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

As explained in the background to the study and the problem statement, there is a dearth of literature on solo travellers and their self-presentation. Hence, this study expects to add new knowledge on:

a. The Van Gennep's (1960) Rites of Passage (The Self-Identity Transformation Process) in the context of solo tourism:

In this study, the current researcher uses and supports the study with the basic process suggested under the rites of passage theory, including separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal) and re-incorporation (post-liminal). These stages have been used to explain the relevant actions, and scholars have justified the activities related to each stage. Each of these stages has been well-established in the literature. However, how individuals shift themselves at each stage, what makes them make such changes in themselves, and what pushes them to identify new selves still need to be studied. In the context of solo tourism, solo travellers spend their life during a specific period also and may experience different situations.

When going solo, the time and space given to a self would support an individual to understand the self, and the incidents the individual handles alone would shift his/her actual self. That will reflect in the individual's self-representation, where all the changes demonstrate a self-transformation process. Thus, an individual would realise the changes in the self

throughout the journey. A study focused on the self-representation of solo travellers will provide insights into how individuals experience transformations in their sense of self following periods of solitude during their travels. Furthermore, it will examine the subsequent changes in their self-representation. This analysis aims to offer a comprehensive perspective on the subject.

b. Rethinking self-representation by solo travellers:

Since there is a lack of studies that emphasise the connectivity between solo travellers and their self-representation, by using the theories, 'Theory of Mind and self', 'Gottman's Dramaturgical Approach of Self-Presentation-Impression Management', 'Social Identity Theory, 'Theory of Perception', Theory of Personality'; and the concepts, 'Self-Concept', 'Self-Consciousness', 'Self-Identity', 'Self-Image', 'Self-Appraisal', 'Self-Monitoring'; and the self-related scales, 'Self-Presentation Tactics Scale', and the 'Efficacious Self – Presentation Scale,' the current researcher attempts to study solo travellers' representation throughout the different travel stages. The above-mentioned self-related theories, concepts and scales have previously been utilised to study multiple phenomena, including social, neural, psychological and molecular factors. However, this study is confined to solo travellers and will be a diary that sheds light on solo travellers' journeys.

The theory of the self explains that a person generally believes in himself or herself. It relates to self-concept and self-awareness, self-image, self-esteem and self-efficacy. At the same time, the pattern of theory emphasises that the self can vary based on people's situations. Therefore, the current researcher argues that solo travellers are unique and must be different from ordinary travellers. The existing concepts and theories provide various ideas about self and self-construction. There is no default definition or complete explanation of the self-

representation concept and the self-representation process. Therefore, the current study provides novel insights into solo travellers' self-representation.

In addition to the above, Gottman's Dramaturgical Approach to Impression Management explains that people present themselves positively to others with a view to attracting others. However, this will not be the same at all times, and not applicable to all people, especially travellers. Perhaps this is one of the features of self-representation. Therefore, by rethinking the theories, it becomes clear that each theory explains some feature of self-representation. By gathering all these insights, the study will provide comprehensive knowledge on the self-representation of solo travellers.

c. Bring new insights and comprehensive knowledge about self-representation under aspects of the self:

How solo travellers use the aspects of self, one self to oneself and oneself to other will be an interesting research area. However, previous authors have yet to include self-effecting (which means *encouraging a person's desirable ways and controlling as well as preventing the person from undesirable consequences*); and self-changing (which means *that self-development happens through situational life changes*). Therefore, the researcher argues that self-representation would also include self-changing and self-effecting. Moreover, the situation, personal characters, experiences, and known and unknown factors would bring life changes to travellers; whatever a solo traveller faces during the journey would also be reflected in their self-representation.

1.3.2 Practical Contributions

The study specifies the importance of the self-representation of solo travellers and focuses on solo tourism. Solo tourism is not a specialised field with strict outlines or limitations.

It is born from the unique urge of each individual to execute his/her desires in travel. Therefore, solo tourism opens the path for other forms of tourism and will provide information to stakeholders on the state of the tourism industry and help them analyse tourists' behaviour. Besides, if stakeholders know and understand how tourists present themselves, that would support them in fulfilling tourists' needs and wants regarding their destinations.

Tourists' representations, related to behaviour, indicate whether they identify the destination as unique compared with other destinations they have visited or not; and of course, a positive experience gained at the latter place will increase their future behavioural intention to visit that destination. This favourable situation will result in several benefits to all stakeholders, including:

a. Destination Managers

The self-representation of solo travellers express who they are, what they prefer, what they look for in a destination, and sometimes, their history on social media related to their solo travel. Their travel history would provide ideas to destination managers to think creatively about destination development. Moreover, whether travellers are satisfied or dissatisfied, the level of their expectations before and after visiting the destination is visible through their self-representations on virtual platforms. The collections of all the representations of solo travellers would guide destination managers when thinking about improving the destination, its existing facilities and ways to mitigate all the disappointments of travellers regarding destinations. Besides, designing cost-effective and attractive packages may draw many solo travellers to a destination.

By collecting information about the solo traveller, when most solo travellers visit their destinations, it would help promoters to obtain an idea about the peak time of travel in order to

launch the necessary marketing promotional campaigns during those identified seasons, attract potential travellers and motivate them to think about revisiting.

b. Travel Agencies

Travel agencies could obtain benefits from solo travel through solo travellers' self-representation. In general, online presentations can provide an idea about these travellers' behaviour. If travel agencies collect information about solo travellers, including their favourite places, travel budgets, language requirements, length of stay, interests and food behaviour, they could do a good job by providing travellers with customised services. If they offer such excellent, personalised services, it will spread positive word of mouth (WOM) among solo traveller customer.

After offering these excellent services, agencies would attract loyal customers and expand their networks through trustworthy services. Proper promotional activities on both online platforms and traditional communication channels will create widespread awareness about the agency and its customised services, especially among solo travellers. Besides, if an agency also provides 24/7 services, then, in any part of the world, individuals who plan to travel alone may find it possible to reach the agency at any time without a cost.

c. Hoteliers/ Restaurants

A solo traveller's self-representation would also provide an idea about his/her expectations regarding accommodation, food, travel itinerary and taste for adventure; for instance, it identifies those who are interested in art, yoga, cooking, music, sports and other areas of interest. To capture solo travellers' attention, if hoteliers offer opportunities to arrange musical or dance shows, for instance, and if they allocate free space for such activities and

make them accessible to all guests, such activities would encourage solo travellers interested in culture to choose that particular hotel among other competitors.

Through solo travellers' self-representation, hoteliers can obtain clues to their preferred accommodation. Moreover, since the mode of travel is always alone, most solo travellers expect secure accommodation. Thus, by highlighting the safety and security of their accommodation, hoteliers can promote themselves via advertisements. Even though these hoteliers may fix relatively high charges for the accommodation, if a traveller accords high priority to safety, then, at any cost, that person will pay the necessary amount and stay at the venue. Therefore, these kinds of activities not only benefit hoteliers but also provide greater economic advantages to the industry and the economy.

Moreover, staying patterns will determine the peak time of solo travel. During those identified periods, if hoteliers adopt certain seasonal pricing strategies and adjust their charges competitively according to tourists' demands, this action will attract more individuals who travel alone. Also, this could result in the hotel/restaurant becoming fully booked/full very quickly. In addition, restaurants can provide personalised services if they collect information about solo travellers' food choices via their self-representation. This would help them build strong relationships with solo travellers in the future as well.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section emphasises the importance of solo travellers' self-representation by highlighting the primary aspect of oneself, oneself to others and self-evaluation. The identified gaps in the research have been supported through the theory of rites of passage. On that basis, the researcher has presented objectives for filling the research gaps.

2.1 Solo Tourism

In the 21st century, science has yielded many things to make human life more comfortable and convenient. This advancement has reached and influenced all industries, including the tourism and hospitality industry. The tourism industry is a fascinating industry that has been growing in all countries worldwide. Innovation and creativity take place frequently to capture mass customers and make them happy with their experiences. There are plenty of tourists worldwide, and each type is unique. Among those, the most trending based on international travel blogs and recording enormous growth in recent years is none other than" Solo-tourism". Also, an internationally increasing market is that of 'Solo Travellers.'

Solo tourism is starting to prosper and attract most travellers. The meaning given before for solo was 'being alone,' but this has evolved recently (Seow & Brown, 2020). In 2012, Klinenberg's team mentioned that the growth of solo travellers is due to an increase in the single population. There were several studies that established a strong foundation for the motives for solo travellers' desire to travel alone, such as, *experience* (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020)**;** *relaxation* (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2017; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020)*; Freedom & Flexibility*, *Independence* (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux,

2010); *Social and Wellbeing* (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020)*; Escape from all the responsibilities* (all the mentioned scholars and ; Butler, 1995; Stone & Nichol, 1999; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006, Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013); *Self-motivations* including self-identity, self-realisation, self-actualisation, self-conversion, self-confident, self-control, self-recognition, self-development and so on.

From the existing literature, scholars in tourism have found the reasons or the motives for travellers liking to travel alone. The reasons can be divided into two major categories – namely, by default or by choice. By default, means that individuals who live alone or who are unlucky in finding a travel companion because of their lifestyles or are no more in any sort of relationship with others, are assumed to be the first category of solo travellers (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020). On the other hand, the other group of individuals who fall into the solo group travel alone through choice, and not because they cannot find others to travel with (Seow & Brown, 2020).

The key motive for selecting a solo option is due to the tremendous motivations that exist in the environment. Researchers have explained that the transformative experience could be the reason behind the selection to travel solo. Meanwhile, individuals who like to transform themselves and look for self-development, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-discovery, liberalisation, empowerment, and are more enthusiastic about learning new things and approaching new people, are listed as people who like being solo travellers (Mehmetoglu et

al., 2001; Wilson & Little, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020).

Moreover, an interesting fact about solo travellers is their character. Besides motivations, an individual's character also significantly influences his/her decision to travel alone. In recent years, there has been an increase in solitary lifestyles and the single population due to lower marriage rates, higher employment movement, and divorce rates. Most of these individuals are highly addicted to urbanised lifestyles (Kleinberg et al., 2012; Budgeon, 2008; Leith, 2020). Solo tourists are defined by their individual tourism needs, motivations, and behaviour (Leith, 2020). However, each solo tourist is different from the other. Indeed, scholars who have studied solo tourism have revealed that there would be continual growth in solo tourism. An individual's motivation, behaviour, and experience will be the reasons for solo tourism (Leith, 2020). Besides motivation, an individual's character and psychological behaviour may influence them to decide on solo travelling.

To add value to the above discussion, the name of this type of travel itself, solo, attracts attention among people and gives rise to astonishment. The simple logic is that people who like to travel generally desire to do so with their family, friends, and even with strangers. If anyone thought about solo travel, it automatically created curiosity among the general audience, focusing their attention on those travellers. Scholars Smith and his team (2017) also emphasised in their studies that during family travelling, the head of the family will take over all responsibilities, where the husband dominates completely. At the same time, a group decision should satisfy all members in the group, or at least a few of them may be listed as the dominator's decision (Smith et al., 2017). Today's group travel planning is also pretty much a shared spousal process. However, solo travellers are free from all restrictions, and they can make unhindered decisions based on their preferences and desires. It is not necessary to adjust their itinerary for others (Smith et al., 2017).

In conclusion, with respect to all the points discussed above, when compared with group travellers' travel planning, solo travellers are free to make their decision freely and confidently. Also, psychological factors play a significant role in travellers' final decisions. In line with Kotler (1984), psychological factors are defined as the inner and inborn traits of the individual. It has the closest relationship with an individual's decision-making where motivation, learning, and memory were identified as the most significant determinants under the term psychological travel decision-making (Maneesaeng & Wall, 2017). Moreover, travellers become satisfied when their social and psychological needs have been fulfilled by the destination they have travelled to (Chang, 2007). There is a strong association between tourists' behaviour and the tourism industry. The success of the industry is purely based on 'tourists'. All the activities of tourism or hospitality, without tourists, would be impossible. Indeed, the components of tourism would be decided upon through tourists' behaviour (Guleria, 2016).

For instance, tourism is considered a people-to-people business, where businesses such as hotels, airlines, tour agencies, and anyone involved in tourism-related activities are all based on people. Therefore, the success of tourism depends entirely on how far the industry fulfils the needs and wants of tourists. In other words, tourism will be successful if tourists are happy and if their expectations are met. As a result, a business can obtain and retain loyal customers by providing satisfaction. At the same time, if customers' expectations are not met, then that may cause dissatisfaction and that customer could move to another competitor. A business can carry out many promotions to attract customers. Still, all the benefits that this affords will vanish if businesses fail to study the behaviour of their customers. The same rule would apply to tourism businesses as well. Tourists are the key players and determine the demand for each business. However, industrialists should be aware of tourists' characteristics to predict their behaviour. For example, culture (*solo travellers' cultural background, sub-cultures and social class*); social aspects (*solo travellers, whom they refer to before travelling alone, and getting*

advice or guidance by means of reference groups, solo travellers' family, and their roles and status in society, whether they are family persons, grandmother, mother, wife or daughter); personal aspects (*solo travellers' age, gender, lifestyles, occupation and economic stability*); and psychological factors (*motivations for travelling alone, learning from the experience of internal and external stimuli in the environment, own perception about themselves and beliefs and attitudes*)(Kotler et al., 2001). To make one thing clear on tourists' characteristics and behaviour, with respect to both traits and behaviour, the self is crucial. In other words, understanding the self is vital for the entire study of tourists' behaviour. There could be individual differences among tourists that bring many changes in behaviour-related analysis. However, the manner in which a traveller's self-representation would help the industry predict the behaviour of a group of travellers is still an under-researched area in the academic discipline of solo travel**.**

The current researcher has conducted a systematic review to uncover the fundamental research gap. Therefore, she adopted the PRISMA Model, which is explained in Figure 2.1. This model was introduced by the scholar Cochrane (2009) as fitting to carry out an extensive analysis of the literature. The researcher has used the PRISMA model in the current study to figure out the gap between solo tourism and self-representation. It included four steps: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion criteria. Ultimately, this process can provide information on the existing empirical gaps based on the field researcher searching it. To do that, the present researcher selected two major multi-disciplinary databases. The Web of Science and Scopus are identified as multi-disciplinary databases with high-quality peer-reviewed literature and abstracts, along with the largest set of citations. The literature was searched under the words 'solo/ travel' and 292 (Web of Science= 120; Scopus=172) articles were found.

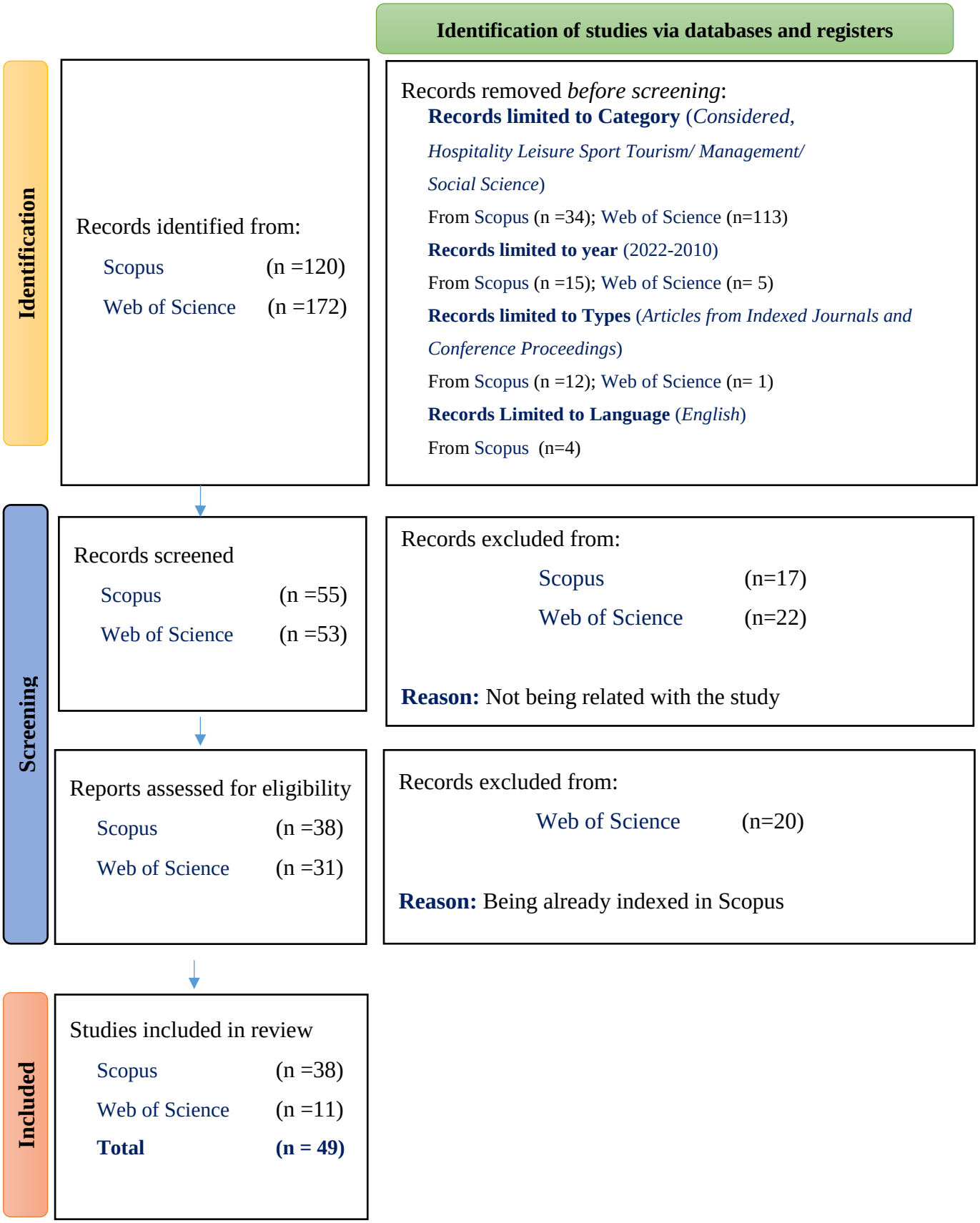


Figure 2.1: Solo Tourism Articles Based on PRISMA Model
(Source: A systematic Review)

Of them, the literature was sorted by using the years 2010-2022 (*Web of Science= 5; Scopus=15*), limited to the area of leisure sport tourism/management/social science (*Web of Science= 113; Scopus=34*); limited to document types, articles from indexed journals and proceedings (*Web of Science= 1; Scopus=12*); limited to language (*Scopus=4*); limited to not related to the context (*Web of Science= 22; Scopus=17*); and finally, the repetitive works of literature were excluded (*Web of Science= 20*). At final, 49 articles were included for review.

Among then, the crucial studies were summarised in Table 2.1. Based on Table 2.1, till now, there have been a considerable number of studies in the field of solo tourism. However, most of these studies have covered the motivations, constraints, risks, and challenges that women solo travellers face when they travel alone.

Therefore, till now, there is an empirical gap remaining in the area of solo travellers' representations. Before highlighting the solo traveller's self-representation in the context of the argument, existing studies done under the solo travel theme are mainly related to women-centric studies and a few more such as comparative studies do exist. The current knowledge provides an idea about what takes place if women select this solo option for their travel and how their journey would turn out to be. Most of these studies have been conducted in the Asian region. Beyond these two major themes, none of the extant studies has understood solo travellers fully. Since this type of tourism has been identified as emerging, looking at only one gender perspective or describing the solo traveller from one narrow point of view will not give a complete picture of this newly identified segment. The recent survey done in 2022 by the scholars Carles, Vila and Brea (2022) also emphasised that researchers should extend the analysis beyond motivations, constraints, and experience.

Based on the summary, it was clear that the motivation to select solo travel is because of self-transformative. Therefore, it is clear that a solo traveller selects especially a solo travel due to specific expectations, including self-transformative experience (Leith, 2020). This

would make different a solo traveller from a general traveller. The type of solo traveller the study would expect for this study is covered in section 2.2. To connect the existing knowledge with the purpose of this study, a specific period, a traveller expecting to experience a change in either life or self.

In accordance with the theory of rites of passage (Gennep, 1960), a liminal period would bring a change in the self, where a specific time would support identifying the true self. Because as per the theory, when an individual disassociates him/herself from routine activity, friends, family, and a comfort zone, that specific period would let individuals realise their own space of time to discover the hidden skills. In the end, it would let an individual emerge a new self. Therefore, the theory of rites of passage would support the aim of this study and help to bring new insights into solo travel.

The purposes of travelling would be general to all types of travellers, and these include, pleasure, business, visiting friends and relatives, conventions and meetings, health, education and visiting religious places. Along with these common travel purposes, the scholar Hosseini et al., (2021) stated that some travellers look for specific and unique intentions for travel, such as freedom of movement, self-discovery, breaking down boundaries, strengthening self-confidence, seeking adventure, risk-taking, seeking love, interest in learning about new communities, discovering new cultures, meeting strangers and exploring various, new destinations; this group of travellers is known as ‘solo travellers’, since many of them travel alone. However, the motivations for solo travelling are not the same as those of general travellers; solo travellers are driven by curiosity and also expect to experience social interactions (Laesser et al., 2009). Therefore, with the support of a liminal concept, this study will focus on how solo travel would bring changes in solo travellers’ self-transformation and how it would reflect in their self-representation.

Table 2.1 Summary of Solo Tourism-Related Past Studies

Authors & Years	Key Variables and Methodology	Essential Findings
Wilson and Little (2008)	• Perceptions, vulnerability, and conspicuousness; • Qualitative approach conducted in New Zealand.	Solo female travellers were much consciousness on others' perception about them.
Heimtun and Abelsen (2014)	• Solo traveller, gender and sports; • Quantitative approach conducted among Norwegian, students, Norway (aged 18-29).	The young single male students are more willing than the females to go on sport- and party-related holidays alone.
Zhang and Hitchcock (2017)	• Gaze, women's blog and solo traveller; • Qualitative approach conducted in China.	The results of this study also demonstrate that travelling in Macao for contemporary Chinese woman is not just a leisure pursuit but an opportunity to bond with family and friends. Ironically, this very modern pursuit enables women to explore their traditional Chinese roles which may not be especially compatible with their contemporary professional careers.
Yang, Lattimore and Arcodia (2016)	• Female solo travellers, culture and behaviour; • A conceptual paper: Asian women (China, Japan and Korea).	Based on this review, it is evident that Asian women's travel behaviour is influenced by cultural identities and gender stereotypes.
Doran (2016)	• Women constraints, negotiation, and benefits for women in adventure tourism; • Conceptual paper.	The study highlighted the women's constraints and benefits in adventure tourism.
Chung, Baik and Lee (2016)	• Constraints, motivation, negotiation; • Quantitative approach conducted in South Korea.	In the indirect path, of perceived behavioural control plays a mediating role in the relationship between motivation for solo travel and negotiation efforts; in other words, motivation for solo travel increases the constraint-negotiation strategies. However, what an individual can control in his or her constraint-

		negotiation efforts (i.e. controllability) is more important in navigating barriers to travel.
Khan, Chelliah and Ahmed (2017)	• Travel motivation, travel constraints and perceived risk; • Qualitative approach conducted in Malaysia.	The positive cognitive and affective images were motivating young women to travel alone and simultaneously the risks in travelling alone were discouraging the young women to travel alone. Hence these travel risks were forming negative cognitive and affective image and thus influencing on their behavioural intention towards a destination.
Brown and Osman (2017)	• Women solo travel, and harassment; • Qualitative approach conducted in Egypt.	Their experiences were highly influenced and often involuntarily altered by unwanted male attention and sexual harassment, as the women felt the need to fit into local female norms of behaviour to safeguard themselves.
Thomas and Mura (2019)	• Unsafe spaces (online blogs), sexual harassment, fraudulent of tour guides, and offending on dress; • Qualitative approach conducted in India;	Concluded the obstacles the women solo travellers face during their solo travelling to India.
Seow and Lorraine (2020)	• Women solo travellers, harassment and sociocultural expectations; • Qualitative approach conducted in India.	Resistance found as a crucial factor in Asian women's solo travelling. Besides, sexualised male attention was found to be an important constraint in women's solo travelling.
Yang, Lattimore, Arcodia (2018)	• Power, empower, perception and risks; • Qualitative approach conducted among Asians.	The findings reveal that Asian solo female travellers were concerned about gendered (e.g. sexual assault and street harassment) and racialised (e.g. discrimination and social disapproval) risks, which imply the unequal power relations underpinning the gendered and racialised tourism space. The findings also reveal evidence where gender intersects with race in amplifying and constructing Asian women's belief of risk. The solo travel supports women to do hers' self-transformation and thus supports to extend the social behaviour.
Wanton and McKercher (2019)	• Backpacker, perception and physical risks and harassment; • Conceptual paper.	There were two groups of backpackers, the one who was willing to travel alone and the one who did not find a partner to travel. Members of both groups found physical risks, especially related to sexual dimorphism associated with being Asian women. However, members of the second group were more likely to identify with social/psychological and satisfaction risks.

Leith (2019)	• Identified four divers of solo tourists: the search for solitude, the search for social interaction, lessening of the solitary stigma, and the digital anchor to others; • Qualitative approach conducted in European countries.	The future of solo tourism will be decided through one's desires, living circumstances and motivations of the individual. A key element will be the level of solitude or controlled or uncontrolled companionship that the individual desires.
Su and Wu (2021)	• Perceptions, reactions toward harassment, and safety; • Qualitative approach conducted in Taiwan.	Results revealed when facing harassment, they opted to neglect, forbear, or blame themselves; hardly had they actively fought back.
Karagöz, Işık, Dogru and Zhang (2020)	• Gendered risk, destination-specific risk, and social-psychological risk; • Quantitative approach conducted online.	Solo female travellers face risks during their solo travel, such as gender, destination-specific, and social psychological risk.
Ratthinan and Selamat (2019)	• Technology, women solo traveller; • Qualitative approach conducted among Malay Muslim Women.	Using the Hierarchical Constraint Model, the findings indicate that culture is significant wherein several constraints faced by MMW differ from those faced by Western or other Asian women. The finding indicates a significant association between travel constraints and negotiation illustrates that women are empowered by using technology to travel.
Yang (2020)	• Inspiring factors: self-discovery and freedom; • Challenges: safety, cost, and social constraints; • Qualitative approach conducted in Australia.	Circumstances and willingness are the reasons behind the decision making of travelling alone.
Monterrubioa, Madera and Péreza (2020)	• Trans women, motivations and constraints; • Qualitative approach conducted among Mexican.	Mistreatment of trans tourists can range from being misgendered to sexual harassment and verbal and physical violence.

Sheeba, Ruksar, Mohd and Sujood (2021)	• Travellers' wellbeing, state of life, escape, happiness, empowerment, Self-growth and self-realisation; • Qualitative approach conducted in India;	The self-transformation and positive wellbeing were Major reasons for solo travelling found during the study were to overcome stress and depression, to bring positive change in present state of life, escape, happiness, empowerment, self-growth and self-realisation.
Brugulat and Coromina (2021)	• Social cultural constraint, personal constraint and spatial constraint; • Qualitative approach conducted in South East Asia;	Socio-cultural constraint: In terms of sociocultural constraints, family, friends and the media play a key role in instilling fear in women. Some women travellers focus on the power of the media, blogs and movies to encourage other women to travel alone and redress the gender balance in society. Personal Constraints: Concerning personal constraints, most risks and fears relate to daily activities such as eating food, using transport, etc. In fact, women developed risk reduction strategies by modifying their behaviour to avoid being victims, most often following their instincts. Practical constraints: Are uncommon on solo backpacking trips. These travellers are motivated by the opportunity to travel spontaneously on a low budget, so avoiding planning their trips is common. In some cases, their itineraries may be changed depending on whom they meet along the way, which questions their degree of freedom. Spatial Constraints: Landscape fear.

(Source: Prepared for the study purpose)

2.2 The Solo Traveller

There is an ongoing debate as to who a solo traveller is In line with Foo (1999), "a solo traveller is defined as tourists who travel alone, mostly abroad, but within their own country as well, without any companionship from partners, parents, children or friends/relatives or in groups of solo travellers from the tourist generating country" (p. 36). Heimtun and Abelsen (2014) defined solo travellers as, "solo tourists (are those who are) completely alone, and who are not part of a packaged trip, group or tour" (p. 162). Most scholars have adopted the same definitions. Besides, solo travellers travel without companionship; they do not meet them (companions) at their destination (McNamara & Prideaux, 2009; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). Sometimes, solo travellers may join with other groups of travellers or strangers at their destination; however, this doesn't change the definition of a solo traveller (Abbasian, 2019).

In coining the term solo, among past studies have found that the most used terms to describe solo travellers were, *'solitary travellers'* (Campbell, 2009; Mehmetoglu, 2003), *'solo tourists'*(Jordon & Aitchison, 2008; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014; Seow & Brown, 2017; Leith, 2019) and *'solo traveller'* (Wilson & Little, 2005; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014; Chung, Baik & KiLee, 2016; Yang et al., 2016; Doran, 2016; Khan, Chelliah & Ahmed, 2017; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Abbasian, 2019; Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Popova, Marinov & Malcheva, 2019; Karagoz et al., 2020; Brugulat & Coromina, 2021), although less used terms to define them were, '*single or alone travellers'* (Navare & Zagade, 2015) and *'independent travellers'* (Sanitmatcharo, 2006; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).

Another interesting fact about solo travellers was found in the works of Heimtun & Abelsen's (2014), such as: (i) default, where individuals prefer not to travel alone if they have a chance to go with their close people, including partners, friends and families; and (ii) Choice, where individuals will not prefer to travel with their essential people. At the same time, solo

travellers have more flexibility and freedom of choice at the destination than other travellers, and can be independent throughout their travelling (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014).

In general, solo travellers are divided into different categories based on four significant drivers. These are , (i) the search for solitude (the individuals who live with their family, friends, or others, and then require a state of isolation; however, this will vary based on their personal needs and motivations); (ii) the search for social interaction (an individual between loneliness and solitude searching for social interaction); (iii) lessening of the solitary stigma (an individual who likes to be alone but is reluctant to go public places alone); and (iv) the digital anchor to others (even though individuals are alone, they may connect with their family or friends via online devices).

The term solitude has generally been used in solo-related literature. According to Larson (1990), "communicative separation from others is an objective condition of being alone" (p.157). However, since the traits of each solo traveller varies, they do not handle it in the same manner. These would include diverse physical settings, including how could they could become experienced in being alone in the home, in public places, in social gatherings and by nature(self) (Long et al., 2003; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). In general, solitude contains positive, neutral and negative experiences. Hence, these three are considered the reasons behind those who travel alone.

Positive experiences are enjoyed by the solo traveller who looks for freedom, facilitates creativity, identifies self, and other positive expectations. Contradicting the positive, individuals who are under pressure, are suffering from depression, loneliness and poor wellbeing sometimes desire to travel alone. Other than these two categories, neutral describes the traveller concerned with mitigating their loneliness, which would encourage them to establish connectivity with strangers at the destination and become involved in social interactions.

Furthermore, solo travellers' experience of solitude is generally decided through their traits such as (i) Highly individualistic, those who do not interact with others often; (ii) Less individualistic, those who seeks opportunities to interact with others; (iii) Outward oriented, those who intend to interact only with local people; and finally, (iv) Inward oriented, those who seek relationships only with those who are close to them (Mehmetoglu, 2003; Cohen, 2018); Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). Subsuming all the points discussed above, as the aim of the present study, the researcher has focused on solo travellers who did not belong to any particular category. Thus, solo travellers may join other groups of travellers or strangers at the destination they visit; this does not make any changes in the definition of a solo traveller, since solo travellers considered in this study are those who started their travel entirely alone, without any companionship, and thus, who are not part of a packaged trip, group or tour.

2.3 The Concept of the Self

Before moving into self-representation, knowing about the self is essential. The concept of the self began to gain more attention from the 1950s onwards (Lehrer, 2012). The idea of 'self' was once thought of as a single, unified and coherent concept. However, it is now viewed as a complex and multidimensional concept with several identities coexisting within an individual at any given time. This change in perspective has been supported by several researchers including, Bahl and Milne (2010), Lyon (2000), Miles, Cliff and Burr (1998) and Joy and Li (2012).

According to social identity theory, individuals may interact with different groups of people and identify as members of those groups. Each group has its own self-conceptualisations, requiring individuals to play specific roles in their daily interactions (Lyon, 2000). These roles can vary depending on the group. Consumer behaviour scholars have differing views on what constitutes a person's 'self-concept' despite the fact that an individual

may have different self-concepts at a given time. Mittal (2006), Reed et al. (2012), and Sirgy (1982) have expressed ambiguity on the matter. Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that an individual's different selves (conceptualisations) are cognitive manifestations of their enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats. Mittal (2006) argues that the self is composed of five components: values, competence, social roles, body image, and personality traits. Hence, it could be argued that the self is composed of various self-perceptions that may differ from each other (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Perez, Castaño & Quintanilla, 2010; Schouten, 1991).

Self-discrepancy theory, presented by Higgins (1987), identifies three types of self-conceptions. There are three aspects of a person's self-concept that are important to understand. These are the 'actual self', which is one's perception of their actual attributes, the 'ideal self', which is the attributes they would like to possess, and the 'ought to self', which are the characteristics someone believes a person should possess. Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that individuals' possible selves determine their perceptions of their potential and future aspirations.

People may adopt different consumption habits to achieve their desired identities (Patrick et al., 2002). It is important to note that having different self-conceptions can create discomfort. This discomfort arises when there is a discrepancy between any two of the self-conceptions mentioned above. Therefore, individuals may try to minimise this disagreement through their actions, as suggested by Higgins (1987). Both present and future aspects of one's life aspirations are incorporated in these conceptualisations of the 'self'. This statement implies that the 'actual-self' primarily deals with the consequences that may arise in the future.

In addition to the above neurological perspective, the self can be divided into two significant mental and physical aspects. The physical self refers to face identification and has been treated as a subject of extensive scrutiny in behavioural studies and neurology. For instance, the scholars Molnar-Szakacs and Arzy (2009) explained that when others perform the

same actions, then the self of an individual starts to react to these others' actions. In other words, the self-created physical relationship between the physical representations of the self is related to the physical presence of others. At the same time, the mental self is purely evaluated through an individual's personality traits (Molnar-Szakacs & Arzy, 2009). The self, therefore, is the centre of gravity of one's personal and social behaviour. Therefore, knowing the self is related to the main focus of this study of solo travellers and is crucial to the investigation.

After the discussion, it has been established that the idea of 'self' is not a singular and unchanging concept. Instead, it is a complex and multifaceted conceptualisation that can evolve over time. Additionally, an individual may possess more than one self-conceptualisation simultaneously. When trying to understand how solo travellers evolve and represent themselves during their travels, it is important to consider the complexity of their experiences.

Expanding the theories and definitions discussed will lead to a better understanding of self-representation. When travelling alone, it is important to consider how one presents and evaluates themselves. This is where the contributions of scholars in the domains of tourism and tourists' behaviour become useful.

Besides the above information, it is relevant to answer the question as to why individuals seek to define themselves. To answer this, Brewer and Gardner (1996) stated that, "individuals seek to define themselves in terms of their immersion in relationships with others and with larger collectives, and derive much of their self-evaluation from such social identities" (1996, p. 83). Based on the degree to which individuals define themselves, their selves are divided into two major categories; (i) Individuated or Personal self; and (ii) Rational or Social self.

The personal self is unique from others and determined by the personality traits of each individual. The social self is diverse from the personal, and is reflected through the relationships the individual has with social groups, and through assimilation to the social

groups the individuals think are crucial to them. From those two selves, the social selves are determined by interpersonal and interdependent relationships. Interpersonal relationships are individual, intimate dyadic relationships that are found between parents and children, friends, families and partners. At the same time, interdependence is entire dependence and does not require a personal relationship; instead, it is determined through the social roles that individuals play in society.

On the other hand, "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as the unique person" (Hogg et al., 1987. p. 50) was visible. To accomplish social needs, the individual performs multiple tasks (*collective self*). And thus, these reflect in their self-representation. To fulfil an individual's social needs, they try to expand their selves in accomplishing all those needs. Meanwhile, defining the self is based on individuals' relationships with others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). By subsuming all the points discussed above related to the self and self-representation, the scholars Brewer and Gardner (1996) explained the levels of self-representation concerning selves in Table 2.2. Solo travellers begin their travels alone. In the middle of their journey, they might join with some other groups at the destination or complete the entire expedition independently. However, how solo travellers will evolve in each circumstance and how they represent themselves still requires investigation in this study.

Table 2.2. Levels of Self-Representation of the Self

Level of Analysis	**Self-Concept**	**Basic of Self-Evaluation**	**Frame of Reference**	**Basic Social Motivation**
Individual	Personal	Traits	Interpersonal Comparison	Self-Interest
Interpersonal	Relational	Roles	Reflection	Other's Benefit
Group	Collective	Group Prototype	Intergroup Comparison	Collective Welfare

(Source: Brewer and Gardner (1996) Levels of Collective Identity and Self-Representations)

The self at the infant stage is centred and self-sufficient. The infant does not have many needs and wants, except for their hunger or need for food. During that stage, they represent themselves through their expression of 'crying'. Likewise, their perceptional ability, needs, and wants also grow naturally, along with their physical development. When people are satisfied with one set of needs, they are used to move on to others. The reasons are the changes that occur in the environment, society, and a person's internal and external factors. There is a thought-provoking connection between human needs and Maslow's hierarchy.

In the primary stage, Maslow (1943) suggested needs under five categories: physical needs (*people first try to satisfy their rudimentary needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter*), safety needs (*once physical needs are met, people seek safety in health, empowerment and uncertainties*), social needs (*these needs highlight the person's emotions and feelings of belongingness.* Next come belongingness *(expresses a person's interpersonal and interdependence relationships*), self-esteem (is *related with the self-respect, where at this level, people expect respect from others and focus on their goals*), and finally, self-actualisation (*explains a person's potential, personal growth and self-fulfillment*).

All five types of needs were grouped into three primary subsets: physical and safety as basic needs, social and esteem which are categorised as psychological needs, and thereafter, self-actualisation needs which are termed self-fulfillment needs (Maslow, 1970a). However, the five stages model evolved and underwent many changes. As a result, the seven and eight stages models were established. The seven-stage model was formed during the 1960s by the scholar Maslow who introduced two new needs, cognitive (*knowledge and curiosity*) and aesthetic (*search for grooming and appreciation*) (Maslow, 1970a). The following year, in 1970, transcendence needs (*the values that were more than a person's self, for instance, unforgettable memories, carrying forward through a person's mystical and past experiences*) were also added to the model (Maslow, 1970b). However, the five-stage model has been used

by many scholars to date. After analysing the different types of selves and various needs, the researcher predicts certain relationships among them. The following Figure 2.2 is conceptualised to explain the connectivity between the kinds of selves and Maslow's hierarchical needs.

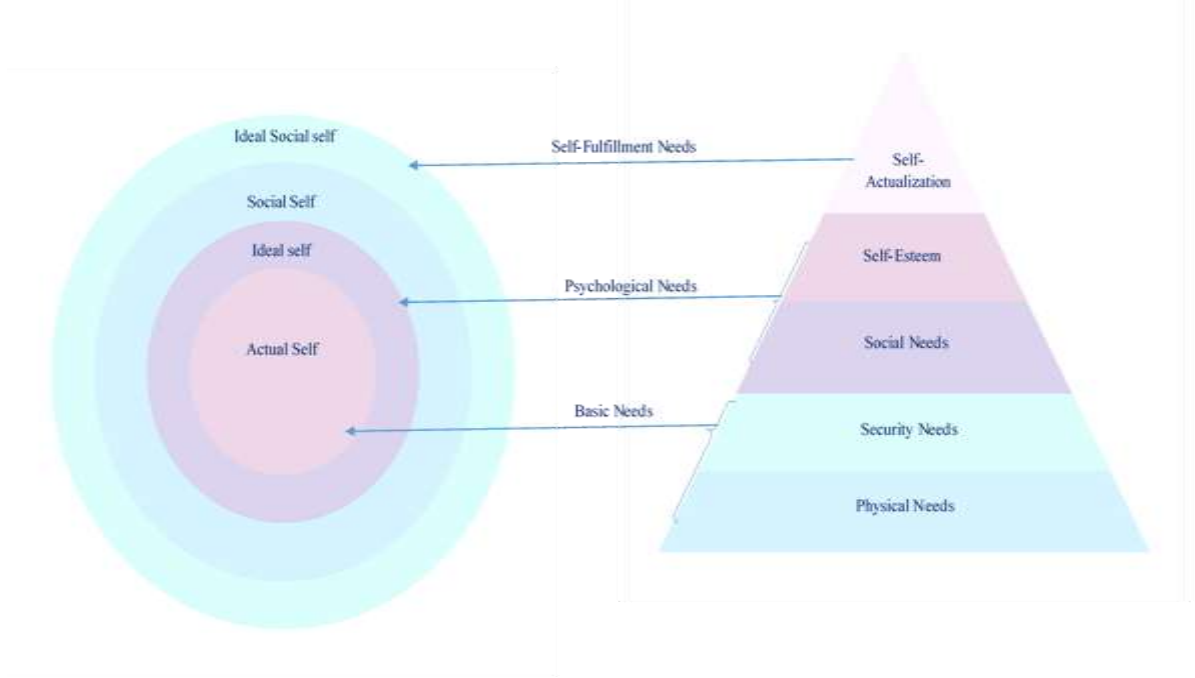


Figure 2.2 Selves and Maslow's Hierarchical Needs

(Source: Conceptualised for the study purpose)

When a person realises himself, he searches for himself and struggles to fulfil his needs. This manifestation is reflected in his self-representation. The notions of a person's self would differ from person to person. Since solo travellers grow constantly during their journeys, knowing about the nature of their selves has captured the interest of the present study. How many studies have focused on the diverse selves of solo travellers? If so, have any studies discovered the changes in travellers' selves during their travel? Because people's experience of Self-learning would bring changes in themselves, this would reflect in their self-representation. Once people meet their wants and needs, they will move on to others. Therefore, there is a relationship between the fulfilment of needs and self-transformation. Since this area has not

been adequately covered in existing studies, the researcher intends to scrutinise how solo travellers identify themselves. This would involve the fundamental element of self-representation.

2.4. The Concept of Self-Representation

There is an existing argument about representation and presentation. A simple understanding of the two concepts is that presentation is part of representation (Thagard & Wood, 2015; Rettberg, 2017). As Jacobson (1964) has defined, self-representation arises from each individual's inner experiences. It arises from an individual's awareness about their inner experiences and through perceiving the body and mental self as objects. That's why self-representation is interpreted as "the conscious, precocious and unconscious endopsychic representation of the body and mental life" (Jacobson, 1964. p. 9). The self is not the same as self-representation because the simple logic is that the object meant here is humans and their characters, including emotions, perceptions, physical and psychological things, along with their experiences, ambitions and aspirations, also known as considered subjects. The object representation is also called psychic representation, where individuals represent their characters (external objects), which they form and carry in their minds. However, this is not a real external object, even though it does have a close relationship with those individuals. Here, the involvement of emotions forms differences between the object and the representation of the object (Milrod, 2002).

Meanwhile, an individual is made up of emotions, character and psychological factors which are reflected in each representation (Hartman, 1956; Jacobson, 1964; Richards, 1982; Milrod, 2002). A self-representation is a representation developed of the self. Therefore, it represents the individual's conception of the self (Milrod, 2002, p. 8). Along the same lines,

self-representation is a persons' representations or beliefs about their abilities and also narrates a person's past experience (Almaas, 1999).

In 2015, Thagard and Wood proposed a new approach for examining self-related aspects and phenomena based on certain self-related theories and literature. They highlighted the primary functions of the self, such as representing, changing and affecting the self. The first primary function was representing, which is self-explanatory in that it is how people represent themselves. It consists of another three subgroups, namely, depicting oneself to oneself (*who portray themselves by using their self-knowledge, serve as a cognitive structure of representing various characteristics of self; and self-understanding indicates the self-interests, which were considered as a collection of one's personal goals, conscious and unconscious*), depicting oneself to others (*this means an individual is more concerned about others' perceptions and acts according to that, which results in deprecation, disclosure, effacement, expression, presentation and promotion*) and evaluating oneself according to one's standards (*individuals present themselves following their evaluation or others' evaluation about the self. It is primarily an ongoing process and consists of appraisal, assessment, criticism, monitoring, reflection, and a self-considered object. It is merged into administration, blame, compassion, confidence, denigration, doubt, esteem, and forgiveness for such evaluation mechanisms*).

The second function of the self, denoted as self-effecting, means that other than representing the self, it also does things to itself. This happens when individuals turn to either encouraging (*actualisation, affirmation, constitution, determination, enhancement, fulfilment, handicapping, helping, indulgence, possession, protection, motivation, reliance and verification*) or discouraging (*abnegation, abuse, alienation, control, defeat, denial, discipline, effacement, restraint, sacrifice and regulation*) their behaviour. However, these changes do not last for a long time.

Self-changing is listed as the final function of the self. Whenever individuals alter themselves, it can be a short-term or long-term goal (for instance, construction, development, expansion, improvement, maximisation, realisation and transcendence of the self). Therefore, studying the self is fascinating. Concordantly, self-representation becomes an inevitable element when describing the behaviour of tourists. As per the arti1cle, self-representation only includes oneself to oneself (*self-concept*), oneself to others (*self-presentation*), and evaluating oneself (*self-evaluation*), but excludes self-effecting and self-changing. Throughout life, people undergo different life experiences, which support them in constructing themselves and strengthening them to lead their life. Therefore, it is clear that even though self-related concepts have been studied before, they still need to be clarified. Besides, how people generate the process of expressing themselves is still an under-researched area in the solo tourism literature.

The aim of this study is the self-representation of solo travellers. Identifying the self is very complicated, and capturing self-representation is even more complex. Moreover, self-representation is dissimilar from the self. Since the study focused on solo travellers, the growing types of tourism industries should have awareness about tourists' behaviour, which is vital for tourism. As discussed, self-representation is evidence of how individuals live and how they accomplish their goals in their lifetime. Before launching a new product or creating a market for the existing product, marketers should carry out a market analysis to identify their customers and their behaviour. Therefore, understanding tourists and carrying out tourists' behavioural studies are inevitable.

For example, self-representation contributes to personal wellbeing. The studies done in this field, have stated that travelling alone stimulates self-confidence and shapes the personality of the solo traveller (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017;

Seow & Brown, 2020; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020). Therefore, using a proper mechanism to identify solo travellers' self-representation would help policymakers build sustainable tourism that satisfies potential tourists' expectations. Furthermore, the digital world has made this comprehensive analysis more straightforward. Starting from providing the statistics of solo travellers, the facilities tourists search throughout their travelling, including accommodations and the destination for a visit, provide a huge amount of reliable information about the solo traveller to stakeholders of this industry. Similarly, the online or social media platform has been shown as the easiest way for tourists to present themselves (*images, videos, storytelling, posts, and status*).

In general, solo travellers are identified as adventure seekers, and, as stated in the literature, they are used to exploring new destinations during their travel, which are generally not recognised by the tourism authority. A small post on social media about a new destination makes considerable changes in the number of potential travellers to that destination. That is the power the online platform has, and a single solo traveller becomes a practical example to people who think of travelling alone. Their self-representation on online platforms provides a great deal of confidence to potential unknown travellers. One's self-representation may influence others' private self-concepts. Ultimately, the studies done under sociology and social psychology evidence that individuals use their self-representation to construct their own identity to establish a solid ideal image. By reviewing all the studies done in the past, there still seems to be a necessity to study solo travellers' self-representation, since scholars in the field of tourism have not covered this area adequately. Indeed, the current researcher has conducted a systematic review to find the fundamental research gap. Therefore, she adopted the PRISMA Model, which is explained in Figure 2.3. The Web of Science and Scopus were identified as multi-disciplinary databases with high-quality peer-reviewed literature and abstracts, which have the largest set of citations.

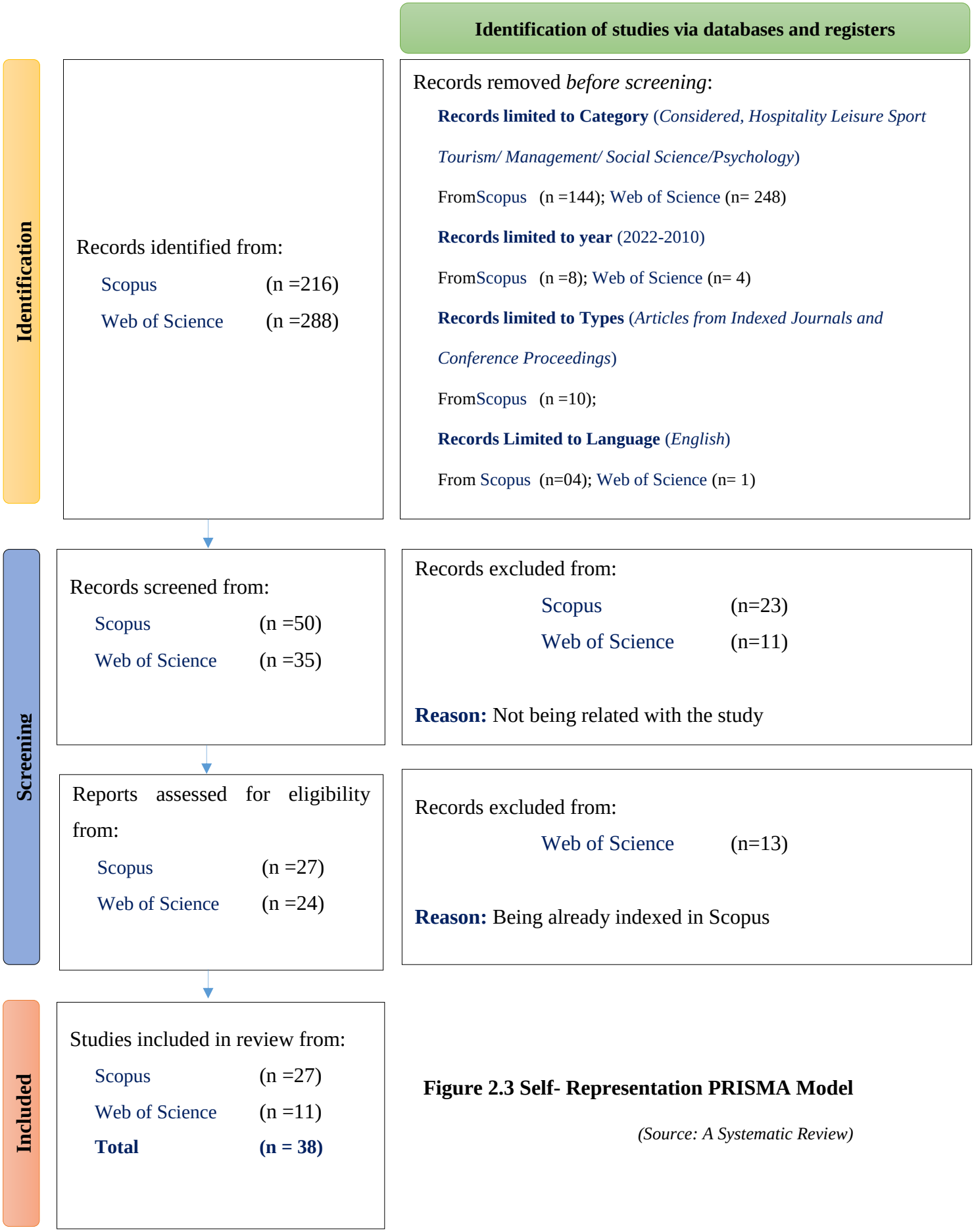


Figure 2.3 Self- Representation PRISMA Model

(Source: A Systematic Review)

The literature was searched under the words ‘travel/self/representation’ and 504 (Web of Science=288; Scopus=216) articles were found. From them, the literature was sorted according to the years from 2010-2022 (*Web of Science= 4; Scopus= 8),* limited to the area of leisure sport tourism/management/social science (*Web of Science= 248; Scopus=144*); limited to document types, articles from indexed journals and proceedings (*Scopus=10*); limited to language (*Web of Science= 1; Scopus= 4*); limited to unrelated context (*Web of Science= 11; Scopus= 23*); and finally those that excluded repetitive literature (*Web of Science= 13*). Finally, 38 articles were included for review.

The summary of the review revealed that most studies covered how people present themselves via photography, online reviews, when choosing characters in online games like Avatar and based on the type of tourism (for example, wild tourism), travellers’ behaviour towards*)* their dress selection, skill development, etc. were identified as self-presentation. A person’s experience that is shared online is mainly framed as self-presentation. From a psychological point of view, a consumption pattern is connected with self-presentation. This is because consumers choose their products consistent with their perceptions of themselves. Therefore, a self is considered an ‘identifiable organisation within each individual and accounts for the unity of personality, higher motives, and continuity of personal memories’ (Curtin, 2009. p. 23). At the same time, the notion of self in travel would differ based on the trip types.

In conclusion, self-representation is not only about how people express themselves or show themselves through physical exposure. Instead, self-representation is a comprehensive thought process and execution of one’s self. Indeed, the thought process form mental patterns and is reflected in an individual’s behaviour and actions. At the same time, the whole process is subject to change. However, this area is yet to be covered in the solo travel-related research. The following section explains the central concept of this study. To understand the concept of self-representation, the current researcher has adopted a two-way direction. One of is how an

individual understands himself/herself well (also called oneself to oneself/self-concept) and the second is how an individual understands others' perception about himself/herself (oneself to others).

2.5 Diverse Perspectives on Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

In addition to the fields of sociology and social psychology, in molecular biology related studies, scholars used oxytocin, a neuropeptide, to support individuals to find what would impress others, and how to make a strong and positive social interaction with others in the society. All this is possible via oxytocin, which has been linked to social recognition (Kavaliers & Choleris, 2011), processing positive cues (Unkelbach et al., 2008), empathic accuracy (Rodrigues et al., 2015; Bartz et al., 2010) and shaping the decision-making process regarding whom to trust and approach (Mikolajczak et al., 2010). However, people who are identified as having 'Social Anxiety Disorder' suffer from this due to their social phobia. These people fear negative evaluation and have a high level of anxiety and avoidance when engaged in social or performance situations. Therefore, these identified groups were seen to be always trying to impress others (Anderso et al., 2008).

The same finding, nevertheless, in a different context, was used by psychologists who treated their patients based on the profile picture, images, videos or posts shared on social media platforms by the patients, in other words, on how patients intended to present themselves to society (Gil-Or et al., 2015). The scholars Twomey and O'Reilly (2017) have suggested that inauthentic self-representation on Facebook may be associated with low self-esteem, elevated social anxiety, and maladaptive personality traits such as neuroticism and narcissism. In addition to other studies, Twomey and O'Reilly (2017) proved that authentic/positive self-representation was consistently associated with increased self-esteem and perceived social support. The central theme of the philosophy of self-consciousness has received attention in

cognitive neuroscience. It is defined as the ability to become aware of one's states, especially (but not only) mental states (e.g., *perceptions, emotions, and attitudes*). In conclusion, through the evidence gleaned from different and multiple streams, it is clear that self-presentation is how individuals attempt to present themselves to control or shape others' perceptions of themselves.

The beauty of this concept is that it is relevant to any stream grounded in human behaviour. For instance, sports players present themselves either online or in face-to-face interaction in matches or in participating in common events; they represent themselves in the form of aesthetics, ethical codes, rules, and ideology. Sports players are generally very concerned with their clothes and accessories, unique hairstyles, selection of their products, and appearance in public. These sports celebrities become influences on youngsters or whoever is following the respective celebrities. Therefore, people create their self-identification through their self-presentation related to attitude, visual appearance, and physical style. The same behaviour can be observed among other celebrities, such as those in the arts & entertainment, science & medicine, academics, business & technology, politics and other fields (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). In conclusion, many celebrities also apply this concept in their lives to create an image in society to impress others and change themselves as per what their fans or audience expect from them.

Another wider area has been discussed in the presentation of culture. Some scholars have used cultural aspects connected with brain function and thus narrated self-representation. The team of Zhu (2008) classified people based on how they presented themselves and how their cultural backgrounds influenced them in their presentation. Because culture affects the psychological structure of self (Zhu et al., 2008), this creates two distinct groups, namely, Western people, who are classified as independent people, and East Asians who are interdependent, based on how both types of people express themselves. When viewing self-

representation via neuroscience, neuroimaging studies have found more vital medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) activation linked to the self- relative to other judgements (Craik et al., 1999; Kelley et al., 2002; Lieberman et al., 2004). The MPFC is engaged in representing self-knowledge, such as one's personality traits (Zhu & Wang, 2008).

Moreover, one's personal traits of self-judgement are less active in interdependent people (Zhang et al., 2007). Once again, self-judgement is derived from a person's self-consciousness (Jonathan & Schroeder, 1995; Newena & Vogeley, 2003; Sczesny & Kaufmann, 2018). Thus, cultural aspects hugely influence individuals' self-representation. (Snider and McCarthy, 2012). In other words, a set of people express and convey a great deal of cultural information via their self-presentation on social media platforms (Georges & Carey-Libbrecht, 2009; Wang & Morais, 2014). Although, a representational study about the culture of an indigenous group of people done by the group of Ambros (2021) pointed out that "representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" (p. 15), it involves "the use of language, signs, and images which stand for or represent things" (Ambros et al., 2021, p. 15). Therefore, people express their feelings, emotions, and cultural expectations via their social-psychological behaviour and express themselves using self-representational concepts.

Furthermore, self-representation is used in the context of queer and stigmatised women. A study conducted on queer women's self-representation on Instagram provided an immense amount of knowledge on self-representation. These people who have hidden their sexual identity from society for years, in recent times have started to reveal their actual identity to the same community because of certain micro-celebrities (also known as influencers), who stand for the people who are affected by social sarcasm (Duguay, 2019). People who boldly represent themselves on social media platforms break all discrimination, voice others, become a personal brand and present themselves as public personas. This behaviour is identified as one of the

prominent components of self-representation. Through the voice of the micro-celebrity, the people who are sequestered by society reveal their actual identification on social media platforms (Duguay, 2019).

Concordantly, the scholars Ellemers and Barreto (2006) explained how people who are living with social stigma, present themselves so that they are able to mingle with society for their wellbeing, especially in relation to a range of social stigmas such as certain medical conditions, mental illness, homosexuality, or lower social background. Also, scholars have found that 84% of stigmatised groups hide their true identity to cope with the depredation of society (Ellemers & Barreto, 2006). For instance, homosexuals tend to hide their sexual orientation and change their clothing, dressing style, and personality based on their environment. They try to express themselves as mainstream humans in society through these means. However, deceit is associated with essential costs (Ekman, 1991; Barreto et al., 2006). These stigmatised groups, forced to hide their identity, sometimes fall into profound stress, poor performance, and depressed self-confidence. The performance of positive self-representation may benefit these groups by protecting them from negative expectations and stereotyping.

Simultaneously, studies related to race, gender, and age also attempt to carry out in depth analyses of the self-representation concept. Racism is everywhere, even though humans have stepped into the twenty first century. However, it is comparably less than in earlier years. People in the USA faced many problems due to racism during the early years. During that time, young black women in Oakland, invested in constructing and maintaining a neat and stylish appearance enhanced by expensive clothes, shoes, and accessories acquired through informal networks (McCurn, 2018). This identified group applied the self-representation concept in their aesthetic performance to prevent the derisive label of ‘ghetto chick’ being applied to them in their community. Although they tried to attain a certain status in society, they also deserved

respect (McCurn, 2018). The present study, which investigates the connectivity between gender and self-representation, points out that women attempt to present themselves as attractive and sexual to impress others on social platforms, more so than men, especially on online dating sites. To impress others online, women express themselves through distance (visual presentation), behaviour (offer, submission, seduction, and affiliation), and (un)dress (dressing and clothing) (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015).

Further, age matters in how individuals represent themselves, and it is interesting to know which age group was more interested in self-exploration and impressing others. The academics Michikyan (2020) evidenced that people show different self-representations online, namely, ideal (positive, realistic, high self-concept clarity) and false (high in general self-identity and less self-concept clarity). The younger adults, aged 18 to 25, represent themselves differently than other age groups on social media platforms. This age group was much more interested in impressing others and showing a false self on social media platforms. The reasons behind this act of the younger generation were self-interest, avoiding social embarrassment, actual/perceived threats and hostility, maintaining and enhancing self-worth and building a positive self-image (Michikyan, 2020).

By relating both age and gender with self-representation, Sczesny and Kaufmann (2018) explained the relationship among those three variables through ‘face-ism’, which is linked to people who use their faces to present themselves on social media platforms to impress others. This behaviour was more highly identified in women than men. However, an increased motive for face-ism was associated with higher ascriptions of intelligence, competence, dominance, mental activity, and morality (Schwarz & Kurz, 1989; Zuckerman & Kieffer, 1994; Loughnan et al., 2010; Sczesny & Kaufmann, 2018). In conclusion, it is apparent that almost all self-presentation happens to impress others (Yee, 2007; Lilleker & Michalska, 2013; Luery,

2013; Kapidzic & Herring, 2015; Yang & Brown, 2016; Sczesny & Kaufmann, 2018; McCurn, 2018; Connell, 2019; Schlosser, 2020; Mahmud & Foong, 2021).

To this point, it is clear that even though self-representation and representation concepts were used constantly, there still needs to be more clarification of the difference between these concepts in the existing literature. Most studies reviewed covered online self-presentation. As mentioned in the above discussions, scholars in the past justified an individual's presentation of himself or herself in the contents shared by themselves on online platforms. However, there is no clear conclusion about an individual's self-representation.

The self-related concepts developed from time to time provide different meanings in different streams. To understand a traveller completely, then, the accumulation of all the self-concepts to express self-representation remains vital. However, the concept of self-representation still needs to be fully discovered. An individual's behaviour is subject to change. By relating behavioural changes with the concept of how individuals express themselves in dissimilar situations, it may be possible to fill the research gap. There have been a number of concepts discussed in the literature, especially about the self-interlinked with each other: self-concept, image, identity, consciousness, interest, knowledge, presentation, expression, appraisal, esteem, actualisation, development, transcendence, etc. The self-representation concept explains and gives a clear idea about the self and projects uniqueness. It is a mass concept, and self-presentation is a part of it. Previous studies have defined 'self-representation' from three perspectives, such as representing oneself to oneself, oneself to others and evaluating the self. However, self-related concepts, such as self-effecting and self-changing, were excluded from the definition of self-representation. Therefore, the whole concept's incompleteness became the strong pillars to focus on when studying solo travellers' self-representation.

Besides, the present study is focused on solo travellers. Since solo travellers are identified as unique from other travellers, their self-representation would provide a comprehensive idea about their travel life. It would not only shed light on their travel experiences but also cover how they express themselves and construct themselves throughout their journey. The existing theories provide a direction to in-depth research on solo travellers. As discussed above, self-representation varies from person to person, and it is decided on through their own physical and mental selves. Thus, it is derived from individuals' past experiences and modified through social interactions. In the following sections, the researcher has brought together the different ideas related to the self, and connected them with self-representation in order to support the purpose of the study.

2.5.1 Oneself to Oneself (Self-Concept) and Self-Representation

The term itself explains the meaning of this concept. How do individuals identify themselves? How do they express themselves? How do they understand themselves? One basis of all these concepts is the thoughts which arise in each individual regarding themselves. That is none other than identifying oneself to oneself. For instance, how do I know myself? Who am I? How do I carry myself forward in the world? The term 'Myself' has a dictatorial influence on one's life; thus, one knows himself/herself more perfectly than anyone else.

Humans have various characteristics that are determined by demographic & sociographic factors (*gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, nationality, and race)* and psychological & physical factors (*personality, motivation, lifestyles, social image, and status*) (Baumeister, 1999). Knowing oneself to oneself is mentioned as self-concept. It is an interesting question as to what nature of self-concept people apply to themselves. The nature of selves depends on an individual's mental and psychological representations. The mental picture is particularly true when elaborating on one's self, and thus, it is related to mental states.

Consequently, the presentation of individuals reflects their mental status (Murthy, 2008; Machery, 2009; Kunda, 1999).

At the same time, psychological mechanisms underlie how an individual behaves differently in different situations. Whenever people interact with others in society, from a psychological perspective, they start to compare themselves with other people's present states (Wood, 1989; Thagard & Wood, 2015). These behavioural changes are part of the self-concept, and they are also called a 'working self' (Markus & Kunda, 1986). A person becomes more aware of himself or herself when they interact with others in society. When interacting with others, as part of human nature, they compare themselves with others to determine their self-worth. This is part of the working self-concept. This kind of behaviour sometimes enhances self-confidence, but can actually decrease a person's self-esteem as well. The same situation is part of social identity, where one group identifies with another, compares themselves with others, and is thus viewed less favourably. Therefore, as part of oneself, one way of identifying a self is through another's viewpoint of oneself (Thagard & Wood, 2015).

Applying the current concept to the present study, travellers who identified themselves as 'solo travellers' may identify themselves and their nature of self through learning from society, at the time they compare themselves with others or their mental states. However, no particular theory in psychology explains a person's representation of the self. At the same time, there is not much evidence on how a solo traveller identifies himself or herself.

Here, others' perceptions about oneself would reflect in one's self-representation (Thagard & Wood, 2015). People with high self-esteem are used to resisting others' feedback on their self-representations. The 'relational self' explains the same idea: when a person loves someone or has a close relationship with someone, then that person willingly adopts the beloved one's characteristics into their self (Aron et al., 1995, Thagard & Wood, 2015). Coinciding with the summary of the evidence presented by past studies, the cognitive

representation of the beloved one's representations becomes one's self-representation. From a neural perspective, scholars have related self-representation with the sensory systems of humans. The preferential activation is in the medial prefrontal cortex in the brain.

To extend knowledge on the self-concept, oneself to oneself using self-representation, the notion of self-concept connects the notes of different self-phenomena under three major categories, namely, (a) general perspective, highlighting self-identity, self-image, self-consciousness, self-interest, self-knowledge, self-projection, self-schemata, and self-understanding; (b) experiential perspective, highlighting self-awareness, self-consciousness, self-recognition and self-focus; and the (c) false perspective, underlining deception and delusion (Thagard & Wood, 2015). The present study considers the self-concept as being entirely related to self-representation and uses it to investigate how solo travellers represent themselves.

In other words, first and foremost, how do travellers use themselves to express themselves, particularly solo travellers? How do they identify themselves, and how do they extend themselves at each stage in their travelling? The upcoming section highlights crucial points related to the self-concept.

2.5.1.1 Oneself to Oneself (Self-Concept) and Different Selves

The concept of 'self' has evolved over time. Previously, it was considered as a single, unified and coherent idea. However, now it is believed to be a complex and multidimensional concept with various dimensions. This shift in understanding has been supported by various studies (Bahl & Milne, 2010; Lyon, 2000; Miles, Cliff & Burr, 1998). An individual can have multiple identities simultaneously (Joy & Li, 2012). According to social identity theory, individuals may interact with various groups of people and identify as members of different groups. According to Lyon's (2000) study, each self-conceptualisation within a group entails

a set of distinct roles that its members must assume during their daily interactions. These roles are closely tied to the group's identity and may vary depending on the context of the situation. Each group requires its members to play specific roles depending on their daily encounters (Lyon, 2000).

Despite the fact that people have multiple self-concepts at a given time, there is still some uncertainty among scholars of consumer behaviour about what exactly constitutes the 'self-concept'. This lack of clarity has been noted by researchers such as Sirgy (1982) and Mittal (2006). Markus and Nurius (1986) propose that an individual's various selves are the cognitive manifestations of long-term goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats. Mittal (2006) proposes that the self comprises five components: values and character, competence and achievement, social roles, body image, and self-perceived personality traits. Hence, the concept of 'self' can be viewed as a collection of related self-perceptions that may vary from one another (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Perez, Castaño & Quintanilla, 2010; Schouten, 1991a).

Self-discrepancy theory, introduced by Higgins (1987), presents a framework that identifies four distinct types of self-conceptions. There are four different ways in which people perceive themselves. The first one is called the 'actual-self', and it refers to one's perception of their own attributes. The second one is the 'ideal self', which is the set of attributes that individuals would like to possess. The third one is the 'social self', which represents how people believe others perceive them. The fourth one is the 'social ideal self', which reflects how individuals would like others to perceive them. Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that an individual's possible selves affect their perception of their potential and future. Various consumption practices can be adopted to achieve desired self-identities (Patrick, Maclnnis & Folkes, 2002). It is important to note that when there is a discrepancy between a person's self-conceptions, it can cause discomfort. As a result, people may use their consumption behaviours to reduce this discord (Higgins, 1987). The idea of 'self' encompasses both present and future

aspects of a person's aspirations in life. The 'actual self' refers to how an individual perceives themselves at a specific moment in time. In contrast, the 'ideal self' or 'ought self' pertains to the future.

Based on the discussion the researcher had, it's evident that the idea of 'self' is not a singular and unchanging concept. It's a complicated and multi-dimensional conceptualisation that evolves over time, and an individual may possess more than one self-concept at any given moment. It is important to consider the complexity of solo travellers when examining how they identify and represent themselves in society. The previous theories and definitions on 'self-identity' have provided us with a better understanding of this concept. However, one crucial element that seems to be missing in these conceptualisations is how individuals choose to establish their sense of self. This is where the research conducted by scholars in the consumer behaviour domain can be particularly useful.

2.5.1.2 Oneself to Oneself (Self-Concept) and Self-Identity

There is no consensus among scholars on the definition of self-identity, although it can broadly be understood from sociological or psychological perspectives. According to sociologists, the concept of 'self' is reflexive and relies on a person's life story (Giddens, 1991). Self-identity refers to a person's feelings and expressions of themselves based on the social groups they interact with (Giddens, 1991). According to Oyserman, Bybee, and Terry (2006), our personal and social identities are formed by who we were, who we are, and who we aspire to be.

In general, an individual's identity is believed to exist from birth and develops throughout their life in various stages (Monroe, Hankin & Vechten, 2000). Two notions are central to this concept: continuity and difference. Continuity refers to being the same person as one was before, while difference refers to being distinct from others (Baumeister, 1999).

When considering one's self-identity, it is valuable to take into account two significant theories: social identity theory and identity theory (Hogg, 2007; Stets & Burke, 2000). Self-identity refers to a person's understanding of belonging to particular social groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1987; Hogg et al., 2004). A social group can be defined as a collection of individuals who consider a particular person to be a member of their group, such as an occupational, religious, or friendship group (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). This concept is comparable to the sociological definition of identity proposed by Giddens (1991). When making comparisons, individuals may recognise members of a group who are similar to them and tend to classify or recognise them as part of an 'in-group' (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Trepte, 2013). When people come together as a group, they tend to associate themselves with those who are similar to them. However, if they come across individuals who do not share similar traits, that group may consider them as the 'out-group' and dissociate themselves from them. This means that people gain a sense of identity through the social categories to which they belong and those from which they do not belong.

On the other hand, identity theory suggests that the concept of 'self' is formed by a person's association with stable and morphological components of social structures, which are commonly known as 'roles' (such as parent, spouse, or employee) (Hogg, 2007; Stets & Burke, 2000). This means that individuals in a society may identify themselves and differentiate from others based on these roles. Therefore, identity theory states that the core of identity is the classification of oneself in relation to socially defined roles and includes the expected performance of those roles (Burke & Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986).

In differentiating between social identity theory and identity theory, the former focuses on 'who one is', while the latter focuses on 'what one does' (Stets & Burke, 2000). Stets and Burke (2000) suggest that identity should be defined by combining both theories. According to social identity theory and identity theory, an individual's self is reflexive. This means that

the self can categorise, classify, or name itself in relation to other social categories. (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224). This process, known as 'self-categorisation' in social identity theory and 'identification' in identity theory, helps shape an individual's identity (Hogg, 2007; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

It is important to note that in the literature, terms such as 'self', 'self-concept', 'self-schema' and 'self-identity' are used interchangeably to refer to the concept of self-identity (Baumeister, 1999, 2002; Elliott, 1997; Hogg & Michell, 1996). The term 'self' encompasses all other terms related to self-identity, however, there has been inconsistent definitions in psychology and sociology literature. (Baumeister, 1999; Bailey, 2003; Dittmar, 2011). In the previous section, we discussed that self-identity is a broader concept that defines who you are, whereas self-concept addresses the question of what kind of person you are (Baumeister, 1999). In consumer behaviour, self-concept is a crucial component of self-identity (Elliott, 1997; Hogg & Michell, 1996). Self-concept includes personal attributes, relationships, and roles that define individuals (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991a; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Based on the definitions mentioned above, we can argue that self-identity is more of an external representation while self-concept is an internal conceptualisation of oneself. This understanding aligns with the 'identity world view model' introduced by Robbins in 1974, which includes the social and personal characteristics of individuals as they are perceived by themselves and others. After considering the arguments presented above, this study has decided to adopt the definition of self-identity proposed by Dittmar (2011). According to this definition, self-identity is the personal and subjective understanding that an individual has of themselves. This concept includes a person's sense of self, self-identity, and self-concept.

The current research utilises a definition of self-identity that integrates the viewpoints of identity theory and social identity theory. This means that while understanding self-identity, both the way a person perceives themselves in connection to the social groups they are part of,

and the responsibilities they hold in their social structures are considered. According to Dittmar (2011), incorporating individual, relational, and group-level self-representations is essential. To understand how people choose to express their self-identity, it's necessary first to review the idea of self-concept, which is linked with self-identity.

2.5.1.3 Oneself to Oneself (Self- Concept) and Self-Consciousness

The concept of self-consciousness is closely related to the self-concept. In recent years, human self-consciousness has played a prominent role in cognitive neuroscience (Gallagher, 2000; Newen & Vogeley, 2003). In accordance with the scholars Newen and Vogeley (2003), "Self-consciousness is the ability to become aware of one's states, especially (*but not only*) mental states (*perceptions, emotions, and attitudes*), as one's states" (p. 530). It explains how much individuals become aware of, care about and evaluate themselves. It can be viewed from two perspectives, private and public consciousness. If a person has public self-consciousness, they try to impress others. They are conscious of how they present themselves to others to avoid the negative perceptions or disapproval of others. (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). As a result, individuals motivate themselves to avoid self-presentation failures and present themselves with extreme caution. Among popular personalities, the level of self-consciousness is higher than among the general public (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schlenker, 1975; Newen & Vogeley, 2003).

At the same time, people who have less public and more private consciousness, demonstrate a dispositional tendency to be aware of covert aspects of the self that are not directly observable by others, including attitudes and affective states (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991, p. 3). These individuals are more concerned about their beliefs, characters, and norms than others' or social pressures (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Besides, the people who prioritise

their private consciousness are used to presenting themselves as they wish, always looking for independence and autonomy in their presentations.

These presentations, in general, are less focused on the public view. This private self is also defined as the 'narrative self', where an individual narrates himself or herself as they want. (Gallagher, 2000). However, in general, most people are possessed of both private and public self-consciousness. The people who belong to this category are concerned with public opinion and attempt to satisfy the general society while balancing this with their conscience (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991).

In line with Metzinger (2003), the characteristics of self-consciousness are primarily three-fold. These are (i) the unity of a person's experience (*highlights a person's beliefs and attitudes*); (ii) the feeling of ownership and agency (*the feeling of ownership underlies the person's perceptions and judgement about their self. Also, the sense of agency illustrates the person's control over his/her actions and thoughts. However, the feeling of ownership and the experience of agency are different from each other*); and (iii) the perspective of the person's own experiences (*the perspective that moves from a first-person perspective to a third-person perspective*). These core features were based on the traditional philosophy of thinking of a self as a non-reducible entity, whereas it is the centre of an individual's experiences. However, since human characters are diverse, self-consciousness would vary depending on people's capacity level (Newen & Vogeley, 2003). Here, a human's cognitive capacity levels connect with self -consciousness and are thus reflected in their self-representations.

The capacities of cognitive levels consequently grow with humans. The first level of cognitive capacity (i) recognises the sensory states (*a newborn baby deliberately experiences the sensory states, for example, feeling of hunger*) ;(ii) classifies objects *(conscious of objects around, for instance, grasping a ball*); (iii) categorises events or complex scenes (*conscious of the ability to discriminate between dynamic events or complex scenes, for example, sports*

games and other parties);(iv) attributes first-order (*has a capacity to attribute propositional attitudes, for example, conscious of differentiating their own beliefs from desires also beliefs and desires*); and finally (v) attributes second -order propositional attitudes *(explains iterative mental models, for example, I believe that my friend thinks that solo travel is safe*) (Newen & Vogeley,2003).

By subsuming all of the above, it is noteworthy that in the beginning, the infant recognises sensory objects, and then attempts to develop the capacity to identify these objects, regain contiguous objects and diversions around barriers. After they are one year old, kids acquire the ability to categorise objects and start participating in cooperative games. After reaching two years and between two and four years, children gain the cognitive level where, related to the traditional notion of self-consciousness, is the capacity to understand oneself and others. This stage remains the basis for social communication and the foundation of building one's biographical narrative, the so-called 'narrative self'. Finally, when children complete seven years, their cognitive capacity level would become mature enough to think about what someone else thinks about their mental state and themselves (Newen & Vogeley, 2003). In the end, each cognitive capacity is related to a particular form of representation, such as non-conceptual, conceptual, sentimental, meta and iterative meta representations. However, these representations are formed based on linguistic features. The forms of representation are extracted at the cognitive capacity and thus related to the self-consciousness of one's self. This self-consciousness is classified into five groups, namely (i) phenomenal self-consciousness (*consciousness of one's states*); (ii) conceptual self-acquaintance (*if the consciousness of one's mental state is based on conceptual thinking, where an individual starts developing the ability to classify objects*); (iii) meta representation self-consciousness (*stage of development which cognise the mental state of one's self and others)*; (iv) sentential representation (*consciousness of the sentential*); and finally (v) Iterative meta representation consciousness (*attained the self-*

knowledge to represent). There is a relationship among the cognitive, self-consciousness and self-representation. In sum, Table 2.3 explains the connectivity among an individual's capacity levels, forms of representations and levels of self-consciousness.

Table 2.3 The Connectivity among Cognitive, Self-Conciseness and Self-Representation

Forms of Representation	Cognitive Features	Types of Self-Consciousness
Non-conceptual Representation	Classificatory: distinguishing properties	Phenomenal Self-Acquaintance
Conceptual Representation	Classificatory and Compositional: Distinguishing things and classify them as part of affairs	Conceptual Self-Consciousness
Sentential Representation	Classificatory, compositional, and recursive: Distinguishing states of affairs and classify them as part of complex states and affairs	Sentential Self-Consciousness
Meta Representation	Classificatory, compositional, recursive, and meta-representational: Distinguishing states of affairs and propositional attitudes	Meta Representational Self-Consciousness
Iterative Meta Representation	Classificatory, compositional, recursive, meta-representational and iterative meta representation: Distinguishing first and second order propositional attitudes	Iterative Meta Representational Self-Consciousness

(Source: Newen and Vogeley (2003) Self-Representation: Searching for a Neural Signature of Self-Consciousness)

When looking at the solo travellers and their self-representation, after the diverse self, cognitive capacity would enrich the conscious level and thus will result in or will influence the form of representation of the selves. However, not much attention has been given to solo

travellers' cognitive level, self-consciousness and self-representation and the manner in which a self can be represented, which will depend on a person's level of self-consciousness.

Meanwhile, there is a need to understand self-consciousness emotions related to self-representation. The term self-consciousness emotions are different from the general term emotions. Self-consciousness emotions play a central role in motivating and regulating people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Hence, those emotions drive people to work hard in the achievement and task domains, and to behave in moral, socially appropriate ways in their social interactions and intimate relationship (Tracy & Robins, 2004. p. 103). For instance, shame, guilt and pride are identified as self-consciousness emotions, whereas joy, sadness, happiness, surprise, anger and fear are emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Therefore, self-consciousness emotions are not the same as emotions in general.

Besides these differences, in 1955, the scholar Goffman stated that the behaviour of people in their social activities, that is, their social behaviour, would be influenced by public shame or embarrassing situations, since many people are very concerned about social approval. For example, what will people think if I do that? If I lose in the competition, how will society treat me? There are so many questions that would form in people's minds when they think about society, and they always look for positive feedback from society. However, all these circumstances apply to people who are concerned about what society thinks about them and who have resultant emotions of shame, pride, fear and embarrassment. On the other hand, people become aware of self-consciousness when they have lived up to or failed to live up to some actual or ideal representation (Tracy & Robins, 2004. p. 105). This situation is related to the widespread notion of 'social anxiety'.

Therefore, self-awareness and representation are the crucial aspects of self-consciousness, and these are the reasons why the latter is different from emotions. Here, self-awareness is considered essential in the self-concept and self-consciousness. In short, self-

awareness emphasises one's inner feelings, motives and thoughts. Moreover, it exists with the following processes of the sense of self, including the sense of self-awareness and the capacity for self-representation. Researchers have included both self-awareness and the formation of stable self-representations when they extended this concept (Lewis, Alessandri & Sullivan, 1992; Lewis, 1995).

To make sense of the above-discussed matter, when children reach 18 to 24 months, their self-awareness and self-consciousness start to grow (Lewis, 1995; Hart & Karmel, 1996). At the same age range, children begin to recognise others and start to describe themselves, through which they display the 'signs of self' (Kochanska, 2002). At 33 months of this gradual development, children show behavioural presentations of self-consciousness of emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Even after these determining age ranges, self-consciousness may grow inside humans when they can (i) understand the standards and rules of social behaviour; (ii) comprehend how others evaluate their behaviour based on those particular standards; and **(**iii**)** enhance the theory of mind from the learning of experience from significant people, such as parents, teachers and caretakers etc. (Tracy & Robins, 2004).

These external evaluations (*for example, my mother gets mad when I mess up the bookshelf*) would be internalised when children develop the capacity for self-awareness. Afterwards, the self-awareness transfers into regular self-evaluations (*for example, I am wrong when I mess up the bookshelf*) (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Consequently, when children grow older, they become less dependent on external standards and believe more in themselves, which ensures the growth of internalised norms for judging behaviour (*for example, at a young age, belief in others' evaluation and when they get older, use their own self-evaluation*) (Fergusin, 1991; Tracy & Robins, 2004).

The primary reason to prioritise others' evaluations is only to achieve social goals and enhance interaction with others. So, individuals internalise society's evaluations and beliefs in

themselves and then form actual and ideal self-representations. Therefore, studying self-representation, especially related to solo travellers, will be fruitful, because solo travellers still find themselves unique from other travellers, because they face all critical events and experiences alone and handle everything alone without companionship. If a solo traveller handles everything himself/herself, their self-representation will be different from others. In addition to these past studies' explanations, using existing scales in this present study would present a more in-depth understanding of self-representation. The scholars Fenigstein, Scheier and Bus (1975) developed scales to measure self-consciousness. The following section provides more information on it.

- **The Self-Consciousness Scale and Self-Representation**

In 1975, the scholar Fenogstein and his team members Scheier and Bus developed the 'Self-Consciousness Scale' based on students (American college students: 179 males, 253 females; German undergraduate psychology and pedagogic students: 165 males, 152 females). The researchers formed three dimensions of self-consciousness such as: (i) Private Self-Consciousness (*the thoughts linked to one's propensity to focus on inner feelings, motives and thoughts*); (ii) Public Self-Consciousness (*reflects a self as a social object*); (iii) Social Anxiety (*embarrassment in presenting a self in front of others*).

However, there were many criticisms of Fenogstein's scale of self-consciousness. Notably, though it indicates the degree to which people are motivated to engage in self-presentation, it does not attempt to measure the propensity to use specific self-presentation tactics. Even though social anxiety includes self-justifying presentations, it is still associated with and determined by some social circumstances. In 1984, Burnkrant and Page criticised Fenogstein's scale (1975) and developed four dimensions of self-consciousness instead of three. Meanwhile, these scholars further divided private self-consciousness into two

subcategories: self-reflectiveness and internal state awareness. However, this new scale was identified as inappropriate by the scholars Burnkrant, Teng and Garbin (1986). Currently, however, private and public self-consciousness and social anxiety generally measure self-consciousness (Nystedt & Smari, 1989).

In sum, regarding oneself to oneself using self-representation, the existing knowledge derived from various multi-disciplines provides an overall picture of the self-concept with self-representation. It provides solid evidence that the self-concept could be considered part of self-representation. However, whatever is illustrated above is subject to change in the case of solo travellers since constant changes occur in solo travellers' behaviour. When frequent changes occur in an individual's behaviour, the manner in which it would affect the self-concept requires further attention.

2.5.2 Oneself to Others (Self-Presentation) and Self-Representation

There are many phenomena of the self, as mentioned above; however, one aspect of self is related to oneself to others, where individuals desire to align their impression with those that have been formed by others and simultaneously, individuals make impressions on others (Churchland, 2002; Newent & Vogeley, 2003; Anderson et al., 2008; Mallan, 2009; Yee & Bailenson, 2009; Snider & McCarthy, 2012; Toth, 2014; Thagard et al. 2015, Fiorot, 2018; McCurn, 2018; Duguay, 2019; Schlosser, 2020; Nair et al., 2021).

Moreover, the well-known sociologist Goffman (1955) explained in his dramaturgical theory, under impression management, that people present themselves to others and society based on certain roles they play in their lives. Several scholars have used Goffman's theory when they attempted to conduct their research on oneself to others in multiple streams. Similar to Goffman's view, the scholar Leary's theory was also used by many researchers from 1950 onwards, and this theory used self-description, attitude, non-verbal behaviour and social

association as the tools to understand oneself to others (Zarghooni, 2007; Thagard & Wood, 2015). At the same time, oneself to others was identified as a tool of connectivity between individual and social levels (Schlenker, 2003). Meanwhile, it may influence others' private self-concepts as well. Ultimately, the studies done under sociology and social psychology evidenced that individuals use their self-representation under oneself to others to construct their own identity to establish a solid ideal image. This identity requires validation from society.

In relation with oneself to oneself, individuals hide their original identity in terms of expecting a social interaction. For instance, social anxiety is a common factor interlinked with the concept of self-representation. It influences social behaviour, self-concept and information processing (Schroeder, 1995). People with lower self-esteem, loneliness, less confidence, self-preoccupation, and nervous behaviour are some of those affected by social anxiety. From a cognitive perspective, anxiety consists of anxious thoughts and worries (Crozier, 1979).

Social anxiety has been defined as "the prospect or presence of personal evaluation in real or imagined social situations. A nxiety is a cognitive and affective response characterised by apprehension about an impending, potentially negative outcome that one thinks one is unable to avert" (Schlenker & Leary, 1982, p. 642). Social situations form anxiety since social interactions let people judge one another (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The self, which evaluates itself compared with others, trying to impress others or fearing others, is sometimes nervous about expressing themselves in front of others, and so would experience tense situations.

Specific groups secluded by society are closely associated with this social anxiety. These stigmatised groups include people with a mental illness, homosexuality, or lower social background. Naomi and Manuela (2006) found that 84% of stigmatised groups hide their true identity to cope with society. Homosexuals tend to hide their sexual orientation and change their clothing, dressing style, and personality based on their environment. These stigmatised

groups, forced to conceal their identity, fall into profound stress, poor performance, and depressed self-confidence (Baumeister, 1982; Ekman, 1991; Barreto et al., 2006).

Anxious people face difficulty in presenting themselves socially and are socially inactive, since non-verbal behaviour requires close attention and skills (Schroeder, 1995). Those who are not confident in their self-presentation are under pressure from social anxiety (Michikyan, 2020). Moreover, social anxiety is closely interrelated with identity interactions, where people with lower interactions are generally those who suffer from high confusion and conflict (Schwartz et al., 2015). Therefore, this identity integration is a crucial element in self-representation since it has a strong relationship with one's self-behaviour (Sacharin et al., 2009). Moreover, self-presentation "is a communication process relevant to social appearances, based on a broader disposition to social interactions and interpersonal ability so that one's attitude can be easily decoded and accepted by others" (Laghi et al., 2011, p. 210). Ultimately, self-presentation ends up as creating an impression.

There is a component of social anxiety termed 'the feeling of shyness' (Schroeder, 1995). Shyness negatively impacts people's information processing skills and influences their performance (Schroeder, 1995). A high level of anxiety would lead to people thinking inversely about the situation of failure. Hence, it leads to one worrying all the time about losing. In such cases, people present themselves as expecting only positive comments. It differentiates the actual self from the ideal self.

Schlenker and Leary stated that social anxiety is a function of self-presentational problems (1982). Further, these researchers added value to this discussion by stating that such people are not fully secure interpersonally. Meanwhile, people without social anxiety (i) do not have an intention to impress others and do not care about others' evaluation; and (ii) are very focused on what they need to focus on, know how to impress and believe they will succeed in what they initiate (Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

2.5.2.1 Oneself to Others and Goffman's Theory of Impression Management

The main reason behind oneself to oneself is to create an impression. From the existing literature related to self-representation, as mentioned above, most scholars used 'Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach'. Among these are: Jensen et al., 2003; Naomi & Manuela, 2006; Zarghooni, 2007; Luery, 2013; Wong, 2012; Lilleker & Michalska, 2013; Kapidzic & Herring, 2015; Yang & Brown, 2016; Hall & Caton, 2017; Twomey, Conal & O'Reilly, 2017; Holmberg et., 2018; and Mahmud & Wong, 2021.

Goffman's dramaturgical approach illustrates one's self-presentation under two principal aspects, 'front-stage' and 'back-stage'. As per Goffman, a person in his/her lifetime performs multiple roles. By linking the roles with drama, when an individual becomes part of the drama, he may act as per the role taken in the drama. At that time, the performance is based on the role. The performers would focus on impressing the audience with the intention of receiving positive feedback on the performance and building the desired image and good name among the audience. Here, the performer uses the front stage to interact with the audience. This interaction is based purely on task orientation, where a performer presents himself to known and unknown crowds of people. As per the scholar, "a performer engenders in his audience the belief that he is related to them in an ideal way that is always the case" (Goffman, 1956, p. 56).

Simultaneously, at the end of the drama, the performer would cast off the role they played in the drama and would loosen up all the restrictions that were imposed while acting on the front stage. This phase is known as the 'backstage' when people return to their natural characters. According to Goffman, "a place, relative to the performance, where the impression of the performance is knowing contradicted, is called the backstage" (1959, p. 114).

This contraction does not mean that something different is enacted when going from the front stage to the backstage. However, the actor's performance in front of the people on the front stage is based on whatever role he took in the drama. Similarly, in life, people have

multiple roles for satisfying others and ensuring social inclusion. At the same time, the backstage remains significant in everyone's life, where this stage has been recognised by the scholar Goffman as crucial in terms of effective performance. When connected with the actual scenario in life, whatever people perform in society is to satisfy or impress others and to ensure social acceptance. But people will be natural and more honest with family members and their close circle of relatives and friends. They do not intend to attract those close to them; there is no need to act in front of them. The family, intimate relations, and friends are all morally supportive people who are used by an individual to figure out who he/she could be. There are no particular theories related to self-presentation. Besides Goffman's view, some other ideas used in the literature are summarised in the following section.

In the past literature, there were many applications used by scholars in terms of explaining the self. For instance, (i) Authenticity (*one who expresses the authentic self*) (Wigton, 2008) ;(ii) Brunswick Lens Model (*persons concerned with information given by others to build their personality to attract others*) (Balaban & Szambolics, 2022); (iii) Double Whammy (*person who often performs misrepresentations and faces difficulties in rebuilding good relationships with others*) (Boulding, Kalra, &, Staelin, 1996); (iv) Expressing the true self (*people who are motivated intrinsically to express their true selves to others; however, this behaviour is often not practically possible*) (Seidman, 2014); (v) Hierarchical model of Self-Concept (*people who play various versions of their selves*) (March, 2008); (vi) Interpersonal Interactions (*people who are forthcoming and honest in expressing themselves in their relationships*)(Raij et al., 2007); (vii) Malleable Online Self-Presentation (*the online presentation is always softer than the real self*) (Twomey & O'Reilly, 2017); (viii)Need to belong (*this is considered as a basis and supports the formation of relationships*) (Baumeister, 2011); (ix) Now Self and Possible Self (*now indicates an identity to known people and possible portrays an identity to unknown people*) (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006); (x) Positive Illusion Theory

(*illustrates the positive perception of self*) (Catina & Ahola, 2004); (xi) Protective and Acquisitive (*the protective self is motivated to avoid social disapproval and in contrast, the acquisitive type of self expects social approval*) (Fuglestad et al., 2020); (xii) Real-Self Vs Ideal-Self (*people who show natural behaviour to others but the ideal self constantly changes as per others' perceptions of them*)(Kasiri et al., 2015); (xiii)Social comparison (*people who are used to comparing themselves with others of similar background and evaluate themselves by using various domains*) (Wheeler & Suls, 2005); (xiv) Social Role (*continuous learning and gradually increasing expectations make changes in the self*) (Kendall et al., 2007); (xv) Poor gets Richer (*people experiencing difficulties in offline interaction obtain more benefits from online interactions*) (Desjarlais, 2022); (xvi) True-Self Vs False-Self (*true self always indicates authentic and spontaneous self while the false self-expresses a temporary image based on the situation*) (Kendall et al., 2007); and (xvii) Cognitive Dissonance (*people who present themselves based on their cognitive concept*) (Twomey & Reilly, 2017).

The following Table, 2.4, explains a summary of the existing theories, including Goffman's Theory. Besides these theories, the scales related to the self also supported the researcher to build a strong argument on oneself to others. The Self-Monitoring Scale (Lee et al., 1999); Social Desirability Scale (Growne & Marlowe, 1964); Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et., 1975); Self-Presentation Scale (Roth et al., 1988); Self-Presentation Tactics Scale (Lee et al., 1988); and the Efficacious Self –Presentation Scale (Laghi et al., 2011) are some of these scales.

Table 2.4 Summary of Theories used under Oneself to Others

Theory	Users	Connectivity with the Conceptual Framework
Self-Perception Theory	Yee (2007); Yee and Bailenson (2009); Buckingham (2009); Toth (2014)	Through perception theory, people infer their attitudes and expected behaviours by observing themselves as if from a third party. Also, observing one's appearance can lead to changes in behaviour.

		Ultimately, it ended up with the impression management to gain social benefits. It connects with psychology and, attitude modification and behavioural modifications identified are identified as the consequences of self-transformation.
Social Identity Theory	Naomi and Manuela (2006); Thagard and Wood (2015)	This theory indicates that people identify with some groups and contrast themselves with other groups based on their psychological perspectives. Thus, the group was viewed as less favour comparatively.
Personality Theory	Twomey, C., and O' Reilly (2017); Demetriou et al., (2019)	The term 'personality' refers to an individual's beliefs and tendencies regarding social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. In line with the personality big five-factor concept, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness relate to the general stability trait. This trait represents efficiency in organising one's life, dealing with pressure, and being accepted. The other two traits, extraversion and openness, reflect plasticity in one's relationship with the world. Therefore, one's personality also influences their self-presentation and their personal decision.

(Source: Yee (2005); Yee and Bailenson (2009); Buckingham (2009); Toth (2014); Naomi and Manuela (2006); Thagard and Wood (2015); Twomey, C., & O'Reilly (2017); Demetriou et al., (2019)).

Subsuming all the points, self-representation has been explained by scholars in the past as object presentation and presentation on social media. However, behind self-representation lies the manner in which this process happens, what factors trigger an individual to change their self and how it reflects in a person's self-representation. In the context of solo tourism, the liminal time that lies between a trav eller becoming a solo traveller may bring changes in their life and that may reflect in their overall self-representation. However, the self-representation concept has been explained in self-related studies and most of these studies have explained

self-presentation related to online platforms. Thus, self-representation is a broader view of a persons' behaviour and behavioural changes, but this area is yet to be studied comprehensively.

2.5.3 The Summary of the Concept of Self-Representation

How an individual represents his/herself depends on each individual's self-concept and presentation of self-based on others' perceptions. Besides, self-representation is a tool supporting an individual in establishing an identity. What, how, and when s/he should present are all decided by an individual and his/her self-evaluation. The term self-evaluation, so-called 'self-esteem', includes self-appraisal and self-monitoring and thus results from a continuum of feelings ranging from self-love to self-loathing (Thagard & Wood, 2015). It is all about a self's overall evaluation. Since human characters vary from one another, the assessment would also fluctuate based on an individual's cognitive level. Zeigler-Hill and Jordan (2011) stated that self-esteem was one's feelings about oneself. At the same time, individuals' evaluations of themselves could be either positive or negative, for example, success or failure in special moments in life, travel planning, examinations, competition, love and work. Whenever people focus on and evaluate themselves positively, their self-esteem will increase simultaneously (McGuire & McGuire, 1996); if not, their self-esteem will decrease.

Thus, individuals' self-esteem supports them in achieving their goals. Not only that, it will motivate, protect and improve each person's self-presentation, and leads people on how to behave and impress others. When one compares the self with others, if the individual feels down, self-evaluation supports that individual to improve the self. If the self-esteem level is high, the individual feels better about themselves and thus will be encouraged to achieve more in life (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Sinclair & Kunda, 2000). Moreover, there is an association between an individual's traits and self-esteem (Burklund et al., 2007; Thagard & Wood, 2015). Therefore, some adolescents' low self-esteem level is said to be the reason for their poorer

mental health (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). People can adapt and experience themselves based on others' attitudes when interacting with others. Therefore, an individual's self-esteem would reflect how others perceive and value that individual. During face-to-face interaction with other people, the individual's self-esteem level will increase the feelings of that individual of being accepted by others; at the same time, it will act reversely if individuals feel disapproved by others. Metzler and Scheithauer (2017) highlighted this behaviour in individuals' self-presentation on social network sites.

To extend the explanation, when individuals present their selves via posting images (*including profile pictures*) and videos on social media, if they receive positive feedback from their friends or followers, that positive feedback would significantly influence their self-esteem. Simultaneously, vice versa, negative feedback lowers self-esteem (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Metzler & Scheithauer, 2017). Therefore, it is clear that others' perceptions would be significantly associated with one's representation. Thus, self-evaluation comprises self-appraisal, criticism, monitoring and reflection (Thagard & Wood, 2015). Moreover, there is another interesting aspect of self-esteem. In the above discussion, whenever individuals feel good about their self-evaluation and are motivated by others' feedback, their self-esteem will increase automatically. This high self-esteem is further grouped by the team Kernis (2005) into two major categories, namely, secure self-esteem and fragile self-esteem. If one has a strong, positive feeling, that self-confidence makes that self more fixed. Therefore, that self does not require social support or positive feedback about itself. This self acquires the social and personal skills to accomplish goals in life. Thus, this self is named the potential self. In contrast, if one is not confident about one's self, the positive feeling is more vulnerable, and the self is always looking for promotion and protection, then it is identified to have fragile self-esteem. This is related to the fantasy self, where the presenting self aims to impress others (Elliott, 1982). This is entirely in contrast to the self with secure self-esteem. The individual with a non-

vulnerable positive feeling about the self and greater focus on achieving life's goals represents one living in an actual state instead of being influenced by others.

The 'self-monitoring scale' related to self-esteem was developed by the scholar Lee and his team in 1999. This scale consisted of (i) enhancing the ability to modify self - presentation and (ii) enhancing sensitivity to the expressive behaviour of others. However, these measures were rescaled by the scholars Snyder (1974); Briggs et al., 1980; Gabrenya and Arkin, 1980; Lennox and Wolfe, 1984; and Ishihara and Mizuno, 1992, who improved it to represent the self, where the individual who monitors the self (i) improves acting ability; (ii) other-directedness; and (iii) extroversion, to enhance his/her interaction with society. However, this scale explained inauthentic self-presentation. However, self-presentation is not necessarily explained by inauthentic behaviour. Because people also present their true identities, some individuals truly believe in what they possess (Lee et al., 1999).

By subsuming all of the above discussions on self-representation, the fundamental or root cause for this self-expressive phenomenon is an impression. Oneself to others could become self-fulfilling; people who want to move towards their desired selves or away from their undesired selves might present public images resembling their ideal selves (Pin & Turndorf, 1990). Also, Birnbaum (2008) stated that there was a close relationship between oneself to others and building an image. However, whether representing the authentic self or wearing multiple selves to fulfil social needs depends on one's self-realisation. Tanis et al., (2012) indicated the connectivity between the timely changes in self-presentation and the concept of self-monitoring. Those who monitor themselves carefully in the way of enhancing social interactions, and who belong to the in- group, attempt to create a good image in society. In contrast, if people have lower self-monitoring, they show their authentic selves (Tanis et al., 2012). Table 2.5 explains the existing studies on self-presentation and underlines the noticeable gap in this context.

Table 2.5 The Summary of Literature in Self-Representation

Author & Year	Name of Journal	The focus of Research and Keywords	Scope of the Research	Theory Used	Type of Research	Basis
Schroeder, 1995	Sage Journals	Self-concept interrelates interpersonal perception skills. **K.W:** Shyness, Sociability, Self-Monitoring, Self-Consciousness.	56 California University Students	Interpersonal Perception Task; Theory of self-consciousness	Qualitative	Perception
Buckingham, 2009	Springer Link	Inter connects the concept of perception with self-representation, identity and visual style. **K.W:** Perception, Self-Representation, Youth Culture, and Visual Style.	Case Study	Not Available	Case Study	Sports
Gable et al., 1973		Interrelates the self-perception with self-concept. **K.W:** Self-Satisfaction (acceptance), Behaviour (act), Physical Self, Moral –Ethical Self, Personal Self, Family Self, and Social Self.	23 University Students, New York	Tennessee Self-Concept Scale	Quantitative	Perception
Schlenker and Leary, 1980	Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Elsevier	The self-presentation involves maintaining a delicate balance between self-enhancement, accuracy, and humility. **K.W:** Self-enhancement, Self-accuracy, Humility.	48 Students who took psychology subject, Florida	Self-Presentation	Quantitative	Selves
Schlenker and Leary, 1982	American Psychological Association	Interrelates the concepts of social anxiety and self-presentation **K.W:** Social Anxiety, Self-presentation.	Conceptual Paper	Social Learning Theory	Conceptual paper	Social Anxiety and Self
Jody et al.,1994	Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Elsevier	Interrelated the self-presentation with cognitive dissonance by highlighting children's education **K.W:** Self-presentation, Cognitive	14 children selected from Boston	Cognitive Dissonance	Mixed method	Cognitive

Lee, et al.,1999	Personality and Individual Differences, Elsevier	Conducted 4 studies and developed the self-presentation tactics scale. **K.W:** Defensive self-presentation and Assertive Self-presentation.	895 College Students	Cognitive Dissonance	Self-presentation tactics scale development	Cognitive Dissonance; Health-related behaviour
Churchland, 2002	Science	Interconnected self and neuroscience. **K.W:** Self, Self-representation, Nervous system.	Theory Based	Self-Consciousness theory and the representational theory of mind	Case Study	Neuroscience
Kim et al.,2003	Asian Journal of Social Psychology	Self-construal on the perception of different self-presentation styles (bragging, and positive and negative styles) **K.W:** Cross-Cultural, Individualism-Collectivism.	246 Korean College Students	Self-Construal Scale	Quantitative	Presentation Styles and Culture
Newena and Vogeley, 2003	Consciousness and Cognition, Elsevier	Interconnected self-consciousness and neuroscience**.** **K.W:** Self-Representation; First-Person-Perspective; Agency; Neural Correlates	Theory Based	Self-Consciousness theory and the representational theory of mind	Case Study	Neuroscience and Cognitive
Hayami, 2006	Southeast Asian Studies,	Used the self-representation concept applied to a nation. **K.W:** Co-Tourism, Northern Thailand, Karen, Identity Negotiation, Ethnic Representation.	Theory Based	Not Applicable	Case Study	Nation Basis

Yee,2007	Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation	Tested the Proteus effect on behaviour via transformations of digital self-representation. **K.W:** Digital self-presentation and Behavioural modifications.	Not Available	Self-Perception Theory and Deindividuation Theory	Quantitative iTinySoft-Avatar	Digital Game
Zhu et al.,2008	Neuro Image	Culture affects the psychological structure of self and results in two distinct types of self-representation (Western independent self and East Asian interdependent self. **K.W:** fMR, MPFC and Self.	13 Chinese college students and 13 Western College Students	Personal Traits and Neuroimaging studies	Quantitative	Culture
Anderso et al., 2008	Behaviour Research and Therapy, Elsevier	Correlated social anxiety with self-representation. **KW:** Social phobia, Autobiographical memory Self-concept.	42 adults diagnosed with SAD and 27 non-psychiatric respondents	Cognitive Model	Experimental	Social Anxiety Disorder
Mallan, 2009	Digital Culture & Education	Interrelated the self-presentation with online self-presentation. **K.W:** Youth Identity, Social Networking Sites, Social Relations, Risk, Visibility, Spatiality, Myspace.	15 Students 4 schools in Australia	Self –Identity	Qualitative	Online based self-presentation
Yee and Bailenson,2009	Media Psychology	People infer their attitudes and expected behaviours by observing themselves as if from a third party through perception theory. Also, observing one's appearance can lead to changes in behaviour **K.W:** Self-Perception, Motivation, Self	73 undergraduate students, California, USA	Self-Perception Theory	Quantitative	Digital Game
Laghi et al., 2011	The Journal of Genetic Psychology	Social presentation is deeply related to self-image, social openness, social sensitivity, and self-confidence. **K.W:** Self-Image, Social Openness, Social Sensitivity, Self-Confidence.	760, young people aged between 16-19 old	Based on the Revised self-monitoring scale, Self-presentation tactic scale	Mixed-Method Scale Development Gratification	Behavioural Perspective

Snider and McCarthy, 2012	International Journal of e-Portfolio	Student the structure of the e-portfolio was influencing students to represent themselves (narrative writing, collecting information via profile, link and list, taxing.	02 International Students	Based on e-portfolio	Qualitative-Case study	
Lilleker and Michalska, 2013	Journal of Information Technology & Politics	Self-representation is based on the online environment, including Web sites and Weblogs, Twitter, and now social networking sites (SNS). **K.W:** Home-Style, Impression Management, Interactivity, Legislators, Representation, Social Media, Strategic Communication.	440 websites linked to European Parliament	Communication strategies: home-style, impression management, and participatory.	Content Analysis	Based on Nations
Luery, 2013	Doctoral dissertation, California State University, Northridge	The study revealed that respective samples were revealed the real face rather than ideal or other faces in social networks.	108 Undergraduates, California, USA	Theory of Identity and Impression Management	Quantitative	Online self-presentation on Facebook
Wang, et al., 2014	Annals of Tourism Research	This study aims to expose local people's understanding of their community and touristic practices. **K.W:** Self-representation, Critical discourse analysis, Subaltern people.	Self-ethnographic texts	Case Study	Based on self-ethnographic texts	Behavioural Perspective
Toth, 2014	UNLV, University Library	A person's interaction with others and own self-appraisals have a great influence on their behaviour **K.W:** Self-image, Self-monitoring, Consumer Behaviour.	93 respondents and tested 40 brands, in Las Vegas	Theory of Self-Concept	Quantitative	Brand
Thagard and Wood, 2015	Frontiers in psychology	Identified eight self-phenomena based on the theories that existed in literature. **K.W:** Self, Mechanism, Self-Change, Self-Representation, Self-Regulation.	N/A	Social Identity Theory,	Conceptual	Based on the theories

Cohen, 2018	Master's thesis, University of Waterloo	A socially desirable self, manipulate the actual self in terms of creating attention in society and achieving particular goals. **K.W:** Social media, Digital self, Self-Identity, Self-Presentation.	8 respondents, Canada	N/A	Qualitative – Content Analysis	Social media (Facebook (Mid-travel)
McCurn, 2018	City and Community	People can directly influence how they are perceived by others. This is central to the work of keeping it fresh means of changing themselves. **K.W:** Self-presentation, Perception	Denmark	Impression Management	Qualitative – Narrative	Racism: Women
Olwig, 2018	Journal of Anthropology	The migrants' narrative self-representation is found as acting and trying to act as local people. **K.W:** Migration, narrative self-representation, adventure, Denmark Caribbean.	Denmark	N/A	Qualitative (Ethnographic analysis)	Migrants' Life style
Khoshsabk, 2018	Doctoral dissertation, Monash University	This study found a relationship between the specific self-presentation and the individual's gender, living environment and level of communication. **K.W:** Self-presentation, Digital identity	10 respondents, aged between 25 to 35 years.	Goffman's Sociology theory of Dramaturgy; Gee's Discourse;	Qualitative (Multiple case study)	Online self-presentation on Facebook
Demetriou et al., 2019	Intelligence	This trait reflects one's ability to efficiently manage one's life, handle stress, and be accepted. **KW:** Cognitive, Personality, Intelligence, Academic Performance.	689 respondents aged between 10 to 17 years.	Big Five Factors-Personality Theory of mind (Wellman,2014)	Mixed Method	Cognitive
Connell, 2020	Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking	The study found that a significant positive correlation was found between age and self-concept. **K.W:** Self-Presentation, Self-Concept, Social Media, Social Networking.	230 respondents aged between 18 to 35.	N/A	Quantitative	Online self-presentation

Duguay, 2019	Social media+ society	Micro-celebrity (Influencers), as a set of practices contributing to personalised self-branding, has become an increasingly prominent component of self-representation on social media platforms. **K.W:** Social media, Platforms, Platformisation, Micro-Celebrity, Queer, Lesbian, LGBTQ, Self-Representation, Labour Influencers.	06 women selected form the Instagram	Senft's (2008) concept of "micro-celebrity"	Qualitative	Online self-presentation (Instagram)
Lee-Cultura et al., 2022	Proceedings of the interaction design and children conference	Selecting the characters for the game is depends on a person's character. **K.W:** Multimodal data; Avatar; Educational Technologies; Embodied Interaction.	46 students aged between 18 to 12	Human centred computing	Motion based touches games	Online Games

(Source: Developed for the Study Purpose by Researcher)

Therefore, considering all these factors, the current researcher has focused on solo travellers' self-representation.

Subsuming all the discussions, the researcher provides an understanding of solo travellers' self-representation process. Apart from that, the researcher explains that each representation of self-adopts the changes happening to the self. Also, she states that these changes would reflect in the travellers' overall self-representation process. In the context of a solo traveller, the solitary travel experiences a solo traveller gains from their trip would reflect in their self-representation. In addition to how they execute this entire process, the experience gained from the liminal period means that a traveller can adopt the solo traveller name tag. However, does this process reflect any changes happening in a solo traveller's self? If so, how do solo travellers make changes in themselves? How do they express those changes? Would these changes be happening in the self-lead to self-transformation? The current researcher attempts to conceptualise this framework and to transform the subjective understanding of self-representation along with self-transformation to reality with the support of solo travellers' lived experiences.

2.6 Solo Travellers' Self-Representation and their Transformative Travel Experiences

In the current study, the researcher defines self-representation as a dual process: how one perceives oneself and how one presents oneself to others. After reviewing existing literature on self and self-representation, the researcher explores the concept of solo travel. If the time spent alone during solo travel leads to self-transformation, then this change will be reflected in the traveller's self-representation. Such transformations may alter personality traits, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours (Godovykh & Tasci, 2022).

A transformative travel is stated as, "that places the individuals in a novel context that forces him or her to develop new sources and respond creatively to challenging situations,

which ultimately adjust taken-for-granted perspectives, behaviour, lifestyle and relationship with the world" (Phillips, 2019, p. 68). When travellers experience new things in a challenging environment, or in a critical situation, which are never experienced before in a travel, that would trigger them to see the changes in themselves and thus called a transformative travel (Malkki, 2012; Robledo & Betle, 2017). Though the existing knowledge provides a basic understanding about transformation (e.g Lean, 2012; Brod et al., 2013; Pung et al., 2020; Tech et al., 2021), however, in the context of solo tourism and transformative experiences with self-representation, there is still no clear explanation of how transformation occurs and solo travellers believe that their personal transformation happened due to their solo travel. The studies done by the Schoar group of Nguyen and Hsu (2023) approached quantitatively and indicated the transformative travel process; however, the extent to which solo travellers are aware of the changes, what triggers them to see their normal travel into a transformative one, and the extent to which they adhere to the changes in their behaviour remains to be studied.

If solo travel brings changes, it starts from solo travellers' self-realisation, where a simple self-definition would reflect each individual's awareness of themselves. This self-reflection, as mentioned in the studies of Nguyen and Hsu (2023), when solo travellers are alone, they get enough time to do a self-dialogue with themselves, where they can recollect the movements and do a self-evaluation on the changes they discovered. During the time of self-evaluation, it is possible for them to assess their values, behaviour and feelings (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Nguyen & Hsu, 2023), which allows them to reflect on their transformative travel experience, behavioural changes and self-definitions (Teoh et al., 2021). Therefore, to answer the question of whether solo travel is a reason for a self-transformation of solo travellers, how do they know about their self-transformation? An individual's solo travel experience can lead to changes in their self-representation. The self-changes of travellers from their travel would reflect on their self-definitions (Teoh et al., 2021; Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). To

the best of the knowledge of the researcher, in relation to this, there is not enough evidence to support this discussion. To fulfill this empirical gap, the researcher intends to achieve the following objective.

Research Objectives (RO): One

RO1: To identify how solo travellers define themselves.

Continuing on the transformative travel experience, it is defined by the scholar team of Pung et al. (2020) as a combination of existential transformation, transformative learning and behavioural change. As mentioned above, a transformation is an outcome of an internal evaluation adopted by travellers when they encounter unfamiliar situations. Moreover, this entire process, as per the team of Pung (2019), is amplified when travellers spend their time alone or in their solitude (Yang et al., 2020; Tech et al., 2021). The transformative experience would be either positive or negative; however, it leads to reflective travellers to lead their self-actualisation, broadening their knowledge of the world and perceptions (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018).

During the time of travelling alone, travellers get more opportunities to learn new knowledge from people they meet at the places they visit, whether it is from locals of the place or travellers from different countries. For example, the students who there for their postgraduate students on their overseas travels they self- destabelised themselves from their cross-cultural; associations and international nationality (Bone & Bone, 2018); travellers who go for a long days holidays thye experiences the transformative experiences through cultural awareness (Pung et al., 2020); the travellers who involves in the activities offered in the places of they visited they equally experience the transformation (Reisinger, 2013). By summarising

all the transformations, it would become possible when the learning happened in the places where travellers visited, as per the existing knowledge, the travellers learned new skills, learning from others and acquiring cross-cultural awareness (Pung et al., 2020; Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). Therefore, the transformative learning is considered a crucial component in a transformative travel.

Besides the learning, the transformation would be possible when travellers are emotionally connected with any of the situations they encounter during their travel. The transformation connected with emotional peaks from meaningful experiences is called an existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017; Nguyen & Hsu, 2023; Richardson & Insch, 2023). As Reisinger (2013) said, when travellers encounter a new environment, it lets travellers become more connected with themselves to feel more individualism, freedom and lead an authentic lifestyle. At the same time, that meaningful experience led them to discover themselves, be thoughtful about the changes in themselves, and aid them in a gradual self-development (Brown, 2009; Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

Further more, in connected with the existential transformation, the exisiting studies explaning that, the intense emotions with their travel experiences, the travellers who were to the overseas for a long days, throughout their staying outside of their country, they used to develop their new identity and they tried to maintain the new sense of self when they get back to their routine life (Brown, 2009); At the same time, the backpackers during their travel and the difficult situtions they experience would turn into identifying their potential selves and thus allowed them focused on a personal growth (Noy, 2004). By coincidence, this individualised process lets travellers evaluate the old and new selves and leads them to build a new sense of self (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). Most importantly, the whole transformative process is amplified especially during the travellers' solitude time (Yang et al., 2019; Teoh et al., 2021), and that leads to the behavioural changes in the long-term.

Other than the behavioural changes are the indirect values of transformative learning, and the existential transformation (Pung et al., 2020). However, in accordance with Godovykh and Tasci (2022), changes of personality traits, feelings, thoughts, attitudes and behaviour are identified as the direct outcomes of travellers' transformative travel experience. In summary, the transformation that happens during travel brings changes in their behaviour and to what extent they need to adhere to themselves after the travel, which depends on each traveller's choice (Godovykh & Tasci, 2022).

In the current study, the transformation has been highlighted as happening in the period of travelling alone, and that has been exaggerated when they encounter a new challenging environment. This period of timing has been highlighted in the current study as liminal time and explained in the theory of rites of passage. Travellers use the time they spend to themselves, and they get enough time to interact with themselves. There is a question arising: how do solo travellers understand the changes that happened in themselves?

In response to this, a transformation is not possible without self-reflection (Pung et al., 2020). One's self-reflection lets them learn about themselves. For example, the self-examination of a traveller after encountering a new environment and the reactions towards that lead to an understanding of their changes and lead to self-learning (Dellaportas et al., 2023). It is perceived as a metacognitive component to the transformative process, directed to changes in behaviour, self-development and personal growth (Duffy, 2007; Middleton, 2017). The existing knowledge emphasises how educators and learners would benefit from self-reflection. Though solo travellers are identified as self-learners, where they learn from their travel experiences, there is a limited understanding of how solo travellers reflect on their self-changes after their self-evaluation. Therefore, in conclusion, if solo travel leads to a self-transformation for its travellers, then by highlighting this specific liminal time, how does this transformation happen in solo travellers' self-representation? However, in relation to this, there is still a limited

understanding of this, and to fulfil this empirical gap on how solo travel brings changes into solo travellers' self-representation, the researcher attempts to achieve the following objective.

Research Objectives (RO): Two

RO2: To interpret how solo travel would cause changes in the solo traveller's self-representation.

Continuing on this, other than explaining the transformation in general in the context of solo tourism, a self-transformation is more pronounced when a traveller experiences challenges (Teoh et al., 2021). As revie wed in the transformative experience literature on the above, transformation happens when solo travellers encounter new environments, which could be chaotic, challenging and risky at the same time. Meaningful travel experiences stimulate the path for changes in themselves (Malkki, 2019; Teoh et al., 2021). However, it raises a curiosity about what those critical movements are that are a reason for the self-transformation and thus lead to bringing changes in their self-representation.

Solo travellers may experience critical moments that trigger a shift in their initial perceptions, leading to self-transformation. While it is not entirely clear what factors cause this shift in their beliefs, there is limited understanding of the critical moments behind travellers' transformative experiences, regardless of the type of traveller they are. However, summarising existing identified trigger points generally include connection with nature (wildlife & scenic attractions), self-examination (solitude, calmness, awareness), spontaneity and novelty, aesthetic experiences (intense art/music), and self-development (physical activities, overcoming limitations, and scientific discoveries) (Curtin, 2005; Farber & Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2009; Ulusoy, 2016; Kiirillova et al., 2017).

According to Kirillova's team (2017), solo travellers often encounter a range of emotions, feelings of transience, demarcation, heightened cognitive awareness, and a sense of connectivity. However, the specific critical moments or actions and how individuals comprehend their self-changes are still under-researched. To fulfil this empirical gap, the researcher attempts to achieve the following objective.

Research Objective (RO): Three

RO3: To examine what critical moments trigger solo travellers to make changes in their self-representation

To build a conceptual framework, self-representation towards self-transformation, the researcher refers to Van Gennep's (1960) theory of the rites of passage, also called the 'Liminal Concept'. It was introduced by the scholar Van Gennep to be used in anthropology. However, later, the demand for it increased, and the rites of passage have been used wisely in multi-disciplinary areas such as management, consumer behaviour, cultural studies, and sociology (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2020). In management studies, many works have touched on this liminality concept, but these were disconnected from the original anthropological aspect of liminality (Soderlund & Borg, 2018). Instead, these studies adopted liminality as a theoretical lens. Here, liminality "is an experience, one that is characterised by powerful, emotionally charged feelings and it is this experiential dimension of liminality that has received considerable attention in consumer research" (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2020, p. 867-868).

In consumer-based studies, liminality has been recorded as an exponential growth. Most studies have underlined the liminal experiences as being related to stress, anxiety, discomfort and ambivalence (Tonner, 2016; Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2020). At the same time, in tourism, the liminality concept is used in studies on tourists' experience, where the tourist

voluntarily escapes from routine to temporarily dwell in a new location, to relax, recreate and rejuvenate (Brooker & Joppe, 2014). Meanwhile, liminality is also defined as, "any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life" (Turner, 1974, p. 47), a counter to daily living that potentially allows an individual to discover his/her true self (Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Preston-Whyte, 2004; Wickens, 2002; Graburn, 2002). A liminal time brings changes or let's people experience themselves intellectually. This has been narrated by the scholar Turner (1974), as the time, 'betwixt and between', a specific time duration between a tourist leaving home and returning home, which is considered a threshold, also called a 'rite', "during which existing norms may be replaced by disorder, anxiety, and experimental behaviour (Brooker & Joppe, 2014, p. 501). In accordance with Chambers (2001), liminality shifts highlight the significant move from focusing on self-sharing to sharing experiences with others.

In relation to liminal tourism experiences, the existing literature covers the experiences of tourists who gained liminal experiences from hotels (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006), vacations (Weichselbaumer, 2012), cruises (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005), resorts (Shields, 1991), and campgrounds (Foley & Hayllar, 2007; Ryan & Kinder, 1996). These studies highlighted that tourist's experienced uninhibited liminal behaviour during these liminal spaces. For instance, some tourists engaged in sexual relationships with strangers (Weichselbaumer, 2012; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Foley & Hayllar, 2007). In tourism studies, liminality has also received attention in sex tourism studies. All studies done in the past have explained the changes that occurred in tourists' behaviour. To what extent individuals change or invert their routine lifestyle lies on a continuum from minimal to radical and reflects their individual characters; however, this is yet to be studied in tourism-related studies. Insights on this will create an innovative development in the liminal concept (Brooker & Joppe, 2014).

In addition to the above, the self-transformation process has also been tested with the theory of the rites of passage. In the past, scholars Beudaert, Toulouse, and Ture explained self-

transformation in the context of sensory-disabled individuals. The self-transformation referred to in this article as self-transformation related to consumers with a sensory disability; how does the liminal phase of the rites of passage inhibit the transformation to a new self and redefine the boundaries of normalcy, something which helps sensory disabled consumers to achieve self-transformation.

In consumer-related studies, self-transformation has been treated as the process accompanying life transitions (Brooker & Joppe, 2014). For instance, in 2012, Cody found that the transition from childhood to adolescence is ambiguous in teens' consumption; the team of Gentina discovered that teenage girls made a ritual of moving towards adulthood, while the scholars Mehta and Belk (1991) indicated that losing identity related to possessions is a chance for generating new identities; besides, natural disasters also bring transformative changes in people's lives (Baker et al., 2007).

In detailing the three phases in the liminal concept, including (i) the pre-liminal phase (separation stage), where a solo traveller detaches from his/her routine life and companions and his/her old identity emerges; (ii) the liminal phase (transition), where solo travellers' new identity based on their experiences and critical situations gained in their solo travel, emerges. During the second stage, individuals experience an ambiguous state where they are uncertain about their emerging and fading selves (Kennett-Hensel, Sneath & Lacey, 2012); and (iii) the post-liminal stage (re-incorporation), the third stage occurs when their new life is established, and they can (re)develop their new identity. The following Figure 2.4 explains the stages of the rites of passage theory.

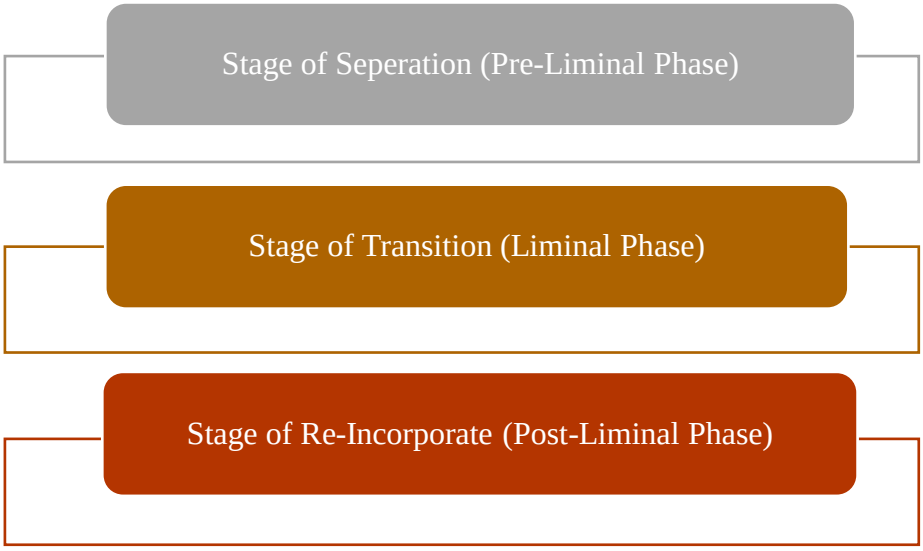


Figure 2.4: Van Gennep's (1960) Rites of Passage (Transformation Process)

Thus, it is apparent that liminal phases enable the self-transformation of individuals. If so, what can be said about the liminality in the context of solo travel, which brings self-transformation to solo travellers' lives? Therefore, if a solo traveller's self-representation explains a solo traveller and his/her changes in behaviour, which is connected with the self-transformation, if solo travel makes changes in the traveller's life (during that particular liminal phase), then that will reflect in their self-representation process. If so, how do solo travellers execute this whole process? What mechanism would they adopt to execute their self-representation process? To answer all these questions, the researcher has adhered to the theory of the rites of passage in the study context to build a framework for self-representation**.**

Research Objective (RO): Four

RO4: To conceptualise solo travellers' self-representation in the context of liminality to understand how solo travel brings changes to their self-representation.

The following figure, 2.5, illustrates the overall content of this chapter on the Literature Review.

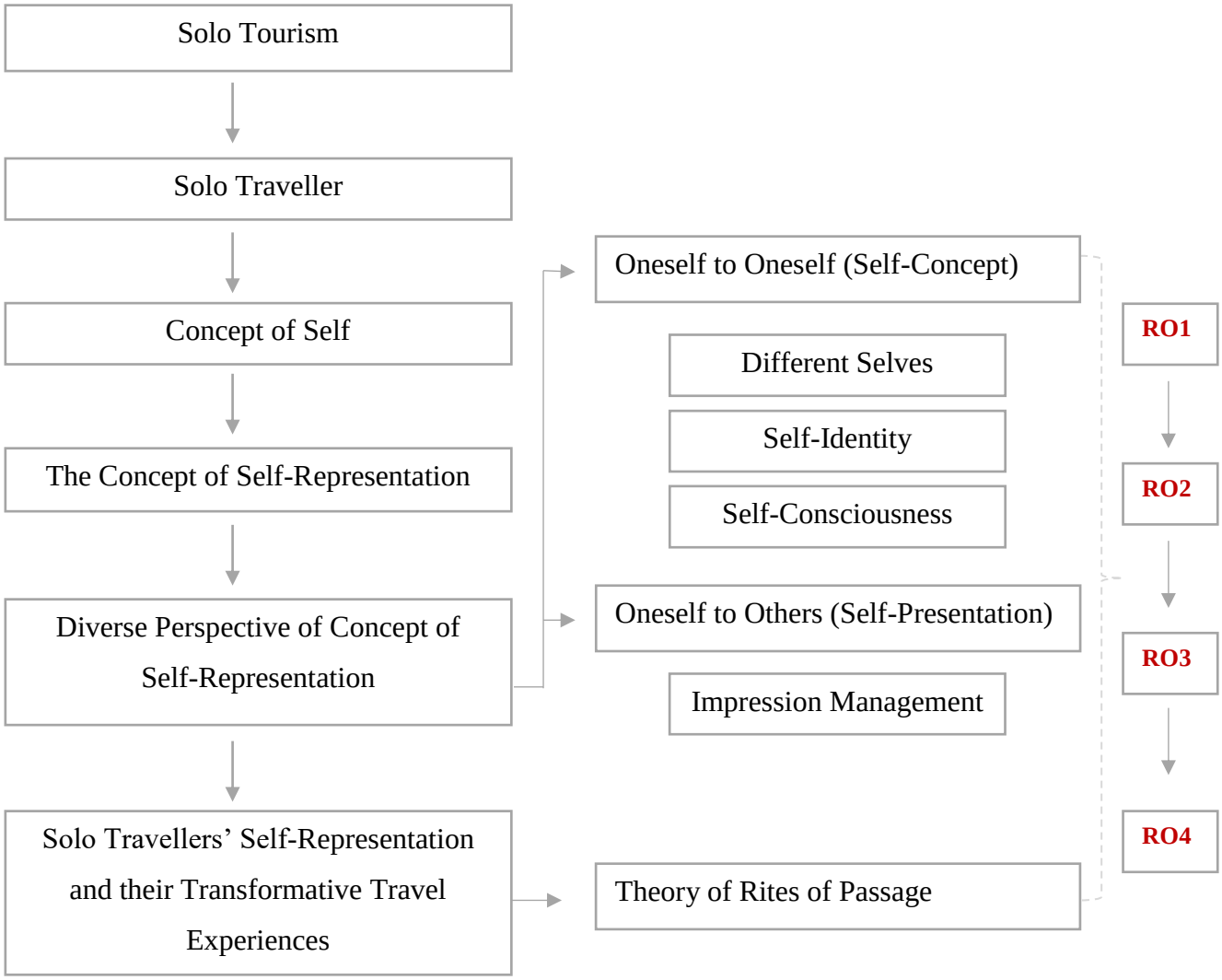


Figure 2.5 Summary of Chapter Two

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the current study. The chapter is divided into eight main sections. The first section explains the research paradigm that supports the current study, including the ontological and epistemological assumptions. The second section outlines the research design of the study. Thirdly, it explains the phenomenological approaches, including descriptive, hermeneutic, and existential-phenomenological approaches. Thereafter, the research strategy, data collection, and data analysis are presented. Subsequently, the chapter describes how the rigorousness of the research was assured. The chapter concludes with the section on ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Philosophy

3.1.1 Research Paradigm

Researchers follow a paradigm that guides their inquiry (Perry, Reign & Brown, 1999). The paradigm is a belief system that impacts how researchers conduct their study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). A research paradigm consists of three main components: ontology, which deals with fundamental questions about the nature of reality; epistemology, which seeks to answer questions like ‘how do we know what we know?’ and ‘what is the connection between the researcher and the known?’ and methodology, which is concerned with how we acquire knowledge about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

It is important to note that a research paradigm dictates the scientific inquiry process, and scholars use different terms such as worldview, epistemologies, and ontologies to refer to it (Creswell, 2012; Crotty, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identified five interpretive paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory theory. Every theoretical framework has its own beliefs about the nature of reality and the best ways to gain knowledge. These beliefs influence how research should be conducted, from the

initial formulation of the research question, to the collection and analysis of data, and ultimately to the presentation of findings. These ideas are discussed in works such as Lincoln, Lynham & Guba (2011) and Perry, Riege & Brown (1999).

3.1.2 Research Ontology and Epistemology

The constructivist paradigm is one of several paradigms, and it assumes a relativistic ontology and subjectivist epistemology. A relativistic ontology suggests the existence of multiple realities, while a subjectivist epistemology implies that knowledge is co-created by the researcher and respondents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This particular approach is also known as 'interpretivism' (Creswell, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2006). According to this approach, individuals assign subjective meanings to the objects around them. Therefore, this approach helps the researcher to better understand the complexity of data (Creswell, 2013). Instead of starting with theory, the researcher may generate a theory from the data themselves (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Morehouse (2011) classified research paradigms as positivist or naturalistic and posited that these two paradigms are incompatible. In naturalistic inquiry, the researcher must become part of the phenomenon being studied instead of the positivistic approach, which seeks to eliminate the researcher's impact (Belk, Sherry & Wallendorf, 1988). In this way, researchers can closely interact with respondents and thoroughly explore topics of interest (Morehouse, 2011). During the data collection phase, being self-aware is an important aspect of naturalistic inquiry (Douglas, 1985).

An interpretative inquiry, which is the category that this thesis falls under, is part of Morehouse's (2011) 'naturalistic' paradigm of categorisation. The interpretive approach is commonly used in qualitative research to understand participant perspectives (Patton, 2002). This approach encourages researchers to participate in data collection actively and enables

respondents to become co-creators of the resulting knowledge (Morehouse, 2011). Interpretative approaches are becoming popular in behavioural research. Therefore, in this study, the researcher adopted the theoretical position of interpretivism to examine how solo travellers portray themselves at different stages of their journey.

3.1.3 Axiology

This study's axiology explains the researcher's role and ethical considerations. In accordance with Neuman (1997), "the axiological perspective of a research paradigm characterised the level of consistency, reliability, or otherwise reconstructing or extending the previously held theories or constructions" (p. 3). It explains in which way a researcher is going to achieve the research objective. Since the current research adopted the qualitative research method, besides the defined research paradigm, the research has ensured an appropriate method to achieve the objectives by underlining the researcher's role and ethical considerations. Such an approach remains vital for producing reliable and well-organised results to accomplish the main research objectives.

3.1.3.1 The Researcher's Role

The researchers' role is another significant part of producing good research. Since the study is qualitative and the approach is phenomenology, the researcher's role becomes more powerful. Phenomenological interviews are more sensitive and are effective tools to bring depth to experiential sharing by participants. Here, the researcher should support and encourage bringing meaning via an active "improvisational, yet focused presence" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 77). At the same time, the researcher should first identify his or her assumptions, experiences and biases that he/she brings to the research. In accordance with Hein and Austin (2001), "phenomenological research is the notion of bracketing assumptions, which is the idea

that, before a researcher can conduct any analysis of (our) data, they must first explore their own biases, the taken-for-grandness that make up the researcher's unique perspectives" (p. 6). The researcher should keep in mind these biases when conducting the analysis. Therefore, this study's researcher must decide on the mechanism that needs to be used to keep the existing knowledge rather than eradicate it all. (Harvey, 2007).

In addition, the participants will consider themselves experts on their own experience under the supposition of phenomenology (Wassler & Kirillova, 2019). As per this, the researcher tries to minimise the hierarchy between himself/herself and the participants to generate the belief among solo travellers that they, the participants, are experts, and that their experiences provide a more in-depth view about solo tourism, and how their own experiences gained during travel would aid in their self -transformation. As a result, the entire process would provide an idea about their self-representation. Therefore, the researcher revealed the research purpose to the participants and be generous with them. It supported the researcher in learning about and gathering the valuable experiences of potential solo travellers, which added more value to the study related to solo travellers' self-representation.

3.1.3.2 Ethical Considerations

The collected data is treated as confidential. To preserve the integrity of the study, it is necessary to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and maintain data security. To this end, the interviews were conducted using a friendly approach. Respondents were asked to suggest times for the interviews when they were free and relaxed enough to participate. Facts derived from other researchers were specified, and their contribution and commitment were clearly stated in the research. Data analysis was carried out and reported without prejudice and with forthrightness. In addition, the conclusion would not reflected the researcher's subjective perceptions.

In addition to the above, the researcher is a student of, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong and the following ethics guidelines declared by the university were adhered to in the study, namely:

- Informed consent will be given by the participants after being provided with either oral or written information on the research;
- The right of the individual to have any personal information, data, or, empirical materials treated as either confidential or anonymous as befits the circumstances of the research;
- The right of the individual to withdraw from the research at any time while it is being conducted;
- The right of the participants not to be deceived regarding any aspect of the research (purpose, sponsors, or usage of the findings);
- The right of the participants not to be harmed during any stage of the research, as well as after the research has been conducted;
- The right of the research participants to access the research findings; and
- Voluntary participation by the individual.

(Jennings, 2001, p. 99)

3.1.4 Methodology

The study aims to investigate solo travellers' self-representations. Throughout the study, the researcher attempts to discover how solo travellers represent themselves throughout their solo travel. Self-transformation was the primary motivation behind solo travel identified by scholars in the past. However, there is hardly any empirical evidence on whether a solo

traveller, after the journey, achieves such self-transformation or not. An individual's self-representation is one of the tools used to examine self-transformation. This is necessary to answer the question how would it happen? Therefore, to discover the moment of truth in the solo traveller's life, the researcher has chosen a qualitative approach and adopted the interpretivist paradigm, relativistic ontology and subjectivist epistemology.

In line with the same approaches, to understand the lived experiences of people, 'Phenomenology' is a methodological approach used to capture solo travellers' self-representation. The reasons behind selecting phenomenology are (i) that this study is not constructed theory but instead discovers the real experiences of these travellers through solo travellers' interpretations of solo travel experiences, in their own words. The interpretive paradigm is suited to the present content because (ii) the researcher strongly believes that "tourism is an endlessly creative field of lived experiences that should be more deeply explored interpretively, and thereby 'qualitatively', especially in the light of new insights gained across social science disciplines" (Schanzel, 2010, p. 77).

3.1.4.1 Application of Interpretivism and Phenomenology to this Study

The present study is focused on solo travellers and their self-representation, including how solo travellers define themselves, how solo travellers make changes in their representation of a self, what critical moments trigger them to change their native self-representation, and, if they could make significant changes to their selves due to critical situations, what mechanisms they would use to adhere to these changes in the self. All these can be investigated based on the paradigm of interpretivism. Besides, it is possible to capture real experiences and in-depth understanding about an individual's emotions and feelings only through qualitative studies. There are five widely used qualitative methodologies identified by the scholar Creswell (2018), namely, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology. To capture

the lived experiences of solo travellers, the present study focuses on phenomenology. This approach was established by Husserl who is also known as the father of the philosophy of phenomenology, in the early 1900s. This approach was used in psychology in the early stages of the discipline, but later on, it was used in other streams in the social sciences as well. Phenomenology, "offers researchers a way to conceptualise the lived experience of people" (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2020, p. 126).

Under the phenomenological methodological approach, there are two major phenomenological orientations, including Husserl's phenomenology, also called 'descriptive phenomenology' and Heidegger's phenomenology, also known as 'hermeneutic phenomenology' (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2020; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Kirillova, 2018). Descriptive phenomenology "is viewed as an exact science of the consciousness and search for universal truth, which has been called 'bracketing' which means 'the separation of researchers' preconceived notions and biases from the phenomenon of interest, to be able to describe it as it appeared in a participant's life-world" (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3329). This means that it only covers 'what a solo traveller's experience is like'.

On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenology highlights the in-depth meaning of each individual's experience, which explains the thematic meaning rather than a general perspective (Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology consists of hermeneutic, interpretive and existential phenomenology (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

Of these, existential phenomenology discovers the meaning of being without reduction or bracketing, meanwhile suspending all beliefs about the phenomena under investigation to acquire knowledge about the essences of the manifestations of consciousness (Chen, 2021, p. 87). It is an integration of the philosophy of existentialism. Existentialism highlights human existence and is thus interpreted by interpersonal encounters (Zahavi, 2012). Thus, existential phenomenology is considered as another appropriate methodological approach for the study

due to the fact that (i) during solo travel, travellers would face critical moments and strange people at the destination, and that interaction with society would trigger changes in the solo traveller's self-representation. Besides, under self-representation, as a subsection, an individual sometimes gives more importance to impressing others in their self-representation, with the motive of enhancing social interaction; and also (ii) existential phenomenology consists of both Husserl's phenomenology (realist ontology) and Heidegger's phenomenology (relativist ontology). In conclusion, it can be said that existential phenomenology provides a holistic view of solo travellers' experiences and how they present themselves throughout their travel. Therefore, the researcher has utilised the existential-phenomenological approach as the theoretical framework for this study.

3.2 Research Design

The research design encompasses the methods, data collection techniques, and analysis methods to be used in conducting research (Creswell, 2013; Myers, 2013). The design aspects of a research project are guided by its ontological and epistemological assumptions (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2002). The following sections provide a detailed description of the research design used in the current study.

3.2.1 Choice of Method

The researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions should match the chosen method. This method also influences aspects like the techniques used in data collection, the processes adopted in data analysis, how findings are presented, and how the study's validity is assured (Creswell, 2013).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that, "qualitative researchers aim to interpret natural phenomena based on the meanings people give them in their respective settings" (p. 3). While conducting qualitative research, it is crucial to choose a specific approach that aligns with the

research questions. In the literature, various classifications of qualitative research methods can be found (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Some popular qualitative research methods include grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative analysis, ethnography, case studies, and basic interpretive studies. Grounded theory was developed by Charmaz (2003), Glaser (1978), and Strauss & Corbin (1990). Phenomenology was introduced by Goulding (2005), while narrative analysis is credited to Cortazzi (1993) and Mishler (1995). Ethnography was introduced by Clifford (1986) and Denzin & Lincoln (2000), case studies were popularised by Yin (2006), and basic interpretive studies were introduced by Merriam (2002).

The method of phenomenological qualitative study, which has been brought forth by Merriam (2002), presents itself as a promising approach for the current study. Using this approach, the researcher intends to comprehend how solo travellers identify themselves in order to understand how each self-phenomenon, at different stages of travel, represents itself. Data are collected through interviews (Patton, 2002).

Data is analysed through induction to identify common patterns; a descriptive account of the findings is then presented based on the literature that framed the study (Kleining & Witt, 2001; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Given the nature of the research questions, a phenomenological approach is appropriate for the study.

3.2.2 Study Context

Next to the research method, selecting a suitable study context was vital. This study explores how solo travellers could evolve via their solo travelling, and would thus express by representing themselves. The study aims to discover the solo travellers self-representation in detail. Therefore, the researcher is focused to collect the data from four distinctive destinations including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The researcher visited the

places in person and collected the data. Simultaneously, data was also collected through online platform based on the potential sample's convenience.

Leading online travel media sources, including Lonely Planet (2022), Travel and Leisure (2023), Intrepid Travel (2022), and Conde Nast Traveller (2020), have identified Mainland China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Thailand as popular destinations for solo travellers to Eastern, South and Southeastern Asia. Besides famous destinations, solo travellers from China have been identified as collective travellers (Zhang et al., 2019). However, the recent statistics indicate a rise in the number of Chinese travellers who are travelling alone (Travel Daily China, 2025). Notably, Sri Lanka and Thailand have been recorded as the top destinations for solo travellers (Globe Tenders, 2025). While solo travel is common among Westerners, the increasing number of solo travellers in Asian countries, particularly those rich in culture, generates curiosity about these travellers and their experiences in these destinations. If solo travel contributes to the self-transformation of travellers, it is essential to study the travel experiences and behaviours of those who originate from these destinations as well as those who visit them. Understanding these perspectives will be crucial in exploring how solo travel brings about changes in solo travellers' self-representation.

Following this, specific locations within these selected destinations were chosen for data collection. Before finalising the tourist attractions in each destination, the researcher conducted a pilot study involving five respondents representing the nationalities of the respective destinations: two from Mainland China and one from each of the other three destinations, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Thailand. These individuals were selected using a snowball sampling technique. Based on the data collected from these individuals, the researcher finalised the locations for this study. The following table 3.1 provides detailed information regarding when, where, and for how long the researcher conducted the data collection in person.

Table 3.1 Study Context- Destinations and Locations

Data Collection Methods	Data Collection Period	Location	Covered Tourist Destinations	Destination Selection- Reasons
Observation & Interview	June 2023	Sri Lanka	• Temple (*Seethaeliya, Nallur Sri Kandha Suwami temple, and Sri Dalada Maligawa*); • Attractions (*Little Adams's Peak View, Nine Arches Bridge, Ravana Ella Falls, Hakgala Botanical Garden*).	• The Popular tourist attractions in Sri Lanka
Observation & Interview	August 2023 to May 2024	Hong Kong	• Temple & Monastery (*Big Buddha Temple, Chi Lin Nunnery 7 Nan Lian Garden, Man Fat Tsz, Po Lin Monastery, and The Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery*); • Museum & Galleries (*Hong Kong Palace Museum and Space Museum*); • Attractions (*Avenue of Stars, M+, Victoria Harbour, The Peak, Sky100 Observation Desk);* • Heritage & Nature Reserves (*Hong Kong UNESCO Geo Park, and Yim Tin Tsai*).	• The popular tourist attractions in Hong Kong The researcher required places with less tension and fewer activities to observe and select study participants.
Observation & Interview	Aug 2023	Shanghai	• Temple & Monastery (*Jade Buddha Temple & Yu Garden*); • Attractions (*Shanghai Bund, The Oriental Peral Tower and the People's Square*); • Museum & Galleries (*Shanghai Museum*).	• The popular tourist attractions in China The researcher required places with less tension and fewer activities to observe and select study participants.
	Aug 2023	Hangzhou	• Temple (*Linyin Temple*); • Attractions *(Xixi National Wetland Park, Xi Lake, and Three Pools Mirroring the Moon).*	

Observation & Interview	June 2024	Thailand	• Temple (*Wat Arun, Wat Phra Kaew, and The Grand Palace*); • Bangkok Museum; • Attractions (*Rawan National Park, Wild Life, Safari World*).	• The popular tourist attractions in Thailand

(*Source: Author's Compilation)*

3.2.3 Data Collection

In order to investigate how individuals reconstruct their self-representation and the role that their possessions play in this process, decisions had to be made on how to collect data within the study context. The primary data is gathered through in-depth interviews. The data collection section is further subdivided and explained further in detail below.

3.2.3.1 Tools of Data Collection: In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interview is a commonly used data collection tool. Researchers conducting qualitative studies must understand the context and participants' positions (Howe, 2004; Saunders et al., 2011). This phenomenon can be better understood through in-depth interviews, as this format allows the researcher to gather more comprehensive information by facilitating the interaction between the researcher and the respondents (Howe, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews are also used as they offer flexibility to the researcher to ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions to gather more information and clarity. This method also gives an opportunity to the respondents to raise any important issues or topics which the researcher might not have considered earlier (Saunders et al., 2011). This method of data collection provides empirical depth for investigating topics not directly observable. It is a well-accepted approach when investigating self-representation. It supports the researcher in contrasting the behaviour of a solo traveller from other types of travellers in the tourism industry.

During the interview time, the researcher used the interview guide *(refer to Appendix A)* to support her interview; also, the follow-up of the questions depended on how each respondent responded, and the questions varied based on the respondents' solo experiences. For instance, there are first-time and multi-time solo travellers. At the same time, based on the place where the solo travellers visited, the travel experience has added more insights to the current research of solo travellers' self-representation. Further, to know the participants' socio-demographic information, the researcher asked a socio-demographic information set of travel-related questions via Microsoft forms, as explained in *Appendix B*. To enhance the data collection and time effectiveness, the researcher used Google Forms. During the interview time with the participants, she was instructed about this personal information and received their ethical consideration before sharing this form via email. As informed to the participants, she used the information only for analysis purposes and remained more confident.

The researcher employed the aforementioned interview guide to collect data from participants. Concurrently, the researcher allocated and scheduled specific time slots for each location, commencing the data collection process in June 2023 and concluded in July 2024. An observation tool was utilised to identify eligible participants during their travel phases. Location was considered a crucial factor when selecting participants for the study. The chosen sites were less crowded, and a tranquil environment for travellers. This facilitated the researcher to approach potential solo travellers without disrupting their journey. Before finalising a participant, the researcher checked the criteria, the most important being that the individual had travelled alone at least once. Existing participants were also asked to recommend other solo travellers they knew. Interviews were conducted both in-person and online, depending on the convenience of the selected participants. Since the study adopted phenomenology, in accordance with Englander (2012), the sampling unit and the unit of analysis are experiences instead of the number of participants. Participants were initially

approached during the travel phase; however, the interview sessions were conducted during their post-travel phase at times that were convenient for them. The participants, who were selected through a snowball sampling technique, were also in the post-travel phase when the researcher commenced data collection. Therefore, coinciding with the data collection tools, the researcher of this current study used in-depth interviews to find answers to the following research questions:

R.Q. 1 How do solo travellers define themselves?

R.Q. 2. Does solo travel bring changes in solo travellers' self-representation?

R.Q. 3. What critical moments may trigger solo travellers to make changes in their self-representation?

R.Q. 4. How do solo travellers adhere to the changes in their self-representation?

3.2.3.2 Sampling and Recruitment of Participants

The study has used experience–based snowballing under criterion sampling strategies. For the study on solo travellers, the snowballing sampling technique involves selecting a few information-rich respondents (Patton, 2002). This approach is useful as it improves the richness of the data, which cannot be guaranteed with other sampling techniques, such as convenience sampling (Saunders et al., 2011). Snowball sampling is a popular sampling technique used in qualitative studies, especially in behavioural research (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Tuskej, Golob & Podnar, 2013; Karanika & Hogg, 2013; Afflerback et al., 2014). The researcher selected the potential respondents for this study based on this technique. As the first step in choosing a suitable participant, the researcher developed the necessary criteria. The criteria for selecting participants are included in Table 3.2. It consists of the definition given to expected solo travellers to this study, types of travellers, year of experience, age limit, language and nationality.

Table 3.2 Sampling Criteria

Criteria	Description
Solo Traveller	• The solo traveller, according to the researcher, is defined as a person who has planned a trip where he/she will travel alone (without companionship) and depart from their home country alone; • The solo traveller should primarily be considered a leisure traveller. This is because the main motive for leisure tourism is enjoyment, and having leisure time is essential for enhancing happiness and gaining a better understanding of life (Liu & Li, 2020). In contrast, business travellers will not be included as potential participants in this study, as their primary motive for travel is business-related activities, such as meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE).
Selection	• Potential participants should have chosen solo travel as a deliberate choice rather than as a default option. The ultimate purpose of this study is to explain how solo travellers represent themselves while travelling alone and to explore whether their experiences during solo travel lead to changes in their self-representation. This aspect will be covered in the study. • The potential participants who used to be alone may have already experienced the changes the current study expects. • The potential participants who choose solo travel as their preference may experience critical events, referred to as unfamiliar situations, during their travels, leading to changes in their self-representation. • Therefore, the current study focuses only on those who chose solo travel rather than it being a default option.
Year of Experience	• The solo traveller should have travelled alone at least one time before. • Therefore, the experience is considered as an important tool in the current year. The experience indicated here is the number of solo trips. • Both one-time and multi-time solo travellers will be considered in this study.
Age	• The potential solo travellers should be above 18 years old.
Language	• The potential solo travellers should be English-speaking travellers.
Nationality	• It is not limited.
Other Conditions	• If an individual travels alone and unexpectedly joins strangers at their destination, that person may be considered a potential participant in this study (to clarify the various types of solo travellers discussed in the literature, the researcher has clearly defined who qualifies as a solo traveller for the purposes of this study).

Therefore, a solo traveller, according to the researcher, is defined as a person who has planned a trip where he/she will travel alone and depart from the home country alone. When it

comes to qualitative studies, one of the main challenges is to determine the appropriate sample, which refers to who should be interviewed and how many people need to be interviewed. The sample size and composition are usually linked to the idea of 'generalisability' - in other words, the ability of the research findings to be relevant in similar contexts. This notion has been discussed by Draper in 2004 and Mays & Pope in 1995. When it comes to sampling strategy, an important decision is to determine the number of respondents (Creswell, 2012; Rossman & Rallis, 2011). The sample size is crucial as qualitative research usually involves a relatively small number of people or cases (Labuschagne, 2003; Marshall, 1996). There is no agreement among qualitative researchers on the ideal sample size (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Emmel, 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Patton, 2002). The size may vary depending on factors such as the research questions, data gathering methods, and the researcher's time and resources (Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

Apart from general guidelines, certain qualitative methods (such as grounded theory) require specific considerations for sample size (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Creswell, 2012). Given the qualitative approach used, specific methods are unsuitable to determine sample size. As Marshall (1996) suggests, researchers should select a sample size that is sufficient to answer the research questions. In the current research, the point to end the interviews was determined by reaching a stage where no new or relevant data was obtained. This stage is referred to as 'data saturation' and is considered while determining the sample size (Francis et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2013; Marshall, 1996). As the researcher reached a point of no new information, further interviews were deemed unnecessary. Since the study adopted phenomenology, in accordance with Englander (2012), the sampling unit and the unit of analysis were experiences instead of the number of participants. Also, data collection is based on data saturation, and the current researcher collected data from 40 eligible participants. More details about the sample are presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Data Collection and Sampling Approaches in Qualitative Studies

Method	Rationale	Focus	Applicability to this study (Y/N)	Suggested sample Size	Data Collection
Case Study	For case studies, 'the case' must exist at a specific time and place or over a while (Creswell, 2018). The cases should represent a category of phenomena that provide an analytical frame (Thomas, 2011). Tourist experience does not exist in a frame but it is affected by uncertain external stimulation and subjectivity.	Organisations, projects, entity, individuals or events	N	/	Interviews, documents, reports, observations
Narrative	Narrative focuses on the stories told by one or two individuals by collecting their stories as data, giving an account of their personal experiences, and sorting out the meanings of those experiences chronologically (or using life course stages (Creswell, 2018). The emphasis of chronologically ordering or linear time is not applicable to the temporal and random nature of a guimi holiday.	Individual experience & sequence	N	1 to 2	Stories from individuals & documents
Grounded Theory	The use of grounded theory is to generate a theory for a process or an action (Creswell, 2018). However, this focus of this study is about the lived experiences of female tourists.	Develop a theory from field data	N	20 to 60	Interviews, then open and axial coding
Ethnography	Ethnographical studies focus on an entire culture-sharing group; it could be a small group but typically large, such as teachers in an entire school, a community of a village (Creswell, 2018). And it requires the researcher to get immersed into the participants' daily lives. However, the participants of this study are friendship dyads who are usually best friends. It is not possible for the researcher to travel with dyads who are close friends to observe their daily life.	Context or culture	N	/	Observations & interviews.

Phenomenology	Some common features shared by all phenomenological studies include; emphasising a phenomenon to be explored; and the collective experience of individuals (Creswell, 2018). To this study, the popularity of guimi holidays in China is a typical social phenomenon, while female friendship dyads share the joint travel experience, which shapes this research as phenomenological	People who have experienced a phenomenon.	Y	5 to 25	Interviews as the primary method; with poems, observations and documents as a supplement.

(Source: Chen's (2021) modifications based on Creswell, 2018)

3.2.3.3 Data Collection Process

This study's researcher collected the data from June 2023 to July 2024. Before the pre-interviews is taken in advance among a few solo travellers identified by the researcher, the respondents for the first method of data collection, the in-depth interviews were contacted through face-to-face and online video conferences (the online platform is finalised based on the interviewee's convenience and conducted on MS Teams, Zoom and VooV Meeting).

Before the interview began, the researcher obtained consent from each respondent, and Figure 3.1 explains the consent form the researcher distributed among participants before collecting the data.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Research Project Title: The Solo Travellers' Self-(Re) presentation

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research conducted by _____.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and published. However, my right to privacy will be retained; i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet, has been fully explained. I understand the benefit and risks involved. My participation in the study is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind.

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Name of researcher _____

Signature of researcher _____

Date _____

Figure 3.1 Consent Form

3.3 Data Analysis

When embarking on a research study, it is crucial to determine the specific area that data collection and analysis should concentrate on, such as an organisation, process, or individual. This is known as the 'unit of analysis' (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). In this particular study, the aim is to gain a better understanding of how solo travellers represent themselves at different stages of their journeys.

At this stage, the research challenge is to determine the appropriate method for analysing data within the study's adopted paradigm (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2010). By adopting a basic qualitative research approach, it is necessary to employ a method that is not dependent on theories and can be applied across different epistemological approaches for qualitative analysis. Since the study has adopted a phenomenological base, it comprises three phases. In the first phase, the researcher intended to identify how solo travellers define themselves and how they experienced their self-transformation due to the solo journey. The first two research questions covered this intention and attempted to fill this research gap. At this stage, the researcher has maintained the phenomenological essence of 'bracketing' in mind during the data collection process. The researcher ensured this condition in the following ways.

First, until the researcher found answers to the study's first phase, she bracketed her experiences and pre-assumptions and did not undertake any solo journey until she completed the findings. Second, the researcher refrained from influencing the participants with what knowledge she had gained from the literature. Third, she ensured and collected the participants' experiences from an entirely fresh perspective and did not connect these experiences with the researcher's own experiences. To figure out the solutions to the first and the second research questions, the researcher adopted 'Husserl's Phenomenological' analysis.

The study is underpinned by Husserl's phenomenological analysis using the scholar Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological data analysis. It consisted of four primary steps,

namely, (i) read and re-call all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole; (ii) determine the meaning units that contain the description of each phenomenon by returning to each transcript and marking the place where significant shifts of meaning have been identified; (iii) transform all the meaning units into expressions that are psychologically sensitive; and (iv) based on all the essential transformed meaning units that are common across all transcripts, to write out or graph a general structure of an experience (Giorgi, 2009).

To conduct the descriptive phenomenological analysis, the researcher obtained a thorough understanding of the collected data before finalising the transcripts. The participants' responses related to their concerns were voice-recorded. The researcher attempted to focus primarily on English-speaking solo travellers. To ensure the quality of transcriptions, the researcher checked the audio recordings and the transcripts to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Afterwards, the researcher developed a description of the respondents with enough understanding and thus considered it as the third step.

With the developed description, the researcher continued checking on the proper meaning of these tourists' self-representation and discovered how these solo travellers define themselves and how solo travel contributed to their self-transformation as the fourth step. Fifth, once this was done, the researcher checked the level of generalisability of the data to ensure that she had collected different experiences from each solo traveller. Before the final step, the researcher ensured that the experience structure was under each examination.

As the final step, the researcher described the meaning of a solo traveller's real experience by identifying the participant's accurate expressions, re-reading all the transcripts and ensuring the synonyms.

Figure 3.2 explains the steps of the descriptive analysis of phenomenology recommended by Giorgi (2009).

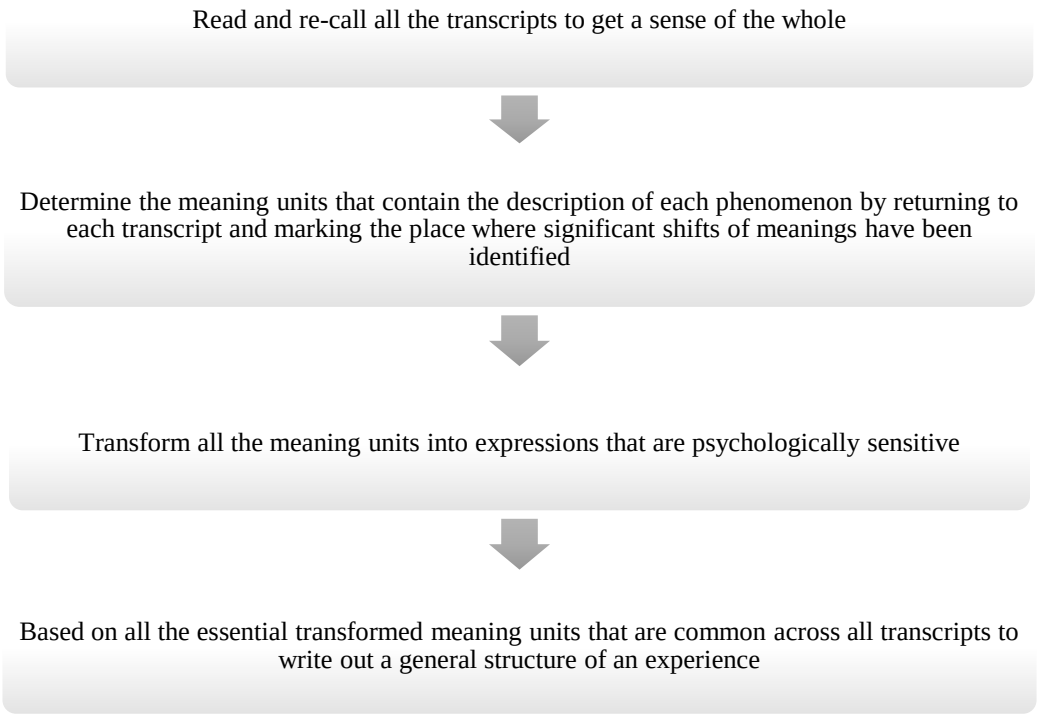


Figure 3.2 Descriptive Analysis of Phenomenology Process

(Source: Giorgi, 2009)

The second phase of the research focuses on the critical moments in solo travel and discovers how those incidents or situations push a solo traveller towards a shift to a new self and a new identity. During this process, the solo traveller would encompass different situations and meet various people because there is a possibility that during solo travel, there will be many certain and uncertain factors that would influence their self-representation.

To capture the moment of truth and explain how a solo traveller would present a certain self and be considered unique, the researcher adopted Van Manen's Iterative (whole-part-whole) method (1997) under 'Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis'. This analysis explains that there is no fixed method, and it allows the researcher to select her own way. Under this method, the researcher eliminated her biases; however, the researcher also controlled the bias by philosophically disclosing and discussing the potential bias. The hermeneutic phenomenological analysis explains the hermeneutic cycle, which consists of three circles:

reading, reflective writing and interpretation (Laverty, 2003). This is in accordance with Kafle "commitment to an abiding concern, oriented stance toward the question, investigating the experience as it is lived, describing the phenomenon through writing, and rewriting, and consideration of parts and whole" (Kafle, 2011, p. 191). This analysis has been used to find the solution to Research Question Three.

The researcher followed six steps to execute this analysis, including re-reading and carefully reviewing each respondent's responses and grasping the fundamental meaning from the interviews as the first step. Secondly, the researcher developed themes suitable for each interview's transferred meaning. Thirdly, she reflected on the essential themes and ensured variation among the identified themes as the fifth step. Finally, it was necessary to balance the writing.

Figure 3.3 graphically explains the steps of the cycle of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis.

Figure 3.3 Hermeneutic Cycle

(Source: Kafle, 2001)

In the current study, the researcher used three different research analyses. This is possible, if a researcher's intention is to capture differences. In line with Wassler and Kirillova (2019), "two distinct methodologies need to be distinguished regarding the approaches to interview the participants and data analysis. For instance, the practice of bracketing is relevant in descriptive (Husserlian) phenomenology but cannot be employed under the hermeneutic (Heideggerian phenomenology) principles. At the same time, the final phenomenological account, presented as research findings, should read as a coherent analysis and reconcile results from both approaches" (p. 119). Therefore, when attempting to answer the research questions, the researcher used two different analyses. Also, the phenomenological methodology emphasises life experiences, which reflect a person's experiences toward changes in an environment (Chang & Wang, 2021).

In the third phase of the research, the researcher adopted the six-step data analysis method recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), the so-called 'Thematic Analysis', which includes (i) familiarisation with the data; (ii) generating initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing themes; (v) defining and naming themes; and finally (vi) producing the report. To find answers to the fourth research question, it is necessary to investigate how solo travellers build a self-representation by adhering to changes in themselves.

The motive of the researcher is to develop a framework for solo travellers' self-representation. The previous research questions are used to discover solo travellers' lived experiences, and the final research question frames the concept of the self-representation of solo travellers. What mechanisms do solo travellers use to acknowledge changes in the ways they present themselves? Thematic analysis is also related to phenomenology when a study is subjectively related to perceptions, experiences, and feelings (Change & Wang, 2021). Therefore, a pluralist research analysis is considered appropriate in this current study. Table 3.4 explains the different analyses used in the tourism literature.

Thematic analysis is a method that focuses on identifying patterns and meanings within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). A theme encapsulates relevant aspects associated with the research questions (Braun et al., 2014; Grbich, 2012). Researchers may determine potential themes based on their frequency of occurrence or their relevance to the research questions (Aronson, 1995; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). It is important to note that the occurrence frequency of a theme does not solely dictate its significance in research. Equally important is the researcher's judgement regarding the theme's relevance and importance to the research question (Braun et al., 2014).

It is important to understand that the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) differs from the 'thematic analysis' used in other qualitative research methodologies, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, or interpretive phenomenological analysis. Each qualitative research method is influenced by its own theoretical assumptions and follows specific steps during data analysis. In contrast, thematic analysis, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a flexible approach that can be applied across various theoretical perspectives and has its own distinct steps for analysing data. This sets it apart from other forms of thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was selected as the method for data analysis in this study for three specific reasons. First, the study employs a basic qualitative approach that necessitates a suitable data analysis method. The chosen approach is appropriate because of its flexibility in accommodating various epistemological positions. It is noteworthy that qualitative data analysis methods are widely used in social psychology (Smith, 2007). Given the current research's focus on self-representation, it is fitting to use a data analysis method commonly applied in social psychology research. Additionally, many studies investigating human behaviour have successfully utilised the same method for analysing

qualitative data (Al-Mutawa, 2013; Clarke & Turner, 2007; McNeill & Wyeth, 2011). Since this study centres on solo travellers, the proposed analysis method is particularly relevant.

In summary, the data analysis process involves applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, which consists of six steps: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The first five steps are explained in detail below.

- **Step 1: Familiarisation with the Data**

Acquainting oneself with the data necessitates an active engagement with the interview transcripts to discern meanings that extend beyond their surface level. A meticulous analysis of respondents' language is critical for extracting rich qualitative insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In the present study, the researcher independently collected the dataset, which has fostered a profound familiarity with the material. This familiarity is further bolstered by the knowledge acquired during the data collection phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). To enhance her comprehension of the data, the researcher undertook multiple reviews of the interview transcripts, examining them both in their entirety and in segments suitable for coding. Furthermore, she annotated the transcripts based on the field notes gathered during the interview process, thereby deepening her engagement with the data.

- **Step 2: Generating Initial Codes**

A code is a concise phrase, while coding refers to the process of identifying relevant parts of data in relation to a research question (Basit, 2003; Clarke & Braun, 2013). The choice between data-driven and theory-driven coding can influence the selection of codes to some extent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, a data-driven approach is employed, meaning that most codes are derived directly from the data itself. The coding process is guided by the

research questions, the collected data, and relevant theoretical frameworks. As noted by Basit (2003), Braun and Clarke (2006), and Saldana (2021), coding can be performed either manually or with specialised software. However, in the initial stages of the research, the researcher used both manual coding and software-based coding, particularly until they gained proficiency with the NVivo software to generate initial codes.

- **Step 3: Searching for Themes**

During the phase of sorting codes into potential themes, the focus shifts from merely identifying the features of the data to providing a more meaningful explanation. Themes are essential for answering research questions and achieving a deeper understanding of the data. This stage follows the completion of initial coding and requires a thorough analysis of the data.

According to Clarke and Braun (2013), a theme should go beyond the basic characteristics of the data to offer a significant interpretation. When analysing data, researchers must look beyond simple code frequencies and explore the meanings related to their research questions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Thomas, 2006). A code captures a single idea, whereas a theme represents a central organising concept that conveys something significant about the data. This approach contrasts with a passive method where the researcher merely identifies themes that are already present in the dataset, as noted by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). The process of identifying themes is not linear; it requires multiple transcript readings and careful reflection on field notes. This procedure does not adhere to a fixed set of steps but rather evolves through the researcher's analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- **Step 4: Reviewing Themes**

Following the identification of themes, the researcher evaluated whether they required further refinement or if they were sufficiently established as definitive themes (Braun et al., 2014; Thomas, 2006). The potential themes were subsequently discussed in depth with the

supervisory panel and fellow researchers, resulting in essential revisions. Additionally, the researcher conducted a thorough review of the existing literature on self-transformation within the context of solitary travel, which facilitated further refinements to the identified themes. Moreover, an examination of previous literature concerning transformative learning theories was undertaken to ensure that the findings were congruent with the current body of knowledge.

Through the consultation of existing literature and the analysis of transcripts, reflections, and discussions, themes emerged progressively, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the data. Ultimately, the themes that were developed accurately represented the meaning derived from the data.

- **Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

In this stage, the researcher defined and refined the themes and their interrelationships as identified in the preceding stage, in accordance with the framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). Following several discussions with the supervisory team, each section of the findings was revised until the researchers finalised the nomenclature of the themes. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature was conducted during this phase.

- **Step 6: Producing the Report**

Step six entails documenting the themes identified in the preceding stage to articulate the transformative experiences and memorable narratives of solo travellers derived from the collected data. In this section, the researcher provides a comprehensive explanation of the analytical process employed, utilising the thematic analysis framework as established by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher illustrates the measures implemented at each phase of the analysis, ensuring alignment with the study's philosophical underpinnings and the inherent characteristics of the data. Table 3.4 explains the phenomenological studies in detail.

Table 3.4 Selected literature of phenomenological studies and types of Analysis used in Tourism Literature

Author (Year)	Research Questions and Findings	Phenomenological as Methodology	Theory	Methods of Data Collection	Sampling Energy	Sample Size	Data Analysis Method
Stierand and Dorfler (2012)	*What is the lived experience of creativity and innovation in haute cuisine?* The research presented an empirical example of a phenomenological study by examining the nature of creativity in haute cuisine settings.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	In-depth unstructured interviews and field notes	Purposive sampling	18	Reduction procedure by Giorgi (1997)
Malone, McCabe and Smith (2014)	*How hedonism Is experienced and the links between hedonic experiences and intentions for future ethical behaviour?* The results show that emotional experiences are a powerful driving force of consumers' ethical choice, which could be an alternative form of hedonism.	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interview	Purposive sampling	13	The steps of IPA by Smith et al. (2009)
Ainley and Kline (2014)	*What is currently understood about why farm families in North America are embracing agritourism?* The results show that farmers and family members taking part in this study view agritourism as a transitional process, suggesting that farm families should be supported throughout the process while business skills	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Interviews	/	17	The steps of IPA by Smith et al. (2009)

	and capacities are built over time.						
Kirillova, Gilmetdinova, and Lehto (2014)	*How does religion influence the construction of the meaning of hospitality and its enactment by various religious groups?* Findings reveal that interpretation of hospitality and hospitable behaviour in private and public domain varies according to religious values, while commercial hospitability, somewhat influenced by religion, is mostly understood as a money-making venture.	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling;	30	Following Van Manen's iterative (whole-part-whole) method (1990)
Shim and Santos (2014)	*To understand the experiences and meanings that tourists ascribe to their visits to shopping malls in Seoul, Korea.* Findings show that malls can be understood as a negotiated reality between the forces that create placelessness and those that enhance the appeal of malls.	Husserlian Phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Purpose sampling	26	Reduction procedure by Giorgi (1997) and thematic description by Hycner (1985)

Berdychevsky and Gibson (2015)	*What constitutes sexual risk-taking in tourism and its potential consequences from the young women's perspective?* The findings show that women's sexual risk-taking in tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon. Specifically, the physical and cultural dimensions relate to the geography of fear and sexual terrorism. The social dimension is associated with sexual double standards as a form of control, while the emotional and mental dimensions are interwoven with internalised self-surveillance.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling	15	Follow the steps by Moustakas (1994), starting with epoche and transcendental-phenomenological reduction, proceeding to imaginative variation, and concluding with synthesis
Laing and Frost (2017)	*What Is the lived experience of women travelling in Italy in non-fiction travel books?* Findings show that eudaimonia and hedonic are important components of wellbeing, and the overall narratives constructed by the writers as transformative experiences are associated with a new identity.	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Nine travel texts were written by women about Italy	/	/	Thematic analysis focusing on the narrative content (van Manen,1997)
Golubovskaya, Robinson and Solnet (2017)	*How do hospitality frontline workers interpret hospitality?* The findings indicate that most of the frontline hotel employees feel they struggle to express their understanding and	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Dual-stage-structured interviews with open questions	Purpose sampling	22	Conventional content analysis

	perceptions of the hospitability construct in Australia.						
Wassler and Schuckert (2017)	*What is the essence of the lived experience of travelling to North Korea?* The findings show that the essence of the lived North Korea travel experience comprises dimensions of trepidation, self-regulation, doubt, and catharsis.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling	8	Descriptive analysis following the steps by Giorgi (2009)
Kirillova, Lehto and Cai (2017)	*What is the essence of a transformative experience during travel and its enduring consequences via existential lenses?* The study presents nine existential themes related to a transformative experience in chronological order.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Purposive and snowball sampling	10	Descriptive phenomenology following the steps mentioned by Giorgi (2009)
Mair and Frew (2018)	*What does it mean to attend an association conference for female academics?* Findings show that the importance of networking, personal and professional development opportunities, the conference venue, and the social programme are the main motivational factors.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology		Duo-ethnographic approach; an unstructured and open interview	/	2	Van Manen (1990) approach

Podoshen et al. (2018)	*What are the essences of a dark tourism experience whereby there exists a feeling of being closer to death?* Findings show that transitory space acts as an important moment in the dark tourism experience, and there is a desire for experiencing abjection in a ritual-like context.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	Attribution theory	Participant observation; Unstructured or semi-structured interviews	Participant observation as a means of data gathering	30	Steps suggested by Hycner (1999)
Goolaup, Soler and Nunkoo (2018)	*What dimensions of surprise are contained in the extraordinary food experiences of food tourists?* Findings show that elements of surprise in extraordinary food experiences were connected to tourists' food cultural capital. Food tourists who possessed a high level of cultural capital were surprised by the simplicity or complexity of the experience, while those possessing a low level of cultural capital were surprised by the genuineness of the experience.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	Cultural capital	Semi-structured interviews	Purposive sampling	16	Following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method
St-James, Darveau and Fortin (2018)	*How consumers use film in their overall experience?* Findings expand the understanding of the relationship between film and tourist experiences by documenting instances of accidental film tourism wherein	Heideggerian phenomenology	Appropriation theory	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling (Researchers' networks)	13	Thompson's (1997) hermeneutically grounded framework for interpreting consumer stories

	film plays an impromptu, meaningful role in tourist experiences						
Hockert, Luthje, Ilola and Stewart (2018)	*How tourists photograph local people in tourist destinations?* Encountering 'the face of the other' is a disruptive experience that demands moral sensibility and calls for heightened respect and care towards the other	Heideggerian phenomenology		Writings	Recruiting participants through newspapers with guiding questions	25 written accounts	Following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method
Wassler and Kirillova (2019)	*How the local gaze is empirically lived by tourists?* Findings show that tourists experience local gaze as positivity, discrimination, alienation, and self-consciousness. Local gaze as a whole means connection ton tourist.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	Foucault's (1963/1973) concept of the medical gaze	Semi-structured interviews	Experience- based purposive sampling	30 experiences collected from interviews with 10 participants	Descriptive analysis by following the four steps of Giorgi (2009) and hermeneutic analysis by following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method

(Source: Adopted from Chen, 2021)

The existential phenomenological methodology was adopted to explore solo travellers' experiences and to highlight how solo travel can impact their self-representation. The first two research questions focused on the travel experiences of solo travellers, while the third question examined the critical moments that triggered meaningful changes in their self-representation. The final research question aimed to conceptualise the entire process. The adopted existential phenomenological approach facilitated the use of three distinct analyses:

- *Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis:* This method helped bracket the researcher's own experiences to avoid bias and accurately describe the authentic travel experiences of solo travellers, capturing the essence of the self-changes that occurred due to those experiences.
- *Hermeneutic Analysis:* This analysis provided an in-depth understanding of the meaning of travel, emphasising how extensive solo travel enriched their lives and led to changes in their self-representation.
- *Thematic Analysis:* This method was used to integrate liminality theory, conceptualising how and to what extent solo travellers experienced changes in their self-representation.

Overall, the existential phenomenological approaches used in this study allowed for a comprehensive combination of analyses, providing both depth and meaning to the existential experiences of solo travellers (Sumith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 2016). In summary, the interpretivist research paradigm aligns with the data analyses used in this study, which aim to capture and express the real experiences of solo travellers (Sumith et al., 2009; Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 2016).

3.4 Rigour of the Study

The evaluation methods employed in qualitative studies differ markedly from those used in positivistic or quantitative research. Quantitative studies are assessed based on external and internal validity, as well as reliability and objectivity. In contrast, qualitative research adopts different strategies to ensure the rigour of its findings. For example, methodologies articulated by Erlandson et al. (1993), Fade (2003), and Halldorsson & Aastrup (2003) are utilised to validate and explain the reliability of qualitative outcomes. Furthermore, a variety of approaches exist within qualitative research to establish the rigour of a study, as indicated by Healy and Perry (2000) and Tobin and Begley (2004).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise the importance of demonstrating credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to establish trustworthiness in research. Furthermore, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) contend that, in order to enhance the rigour of naturalistic inquiries, it is essential to incorporate 'integrity' in addition to these four dimensions. Accordingly, the present study has adopted all five dimensions, as they are consistent with the constructivist paradigm articulated by Wallendorf and Belk (1989), which serves as the foundational framework for this research.

Scholars recommend various techniques to establish the rigour of a study through five aspects. For instance, Creswell and Miller (2000) proposed nine strategies that aid in implementing the four criteria of rigour, as presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These strategies include researcher reflexivity, member checking, triangulation, collaboration, audits, prolonged engagements in the field, peer debriefing, and thick and rich descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Healy & Perry, 2000). In addition to the techniques previously mentioned, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) advocate for a variety of methods to ensure the rigour of a study, emphasising five essential aspects. Creswell and Miller (2000) identified nine strategies that effectively apply the four criteria of rigour established by Lincoln and Guba

(1985). These strategies encompass researcher reflexivity, member checking, triangulation, collaboration, audits, prolonged engagement in the field, peer debriefing, and the provision of detailed and nuanced descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Healy & Perry, 2000).

Furthermore, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) recommended additional techniques, such as prolonged engagement and the establishment of rapport and trust, to ensure integrity as a key aspect of rigour. To ensure the reliability and accuracy of this study, researchers synthesised the techniques proposed by Creswell and Miller (2000) and Wallendorf and Belk (1989). The forthcoming sections illustrate how rigour was established in the current research. These sections are organised to demonstrate the specific techniques employed to address the five primary dimensions of rigour. It is noteworthy that multiple techniques were utilised to establish each dimension of trustworthiness.

3.4.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to how believable the interpretation of data is (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). It can be established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation of sources and researchers. Prolonged engagement involves dedicating a significant amount of time throughout the research process and the time needed for a study can vary based on the researcher's experience and the study's goals.

In conducting persistent observation, the researcher dedicated sufficient time to field observations in finding participants for this study. Also, ensured transparency in data collection by providing detailed descriptions of the study setting. Participants were allowed sufficient time to comprehend the study, and data were collected at their convenience. The researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcripts and maintained ongoing communication with participants. Before finalising the themes, the researcher enlightened with participants that the transcripts

accurately represented their experiences and the meanings they shared. In this particular study, which involved three different data analysis methods including descriptive phenomenological, hermanutic and thematic analyses, the data collection techniques helped ensure credibility. Additionally, allowing participants to share their honest opinions and feelings during interviews further enhanced the credibility of the data.

3.4.2 Transferability

Ensuring trustworthiness in research is essential for validating that findings are transferable and applicable to various contexts. Although qualitative studies do not require generalisability, the insights derived from them can be relevant in comparable situations. A recommended approach to establish transferability in qualitative research is to collect data from multiple sites. This method has been advocated by several scholars, including Golafshani (2003), Shenton (2004), and Wallendorf and Belk (1989).

This study emphasises phenomenology by focusing on the individual experiences of participants instead of a collective group. As a result, the transferability of the findings is enhanced due to the rich, detailed information obtained from the journeys of solo travellers.

3.4.3 Dependability

Dependability is a concept closely aligned with the notion of ‘test-retest’ used within positivistic research paradigms. In the realm of qualitative research, dependability asserts that findings can be replicated if the study is repeated with similar participants in a comparable context. However, achieving this level of dependability poses significant challenges. To address these challenges, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) recommend the incorporation of longitudinal observations and the provision of explanations for any observed changes as techniques to establish dependability.

The researcher offered participants the opportunity to correct and clarify their responses, thereby enhancing the reliability of the research outcomes.

3.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is defined as the impartiality and precision of data interpretation, which significantly enhances the credibility of the findings' central themes in the present study (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Tobin & Begley, 2004; Yilmaz, 2013). This concept emphasises the necessity of deriving conclusions directly from the data and the conditions of inquiry rather than allowing the inquirer's interests, motivations and biases to distort the results (Tobin & Begley, 2004). While it is impossible to achieve complete objectivity in naturalistic inquiries, the establishment of confirmability in qualitative studies can be effectively achieved through the use of reflective journals, the triangulation of researchers, and the implementation of audits (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

The current study employed three different data analyses. Under each analysis, the transcripts were checked again and again until they reached clarity. Also, the supervisory research panel confirmed the entire data collection and analysis process. All these steps ensured confirmability.

3.4.5 Integrity

Integrity pertains to the degree to which a researcher's interpretations are influenced by misinformation, misrepresentations, or falsehoods presented by respondents (Morse & Richards, 2002; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Issues of integrity emerged during research if respondents felt uncomfortable divulging certain information. To mitigate these concerns, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) recommend four strategies: prolonged engagement coupled with the establishment of rapport and trust, triangulation, protection of respondents' identities, and

self-analysis and introspection by researchers. This study emphasised the importance of individual privacy and ethical considerations throughout the data collection process.

Therefore, the following figure 3.4 outlines the contents explained in this chapter. The research is framed within a constructivist philosophical perspective. The study employed a snowball sampling technique and used in-depth interviews to collect relevant data. The study incorporates both Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, as well as thematic analysis. Finally, the rigour of the study is maintained through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and integrity.

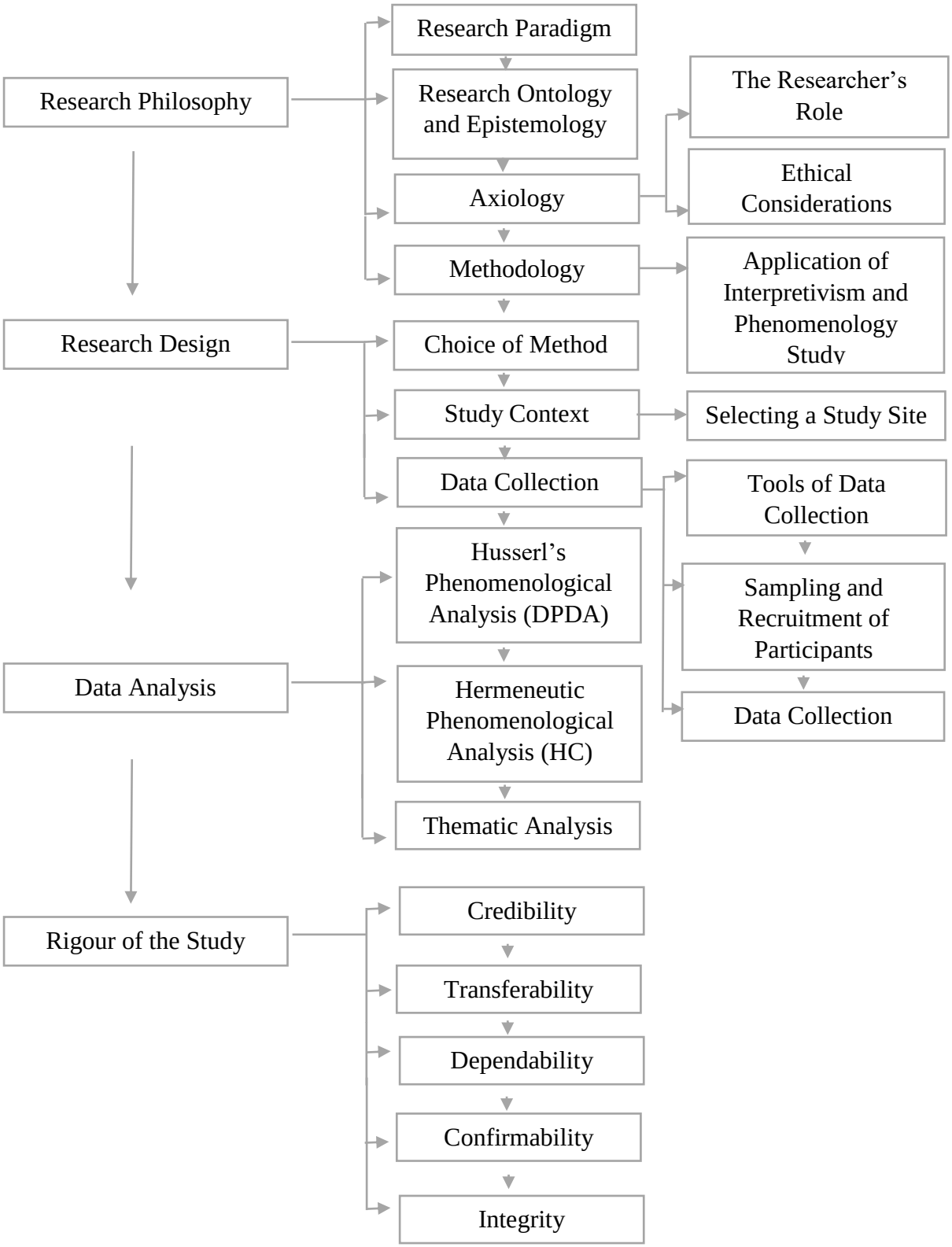


Figure 3.4 Summary of Chapter Three

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the current study and is divided into two main sections. The first section describes the profile of the solo travellers who participated in the study, including their socio-demographic information and travel behaviour. The second section highlights the findings, which are organised into four subsections corresponding to the four major research questions. Each subsection concludes with a summary of the findings related to that research question.

4.1 Introduction to the Solo Traveller Informants

Solo travel is garnering increasing attention among tourists who seek to explore destinations independently. The researcher has uncovered compelling insights into the motivations behind solo travellers' choice to embark on solitary journeys and their continued preference for this mode of travel despite the availability of alternative options.

This section provides an overview of the study's participants, and the findings are useful for supporting the main research questions. A cohort of forty (40) solo travellers was selected as the sample for this study. Table 4.1 illustrates the demographic profiles of the participants, encompassing gender and age, place of residence, nationality, educational background, and marital status.

Table 4.1 Profile of Solo Travellers

No.P	Gender	Age	Living in	Nationality	Educational Qulaification	Marital Status
1	Male	18-29 Years Old	Guangxi	Chinese	High School/ Colleges	Single
2	Male	18-29 Years Old	Guangzhou	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
3	Male	30-39 Years Old	Hang Zhou	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
4	Female	30-39 Years Old	Guangzhou	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
5	Female	40-49 Years Old	Beijing	Chinese	Doctorate Degree	Married
6	Male	18-29 Years Old	Hong Kong	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
7	Female	18-29 Years Old	Hangzhou	Chinese	Master's Degree	Married
8	Male	30-39 Years Old	Germany	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
9	Female	30-39 Years Old	Hong Kong	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
10	Male	40-49 Years Old	Hangzhou	Chinese	High School/ Colleges	Single
11	Female	30-39 Years Old	Hong Kong	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
12	Female	30-39 Years Old	Hong Kong	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
13	Female	18-29 Years Old	Hangzhou	Chinese	Undergraduate Degree	Single
14	Female	30-39 Years Old	Hangzhou	Chinese	Doctorate Degree	Married
15	Female	40-49 Years Old	Shanghai	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single
16	Female	40-49 Years Old	Hangzhou	Chinese	Master's Degree	Married
17	Female	40-49 Years Old	Hangzhou	Chinese	Doctorate Degree	Single
18	Female	40-49 Years Old	United States	Chinese	Doctorate Degree	Single
19	Male	50-59 Years Old	Shanghai	Chinese	Master's Degree	Divorced
20	Female	30-39 Years Old	Shenzhen	Chinese	Master's Degree	Single

21	Female	18-29 Years Old	Sri Lanka	Sri Lankan	Undergraduate Degree	Single
22	Male	30-39 Years Old	Germany	Sri Lankan	Post Doctorate	Single
23	Male	30-39 Years Old	Thailand	Thais	Master's Degree	Single
24	Female	40-49 Years Old	Thailand	Thais	Master's Degree	Married
25	Female	30-39 Years Old	Hong Kong	Indian	Master's Degree	Single
26	Female	18-29 Years Old	Hong Kong	Indian	Master's Degree	Single
27	Male	30-39 Years Old	Hong Kong	Indian	Master's Degree	Single
28	Male	30-39 Years Old	Sri Lanka	Sri Lankan	Master's Degree	Single
29	Male	18-29 Years Old	Australia	Sri Lankan	Undergraduate Degree	Single
30	Female	18-29 Years Old	United Kingdom	Pakistani	Master's Degree	Single
31	Female	30-39 Years Old	Hong Kong	Ghanian	Master's Degree	Single
32	Female	30-39 Years Old	Netherlands	Nederland's	Master's Degree	Single
33	Female	40-49 Years Old	Hong Kong	Pakistani	Master's Degree	Single
34	Male	18-29 Years Old	Germany	German	Master's Degree	Single
35	Female	18-29 Years Old	Italy	Italian	Master's Degree	Single
36	Female	18-29 Years Old	Russia	Russian	Undergraduate Degree	Single
37	Female	50-59 Years Old	United States	American	Undergraduate Degree	Divorced
38	Female	30-39 Years Old	Bangladesh	Sri Lankan	Master's Degree	Married
39	Male	50-59 Years Old	United Kingdom	British	Doctoral Degree	Single
40	Male	30-39 Years Old	Finland	Finnish	Master's Degree	Single

(Source: Interviewed Data)

According to Table 4.1, out of 40 participants, females comprised the majority, 62% (n=25) of participants, while males made up only 38% (n=15). All the participants came from diverse family backgrounds and were found to be highly educated. They were all literate, with the majority, 68% (n=27) holding a Master's degree. The second highest report among doctorate holders and undergraduate degree holders was 13% (n=5); 5% (n=2) of the participants had a high school qualification, and 3% (n=1) had a post-doctoral qualification.

Most participants were between 30 and 39, accounting for 43% (n=17). This was followed by the 18-29 age group, making up 30% (n=12) and 20% (n=8) from the 40-49 age group, with the remaining 8% (n=3) in the 50 and above age group. Regarding marital status, 80% (n=32) identified as single, 15% (n=6) as married, and 5% (n=2) as divorced.

During the survey, solo travellers from various countries were identified. The majority of solo travellers were Chinese, accounting for 53% (n=20). The next largest groups were from Sri Lanka, accounting for 13% (n=5), India, accounting for 8% (n=3), and Thailand, accounting for 5% (n=2) respectively. The remaining nationalities collectively represented only 3% (n=1), including Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Ghanaian, Dutch, German, Italian, Russian, British, Finnish and American.

Simultaneously, Table 4.2 explains the solo travelling behaviour of the selected participants in this study. It includes details about who planned their solo trips, when they took their first solo trip, the number of trips they have taken, the list of countries they have visited, whether they have travelled between 2020 and 2023, the longest duration of their solo travels, and the types of accommodation they chose when travelling alone.

This summarises the travel behaviour of the 40 identified solo travellers. The highlights from table 4.2 are mentioned below.

Table 4.2 Travel Behaviour of Solo Travellers

P	Trip Planner	The Countries/Destinations you have travelled alone	Travelled in between 20-23	Max Stay	No of Times	Age at 1st solo Travel	Types of Accommodation
1	Myself	Within China (Yunnan Dali, Lijiang, Shangri-La, Qinzhou)	Within China (Qinzhou)	10 Days	4-6 Times	15 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms/Hostels
2	Myself	United Kingdom, Germany, France, Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Czech Republic, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, India, Turkey, South Korea, United Arab Emirates	Within China	1 Month	10 Times and Above	18Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
3	Myself	Canada, Japan, Hong Kong and China (Beijing)	No experience during this period	20 Days	4-6 Times	26 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
4	Myself	Taiwan, China (Guangdong, Jilin)	Guangdong, Jilin	1 Week	1-3 Times	22 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms/Hostels
5	Myself	Bangkok, Singapore, Malaysia, China (Nanjing)	Singapore, Within China	5 Days	4-6 Times	34 Years Old	Only Hotels
6	Myself	Australia, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States of America, Singapore	Within Hong Kong	3 Months	4-6 Times	23 Years Old	Hotel, Hostels, Service Accommodations
7	Myself	Chiang Rai，Thailand	Within China	2 Days	1-3 Times	23 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms/Hostels

8	Myself	Netherlands, Indonesia, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain, Norway, Iceland, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, China	Within Germany, Australia	4 Weeks	10 Times and Above	22 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
9	Myself	France, UK, Within China, Luxembourg, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Australia, Japan	Within China, Australia, Germany, UK, Japan	1 Week	10 Times and Above	21 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
10	Myself	Within China (Chengdu, Xi An), Doha, Thailand	Within China	2 Weeks	4-6 Times	28 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hotels
11	Myself	Mexico, Chicago, Japan, United Kingdom, France	Within Hong Kong	1 Week	4-6 Times	23 Years Old	Only Hotels
12	Myself	New York, California, France, Japan, Hong Kong and within China (Chengdu)	Within China, Hong Kong	5 Days	7-9 Times	19 Years Old	Budged Rooms, Hotels
13	Myself	Only within China (Hangzhou)	Within China	3 Days	1-3 Times	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms
14	Myself	Within China (Hangzhou), Australia, Sweden, France and Thailand	Within China	5 Days	4-6 Times	23 Years Old	Budgeted Hostel and Shared Rooms (only with Female)
15	Myself	Within China, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, Russia, Hong Kong	Within China and Hong Kong	2 Weeks	10 Times and Above	24 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms and Hotels
16	Myself	Within China (Shanghai), France, Australia, and Canada	Within China	1 Week	4-6 Times	22 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms and Hotels

17	Myself	Withing China (Xi An, Chengdu, Kaifeng), United States of America, Italy, France and Indonesia	No experience during this period	1 Week	7-9 Times	28 Years Old	Only Hotels
18	Myself	Within China, United States of America, Switzerland, Sweden, France, Italy, Iceland, Germany and Denmark	Within United States of America	1 Month	10 Times and Above	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, and Hotels
19	Myself	Within China, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, South Korea, Denmark, and Thailand	Within China	2 Weeks	7-9 Times	27 Years Old	Budged Rooms and Hotels
20	Myself	Within China (Hangzhou), United States of America, Malaysia	Within China	1 Week	4-6 Times	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms and Hotels
21	Myself	Within Sri Lanka (Ella, Kandy, Jaffna)	Within Sri Lanka	3 Days	1-3 Times	24 Years Old	Relative House
22	Myself	Singapore, India, Malaysia, Germany, France, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Chicago, and United Kingdom	Within Germany, United Kingdom, Sri Lanka	10 Days	10 Times and Above	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels
23	Myself	Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, France, Hong Kong	Hong Kong, Malaysia and within Thailand	1 Month	7-9 Times	30 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels
24	Myself	France, Thailand, Hong Kong	Hong Kong	5 Days	4-6 Times	30 Years Old	Only Hotels
25	Myself	Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain, Norway, Iceland, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Within India, United Kingdom, Italy, Hong Kong, Rome, Maldives	Hong Kong, United Kingdom	10 Days	10 Times and Above	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations

26	Myself	Maldives, Germany, Hong Kong	Hong Kong, Germany	1 Week	1-3 Times	26 Years Old	Airbnb, Hotels
27	Myself	Hong Kong, France, United Kingdom, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and within India	Hong Kong	15 Days	7-9 Times	17 Years Old	Budged Rooms, Hotels
28	Myself	Within Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Thailand, Azerbaijan, China, Tanzania	Within Sri Lanka	10 Days	10 Times and Above	24 Years Old	Budged Rooms, Hotels
29	Myself	Australia, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States of America, Singapore, Malaysia, and within Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka, and within Australia	1 Week	7-9 Times	17 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
30	Myself	United Kingdom, Within Pakistan, Hong Kong	United Kingdom, Hong Kong	1 Week	4-6 Times	23 Years Old	Budged Rooms
31	Myself	Chicago, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Within Ghana	Chicago, Hong Kong	2 Weeks	4-6 Times	17 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels
32	Myself	Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain, Norway, Iceland, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, New-Zealand, Within Netherlands, Hong Kong	Hong Kong,Australia, New-Zealand and within Netherlands	3 Weeks	10 Times and Above	21 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms Hotels, Hostels
33	Myself	United Kingdom, Within Pakistan, Hong Kong	Hong Kong	2 Weeks	4-6 Times	24 Years Old	Airbnb, Hotels
34	Myself	Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany	Hong Kong and within Germany	3 Weeks	10 Times and Above	22 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
35	Myself	Canada, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Italy	Sri Lanka, Maldives and within Italy	2 Weeks	7-9 Times	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hotels

36	Myself	Russia, India, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan	South Korea, Hong Kong, China	2 Weeks	10 Times and Above	16 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, Service Accommodations
37	Myself	Most of the North parts of the America, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, China	Australia and China	1 Week	4-6 Times	31 Years Old	Only Hotels
3 8	Myself	Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Maldives, Iran, Italy, United Kingdom, Mexico, Bangladesh, France, and within Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka, Bangladesh	3 Weeks	10 Times and Above	24 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, and Hotels
39	Myself	Canada, Thailand, France, Germany Switzerland, Australia, New-Zealand, Poland, Denmark, Mexico, Norway and Italy	Within Thailand	2 Weeks	10 Time and Above	15 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, and Hotels
40	Myself	Germany, Thailand, France, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, and Within Finland	Within Thailand	1 Week	7-9 Times	19 Years Old	Budgeted Rooms, Hostels, and Hotels

(Source: Interviewed Data)

According to Table 4.2, the current participants have been divided into four groups based on the total number of solo travels they have taken: 1-3 times, 4-6 times, 7-9 times, and 10 times and above. According to the analysis, 13% (n=5) reported travelling solo 1-3 times, 35% (n=14) travelled solo 4-6 times, 20% (n=8) travelled solo 7-9 times, and finally, 33% (n=13) of them had travelled solo 10 times or more. Therefore, the study found that the majority of solo travellers have travelled more than three times alone and more than 10 times.

In the current study, it was observed that participants initiated their first solo travel experiences at varying ages. The majority commenced their solo travels during their early 20s, while others commenced in their 30s or 40s after attaining career objectives and social standing. The youngest reported age for embarking on solo travel was 15, while the eldest was 34.

All 40 solo travellers planned their itineraries based on their preferences, convenience, availability, safety, and budget. During the interviews, participants were asked which stage of travel - planning, during and post-travel - they found more challenging. Their responses varied based on their experience, age, and uncertainty about events at the destination.

The current study has classified accommodation facilities into four distinct categories: hostels, budgeted rooms (including Airbnb, guest houses, and cottages), hotels (at reasonable room rates), and similar service accommodations. Initially, young solo travellers embarking on solo travels tended to favour hostels, budgeted rooms, and service accommodations. As they attained financial independence, many transitioned to independent rooms within hotels or continued to opt for independent budgeted rooms. Age and a preference for privacy, safety and hygiene were associated with a tendency to stay alone and consistently favour independent rooms. However, financially secure individuals keen on social interaction and varied experiences, while mindful of accommodation costs, continued to select hostels, budgeted rooms, and service accommodations.

Based on the information provided, 40 travellers stayed for different periods. The shortest stay was 2 days, and the longest was 3 months. The duration of the stay was determined by each individual's preference and available time.

The study revealed that 40 solo travellers visited 48 different countries, including, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Netherlands, New-Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States of America.

The most frequently visited countries by the selected participants were China *(55%, n=21)*, France *(50%, n=19)*, Hong Kong *(45%, n=17)*, the United States of America and the United Kingdom *(34%, n=13 each)*, Thailand *(32%, n=12)*, Switzerland *(29%, n=11)*, and Germany and Denmark *(26%, n=10 each)*. After the previously mentioned countries, the following countries were also popular among the selected participants: Italy *(24%, n=9)*, Australia *(24%, n=8)*, Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden *(18%, n=7)*, Austria, Belgium, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Norway *(16%, n=6)*, and a group of South Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, India and Maldives *(13%, n=5)*.

Additionally, the number of visits that were recorded from the following countries was less than four: Canada, Indonesia, Iceland, Luxembourg and Czech Republic *(11%, n=4)*; South Korea, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Poland *(8%, n=3)*; Turkey, Russia, and Pakistan *(5%, n=2)*; and finally, United Arab Emirates, Finland, Qatar, Myanmar, Tanzania, Ghana, New Zealand, Ireland, Iran, Azerbaijan, Taiwan and Bangladesh *(3%, n=1) (For easier review, the researcher has only listed the countries instead of individual locations).*

4.2 Research Question One: How Do Solo Travellers Define Themselves?

The existing literature on solo tourism has laid the groundwork for understanding why solo travellers choose this type of travel. It has also been stated that solo tourism brings about changes in an individual's self. These changes are reflected in how the individual presents themselves. The concept of self-representation emphasises an individual's perception of themselves (Milrod, 2002, p. 8). However, there is still a need for clear evidence on whether solo travellers believe that their choice of travel will bring about changes in themselves. If so, how do they perceive themselves as solo travellers? Self-representation is synonymous with one's beliefs, and these beliefs are reflected in the way an individual presents themselves. Therefore, the researcher aims to demonstrate that a solo traveller's self-realisation serves as a tool to explain that they have gained something from their travel experiences, and based on their personal definition of themselves, it will undoubtedly highlight how travelling alone has brought about changes in themself. Their self-identification will contribute to achieving the remaining research objectives of the study. Furthermore, an individual's self-realisation is considered a part of self-transformation, and it is also listed as one of the motivations for solo travellers choosing to travel alone.

Figure 4.1 explains the steps of the analysis followed by the researcher to conclude the findings. The same analysis technique was used for research question two. Therefore, the following figure combines the first and second questions and further elaborates on the researcher's role in analysing both questions. Additionally, before analysing all the collected information, the researcher explained the validity and reliability of the information based on the qualitative research method approach.

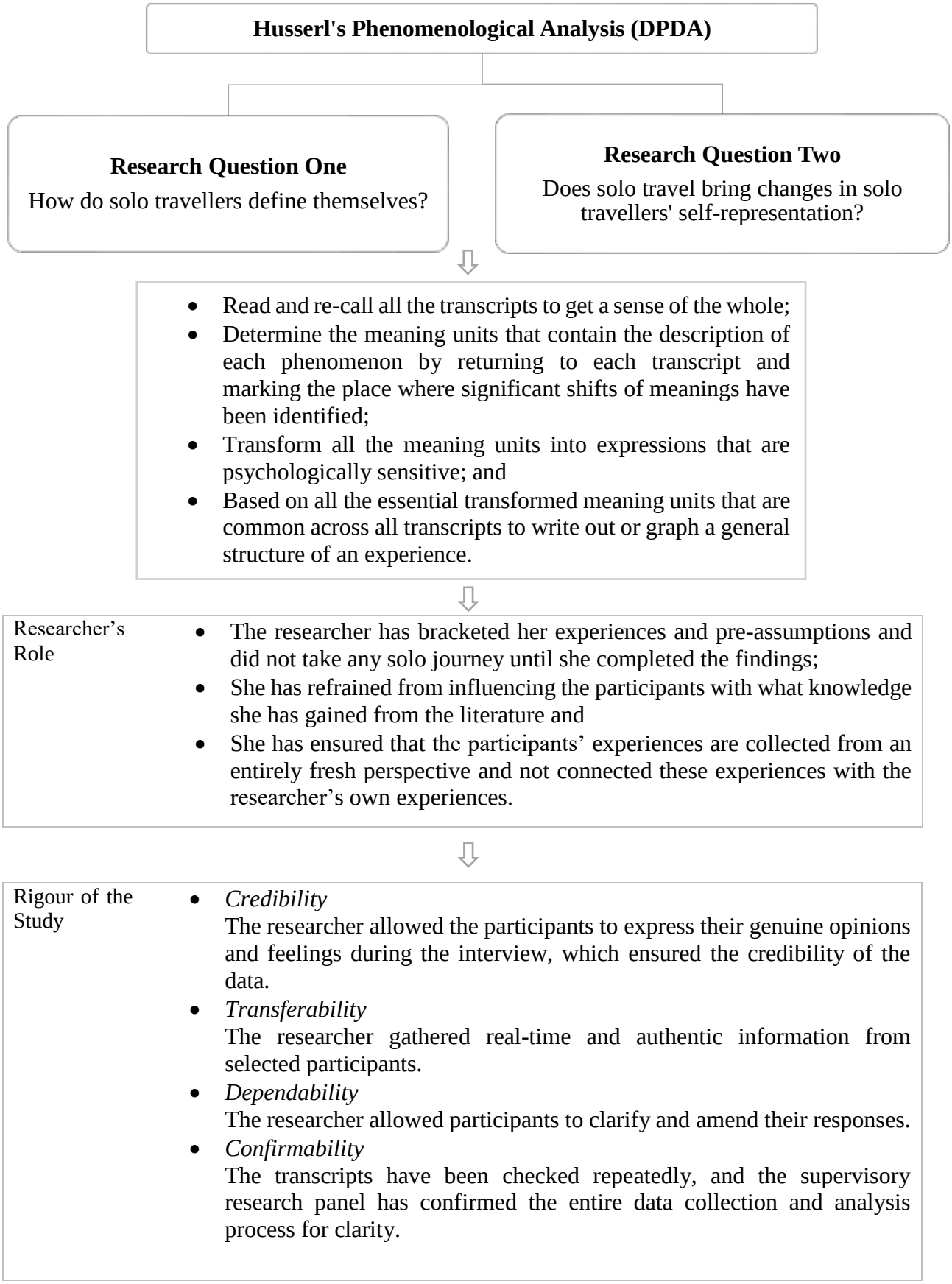


Figure 4.1 Procedure of Husserl's Phenomenological Analysis (DPDA) for both Research Question One and Two

(Source: DPDA (Giorgi, 2009); Author's compilation)

4.2.1 How Do Solo Travellers Define Themselves – Based on Husserl's Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data

The researcher aims to capture the participants' solo travel experiences through their understanding of solo travel as the current study is phenomenological in nature. In accordance with the collected information from the participants of this study, were defined themselves based on their experience. Meanwhile, the learnings from their travel, challenges they come across during their travel and lastly the benefits they gained from their solo travels. By using this analysis, the researcher of the study has found the common ideas among the participants, including a choice of independence, changes in self, finding new people and new learning, loneliness, lifelong experience, self-discovery, self-development, self-empowerment and personal wellbeing. The following sections explain solo tourism from a solo travellers' perspective.

a. Solo travellers can enjoy the independence they desire *(A Choice of Independence)*

The participants of the current study defined solo travel as independent travel, which is a well-established benefit of solo tourism according to existing literature (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). This choice of independence allows solo travellers to plan their travel as they wish, giving them more freedom during their travels. Independence in solo travel also means *convenient*, *flexible*, *personalised travel* and *travel without the fear of being judged*. While convenience, freedom and flexibility are the most commonly cited benefits of solo travel, the personalised nature of the experience and the freedom from judgement give it a more profound significance for solo travellers.

- **A Convenient Travel**

Regardless of other types of travel, solo travel has become increasingly popular due to its convenience (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). Unlike other types of travel, the same person usually plans and executes the solo travel. However, individuals with different levels of experience (*measured by the number of solo trips they have taken*) may define solo travel differently based on their own experiences. Though the concept remains the same, the perception of solo travel varies among participants.

"Travelling alone is incredibly convenient, as it allows you to have more free time and enables you to see your dream destinations more quickly"

(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

"Solo travel is an opportunity to explore the beauty of life… it's a chance to unwind and explore independently"

(P5, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

"Life changes as we age, so if you're looking to spend some time on yourself before settling down into marital life, solo travel is a great option"

(P6, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

"Solo travel lets you be in the way you dreamt"

(P7, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"Solo travel is more convenient than travelling with others"

(P10, Male, Aged 40-49 years old)

"Solo travel is a unique experience that allows you to discover how you like entertaining yourself"

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

"It is a wholly independent and free-spirited travel experience where you can make choices"

(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Based on the summarised form, solo travellers generally agree that solo travel is a convenient option. This observation applies to solo travellers of all ages and those who have travelled alone multiple times. Additionally, another aspect that has been identified is similar to convenient travel but in a more extended form called flexibility.

- **Flexibility in Travel**

Solo travel offers a great degree of flexibility to its travellers. This means that they are free to plan their trip based on their preferences, as they have complete control over their itinerary. Flexibility is a major advantage that adds value and enriches the demand for solo travel. All of the participants emphasised the same idea, but in their own unique way. For instance, participants recalled that:

"…when travelling solo, you are free to plan your itinerary…"

(P39, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

"…it's a chance to unwind and explore independently"

(P31, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

"Solo travel lets you be in the way you want"

(P7, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"…it allows you to have your own schedule"

(P10, Male, Aged 40-49 years old)

"…allows you to discover how you like spending time" and where you can make choices"

(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Solo travel offers the benefit of flexibility, which has been widely acknowledged in previous studies (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). This means that solo travellers can plan and schedule their trips based on their own convenience. However, the current study explains how they perceive it as a flexible way of travel in the following manner. During the data collection, most participants pointed out this feature. For example, if someone wants to spend more time in a particular place, such as a museum or art exhibition, wait for a specific time to capture a photo, or engage in certain activities, solo travel provides them with the freedom and control to do so. The travel itinerary is entirely up to the individual, and no one can disrupt their plans unless they allow strangers to join their itinerary or choose to travel with others.

- **Freedom in Travel**

Freedom is an important aspect of solo tourism and is often seen as a unique feature (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). Solo travellers have more freedom to choose what they want to do at their destination than other travellers and can be independent throughout their travel (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). The participants of this study recalled that:

"…as per your preference and execute it with ease"

(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

"…. you don't have to compromise your interests for anyone else's"

(P40, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

"Travelling alone offers a sense of freedom and I can do things without depending on anyone else."

(P21, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"You don't have to be with anyone else at any particular moment; you can enjoy the freedom to move at your own pace"

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

During the data collection, the participants commonly shared their discomfort with travelling in groups with family members or friends. They preferred travelling alone as it allowed them to have zero compromise (Smith et al., 2017). Although travelling with others can be fun and guarantee maximum enjoyment but at the same time, it is often perceived as frustrating and stressful. This is because it is difficult to execute the plan as planned due to the different personalities and preferences of the people involved (Wheatley & Bickerton, 2016).

- **Personalised Gift**

The notion of a personalised gift in the context of solo travel shares similarities with the concepts of convenience, flexibility, and freedom. Personalised travel encompasses all three elements of solo tourism and allows solo travellers to plan their trip from start to finish. This includes choosing a destination, selecting accommodation, deciding on transportation, determining the duration of the trip, and carefully selecting activities to do at the destination. The solo traveller also has control over how they will do these activities, how they will spend their free time, and with whom they will enjoy the experience. This approach provides a comprehensive coverage of an individual's expectations for solo travel and enables them to fully execute their trip as they desire. It is important to note that this option is not always available in other types of travel. The ability to personalise travel means that the solo traveller can tailor their journey to their exact preferences. To strengthen the discussion on solo travel as a personalised gift, Participant 5 stated:

"Solo travel is a personalised gift that one can give to oneself. You don't have to compromise your interests for anyone else's; it's a chance to unwind and explore independently. It's a relaxing experience that makes you feel like you are the centre of the world. Solo travel is an opportunity to explore the beauty of life and bring positive energy into your life. There is no one to judge you, and you can feel the freedom to create your world, away from your busy and routine life."

(P5, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

Solo travel provides numerous benefits, including convenience, flexibility, and freedom. Besides, solo travel is considered a personalised gift for those seeking solitude. It offers a comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness of solo travel and its potential to enhance one's personal growth and development.

- **No one there to Judge**

Based on research findings, when travelling alone, individuals tend to be more concerned with society. It's pertinent to note that there are societies with both positive and negative traits. In certain negative societies, individuals are more likely to conceal their true identity to fit in, which can lead to anxiety as social situations tend to involve judgement (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). This is closely intertwined with the concept of self-representation and may affect social behaviour, self-concept, and information processing (Schroeder, 1995). The Participant 38 recalled that,

"There *is no one to judge you*, and you can feel the *freedom to create your world, away from your busy and routine life*."

(*P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old*)

During the interviews, a female solo traveller raised the concept of "public self-consciousness," which refers to an individual's concern about their presentation in front of others. Specifically, if someone enjoys travelling solo but faces bullying, cursing, or judgement from their society, they may feel compelled to seek a more accepting community. Participant 5 shared a personal anecdote highlighting the impact of such societal pressures. Reflecting on their experience, she felt more confident defining solo travel that no one is there to judge. When an individual travels alone, there is a lack of oversight or guidance from others to regulate their conduct.

Similarly, at the same time, at the peak of the emotion, participant 39 shared that he was proud to identify as a solo traveller. He explained this in detail.

> *"Solo travel is an opportunity to find your own path to happiness and become a more versatile, open-minded person. The experience of travelling allows you to explore in your own way and live life on your own terms. The way you perceive the world would be different, revealing the true beauty of the world. You don't need to hide your desires, and you can get things the way you want. Instead of being part of a rigid community where people always want you to be their member, you can fly to a place, unwind your wings without any limitations. As a solo traveller, I think I found a way to be away from those people and I found my happiness on my own terms."*
>
> (*P39, Male, Aged 50-59 years old*)

Solo travellers define themselves as independent travellers. They value the convenience, flexibility, freedom, and personalised experience that solo travel offers. Additionally, they appreciate the opportunity to escape toxic environments and create the life

they desire. Solo travellers not only embrace liberty in their travel and itinerary but also in their behaviour.

b. Solo travellers can explore their true selves through their travel experiences (Self-Discovery)

In a scholarly study conducted by Yang (2020) on solo travel and its challenges, self-discovery was identified as a significant benefit. According to Yang, self-discovery is one of the factors that inspires individuals to travel solo. However, the concept of self-discovery needs further clarification regarding how individuals relate to their experiences, are aware of themselves, and establish self-identity and their self-exploration. The researcher of the current study focused on how solo travel offers individuals the time and space to understand themselves better. The incidents that they handle alone during their travels could cause a shift in their initial self-identity, which would reflect in their self-representation. All the changes demonstrate a self-transformation process, where identity construction and a new emerging self are interconnected.

- **Self-Awareness**

Self-discovery can lead to the emergence of a new self, where individuals can uncover their hidden skills and develop a better understanding of themselves. Solo travel has been identified as a means to achieve this, as it creates a liminal phase or transition, where the individual's new identity, based on their experiences and critical situations gained during travel, emerges. This period of time, between the start and end of the trip, provides a space for self-reflection and introspection, enabling participants to focus on themselves and emerge as a new self. How much does an individual know about themselves? By exploring the extent of

self-awareness in individuals, the following participants articulated their experiences in the subsequent manners:

"Being a solo traveller and travelling solo provided an opportunity for me to know who I am, and it allowed me to identify my unique talents, such as photography."

(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

"…leading you to discover more about yourself and the world around you"

(P21, Female, Aged 18-29 years old; P28, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

"I love exploring and learning from my experiences. At first, I did it just for fun and out of curiosity, but later, after travelling, I felt like I was adding different flavours to my life, such as self-reflection, how I treat others, spending habits, and more. It's like I've become more mature than my age. Real joy comes from discovering your talents and figuring out who you are in tough situations during travels."

(P35, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

The participants, namely P1, P15, P21, P28, P35, and P36, shared their experiences of discovering themselves through solo travel. During their solo journeys, they were able to identify their hidden skills and gain a better understanding of themselves. It is worth noting that these participants had substantial prior experience in travelling alone and the emotions they expressed explained that they were true stakeholders of solo travel. The study revealed that solo travel brings significant positive changes in one's personal growth. As individuals seek to gain benefits from this form of travel, it is evident that it has a profound impact on their self-discovery.

- **Self-Identity**

As per the findings of the study, the participants reported that their travels had provided the backbone for self-discovery, helping them explore their self-identity (*who am I?*) and develop their self-concept (*what kind of a person am I?*) (Bailey, 2003; Dittmar, 2011). For instance, participants 3, 11, 18, 19, 22, 27 and 32 cited that their travels were instrumental in aiding their self-discovery.

> *"A solo travel can help you discover a new version of yourself that you never knew existed"*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

> "*I am capable of driving myself* towards *my dreams*. Unlike other travellers, solo travel allows us to go through the entire process alone, which gives us the *courage to discover our strengths and weaknesses*."
>
> *(P19, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)*

> *"I would define a solo traveller as someone who has chosen to travel alone….as for self-discovery, you can push beyond your boundaries, try many new adventures, and realise that you are capable of much more than you thought."*
>
> *(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

It is commonly acknowledged that the liminal period brings about significant changes in an individual's self. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for personal transformation and the emergence of a new identity by assimilating the most significant learnings acquired during that specific period (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012) in the context of solo travel, it is evident that further insights are required to construct a persuasive argument from the tourists' perspective.

The results obtained from our study reveal that an individual who has undertaken more than four instances of solitary travel has had a profound experience, witnessing a new version of themselves.

- **Self-Exploration**

Through self-discovery and self-exploration, solo travellers have often reported experiencing a common feeling that helps them define themselves. If self-awareness is the capacity for introspection (Fleming, 2021), then the process of comprehending one's inner self emerges as an authentic intuition stemming from personal travel experiences catalogued as self-exploration. This can be regarded as an elevated manifestation of self-awareness (Fleming, 2021), directing individuals to attain a more profound comprehension of themselves and make decisions aligned with their requirements and aspirations based on their accumulated experiences. For instance, a 25-year-old participant delineated how his solo travel experiences facilitated a more profound self-understanding.

> *"It's about giving yourself quality time to understand yourself rather than simply enjoying the time, like when travelling solo. We may not enjoy it as much as when we travel with a group, but solo travel provides a lot of time to introspect. If you're considering solo travel, you must first understand yourself to some extent. I believe I can control myself and act beyond my limits."*
>
> *(P25, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

An ultimate understanding of themselves, in terms of their thoughts, behaviour, beliefs, feelings, emotions and values, to understand themselves better. The study found the peak of emotion in the definitions of solo travellers who travelled more than seven times. Therefore, it

reveals that solo travel provides enough time for each individual to understand themselves better.

c. Solo travellers can discover changes within themselves *(Changes in a Self)*

As per prior research, the decision to engage in solo tourism often stems from a pursuit of self-improvement. However, it remains uncertain whether solo travellers genuinely undergo this transformation during their journeys. This aspect has been underscored in the problem statement, with a specific focus on the self-presentation of solo travellers.

The present study's findings reveal that individuals who have undertaken four or more solo trips have indeed experienced notable self-evolution, leading to personal development. Participants P2, P4, P9, P12, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P25, P28, P32, P36, P38, P39, and 40 have affirmed observing internal changes. Solo travellers recognised their self-evolution by noting an elevation in their maturity levels, identifying shifts in their actual characters, their actions towards their objectives, and ultimately, an augmented self-trust ensuing from their solo travels.

- **Increased Level of Maturity**

There are valid reasons and benefits that solo travellers experience when they choose to travel alone, despite having the option to travel with others. One of the least recognised outcomes is an increase in maturity, which has not been widely studied. However, in the current study, most solo travellers strongly believe that their level of maturity has improved as a result of their solo travels.

It has been noted that there is a relationship between maturity level and the number of travel experiences. Excluding one participant, all others who claimed maturity in their self-definition have travelled more than seven times. Additionally, the depth of the situations

encountered by solo travellers during their trips could have a significant impact on increasing their level of maturity. Participant P2 recalled that,

> *"Travelling alone can be a self-transformative experience, while you can bring many changes into yourself, where your maturity talks about your solo travel experience."*
>
> *(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Aside from the general sense of increased maturity, solo travellers encounter situations during their journeys that force them to confront the challenges of travelling alone. This provides valuable lessons in self-control and navigation through tough situations, ultimately leading to greater self-assurance and heightened self-confidence. These experiences contribute to personal growth and help individuals handle situations more effectively in their everyday lives and future travels.

> *"It is a wholly independent and free-spirited travel experience where you can make choices. Although you may feel lonely or bored at times, by the end of the trip, you will be pleasantly surprised by how much you have learnt about yourself. This type of travel allows you to have the time and space to reflect on your thoughts and gives you the opportunity to handle everything on your own. Though this travel is not easy and risky, I want to put a comma instead of a full stop to your solo travel. I have become aware of the changes taking place within me."*
>
> *(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

At the same time, individuals mature when they step out of their comfort zones and into unfamiliar destinations. They meet different people and encounter expected and unexpected situations. To illustrate this, participant 15, explained that,

> *"Being free from disturbance and compromise allows you to be your true self and take control of your life. Travelling can help you discover new aspects of yourself, and in any situation, you can become a more mature person."*
>
> *(P15, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

Therefore, travelling alone has been linked to the development of maturity, particularly observed in individuals who have travelled solo more than seven times.

- **Changes in the Character**

The scholar team of Hamid et al. (2021) has identified happiness, empowerment, and escapism from stress, self-realisation, and self-growth as positive changes resulting from solo travel. They explained how participants described changes in their character in their self-definitions. For example, participant 4 defined herself as,

> *"Solo travel has the potential to alleviate stress, heal emotional pain, and bring a sense of peace to your life. It also provides opportunities for personal growth and self-reflection, allowing you to make positive changes to your character."*
>
> *(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

A solo traveller has the power of holding the license to control their life with the support of the experience they gained through travelling. Even though technology has developed and

can connect people wherever they go when travelling alone or in person at the destination, an individual who chooses this type of travel is left alone. The final decision about what to do and how to do it all depends on the individual's choice. So, being alone is not an easy task all the time. If an individual fears facing the world, has reluctances to approach new people or move out of their comfort zone, is introverted, shy, reserved, or has less experience, including all other factors, whatever the solo traveller expects to achieve from their travel will bring a change in their character. Based on the participants of this study, in general, the opinion the people had on their itinerary was that before travelling alone, mostly all of them had a pre-travel plan, including the list of places to visit, special notes on transportation, directions to the places, and the day and time for each visit, and some of them included their budget and expected expenses.

However, at the end of the trip, if someone is asked whether they followed the itinerary as planned, the typical answer would be no. Travellers may visit all the planned places, but not necessarily at the exact times or with the exact details originally outlined in the pre-travel plan. Solo travel is known for its flexibility and convenience, and those who choose to travel alone generally have a rough idea of the places they want to visit. However, the actual execution of the plan depends on each individual's preferences and the circumstances they encounter during solo travel.

The self-learning from the travel experience, from the study's participants' perspective, demonstrated that solo travel leads to changes in an individual's behaviour. To support the current discussion, participant 32 said that:

> *"I've become more passionate because I can proudly say I have taken many adventurous trips alone. Live your moment, and you will find a way to make yourself happy. Think boldly, be open-minded and self-confident, and have less fear when expressing your opinion and standing firm by saying no if you can't do it."*
>
> *(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

- **Goal Oriented**

Under the self-changes, besides the positive changes identified of being brave enough to control themselves and manage all the challenges alone, solo travellers turned out to be goal-oriented people who learnt to build the talent of making the right decision and sailing the lifeboat on the right direction would be possible for the solo travellers due to their unique and remarkable travel experiences. One of the participants, 17, revealed her personal experience of how her solo travel experiences supported her in reaching her life goal.

> *"Although being alone can at times be both boring and dangerous, it can also be empowering in helping you to achieve your goals and dreams."*
>
> *(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

When a solo traveller lives on their own terms, it can inspire friends, family, and others in their social circle to create a positive impression. Some solo travellers even become social media influencers by sharing their travel experiences, gaining attention from familiar and unfamiliar groups. Additionally, participant 38 added that.

> *"I find myself in a position where my friends and family seek my ideas and suggestions when it comes to travel. Even my younger cousins in the family look up to me and express their desire to be like me, which is always encouraging and boosts my confidence."*
>
> *(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In line with participant 38, she became more self-assured and confident when she realised the truth about herself and started receiving compliments from others in her close

circle. The encouragement and her own self-realisation prompted her to engage in more solo travel and she further said that, *"whenever she feels bad or down, I used to go on solo travel to bring a positive distraction into my behaviour. Also, I used to do self-communication and strengthen myself if I could handle all since, I am handling the uncertainties at unfamiliar destinations and surviving among new people. Why can't I be scared of facing new problems?"* Therefore, by embarking on solo travel, individuals willingly choose this experience to create positive changes within themselves.

- **Self-Trust**

One's self-trust refers to their confidence in their own abilities (Kassar, 2021). This is an advanced form of maturity, reflecting a strong intrinsic belief in one's capabilities. From the perspective of solo travellers, the experiences gained from solo journeys allow individuals to encounter the realities of life and perceive the world with a more mature outlook.

Explaining in-detail, participant 16's statement was included to help understand the discussion on how solo travellers can build self-confidence. It can be beneficial and provide positive energy, as long as it does not lead to overconfidence or ego. The participants of the current study have shared their views on self-trust in the following ways within their self-definitions:

> "*By embarking on a journey, individuals can take time to reflect on their goals and intentions, as well as develop new skills and perspectives. It lets you trust your real feelings (love the way you live)."*
>
> *(P16, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*
>
> *"Solo travelling has made me a more mature person and given me the courage to face any challenges that come my way."*
>
> *(P18, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

"I've found that travelling has helped me grow, allowing me to become more understanding and empathetic as I experience different cultures and diverse perspectives. I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but I truly believe that my travels have helped me become more self-aware and emotionally stable and have given me insight into both my strengths and weaknesses."

(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

After considering the statements of participants, it is apparent that solo travel experiences enable individuals to believe in themselves while discovering their strengths and weaknesses. Embracing uncertain situations also allows for learning new things, meeting new people, and gaining knowledge about the world. When faced with challenges alone, individuals have the opportunity to stand on their own feet, gaining the power to shape their lives according to their liking, achieve their dreams, and pursue their passions.

d. Solo travellers can empower themselves *(Self-Empowerment)*

Solo travel allows its customers, known as solo travellers, to empower themselves and fulfil their desires on their own terms. It enables individuals to be self-reliant starting from pre-travel planning (*booking flights, arranging accommodations, and planning itineraries*), during the trip (*deciding which places to visit, how long to stay, waking up time, food choices, whether to join strangers for sightseeing or just for nightlife, what to buy, and handling unexpected situations*), and after the trip (*adjusting from vacation mode to work mode, reflecting on what they've learnt, and deciding what to avoid*). Each traveller can make their own decisions, take care of themselves, discover their own interests, and develop the resilience to face challenges, step out of their comfort zone, and build self-confidence.

In the existing solo travel literature, from women's solo travellers' perspective, women empower themselves to reach self-growth and make decisions in their lives. As a result, they strongly believe that their solo travels give meaning to their life and motivate them to do solo travel to experience life-changing moments (Hamid et al., 2021; Seow & Brown, 2017; Wilson & Harris, 2006). However, to have an in-depth meaning carrying from the word of empowerment from the solo travellers' experiences, irrespective of gender differentiation, illustrates the magic of travelling alone in terms of self-learning, self-consciousness, stepping out of a comfort zone, self-care, self-capability, self-interest, dream catcher and a self of accepting challenges.

Self-empowerment is a common realisation observed among all the participants in the study, regardless of the number of solo travels they have undertaken. Initially, individuals who travelled solo had 1-3 times felt empowered due to heightened self-awareness, self-care, and the courage to embrace challenges despite the act of solo travel being inherently challenging. As they gained more experience, those who had completed 4 to 6 solo trips identified their capabilities and became empowered to manage all situations on their own. When solo travellers have more than seven travel experiences, they empower themselves to be open-minded, learn more insights from the outside world, and enhance their self-capability.

At the same time, those who identify as frequent solo travellers, having travelled more than ten times alone, often find empowerment in embracing the changes in their lives and integrating the valuable lessons learnt from their journeys. A typical behaviour observed among solo travellers is their ability to care for themselves. When alone and without assistance, they naturally take ownership of their wellbeing. The following section outlines how each individual empowers themselves during their travels and explains why they are considered capable of self-empowerment compared to other travellers.

- **Self-Learning**

During solo travel, individuals volunteer to learn new things from their travel experiences. Before incorporating these learnings into their behaviour, solo travellers should be open-minded and willing to learn from the new environments and people they encounter during their visits. The self-courage to push oneself to learn from familiar and unfamiliar environments during solitary travel. Participant 3 explained in detail the process.

> *"Travelling alone can lead to unexpected situations that you may have never experienced before. However, it can also teach you how to become resilient in challenging circumstances. Even a simple journey can provide you with valuable experiences and lessons that can last a lifetime. A solo travel can help you discover a new version of yourself that you never knew existed."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The world is full of knowledge, and there are both good and bad things. What to learn and how to behave all depend on personal interests and decisions. When unexpected situations occur during travel, solo travellers learn to manage and handle themselves. Travelling alone allows individuals to observe the environment and learn new things. During solo travel, travellers can be alone and are not expecting company, allowing them to focus on their own experiences and observations without distracting others.

> *"The solitude and freedom of solo travel as an opportunity to learn about themselves, challenge their limits, and gain new perspectives…I often seek authentic cultural experiences and interactions with locals. Without the distractions of*

companions, I become more inclined to engage with the local community, try local cuisines, and learn about different customs and traditions."

(P22, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Therefore, zero companionships, along with independence in travel, would facilitate solo travellers' acting independently and let travellers take ownership of their actions. This self-empowering would make the solo travellers brave, confident and mature.

- **Self-Consciousness**

Along with the discussion, one's personal traits of self-judgement are less active in interdependent people (Zhang et al., 2008). Once again, self-judgement is derived from a person's self-consciousness (Jonathan & Schroeder, 1995; Newena & Vogeley, 2003; Sczesny & Kaufmann, 2018). "Self-consciousness is the ability to become aware of one's states, especially (*but not only*) mental states (*perceptions, emotions, and attitudes*), as one's states" (p. 530). It explains how much individuals become aware of, care about and evaluate themselves.

As discussed in the literature review, self-consciousness can be seen from two perspectives: private and public. Public self-consciousness involves trying to impress others and concealing personal desires if they are considered awkward or seen as a hindrance to socialisation. On the other hand, being true to one's conscience falls under private self-consciousness. When it comes to self-evaluation, participant 38 explained that,

"I still think solo travel is nice because you can be in your own space and explore what you like. It's rare to find a companion with the same level of thinking and wavelength matching. Whether it's good or bad, I made the decision and take

responsibility for my actions. The collective travel experiences have always enriched me, improving my communication skills, ability to evaluate people, acceptance of challenges, and overall knowledge."

(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

From participant 38's self-definition, she has empowered herself to evaluate her own judgement based on her self-consciousness. However, in contrast to the above, the participant 39 shared his view in the following way:

"The experience of travelling enables you to mature and gain insight into your life. Meeting new friends, experiencing different cultures, and exploring in your own way allow you to live life on your own terms. The way you perceive the world would be different, revealing the true beauty of the world. My travels have given me the strength to embrace my own identity. There was a time when I feared society because the society, I grew up in was rigid. However, experiencing different communities and cultures and encountering open-minded people who accept others without judgement has given me the strength to live my life on my own terms. I no longer feel the need to act in order to fulfil others' expectations. I am empowered to live my life as I want."

(P39, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

Hence, the decision to disclose or conceal information largely depends on an individual's self-empowerment and self-confidence. Self-awareness plays a crucial role in how solo travellers present themselves. If a person experiences public anxiety, their self-esteem and confidence may be lower. Therefore, opting for solo travel can provide valuable experiences that empower individuals to become more courageous and self-assured.

- **Step out from a Comfort Zone**

Stepping out of one's comfort zone is a common occurrence when travelling alone. Typically, when individuals are with friends, family, or close companions, they tend to be less cautious and worry less because they rely on others to take care of things. This carelessness is common when travelling with a group. However, when alone and outside their comfort zone, individuals can expand their social circle and be more open to learning new things without limitations or reluctance. The participants highlighted that,

"Travelling helped me step out of my comfort zone and stay vigilant."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

"It's a chance to step out of my comfort zone, deal with financial constraints, and adhere to a specific schedule, all while finding enjoyment in the experience. That's the power of a solo traveller."

(P30, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"You can push beyond your boundaries, try many new adventures, and realise that you are capable of much more than you thought."

(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

"Travel without compromise and expand your comfort zone while engaging with new people. Embrace new experiences and transcend introverted tendencies through travel."

(P40, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Subsuming all, solo travellers empower themselves by travelling alone and learning new things. This helps them step out of their comfort zone and see the world with an open

mind. Choosing to travel alone reveals that they are willing to challenge themselves. As a result, solo travellers take pride in their decisions and the freedom they experience during their travels, which marks the beginning of their self-transformation.

- **Self-Care**

The most common motivating factor and strong emotion found among all the participants was "self-care." The current study's findings illustrated that it gives individuals enough time to focus on themselves. During this exclusive time, individuals naturally start thinking about themselves. If asked whether others take care of themselves, the answer is no; they also find ways to calm down from the factors that cause them stress, sadness, frustration, and other negative feelings. For example, people used to go to the gym, practice yoga, cook, meditate, listen to music or isolate themselves to find peace. In general, the most popular benefit that solo travellers gained from their journeys was finding peace. The term 'peace of mind' is closely related to self-care, encompassing psychological and physical health.

To capture the exact sentiments of solo travellers, one participant shared her deep attachment and expressed pride in herself in the following manner:

> *"Solo travel is an opportunity to challenge your self-confidence and embrace unexpected experiences. It teaches you how to take care of yourself."*
>
> *(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Based on their self-definition, participant 13 did not travel solo more than three times, and she is in the initial stage of getting an understanding of solo travel. From the travellers who are in the initial stage, it is obvious they are curious and time lets them to realise they should

take care of themselves. At the same time, the participant who has done it more than 6 times explained that how he connected to solo travel due to its absolutely unique character, such as,

> *"As a solo traveller, I believe in empowering myself with the skills necessary to take care of myself and not depend on others. I am capable of driving myself towards my dreams. Unlike other travellers, solo travel allows us to go through the entire process alone, which gives us the courage to discover our strengths and weaknesses. In the end, this makes us mentally and physically stronger individuals in this dangerous world."*
>
> *(P19, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)*

There is no need to depend on others, and also, do not expect others to fulfil your needs. If you do depend on others, then the problem of compromising, adjusting, and constantly looking for others to comfort or console you arises. Solo travel is not only adventurous entertainment; it also imparts valuable lessons and enables travellers to realise the power of self-reliance. There are many reasons behind an individual's stress; seeking love and expecting too much from others could be reasons for sorrow. By illustrating the same situation, participant 18 expressed that,

> *"I went through many problems in my life. At one point, when I look back at my entire life, I couldn't see myself in my own life. I spent half of my years fulfilling others' expectations. When I realised that, I wanted support from others, but I didn't have anyone there for me. I took a short break from everything, and that's how I started my solo travel journey. As a solo traveller, it gave me time to take care of myself first in*

life, to think about myself, and to realise who I am. It always brings positive vibes into my life, and I'm proud to say that I'm the happiest and most self-fulfilled person."

(P18, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

The participants shared that solo travel allows individuals to care for themselves, understand their true desires, and learn valuable life lessons. For example, they can create their own unique experiences, leading to a more fulfilling life. Additionally, solo travel fosters self-respect, responsibility, maturity, and open-mindedness towards others, as well as the ability to set their own pace.

- **Self-Capability**

The literature is based on women-centric views in the solo travel context; self-capability has been discovered, along with women who do solo travel and take challenges (Jaworski, 2020; Hamid et al., 2021). At the same time, there is a slight difference between the ability and the capability. When it comes to ability and capability, those two even sound similar, but there is a slight difference between those two, where ability is inherent and remains over time. However, the capability would be generated through lessons and experiences gained from the environment (Acorn, 2023). In the context of solo travellers, the ability would be innate; however, the capability they developed through the lessons and experiences they gain from their solo travels. The participants of the study have defined how they used their solo travels to enrich and grow their capabilities in the following ways:

"The time I spend in solitude has always helped me to resolve the problems I face in life and gives me the opportunity to reflect on my life."

(P18, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

"I am capable of driving myself towards my dreams. Unlike other travellers, solo travel allows us to go through the entire process alone, which gives us the courage to discover our strengths and weaknesses."

(P19, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

"I use the solitude and freedom of solo travel as an opportunity to learn about myself, challenge my limits, and gain new perspectives…I often seek authentic cultural experiences and interactions with locals. Without the distractions of companions, I become more inclined to engage with the local community, try local cuisines, and learn about different customs and traditions."

(P22, Male, Aged 30-39 years old; P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"Moreover, you become more open-minded and confident when trying new things, and you are able to express your opinions more clearly. It helps you to be more organised and concerned."

(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

"Think boldly, be open-minded and self-confident, and have less fear when expressing your opinion and standing firm by saying no if you can't do it."

(P33, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

In accordance with the collected information, the solo travellers who had made more than three times of solo travels incorporated how their solo travels let them develop their capability in terms of handling everything alone during travel, loving themselves, respecting other cultures, being brave in the most challenging situations, discover the way to reach their

dreams, expressing the opinions boldly and clearly with confidently and in sum, learn about the self's strengths and weaknesses.

- **Self-Interest**

Self-interest becomes the primary driving force to pursue a dream, and over time, it transforms into a passion. In line with the information shared by the study's participants regarding their solo travels, the researcher has highlighted, in the section on solo travellers' travel behaviour, the initial motivations for solo travel, which eventually evolved into a passion for discovering new destinations. In summary, the shared perspectives indicate the reasons why solo travellers take pride in their experiences.

> *"I find that this brings me a deep sense of peace and happiness that also positively impacts those around me. While I may not always resonate with my own culture, I'm committed to living a life filled with peace and spirituality. I pick destinations based on my interests, and I'm grateful for the support of my parents, even if they may prefer a more conventional lifestyle for me. I've found that travelling has helped me grow, allowing me to become more understanding and empathetic as I experience different cultures and diverse perspectives."*
>
> *(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

When solo travellers found themselves, their travels brought changes in themselves, which they found interesting and motivated them to do travel more. The interesting fact is that, among all the participants, the participants who had done many times of travelling alone indicated that they were very passionate about travelling by themselves and with themselves.

- **Dream Catcher**

In general, every person has a dream in their lifetime. Some people focus on achieving their dreams, while others let their dreams remain as aspirations. In the context of solo travel, at the start of their journey, the study participants were curious about what solo travel would be like. Once they had experienced travelling alone, they used solo travel as a means to pursue their dreams.

Participant P2 explained that independence in this type of travel encouraged him to pursue his dreams and continue to follow them. It was noted how much the person was inclined to travel.

> *"Travelling alone is incredibly convenient, as it allows you to have more free time and enables you to see your dream destinations more quickly. Additionally, when travelling solo, you are free to plan your itinerary as per your preference and execute it with ease."*
>
> *(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Similar to participant 2, another solo traveller who expressed the idea while defining themselves indicated that to achieve your dream, you do not need to depend on others or expect others to support you. Once individuals realise their strengths, they can empower themselves to pursue their dreams. This requires considerable time for introspection and self-reflection. As a result, it fosters the determination and solid self-awareness needed to achieve one's aspirations.

> *"Based on my experience, solo travel is a time, where it helps solo travellers to connect their self with their mind and action also helps them to discover their hidden*

skills, and a solo traveller is an independent traveller, who can create their own wings fly to wherever they dreamt to go."

(P21, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

- **A Self of Accepting Challenges**

Solo travel is considered adventurous (Wantono & McKercher, 2019) since most people view travel primarily as a form of entertainment. Generally, individuals prefer to travel in groups rather than alone (Mehmetoglu, 2003). However, there are still people who are willing to embark on solo journeys. This type of travel teaches individuals how to navigate difficult situations. Each instance of travelling alone brings new experiences and unexpected outcomes that travellers may not anticipate. To illustrate this, Participant 23 expressed that,

"Travelling is a way for me to break free from my everyday life. It's a challenge that allows me to test myself and see if I can survive in an unfamiliar environment. Travelling forces me to take care of myself and make decisions independently, which helps me learn to make the right choices and act appropriately in different situations."

(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Besides offering the chance to navigate various situations in both familiar and unfamiliar destinations, solo travel enables individuals to confront their negative thoughts, low self-esteem, limitations, problems, lack of skills, and any other obstacles they believe could disrupt their peace of mind. Participant 22 mentioned that,

"I embark on my journeys as a means of self-discovery and personal growth. I use the solitude and freedom of solo travel as an opportunity to learn about myself, challenge my limits, and gain new perspectives."

(P22, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Therefore, unlike group travel, solo travel challenges each traveller who chooses to travel alone. It also allows individuals to challenge themselves before, during, and even after their solo travel.

e. Solo travellers can develop themselves through their travel experiences *(Self-Development)*

Since all the participants agreed, solo travel has given them enough time to discover and realise their talents, to understand themselves. During their solo travels, the respondents utilised the time alone to discover their hidden skills (*such as managing any kind of situation, bravery, good at mingling with people, navigation, communication, survival skills, etc)* They also used this specific period to develop their talents (*for example, photography, map reading, communication skills, time management, making proper travel plans, learning new languages, exploring new cultures, etc.*). Self-development happens as life circumstances change and is shaped by individuals' self-perceptions. It consists of personal growth and self-improvement and is supported by participants' own thoughts.

- **Personal-Growth**

The concept of personal growth is well-known in solo travel literature and is often associated with wellbeing. Studies have shown that personal growth, as a part of eudemonia wellbeing, is a result of solo travel (McCabs & Johnson, 2013). Personal growth, from the perspective of solo travellers, involves learning new things and using travel experiences to fulfil their personal needs. Participants emphasised how they overcame limitations and achieved self-sufficiency. In addition to existing knowledge, the current findings contribute valuable insights into how solo travellers express a sense of self-actualisation, particularly in overcoming their limitations and embracing their own thoughts.

The participant 37, highlighted that,

"During this time, I reflected on many things and found solutions to my problems. What really struck me was seeing people who were facing their own struggles and yet never gave up. It made me realise that my problems aren't as big as I thought. Overcoming your own doubts and breaking free from self-imposed limitations is crucial for personal growth. I'm looking forward to spending the rest of my life doing things that I love, and this has motivated me to prioritise my health because only then can I truly live life to the fullest."

(P37, Female, Aged 50-59 years old)

Travel is not only an entertainment activity but also teaches many lessons to the people who choose it. People who don't have experience travelling would think it is boring, even the participants of the study who had the same idea before they became solo travellers. The biggest personal growth is when an individual overcomes their own personal limitations. Simultaneously, when an individual finds a way to alleviate the stress and the factors that cause pain in their life, it psychologically aids them in focusing on their goals and bringing positive energy into their lives.

One participant, Participant 4, recalled that,

"Solo travel has the potential to alleviate stress, heal emotional pain, and bring a sense of peace to your life. It also provides opportunities for personal growth and self-reflection, allowing you to make positive changes to your character."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Therefore, personal growth is considered a part of self-development since it relates to an individual's self-actualisation needs. In summary, all the stories of solo travellers reveal that

solo travellers are motivated to continue travelling due to the benefits they receive from their own choice of travel.

- **Skill-Development**

Continuing the discussion, solo travellers mostly agreed that skill development is a significant outcome of travelling alone, especially among those who have travelled alone more than six times. As mentioned in the first part of the analysis based on solo travellers' travel diaries, participants have developed various skills, including photography, using electronic devices for mapping, booking flight tickets, finding the best lodging, making reservations, driving, diving, creating social media content, language fluency, itinerary planning and organisational skills, budgeting, mountain climbing, hiking, and blending in as a local to avoid risks at new destinations. Additionally, participants have excelled in risk assessment and safety precautions, survival skills, self-control, positive thinking, taking responsibility, kindness, self-love, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, negotiation, interaction, networking, open-mindedness, respecting different cultures and religious beliefs, work-life balance management, self-motivation, decision-making, and overcoming the fear of interacting with people and public speaking.

To add value to the skill development among solo travellers, the researcher supported two of the participants' views extracted from their self-definitions.

> *"My travels have given me the chance to find myself, choose a suitable career, and improve my social interactions with the people I meet during my solo travels. Solo travelling has made me a more mature person and given me the courage to face any challenges that come my way."*
>
> *(P18, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

"As a solo traveller, I believe in empowering myself with the skills necessary to take care of myself and not depend on others. I am capable of driving myself towards my dreams. Unlike other travellers, solo travel allows us to go through the entire process alone, which gives us the courage to discover our strengths and weaknesses. In the end, this makes us mentally and physically stronger individuals in this dangerous world."

(P19, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

Therefore, to conclude, solo travellers in the study showed much skill in self-empowerment, including self-learning, self-awareness, stepping out of their comfort zone, self-care, self-efficacy, self-interest, pursuing dreams, and accepting challenges.

f. Solo travellers are able to make themselves happy *(Personal Wellbeing)*

In solo tourism, wellbeing has been identified as the motivating factor why travellers who courage to continue these types of travel (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Seow & Brown, 2017; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020) and also it has been discussed under the women solo travelling with hedonic wellbeing and eudemonia wellbeing. Concurrently, solo tourism contributes to personal human wellbeing because travelling alone also allows individuals to develop autonomy and maturity, increase their self-assuredness and self-esteem, improve their decision-making skills, and generate confidence to tackle new and different sensations and feelings (Carels et al., 2022). However, without further classifying wellbeing, the researcher

has identified four common self-definitions among solo travellers: problem-solver, escape from routine activity, relaxation, and a tool for happiness.

- **Problem-Solver**

From the participants' view, personal wellbeing has identified a common thought, an expectation among all, irrespective of their travel experience. Solo travellers agreed that spending time alone and spending time for themselves aided them in knowing what issues or stressing factors they were undergoing, how to solve them, how to get relief from the pain, and how to have peace of mind and a positive distraction.

Participants 18 and 27 expressed that the time they spent alone helped them resolve their problems and illustrated that the considerable time brought positive distraction or was the reason for the change in their lives.

> *"The time I spend in solitude has always helped me to resolve the problems I face in life and gives me the opportunity to reflect on my life."*
>
> *(P18, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

> *"When I feel down, spending time alone provides the space and positivity I need"*
>
> *(P27, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Travel not only provides solo travellers with the opportunity to find solutions to their problems but also allows them to observe and understand different people's challenges and how they run their lives amid struggles. Sometimes, others' problems may be more severe than those of solo travellers, but still, those people may run their lives in the middle of all those

struggles. This truth will be a valuable experience for solo travellers during their journeys. Solo travel provides independence and liberty for travellers to be flexible and make their travel convenient, so they have a chance to visit wherever they like and also get a chance to interact with many new people since they do not have a companion with them.

The collection of their travel experience would teach them survival skills and vast knowledge. The participant 37 agreed and defined herself as:

> *"…during my travel, I reflected on many things and found solutions to my problems. What really struck me was seeing people who were facing their own struggles and yet never gave up. It made me realise that my problems aren't as big as I thought…I'm looking forward to spending the rest of my life doing things that I love, and this has motivated me to prioritise my health because only then can I truly live life to the fullest."*
>
> *(P37, Female, Aged 50-59 years old)*

Therefore, coinciding with all this, the study's participants strongly believed that the decision they made to travel solo was a good decision and also agreed that it was a personalised gift they could give themselves. It carries the peak of their emotions and the extent to which they embrace themselves as solo travellers.

- **Escape from Routinised Activity**

Continuing on the personal wellbeing of solo travellers, the common motivation found in the literature also the researcher of this study has mentioned in the solo travellers' behaviour section at the beginning of this chapter and reviewed in the literature, escape from the routinised work is a common motivating factor behind the solo travellers (Butler, 1995; Stone & Nichol,

1999; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006, Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013; Hamid et al., 2021). The following statements from the participants expressed why they became solo travellers.

"Solo travel is an opportunity to explore the beauty of life and bring positive energy into your life. There is no one to judge you, and you can feel the freedom to create your world, away from your busy and routine life."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

"Travelling is a way for me to break free from my everyday life."

(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

- **Relaxation**

Relaxation has been identified as another famous motivation factor that solo travellers courage to select solo tourism (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al.,2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017). When an individual gets enough time, from solo travellers' point of view, they feel relaxed and feel refreshed themselves. All the participants of the current study merely agreed that being solo travellers, they benefited from relaxing and empowered themselves to bring refresh into their lives. The participants' collective thoughts indicated that they used to engage in solo travel to enjoy the quality time they received from solitude.

"It's a relaxing experience that makes you feel like you are the centre of the world"

(P5, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

"Solo travel lets you be in the way you dreamt. It provides greater freedom to customise your travel experience and can increase relaxation for both the mind and body."

(P7, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"Travel experiences refresh my mind and help me focus more on my work"

(P35, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

"I find that this brings me a deep sense of peace and happiness that also positively impacts those around me."

(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

- **Tool for Happiness**

The last common opinion from the respective solo travellers is that they can find their own way to happiness and do not want or wait for others to make them happy (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Sheeba et al., 202; Hamid et al., 2021). From the solo travellers' accumulated experience sharing, solo travel acts as a crucial metaphor for their happiness. The participants of this study have highlighted that they can find a way to make themselves happy and enrich their wellbeing. At the same time, it can give them self-satisfaction.

"As for me, I end up refreshing things at the end of each solo travel. Exploring new things is always enjoyable and more fun."

(P34, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

"When I plan to travel solo, I want to visit a place or I need a positive distraction. It allows me to have my own time and freedom while exploring new environments and reflecting on different aspects of my life. Live your moment, and you will find a way to make yourself happy."

(P25, Female, Aged 30-49 years old)

"I believe that solo travel allows me to be anywhere and still enjoy my own company without needing external validation."

(P33, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

"Solo travel is an opportunity to find your own path to happiness and become a more versatile, open-minded person. The experience of travelling enables you to mature and gain insight into your life."

(P39, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

In conclusion, the firsthand experiences shared by solo travellers demonstrated that anyone could enjoy solo travel at any age; there is no age limit to finding happiness in travelling alone. The findings also revealed that one's choice to travel can bring about positive changes in one's life, leading one to create and cherish one's happiest moments.

g. Solo travellers can have an incredible travel experience

Since solo travel carries a number of unique features, solo travellers of this study's participants shared that they were embracing themselves to become solo travellers, and they were proud of themselves to say they had an incredible travel experience compared to other types of travellers. For instance, a solo traveller can customise the travel based on convenience;

at the time, there is no obligation to compromise except for self-limitations. Based on each person's financial range, everyone plans and travels to their preferred places to achieve their dream. The time spent alone teaches a person to take care of oneself, and that peace allows individuals to love themselves, enabling them to communicate with themselves. As a result, an individual learns to know their self-worth.

Continuing, a solo traveller would be able to fulfil their basic needs (*self-autonomy, knowing the strengths and the weaknesses*), safety needs (*knowing the mechanism to safeguard themselves, absorbing and pretending like the locals, language fluency, developing skill to use maps to avoid unnecessary risks, and some extra in case if you need*) social needs (*friendship, network creation, love, connection with their interest -spirituality, come out from the comfort zone, freedom in revealing identity, moving with new people, learning new cultures*), esteem needs(*confidence, goal achievement, dream catching, self-courage, self-control, being responsible, respecting people and feel positive even in the worst condition, skill-development, personality development*), self-actualisation needs (*problem -solving and intellectual thinking, being matured, spontaneous, open-minded, acceptance of the reality, self-trust, holding ownership for own happiness, self-satisfaction and sense of self*).

To support that, how solo travellers feel about themselves proud and explained that solo travel gives them an incredible experience in the following ways:

> *"Solo travel has the potential to alleviate stress, heal emotional pain, and bring a sense of peace to your life. It also provides opportunities for personal growth and self-reflection, allowing you to make positive changes to your character. Solo travel can lead to unforgettable experiences and teach you valuable lessons. It can aid you connect with your spirituality and cultivate a positive mindset. The challenges you face during solo travel can serve as a reminder of your strength and resilience and*

ultimately help you develop a stronger sense of self. Travelling helped me step out of my comfort zone and stay vigilant."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Participant 4's accumulated travel experience, she embraced each moment of becoming a brave girl travelling alone and cherishing moments when she became more confident and alleviated her stress by finding her own way of making herself happy. Participant 4 shared their travel experiences, while another participant, 28, expressed their belief that solo travellers often take pride in their uniqueness and enjoy introducing themselves as solo travellers. They feel that travelling fosters strong connections and that all travellers share the same level of curiosity and excitement about their experiences.

There's a significant difference between being a solo traveller and an observer. To some people, solo travellers are considered to be individuals who travel due to a lack of companionship, some are backpackers, or are even seen as eccentric. However, from the perspective of some others, solo travellers are viewed as amazing, free-spirited individuals who know how to enjoy their lives. These perspectives have been gathered from current solo travellers, reflecting the thoughts they had about solo travellers before they became one. It demonstrates how being a solo traveller can change one's own thoughts and perceptions.

"I believe that solo travel can be incredibly relaxing and can lead to self-discovery. It exposes you to new adventures and unexpected experiences, testing your personality, traits, and resilience. Travelling alone is a unique and personal experience. It doesn't always have to involve going abroad or visiting famous places; it can also mean exploring unknown places and spending time alone, providing a unique and personal experience. Others may not understand this type of experience and

is something that only you can truly understand and appreciate. If you are open-minded, solo travel can be fascinating and offer numerous opportunities to explore and try new things."

(P28, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

h. Solo travellers can be open-minded people

In the context of solo tourism, scholars have noted that solo travellers often meet new people or strangers at the places they visit (Beritelli et al., 2018). Developing good relationships with strangers has been associated with the hedonic wellbeing of solo travellers (Seow & Brown, 2020; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).

Solo travellers need to be open-minded and have zero expectations to meet new people and move with strangers to new destinations. This approach allows them to interact with new people without pre-judgements or expectations.

"If you are open-minded, solo travel can be fascinating and offer numerous opportunities to explore and try new things."

(P28, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Being open-minded, solo travel always encourages its travellers to learn many new things from the environment.

"You become more open-minded and confident when trying new things, and you are able to express your opinions more clearly. It helps you to be more organised and concerned."

(P31, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

i. Solo travellers can find their own mechanisms to get rid of their boredom

Solo travellers can find their own ways to make themselves happy. This was discussed at the beginning of this findings section. Although solo travel is often considered an adventurous option, solo travellers may still experience boredom during their travels. One reason why solo travel differs from group travel is that it allows travellers to learn to handle their boredom. Participants who had travelled alone more than three times reported feeling bored but also becoming adept at managing these feelings. Interestingly, some people even enjoy being bored during their solo travels. For instance, participant 14 expressed that,

> *"It is a wholly independent and free-spirited travel experience where you can make choices. Although you may feel lonely or bored at times, by the end of the trip, you will be pleasantly surprised by how much you have learnt about yourself also you love that time and know how to handle it efficiently. Whenever I felt lonely, I used to take a leisurely walk, soak in the local atmosphere, grab some tasty street food, chat with the local sellers, and immerse myself in the new energy around me. It always helped me beat the boredom."*
>
> *(P14, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Other than enjoying the fragrance of localisation, listening to music, playing their favourite music, playing with their musical instruments (guitar, violin), enjoying the breeze, sounds of birds, the smell of nature, writing travel diaries, talking to people whom they loved, playing favourite movies, sometimes playing games and also sleeping without any disturbance were all discovered how solo travellers of this study had enjoyed their boredom during their travel. Therefore, concluding the findings of the objective, one using 'Descriptive Analysis of Phenomenology Process', the researcher has found that solo travellers have identified

themselves as independent, open-minded people who are able to find their true selves, discover changes within themselves, empower themselves, develop themselves, make themselves happy, find their own mechanisms to get rid of their boredom also able to have an incredible travel experience.

4.2.2 Summary- Research Question One

The researcher has attempted to explain that solo travel brings about changes in the self-representation of solo travellers, leading to what is known as self-transformation. For this self-transformation to occur, travellers need to have sufficient time for self-reflection. To explain the occurrence of self-transformation, solo travellers should have a realisation about themselves. Therefore, the initial objective is to understand how solo travellers define themselves. The findings were analysed using descriptive phenomenological data based on Husserl's phenomenological method. The results demonstrated that solo travellers define themselves in a consistent manner, indicating that solo travellers take pride in identifying as such.

- Solo travellers are able to make themselves happy;
- Solo travellers can be open-minded people;
- Solo travellers can develop themselves through their travel experiences;
- Solo travellers can discover changes within themselves;
- Solo travellers can empower themselves;
- Solo travellers can enjoy the independence they desire;
- Solo travellers can explore their true selves through their travel experiences;
- Solo travellers can find their own mechanisms to get rid of their boredom;
- Solo travellers can have an incredible travel experience.

4.3 Research Question Two: Does Solo Travel Bring Changes in Solo Travellers' Self-Representation?

To address the research question, the researcher in this study utilised Husserl's Phenomenological Analysis and data from 40 participants to interpret how solo travel could lead to changes in the self-presentation of the solo traveller.

According to experiential sharing from solo travellers, all of them agreed that solo travel had a profound impact on their lives. This realisation prompted an analysis focusing on two perspectives among the study's participants. Solo travellers acknowledged that solo travel brought about changes in two ways: (i) through their travel experiences and (ii) due to specific circumstances that occurred during their solo travel. While the participants could not pinpoint the exact situations that triggered these changes, they strongly affirmed that solo travel is a powerful tool that can have a transformative effect on their lives.

Therefore, taking into account the collected information, describe the changes that have occurred due to solo travel using the following two steps:

- Using solo travellers' self-definitions to describe the changes that solo travel brought into their self-representation; and
- Exploring solo travellers' reflections on significant collective experiences that have changed their self-representation.

4.3.1 Describing the Changes in Solo Travellers' Self-Representation based on their Self Definitions

The findings of objective One have explained that, in the self-definition, solo travellers have identified themselves as independent, open-minded people able to find their true selves, discover changes within themselves, empower themselves, develop themselves, make

themselves happy, find their own mechanisms to get rid of their boredom and also be able to have an incredible travel experience. Simultaneously, they revealed the truth that they discovered changes from their travels in their definitions.

Therefore, having a comprehensive understanding of self-definitions becomes necessary to find a lead to the second question. It also gives an idea of 'transformative travel' along with a transformative experience, where an individual expects to use travel to bring meaning and transformation to themselves. This is related to self-interaction, unforgettable memories, self-actualisation, and spiritual fulfilment during travel experiences (Teoh et al., 2021; Chhabra, 2021; Godovykh & Tasci, 2022; Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

a. Travellers with 1-3 Times of Solo Travel Experience

The solo travellers who had taken 1-3 solo travels until 2023, have defined solo travel by 5 participants were highlighted how did they identified themselves during their travels including, *Self-Discovery* (self-awareness), *A Choice of Independence* (convenient travel; flexibility in travel; no need to compromise; own peace of time), *Self-Empowerment* (self-learning; self-consciousness; step out from a comfort zone; self-care; dream catcher; a self of accepting challenges), *Self-Development* (personal-growth), *Personal Wellbeing* (problem-solver; positive energy), *Changes in a Self* (self-trust) and *Life-Long Experience* (unimaginable travel experience).

At the initial stage of their, solo travellers, who were much more curious and clueless about solo travel, and most of their first travel had happened as a default, and the courage they got from their solitude the curiosity would lead them to continue, and the respective motivations had been discussed in the travellers' behaviour in the beginning part of this chapter. Since they were in the initial stage, they enjoyed the self-autonomy and the liberty from their travels. That gives them enough time to empower themselves to learn how to be

alone; they put effort into getting aware of themselves, trusting themselves, trying to come out of their comfort zone, attempting to challenge themselves to overcome loneliness and learning to care about themselves.

Further explaining in detail, solo travellers learn *to be independent in their lives and also learn to use their independence appropriately without misuse*. This is a major advantage of travelling alone. For example, solo travellers experience benefits such as independence (*providing freedom to make their own travel plans and do whatever they want*), flexibility (*not having to depend on others or compromise*), and convenience (*not needing to rely on others or change their plans to accommodate others*). In essence, solo travel offers convenience, freedom, and flexibility (Wilson & Little, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).

Solo travellers at this stage are more curious about their travel and are preparing themselves to challenge themselves by being alone and seeking adventure. The nature of solo travel is risky and challenging (Khan et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018). However, those who are interested in taking on the challenge are individuals whose personality leans towards being adventurous. This personality trait is commonly observed in both male and female travellers. Throughout their adventurous travels, they have learnt and experienced many incidents that have made them resilient in facing any challenge by themselves. The study revealed that solo travellers learn from their experiences on how to handle everything and manage uncertain circumstances alone. This boosts their self-confidence. Although people may be confident at the beginning, after multiple solo travels, they learn to express themselves more confidently. At this stage, solo travellers become more curious about their travels and start preparing to challenge themselves as adventure seekers. Solo travel is seen as risky and challenging (Khan et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018). However, those interested in taking on a challenge are often solo travellers with a venture-centric personality. This personality type is common among both men and women. Through their adventurous travels, they learn from various experiences,

making them resilient in facing any challenge alone. The study demonstrates that solo travellers learn to handle everything by themselves and effectively manage certain uncertain circumstances, boosting their self-confidence. With each solo trip, they become more confident in expressing themselves, feeling empowered by their ability to navigate the world on their own terms.

Solo travellers empower themselves to take care of their wellbeing. This mindset is based on the behaviour of solo travellers who take responsibility for themselves and become more aware of their actions. Self-care is a unique benefit that solo travellers gain from their experiences. They take ownership of their wellbeing and avoid risky activities when travelling alone. Participants have come to value their time alone as an opportunity for self-care. During their journeys, they are more conscientious about their belongings, such as travel documents (*passport, flight ticket, luggage, personal items*), financial documents (*money, credit cards*), communication devices and gadgets (*mobile chargers, power banks, cameras, laptops*), and are attentive to their itinerary (*checking maps and flight times regularly*), this degree of attention is achievable when solo travellers improve their self-consciousness. According to existing literature, self-consciousness comprises private and public aspects of the self (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schlenker, 1975; Ungar, 1980; Newen & Vogeley, 2003).

Since this category of solo travellers is at the earliest stage of their solo, the majority of them are more concerned about their safety and are not ready to put themselves at risk; they are more cautious about their actions. For instance, not travelling at night, not visiting lonely places, and having their main focus on tourist places where there can be more people who belong to their private self-consciousness. At the same time, solo travellers, especially female travellers, are more concerned about their attire when they are by themselves; for instance, they are more concerned about not wearing clothing that attracts unwanted attention from either locals or strangers at the place they visit.

Simultaneously, when individuals consider how their actions may affect others, it reflects their public self-consciousness. In existing studies on self-consciousness and self-representation, an interesting finding has emerged. Participants who were financially independent were free to make their own travel decisions without the need to ask permission from their parents. However, this only applied to individuals who were financially independent. Participants with family attachments, even if financially independent or married, were more conscious of their actions; they were not willing to take risks that could worry their parents, and married participants also tended to avoid risky situations. In contrast to existing literature, solo travellers' public self-consciousness was related to positive and prudent behaviour, enabling them to avoid unnecessary risks and ensure their safety. Solo travellers were more cautious of their actions to prevent objections from immediate family members, such as parents and spouses, in case of any difficulties during their travels. Less experienced solo travellers were found to be more vigilant in their travels compared to those who were more experienced.

Solo travellers were trying make their own limitations flexible and learn to bring positivity by figuring out the stressing point or enriching their happiness. The motivations of travelling alone, includes relaxation (Brooker & Joppe, 2014), escape from their routine (Butler, 1995; Stone & Nichol, 1999; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006, Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013), and happiness (Sheeba et al., 2020). The new findings from the participants indicate that they view solo travel as a way to provide time for intellectual reflection and problem-solving and to cultivate positive energy. In essence, solo travel is seen as a tool for solving problems and relieving individuals from stress. Additionally, participants who had travelled solo 1-3 times showed a greater interest in enjoying solo travel and were becoming more aware of its impact on their lives, while also feeling uncertain about the changes happening within themselves.

At this stage of travel, individuals voyaging alone and demonstrating a heightened sense of curiosity exhibit a greater awareness and propensity to mitigate unforeseen risks. Their self-imposed isolation necessitates a heightened self-reliance, thereby fostering a steadfast commitment to self-care.

b. Travellers with 4-6 Times of Solo Travel Experience

The solo travellers who had taken 4-6 solo travels until 2023 have defined solo travel by 14 Participants highlighted how they identified themselves during their travels, including Self-Discovery (*self-identity*), A Choice of Independence (*convenient travel; flexibility in travel; personalised gift; no one there to judge; own peace of time*), Self-Empowerment (*self-learning; self-consciousness; step out from a comfort zone; self-care; self-capability*), Self-Development (*personal-growth*), *Changes in a Self* (self-trust), Personal Wellbeing (*problem-solver; positive energy; escape from routinised life; relaxation; a tool for happiness*), Life-Long Experience (*unimaginable travel experience*), Connecting with Strangers & Learning Something New (*open-minded*) and Loneliness (*boredom*).

The participants who belong to these times of experience are in a stage of transition where they love to enjoy their freedom in their travels. They empower themselves to identify their capabilities to handle any tough situation and become more experienced in protecting themselves. Since they love to travel alone, they become skilled at taking care of themselves without any assistance from anyone. They also learn how to make themselves happy. After numerous solo travels, based on the experiences of solo travellers in the study, they become more passionate about travelling alone.

In further detail, solo travellers *were much fascinated with travelling alone*. Travellers who had gone on solo trips 1-3 times and those who had gone 4-6 times had similar experiences. However, participants who had travelled alone for more than 3 times felt a stronger connection

to their travels. The shift from curiosity to passion was evident among this group of solo travellers. For example, they perceived solo travel as a personalised gift. This occurs when people appreciate the true value of spending time alone, allowing them to customise their travel experience as they wish. Importantly, these participants expressed that they discovered new skills and found their true selves during their solo travels. Self-discovery and self-identity are core concepts related to one's self-representation and are key benefits of travelling alone. Additionally, it is demonstrated that self-transformation occurs during solo travel (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Wilson & Little, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Laesser et al., 2009; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020).

Solo travellers were able to satisfy their needs, desires and expectations without anyone's support. Since they were passionate about travelling alone, they combined their adventure seeking to variety seeking based on their desires (*e.g., dreaming about a destination to visit for the long-term*), feelings and emotions (*based on mood, happiness, sad, depression, mood swings would decide the place of visit, how long to spent, how to react and short out the problems, e.g., spiritual places, nature-based sight-seeing, theme parks, street food stores, shopping, movies, historical places, water based activities*).

At the same time, *being an open-minded solo traveller* has connected these travellers to their journeys. They have utilised their travel time to realise their capability to create an identity for themselves and to take care of themselves. As a result, participants expressed that their solo travel helped increase their wellbeing. For them, solo travel is a tool that brings happiness and a positive distraction, creating a clear mindset. Moreover, their travel experiences have enriched their level of confidence and given them the chance to develop themselves. It has helped them remain open-minded and learn many new things from people of different cultures. The considerable amounts of solo travel have led solo travellers to act as mature individuals, regardless of their age.

To summarise, at this stage of travel, solo travellers who were passionate about exploring different types of travel experiences exhibited a variety-seeking travel behaviour. They were showing signs of maturing in their behaviour, particularly in how they represented themselves. As a first step, they excelled at taking ownership of their self-care in any situation. They also demonstrated an open-mindedness and a deep embrace of multicultural experiences. These were individuals who were confident in knowing how to make themselves happy. Overall, this indicates that travelling contributes to the self-transformation of solo travellers, enriching their journey with diverse cultural experiences. It is clear that *travelling plays a significant role in the self-transformation of solo travellers*.

c. Travellers with 7-9 Times of Solo Travel Experience

The solo travellers who had taken 7-9 solo travels until 2023, have defined solo travel by 8 Participants were highlighted how did they identified themselves during their travels including, *Self-Discovery* (self-identity; self-awareness; self-exploration), *A Choice of Independence* (convenient travel; flexibility in travel; freedom in travel; personalised gift; own peace of time), *Changes in a Self* (increased level of maturity; goal -oriented; self-trust), *Self-Empowerment* (self-learning; self-consciousness; step out from a comfort zone; self-care; self-capability; self-trust, dream-catcher; a self of accepting challenges), *Self-Development* (skill-development), *Personal Wellbeing* (problem-solver; positive energy; escape from routinised life; relaxation; tool for happiness), *Connecting with Strangers & New learning* (open-minded) and *Loneliness* (boredom).

Solo travellers who had gone on 7-9 solo trips were quite similar to those who had taken 4-6 solo trips. In addition to the general and specific benefits of solo travel, they explained that solo travel is convenient, flexible and liberating because of their prior experiences. These travellers excel at planning their own trips according to their personal preferences. Their long-

term experiential learning helped them become more self-aware and led to personal growth. However, it was noted that some participants felt lonely and bored at times. Despite this, each individual took ownership of planning their solo travels and their lives based on their preferences.

At this stage, travellers *act more mature* due to the phenomenal travel experiences they have gained from their journeys. They are capable of empowering themselves and strongly believing in themselves. During the interviews, participants explained that they are much more confident in their actions and decisions and are open-minded to seeing the world from a broader perspective. They focus on finding positivity and learning lessons from even the toughest conditions. Interestingly, some of the participants mentioned that they are addicted to solo travel. They appreciate an individualistic lifestyle and prefer not to depend on others too much. This mindset helps them to be independent not only in their travel choices but also in their lives. In summary, at this stage of travel, solo travellers who were more passionate about travel, along with maturity in their travel behaviour. At this stage, the travellers truly trust themselves and take ownership of their actions. Most people agreed that they empowered themselves to care about themselves. Self-care is closely related to personal development and wellbeing (Pipas, 2020). It is a tool of mindfulness that reduces stress and also supports enhanced personal wellbeing. They excelled at finding their own way to find a tool of happiness.

d. Travellers with 10 or more Times of Solo Travel Experience

The solo travellers who had taken 10 or more times of solo travels until 2023, have defined solo travel by 13 Participants were highlighted how they identified themselves during their travels including, *Self-Discovery* (self-identity; self-awareness; self-exploration), *A Choice of Independence* (convenient travel; flexibility in travel; freedom in travel; personalised gift; own peace of time), *Changes in a Self* (increased level of maturity; goal -oriented; self-

trust), *Self-Empowerment* (self-learning; self-consciousness; step out from a comfort zone; self-care; self-capability; self-interest, dream-catcher; a self of accepting challenges), *Self-Development* (personal-growth, skill-development), *Personal Wellbeing* (problem-solver; positive energy; relaxation; tool for happiness), Life-long Experience (unimaginable travel experience), *Connecting with Strangers & New learning* (open-minded) and *Loneliness* (boredom).

The solo travellers who had taken 7-9 or 10 or more solo trips reported similar experiences. However, those who had completed almost 10 solo trips by themselves expressed a greater passion and expertise for travelling alone. According to the participants, they felt *more mature and open-minded with minimal expectations*. Solo travellers choose to explore the world and connect with people. They maintain an open mindset, which encourages them to continue travelling on their own. Experienced solo travellers become influencers for new travellers and those interested in solo travel. Moreover, solo travellers take pride in their ability to remain calm in tough situations, which helps them find solutions. Their extensive knowledge and adventurous travel experiences help them become fluent in the language, improve communication, and gain confidence in their actions. They have high self-esteem and do not worry about what others think or say about them. These travellers commonly discovered that following their passion leads to a successful and happy life. They believe that solo travel makes them strong, helps them focus, and allows them to discover themselves. Furthermore, they see themselves as continuous learners, using each journey as a tool for personal happiness and self-exploration, which helps them develop new skills.

Therefore, concluding all the information shared by the participants who had different travel experiences, the beginners (1-3 times) who were identified as ‘adventure seekers’ (*more curious about travel and enjoy the travel motivations, especially the independence in their choice of their travel*); and more conscious (*on their safety*) and forcing themselves to fit into

the society expectations also the attention seekers, where to differentiate themselves from others and being a cool also a brave person among their friends and family members.

At the same time, the travellers who engaged in 4-6 solo trips were labelled as 'variety-seekers.' Because they appreciated the independence and freedom from compromising or adjusting plans that solo travel provides, they actively sought out diverse experiences during their travels, such as visiting different places, meeting new people, and learning new things. They were still eager to explore more about travel and were in the initial stage of self-discovery, seeking opportunities to learn and grow. Additionally, these travellers courageously embraced solo travel as a means to enhance their personal growth and wellbeing, seeking to escape from stressful factors, monotonous routines, and toxic environments, or simply to find a positive outlet for fresh thoughts.

The solo travellers with 7-9 times of solo travel experience were categorised as 'self-discoverers' based on the information collected from them. In addition to their travel motivations and curiosity, these travellers utilised their time to build an identity for themselves and empower themselves to take care of their own needs. Empowering oneself is considered the best opportunity for an individual to learn self-sufficiency. It teaches the lesson of how to take care of oneself without relying on others for support and to handle any situation. Having fewer expectations leads to fewer problems and less sadness.

Solo travellers who have undertaken 10 or more solo trips are referred to as 'matured-learners' and 'survivors'. These individuals exhibit courage and self-awareness similar to those who have taken 7-9 solo trips, yet they maintain an energetic and enthusiastic approach to learning new things with maturity. They engage with the world and interact with people openly. They believe that being open-minded and warm-hearted always benefits them in building relationships with new people and learning new things. The following 4.3 table summarises the self-discoveries of solo travellers and reveals that solo travel leads to personal growth.

Table 4.3 Solo Travellers' Self-Reflection on their Self-Definitions

Participants	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**	**32**	**33**	**34**	**35**	**36**	**37**	**38**	**39**	**40**
Self-Identity			✓M					✓M	✓F		✓F							✓M	✓M			✓M					✓M					✓F									
Self-Awareness	✓M														✓F				✓M		✓F							✓M							✓F	✓F				
Self-Exploration																									✓F				✓M							✓F			✓M	
A Convenient Travel		✓M			✓F	✓M	✓F			✓M	✓F	✓F								✓F		✓M								✓F			✓F			✓F		✓F	✓M	✓
Flexibility in Travel		✓M			✓F	✓M	✓F			✓M	✓F	✓F																		✓F			✓F			✓F		✓F	✓M	
Freedom in Travel		✓M			✓F	✓M	✓F		✓F	✓M	✓F	✓F		✓F	✓F			✓M		✓F			✓M	✓F	✓F						✓F		✓F			✓F		✓M	
A Personalised Gift					✓F																							✓M	✓M								✓F		✓M	
No one there to Judge					✓F																																✓F		✓M	
Own Pace of Time																				✓F	✓F	✓M			✓F			✓M	✓M		✓F		✓F				✓F	✓F	✓M	
Increased Level of Maturity									✓F			✓F			✓F			✓M	✓M				✓M						✓M										✓M	
Changes in the Character				✓F					✓F																✓F			✓M				✓F							✓M	
Goal oriented																	✓F																					✓F		
Self-Trust																✓F							✓M													✓F				
Self-Learning	✓M	✓M	✓M					✓F								✓F	✓F			✓F		✓M	✓M				✓M	✓M		✓F	✓F	✓F		✓M	✓F	✓F		✓F		
Self-Consciousness				✓F			✓F	✓M																		✓F				✓F	✓F	✓F				✓F		✓F	✓M	✓
Step out from A Comfort Zone				✓F																			✓M				✓M		✓M	✓F	✓F	✓F				✓F	✓F			✓
Self-Care					✓F	✓M	✓F	✓M			✓F	✓F	✓F	✓F	✓F	✓F		✓M	✓M				✓M			✓F	✓M		✓M	✓F		✓F			✓F		✓F		✓M	✓
Self-Capability												✓F		✓F			✓F	✓M				✓M							✓M	✓F	✓F	✓F			✓F	✓F			✓M	✓
Self-Interest												✓F										✓M														✓F				
Dream Catcher																	✓F		✓M		✓F														✓F				
A Self of Accepting Challenges			✓M														✓F		✓M	✓F		✓M				✓F	✓M				✓F				✓F			✓F		✓
Personal-Growth															✓F	✓F						✓M																		
Skill-Development												✓F				✓F		✓M																			✓F			
Problem-Solver				✓F														✓M									✓M	✓M									✓F		✓M	✓
Positive Energy				✓F	✓F							✓F						✓M							✓F		✓M									✓F	✓F			
Escape from Routinised Life					✓F																		✓M														✓F			
Relaxation					✓F																				✓F			✓M							✓F		✓F		✓M	
Tool for Happiness						✓M		✓M			✓F							✓M						✓F	✓			✓M				✓F	✓F	✓M	✓F		✓F		✓M	✓
Unimaginable Travel Experience				✓F				✓M			✓F																							✓M						
Open -Minded									✓F															✓F	✓F			✓M			✓F	✓F		✓M	✓F	✓F			✓M	
Boredom		✓M						✓M				✓F		✓F			✓F																							

(Note: ✓M: Male Solo Traveller; ✓F: Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 1-3 Times); ✓M Male Solo Traveller; ✓F Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 4-6 Times); ✓M Male Solo Traveller;✓F Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 7-9 Times); ✓M Male Solo Traveller; ✓F Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 10 and above))

(Source: Interviewed Data)

4.3.2 Exploring Solo Travellers' Reflections on Significant Collective Moments that have changed their Self-Representation

The first section illustrates self-changes that study participants discovered during their travels, which they have highlighted in their self-definitions. Understanding these changes and how they contribute to one's self-transformation is crucial. Viewing the changes from a transformational perspective becomes essential here.

A transformative travel experience occurs when individuals are placed in a new and challenging context, leading them to develop new perspectives and responses. This ultimately results in changes to their behaviour, lifestyle and relationships with the world (Phillips, 2019, p. 68). At the same time, transformation happens when travel experiences meet tourists' needs and fulfil deeper intrinsic desires (Pung et al., 2020; Teoh et al., 2021).

To explain that solo travel is a reason for the solo travellers' self-transformation, the researcher of the current study has used transformation aspects suggested by the scholar Pung and her team in 2020 after refining the transformation theories of, 'Transformative Learning Theory' (Mezirow,2018), and 'Peirce's Theory of Experience' (Misak,2018), along with 'Value and Attitude Change' (Christie & Mason, 2003). In accordance with them, transformative experience is an accumulation of existential transformation, learning transformation and behavioural change (Pung et al., 2020).

The changes in oneself would be reflected in one's self-representation. The current research focuses on solo travellers and attempts to explain how solo travellers' self-representation changes with the support of transformation theories. The changes have been discussed through identified transformation aspects, including self-authenticity (*believing in oneself and acknowledging the truth of changes*), self-reflection (*the ability to discover the changes in oneself and witness one's own cognitive, emotional, and behavioural stimuli*), existential transformation (*emotions attached to travels bringing significant reasons for self-*

changes), and transformative learning (*new learning from others bringing changes in perception*) from a solo traveller's self-representation perspective. However, these changes were identified from solo travellers' travel experiences.

a. Sense of Authenticity (Self-Believe)

In line with Kolar and Zabkar (2010), authenticity encompasses the genuine thoughts of tourists regarding their travel experiences. The tourists' perception of their experience can serve as a motivator, value, or interest, thereby influencing tourist behaviour and leading to transformation (Yeoman et al., 2007). Notably, the realisation of tourists' authenticity within the context of transformation remains unresolved.

From the data obtained from the study participants, it was evidenced that solo travellers exhibited a sense of authenticity in relation to their self-evolution, particularly from a self-representation standpoint.

- *Oneself-to-Oneself*

  Discovering a new version of oneself (*uncovering hidden skills, and gaining a fresh and clear focus*), self-awareness (*recognising the power of the self, self-interest, and genuine feelings*), self-realisation (*admitting to changes and choosing a career*), and self-motivation (*praising oneself*).

- *Oneself-to-Others*

  Spontaneity (*interacting with strangers, trying new things while travelling, and stepping out of self-handicapping*).

Therefore, the following section explains how each solo traveller experienced changes from their solo travels.

- **Discovering A New Version of Oneself**

From the experiential perspective of solo travellers, they have discovered changes such as identifying hidden skills, acquiring new abilities, and gaining a fresh and clear focus of mind. Although not all solo travellers experience all of these changes, the common emotional sentiment expressed is that they find a new version of themselves after their solo travels.

When individuals travel alone, they are responsible for handling everything by themselves. The experience would be different compared to travelling with a group. From the perspective of solo travellers, companionship and compromise become inevitable if they are with their friends, resulting in less time alone. Participant 3 explained that,

> *"Before becoming a solo traveller, I never thought I would travel alone. I'm not someone who easily mingles with others, and I don't usually like inviting new people into my circle. However, when I travelled alone, I surprised myself by quickly opening up to new people I met at the places I visited. I believe that a simple journey can provide valuable experiences and lessons that can last a lifetime. Solo travel can help you discover a new version of yourself that you never knew existed."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The majority of solo travellers who consider themselves introverted tend to enjoy being in their own comfortable circle. However, when they find themselves travelling alone, they often naturally interact with strangers and initiate conversations with new people. This can lead to the discovery of a new side of themselves. Solo travel provides enough time for individuals to connect with their true selves, as expressed by a participant aged 36.

"I wasn't very interested in religion, but I also didn't consider myself an atheist. When I started travelling to different countries and spent time alone, it opened my eyes to the depth of the spiritual world. As a result, I began to appreciate the peace of mind and learnt to calm myself through meditation. Now, I can focus all my attention much better. I realised true happiness when I connected with religion and meditation. I used to think I couldn't sit in one place for long, but now I can sit still for as long as I want. The time I spent alone and the knowledge I gained from experiencing different cultures during my solo travels really helped me find my inner strength."

(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

In addition to the stories mentioned in the previous section, solo travellers discovered their hidden skills, including both soft and hard skills, during their solo journeys. The world is full of competition, and people often find themselves caught up in the rapid pace of life. Many individuals forget to take the time to fully understand themselves amidst their busy schedules. Participant 3 pointed out that real happiness is linked to the process of self-discovery. The time they spent alone not only helped them identify their hidden skills but also provided an environment for acquiring new abilities. Travel experiences are comprised of both expected and unexpected elements, and individuals often find themselves successfully navigating through unexpected challenges. As a result, they gain invaluable experiences and acquire new knowledge.

Besides acquiring new knowledge and recognising one's real purpose, solo travel also provides enough time for travellers to focus clearly on their lives. To explain in detail, at the age of 30, one participant recalled that,

"I don't want to overstate it, but after travelling alone to different places a few times, I've found that it has significantly helped me in approaching my PhD. I think of a PhD as a solo journey, much like an adventure that you have to embark on alone, regardless of the support you receive. When I travelled alone for leisure, I realised that despite being out of my comfort zone, away from home, and facing financial constraints and specific schedules, I was still able to enjoy it. This realisation has allowed me to find more enjoyment in my PhD. I've learnt to celebrate even the smallest milestones and appreciate them more than I ever did before. It refreshed my mind, enhanced my focus, and led to a clear idea of what I wanted to do. This is something I discovered about myself after solo travelling."

(P30, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

From the point of view of participant 30, she was passionate and addicted to travelling alone because of the positive distraction she received from her solo travels. Whenever she felt confused or not in the right mood to fix her routine activities, she realised that she was feeling down without any reason. Without a second thought, she used to travel alone, and she found that her choice of travel always supported her in resolving problems and refreshing her mind. Once she returned from her travels, she noticed that her efficiency level had increased, and she felt fresh. Therefore, solo travellers discover changes in their behaviour during and after their solo travels, leading them to conclude that they are a new version of themselves.

- **Self-Awareness**

In line with the solo travellers, from their travel experience, they recognised the power of their self, genuine opinions about their feeling on their changes, interest and their choice of their travel. The travellers used the time well to be aware about their self. To explain self-

authenticity under the theme of self-awareness, the researcher of the study has highlighted recognising the power of the self, self-interest, and genuine feelings of the travellers.

When it comes to the power of the self, many participants agreed that during alone time, they had the opportunity to genuinely explore themselves, which led to greater self-awareness. Participant 32 expressed her opinion that,

> *"I like to try new things when I am travelling alone, but at the same time, I equally have a concern for safety. At the beginning of my travels, I like to do camping by myself, but when I attempted to camp on the peak of the mountains, I hesitated and didn't have much confidence in myself. However, on my third or fourth attempt (I couldn't remember exactly, laughing), I motivated myself and went camping on top of the mountain. I believe that if your vision is clear and you trust yourself, you can achieve your dream. I also referred to many online articles and reviews of adventurous travellers on how to prepare for camping, and of course, I fully prepared with enough safety precautions. Now, I can proudly say that I have done many camping trips during my solo travels."*
>
> *(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

An individual's beliefs are instrumental in shaping their strengths and weaknesses, leading to heightened self-awareness. Reflecting on her trip experience, she gained insights into her inner self, fostering a belief in her evolving identity and subsequently engaging in its development. Of significance in this experiential account is the participant's progression from initial interest without confidence to self-encouragement and a confident pursuit of her aspirations. At this pivotal moment, she authentically embraced the changes within herself,

committing to personal transformation. The potency of self-belief significantly underpins individual metamorphosis.

Besides, finding self-interest is an intriguing aspect of solo travel. Various internal and external factors can influence an individual and change their interests over time. Desire often stems from unattained needs (O'Shea, 2002). When travelling solo, a traveller seeks to understand themselves, and from that self-knowledge, they aim to pursue their interests. Therefore, desire becomes a motivation for self-discovery. Additionally, self-interest forms the basis for one's self-awareness (O'Shea, 2002). To illustrate, participant 27 explained that,

> *"I started travelling alone out of curiosity, but later I found myself more interested in visiting historical places and learning about their background. While most tourists may enjoy leisure activities, I prefer to avoid crowded places and always seek to find meaning in my travels. Capturing pictures of historical places and delving into their deep history teaches us valuable lessons. Through solo travel, I have gained knowledge beyond what the curriculum offers. Doing what I truly want brings me great satisfaction, encourages me to follow my interests, and ultimately makes me happier, allowing me to see beauty in everything."*
>
> *(P27, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In addition to self-interest, the genuine feelings of solo travellers also enrich them to find themselves more authentic. When an individual believes or recognises the change happening within themselves, that trust strengthens the self-transformation. Additionally, others witness this transformation as well.

The participant 26 explained that,

"I used to be pampered by my family and always travelled with friends, so I didn't have much experience travelling alone. When the time came for me to travel alone, I was afraid, although I didn't show it to others. However, once I started travelling by myself, I realised I was brave enough to do it. It was sometimes boring and a bit sad when I saw others with their friends, but at the end of the day, I took ownership and handled everything on my own. I felt bold and brave. Although I felt uneasy at first, I later realised that it was the best way to improve myself and show others who I am. I'm not perfect, but I am learning from my travels."

(P26, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

One's belief in their thoughts about their own self changes would lead them to realise self-transformation. Through the power of the self, self-interest, and genuine feelings, solo travellers become aware of themselves. According to the participants, solo travel can be both interesting and challenging, as there are both pros and cons. Travellers may feel sad, bored and embarrassed on many occasions. However, it is interesting that solo travel works its magic and teaches travellers how to enjoy their own company, ultimately impressing them by showing changes in themselves. The next section explains how the study participants realised the changes in themselves and how they incorporated these changes into their self-representation.

- **Self-Realisation**

Self-realisation has been identified as a motivating factor why solo travellers choose solo travel (Hamid et al., 2021). Self-realisation is about acknowledging one's true self and gaining a deeper self-understanding (Ryan & Deci, 2001). From the perspective of solo travellers, many of them have admitted that the time spent travelling solo has allowed them to

discover who they are and has provided quality time for making important decisions in their lives.

The first and foremost thing is for an individual to believe in and acknowledge the changes they need to make in their behaviour. Travel can teach both good and bad things, and whether travellers choose to adopt these behaviours depends on individual preference. One participant, 29, mentioned that through travel, he learnt both good and bad habits. However, after acknowledging the need for self-change, he realised what aspects of behaviour to incorporate and what to avoid based on his maturity level and strong cultural background. Participant 29 continued by saying,

> *"During my travels, I enjoyed the freedom to attend night parties and try drinking and smoking. It was a different experience, and for a short time, it felt okay. I believed that participating in these activities was necessary for socialising with strangers and forming friendships. However, once I returned to my usual routine, I didn't have much time for parties, and I made a conscious effort to avoid smoking or engaging in other negative behaviours. It took some time to fully transition back to my regular life after the temporary enjoyment of travelling. Due to the influence of my parents and family, I decided to let go of these temporary behaviours and instead focused on making one positive change in my behaviour – being bolder and more confident. Not everyone is proficient in every language, so I decided that if I were to travel to an English-speaking country, I would speak confidently and not worry about making mistakes since English isn't my first language."*
>
> *(P29, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Therefore, one's strong realisation on their self-changes would describe one's self-transformation. The individual believed that the short–term happiness he experienced during the travel it influenced him to continue; however as his maturity and other influential factors (family and cultural values) would not support him to accept the changes instead he adhered changes which would bring positive changes into his personality.

- **Self-Motivation**

Simultaneously, another significant aspect of self-authentication is one's self-motivation, which the researcher has gleaned from the shared travel experiences of the participants. The act of '*praising oneself*' holds significant meaning for individuals and serves to encourage positivity and vitality. To support this argument, the researcher included information shared by some of the participants, such as,

> *"I am not from a sociable cultural background, so from my point of view, travelling alone is a brave thing."*
>
> *(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*
>
> *"When I completed my solo travel in an entirely new country, I felt proud of myself."*
>
> *(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*
>
> *"I am not someone who easily mingles with people, but when I'm alone, I act differently. I engage with strangers who are out of my comfort zone, and I feel really happy that I made my solo travel meaningful. Of course, I am proud of myself."*
>
> *(P33, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

"During the travel, I came across unexpected things. Even now, thinking about it gives me goose bumps. When I reached home after my trip, I felt proud of myself, and it gave me more motivation to continue."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

"At my age and from where I am, not everyone is keen on travelling alone. However, I am still making efforts to keep myself active and pursue my passion. This makes me feel fulfilled and encourages me to do more."

(P19, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

In conclusion, when it comes to self-representation, how one thinks about oneself is paramount. To connect with oneself authentically, this study's researcher has identified and emphasised the most commonly agreed-upon opinions from the travel experiences shared by the solo travellers who participated in the study. Before making changes to their behaviour, the solo travellers discovered a new version of themselves, used their travel time to become more aware of themselves, realised aspects about themselves, and motivated themselves to embrace the changes that their travel choices had brought into their lives. The following section elucidates the solo travellers' self-authenticity from both a personal and external perspective

- **Spontaneity**

The spontaneity arises naturally without a plan in human beings (Silva et al., 2020). This was discovered from the selected solo travellers in the current study. In the course of their experiential narratives, individuals articulated their propensity for embracing novel encounters, particularly in their interactions with unfamiliar individuals, their pursuit of novel experiences while travelling, and their willingness to transcend self-imposed limitations. They expressed a firm conviction that their impromptu actions contribute to a transformative reconfiguration of

their self-image, notably perpetuating an acute awareness of others' perceived judgements. Subsequently, the subsequent segment delineates the candid expressions of solitary voyagers concerning their introspections on how others perceive their spontaneous comportment.

Interacting with strangers has been identified as one of the most common behaviours in the context of solo tourism (Wilson & Little, 2005; Jordon & Gibson, 2005; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Hamid et al., 2021). When it comes to self-representation, it provides an in-depth understanding of solo travellers' behaviour. Participant 25 explained that,

> *"I am an extrovert and too talkative, and as for my personality, it is easy for me to mingle and jell with even new people. Yeah, all the time. I like to move, and I am a person who likes to move. Whoever I met during my solo travels are my good friends. I have a bunch of friends. Let's say that they were we met randomly, like in some places. I would support or something, if somebody else approaches, and then we just talked about if it clicks; that's how I made a number of good friends. I don't feel shy or reserved when giving compliments or accepting compliments. Also, if you are in a new place, obviously, you may not know all the places, so asking for help from others is always good, and that's also one of the ways to interact with new people. In front of others, I always want to present myself as bold. It's important when you are in a new place, and it will be a solid shield to avoid unwanted problems. It's also the best safety tool. Also, I believe the new learnings come from when you move from your comfort zone."*
>
> *(P25, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Many individuals experience some degree of hesitation when initiating conversations with new people. This reluctance is influenced by both the individual's disposition and the

specific social context. Even those who outwardly appear extroverted may endeavour to project boldness rather than vulnerability. This mindset can serve as a catalyst, spurring individuals to engage with new acquaintances and cultivate relationships, particularly in the context of travel.

Similar to participant 25, another participant shared a similar experience. In addition, participant 38 explained that she was more conscious when talking to people from her own country because they tend to misjudge her behaviour. However, when in new places, she does not hesitate to talk to others. She also mentioned that she is spontaneous when meeting new people and continued that,

> *"When we talk to people, we can understand their motives. If you are not comfortable with them or if their motives are not correct, it is best to move on and discontinue approaching new people. When I was in my place, I used to have a concern about talking to others in order to avoid unwanted issues."*
>
> ***(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)***

The reluctance to engage in conversation with unfamiliar individuals is a common occurrence, often stemming from apprehension or self-awareness about potential perceptions. However, when it comes to travelling, this hesitation is somewhat mitigated as the need to interact with others for directions and information becomes imperative. Despite these needs, certain personality types, particularly introverts, may still grapple with this due to concerns about their safety and unease in initiating contact with new acquaintances in unfamiliar locales.

In conclusion, both introverted and extroverted travellers present themselves as confident in front of strangers to avoid unnecessary safety issues. In addition, individuals who

enjoy interacting with others also mentioned that they like to receive attention from new people who are open to interacting.

In the context of how solo travellers present themselves, the spontaneity with which they engage in novel activities during their journeys provides them with opportunities to engage with unfamiliar individuals. Consequently, the manner in which travellers represent themselves in such situations becomes an intriguing aspect worth considering. In light of this perspective, it is noteworthy that participant 27 conveyed,

> *"When I was hiking and reached the top, I felt really thirsty and almost about to faint, but I didn't approach or ask for water from others. I had a doubt about how they would think of me, and I was also too shy to ask for help. It might have been my ego. It's good to have independence, but not always."*
>
> *(P27, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Therefore, it is evident that when solo travellers approach strangers in unfamiliar surroundings, some may experience concern about the perception of others, thereby inhibiting their willingness to engage with individuals encountered during their journeys. This notion is supported by another participant's experience, who articulated a heightened self-consciousness when interacting with new acquaintances through a distinct lens.

> *"I am reluctant to initiate contact with unfamiliar individuals due to concerns regarding potential discrimination or unfavourable reactions related to my gender or personal preferences. I exercise caution and discretion when interacting with individuals holding narrow-minded perspectives. Conversely, when engaging with*

those who espouse open-mindedness and demonstrate cultural acceptance, I feel more inclined to seek their assistance and broaden my social network."

(P40, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Based on the responses from participants, individuals may feel hesitant to express themselves if they are uncomfortable or worried about being misunderstood or judged by others, even in spontaneous situations. Therefore, it can be concluded that solo travellers are likely to have genuine thoughts about changes in their thoughts and actions, which may be reflected in how they present themselves.

b. Self-Reflection

The process of self-reflection involves taking action or experiencing something, which leads to a new understanding or appreciation of a concept, principle, or ideal. This creates a pathway to self-learning (Dellaportas et al., 2022, p. 24). Changes in one's self-belief are reflected in one's representation of themselves. In the context of tourism, scholars Coghlan and Weiler (2018) stated that personal transformation would not be possible without individual self-reflection. Similarly, in 2000, scholars Ateljevic and Doorne explained that the time spent travelling allows travellers to reflect on their experiences. Solo travel provides enough time for solo travellers to realise their self-changes, be genuine with their feelings, and then reflect on them. Therefore, self-reflection is essential for observing one's personal changes, development, and growth, in other words, self-transformation (Middleton, 2017).

To describe the self-reflection of solo travellers based on their travel experience, the researcher has discussed solo travellers' self-reflection under self-representation, including the following sub-themes:

- *Oneself-to-Oneself*

A self of curiosity *(self-interaction on one's self-perspective)* and Self-control *(survive in an extremely worst situation, control feelings and emotions, and control the level of fear and anxiety).*

- *Oneself-to-Others*

  A sense of curiosity *(self-reflection from one's own perspective)*

The following section briefly explains the solo travellers' self-reflection based on their travel experience.

- **A Self of Curiosity**

A study focused on solo travellers revealed a pervasive sense of curiosity regarding the personal transformations stemming from their solitary journeys. This inquisitiveness drove them to introspect about the impact of their travel experiences. Participants noted that both during and post-travel, they engaged in extensive retrospection, recalling the nuanced episodes and moments they encountered while traversing alone. This inner dialogue allowed them to ponder over their activities, their adeptness at managing circumstances independently, and the revelations that surfaced about their own inclinations. This introspective process facilitated a thorough examination of the self-evolutions brought about by their travels. In accordance with the study's participant 4, explained that,

"I intentionally chose solo travel to isolate myself and bring about changes in my life due to the high stress I was experiencing. I wasn't very confident in how I would handle everything, but I overcame the fear I was feeling at the time. From the moment I arrived at the new place and had my first interaction with a stranger, to every place I visited and the good friend I made during my trip, it was all amazing. Normally in the evenings, I wouldn't go out. Instead, I'd stay at my place, gaze at the sky, and write in

my travel diary, processing my thoughts and emotions. I wrote many emotional quotes during my travels, most of which reflected how I felt at the time and how I handled everything. This experience helped me realise who I am, why I did what I did, and how I felt, giving me considerable time to think and reflect on my thoughts."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

As per participant 4, she has reflected on her thoughts on what she has discovered during her travels and what kind of changes she experienced during and after her travels. Every person knows more about themselves than others. Likewise, when an individual makes a decision to travel alone and then executes the decision, the individual has a clear idea of their action and is aware of the genuine feelings about their changes. That will aid them in reflecting on their own thoughts and thus lead to behaviour changes.

- **Self-Control**

Simultaneously, solo travellers' self-control plays a vital role in their reflections, especially in terms of surviving extremely difficult situations, controlling feelings and emotions, and managing the level of fear and anxiety. To explain in detail, Participant 15 shared that she never expected such a situation to happen to her while travelling. After encountering the situation, she reflected on how she managed everything. She used the time alone to understand her behaviour and how those thought processes came to mind. Further details of the participant's sharing,

"During my travels, I was waiting for the train to reach the place I had planned to visit for the day. Unexpectedly, there was a terrorist attack, and everyone was screaming, and the transportation had stopped. Despite feeling a bit blank on what to

do next, I managed to act maturely and calm myself down. I listened carefully to the instructions, moved around there, safeguarded all my belongings, and stayed calm until the situation returned to normal. Looking back, I was surprised by the way I handled the situation. If I had shown my inability and panicked, the situation could have been even worse than what I experienced."

(P15, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

Exhibiting maturity and composure in adverse circumstances allows individuals to engage in self-reflection based on their experiences. Solo travel affords ample opportunity for travellers to gain insight into their own behaviour. Moreover, it empowers travellers to regulate their emotions, thus contributing significant value to the ongoing discourse. The participant 37 stated that,

"I have gone through a number of problems in my life, and I found a positive distraction when I started travelling alone. Before I started these solo journeys, I was more sensitive and would react immediately, without being able to control my feelings or emotions, regardless of whether my reactions were right or wrong. I used to truly depend on others, maybe because most of the time, I developed expectations from others since my world revolved around my family, and they were my first priority. However, when I started travelling alone, the experiences I had and the people I met gave me valuable knowledge. I matured through these experiences and I realised that maturity is not based on age but on the experiences you gain."

(P37, Female, Aged 50-59 years old)

Participant 37 explained that she developed the ability to control her feelings and emotions after gaining experiences from her travels. Similarly, other participants agreed that they were better at controlling fear or anxiety and expressing themselves confidently after travelling.

- **A Sense of Curiosity**

The extent of curiosity an individual has about their own thoughts regarding their self-representation depends on their initial thinking before self-reflection. If a solo traveller is aware of their behaviour and has a clear understanding of why they behaved in a certain way, taking into account the perspectives of others, then their self-reflection plays a significant role in their self-representation. To contribute to the current discussion, participant 3 mentioned that after several trips, he gained a clear understanding of how to behave in particular settings. The experiences he had while travelling alone provided him ample opportunities to reflect on his thoughts, regardless of the situations he encountered.

> *"In my past experience, when I visited spiritual places, I was scammed by vendors who charged different prices and provided false information. Initially, as a newcomer, I was friendly to the vendors near Buddhist temples and felt reluctant to refuse to buy from them. However, after realising the price differences, I prioritised my own interests over worrying about what others might think of me. Despite the possibility that vendors at new locations might not have the same intentions, I chose to avoid purchasing from shops near spiritual places. Instead, I preferred to prepare in advance and buy things outside of those areas."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In conclusion, participant 3 shared his self-reflection based on the perception of others, providing insight into the self-reflection of solo travellers. The experiences and concerns about how others might perceive their behaviour were always taken into account in the self-representation of solo travellers. In this context, a solo traveller has a clear understanding of why they behaved in a certain way. This representation of solo travellers was mainly based on their past experiences and the challenging situations they have encountered.

Similarly, solo travellers often find themselves reflecting on their experiences and contemplating the challenges and intentions surrounding safety. This reflection is influenced by past experiences, individual references, information gathered, and advice received from friends and family in preparation for their travels. In support of this assertion, the researcher has included the following participant testimonies.

> *"I am a sociable person and always open to meeting new people and discovering new interests. However, in reality, I am cautious when interacting with strangers in unfamiliar places. I don't mind joining them when I'm in a new place and don't have much information about it. However, I have my limitations, and I realised this when I turned down some invitations from strangers while travelling. Upon self-evaluation, I discovered the reasons behind my actions. Although I enjoy socialising, I prioritise my safety and prefer exploring places alone instead of always hanging out with strangers. Spending a few hours with them is fine, but not for the entire day or an extended period. I am proud of myself for using my alone time wisely. Others' opinions don't matter to me; my safety and dignity are what's most important."*
>
> *(P26, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Hence, in conclusion, the self-reflection of solo travellers is not only dependent on their travel experiences and the critical incidents they encounter during their journeys but also on their thought process regarding their safety. Besides, each individual's personality also equally contributes to the self-reflection of solo travellers. Therefore, solo travel brings changes into solo travellers' behaviour and as to explain that, this section witnessed the solo travellers' self-reflection on their actions.

c. Existential Transformation

The concept of existential transformation suggests that an individual's emotions are influenced by meaningful experiences or significant incidents (Kirillova et al., 2017; Richardson & Insch, 2023; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). Scholars have indicated that when individuals visit new destinations and immerse themselves in unfamiliar environments, they appreciate the freedom that comes with travel and the new knowledge they gain. These authentic experiences trigger emotions and lead individuals to discover personal changes, contributing to their personal growth (Brown, 2009).

This study aims to demonstrate that critical events experienced by solo travellers during their journeys lead to self-discovery and personal change, which is covered under objective three. This section specifically focuses on the overall experiences of solo travellers related to existential transformation and are as follow:

- *Oneself-to-Oneself*

  Self-assertion (*being confident in self-expression and communicating clearly in public*), the power of independence *(being independent and relying less on others),* Self-love *(better self-understanding, finding happiness within oneself, and finding meaning in one's life),* Self-management *(achieving a work-life balance and effective time management).*

- *Oneself-to-Others*

  Being more self-conscious *(pretending to be like others, and being a more appealing character by reducing self-handicapping, and increasing self-esteem)*

Therefore, the subsequent section will provide an in-depth exploration of the existential transformation experienced by solo travellers from the vantage point of self-representation.

- **Self-Assertion**

The concept of self-assertion refers to the ability to confidently express one's opinions, interests, thoughts, and emotions. Participants in the study mentioned that their solo travel experiences greatly increased their self-assertiveness, allowing them to communicate clearly in public, reduce self-handicapping, and boost self-esteem. Their strong sense of self stemmed from these experiences and from critical events resulted in significant shifts in their thoughts, beliefs, or behaviours during their travels. According to scholar Pung and his team (2020), existential transformation may or may not occur during travel, but the study explained that solo travellers' prior experiences and unexpected moments during their travels led to their existential transformation.

The information shared by the solo travellers in this study indicates that they were very confident in expressing themselves. They all agreed that solo travel had allowed them to bond with themselves, gain valuable experiences, and become more self-assured. One participant, 12, expressed that solo travel had helped her discover a new version of herself, enabling her to express herself more confidently and handle emotions more maturely. It is logical to think that when an individual develops a strong connection, they also begin to value both living and non-living things, realising their importance in life.

"I am the only child of my parents, so I have always been surrounded by everything I need. I have never felt alone, as my parents or friends were always there for me. When I chose to study far away from home, my parents couldn't come with me. I had very little confidence in my ability to survive alone in a new place without my parents or the familiar environment. However, this period of being alone taught me how much I depended on others. From then on, I began to travel alone and learn and experience everything for my own benefit to increase my confidence. Every journey teaches me different lessons and helps me face people who discriminate based on skin colour, unexpected challenges, and strengthens my mind. While I may be physically weak, mentally, I am strong. I've stopped worrying about what others think about me - this is my life, and I live it as I choose."

(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

At the same time, solo travellers expressed that due to travelling alone, they developed confidence in communicating with others. In this context, participants who feel confident communicating in public, have no hesitations in asking for help during trips (*e.g. navigating to a place*), are assertive in rejecting unwanted invitations (*e.g. offers from both locals and non-locals in a new destination*), are comfortable bargaining and interacting with new people at the destination, and after travelling, can confidently decline unwelcome invitations, clearly reject unfair work allocations and responsibilities, and confidently share their opinions in meetings or discussions (*e.g. in a working environment*).

Furthermore, individuals who have travelled solo more than ten times and have encountered unexpected moments during their trips have shared their experiences of personal growth. They have learnt to communicate more effectively, have self-control in expressing their emotions, and be clear on what to say and what not to say. This does not mean that only

solo travellers excel in public speaking and communication, but their solo travel experiences have taught them valuable lessons in their own unique way. Whether all solo travellers experience the same level of improvement in expressing themselves confidently varies based on individual preferences, cognitive abilities, and personality types. However, the study's participants have shown common traits in seeing solo travel.

Participant 28 explained how he became more confident in expressing his opinion in public or with others by using how others viewed the changes that happened within himself.

> *"I was very shy. I had never really ventured outside of my school and home. However, now people see me climbing mountains and engaging in outdoor activities, which is a completely different side of me compared to what they knew before, especially my school friends. I used to be very reserved and more into study activities. They have noticed a significant change in me. Even the way I talk and my broadened knowledge and perception of the world have surprised them. I often talk about things they never expected me to, and I have embraced experiences they wouldn't have tried. They always say I'm bold and open-minded, and they admire my outgoing nature. I have also noticed that I am much more confident in sharing my opinions in discussions and stating my opinions clearly. In the past, I used to accept more work in addition to my responsibilities, sometimes taking on tasks from others without really thinking about it. It felt like they were purposely targeting me because I wasn't able to say no and lacked the confidence to refuse. (Hahaha, sometimes I can be such an emotional fool.) However, after gaining more experience and spending time alone, I have enriched my personality and I am now able to say no if I am unable to take on more tasks."*
>
> *(P28, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

When an individual experiences unforeseen benefits and positive behavioural changes while travelling, it cultivates a strong bond between the traveller and their chosen mode of travel. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the context of solo travel. Expanding upon the discourse regarding the self-assertion of solo travellers, the majority of participants concurred that they feel more robust and self-assured when they recognise their ability to transcend self-imposed limitations. As indicated by the participants, both anticipated and unanticipated circumstances encountered during travels contribute to personal development, fostering mental and physical fortitude in travellers.

- **The Power of Independence**

A solo traveller becomes more connected to travelling alone because it is one of the major features of independence. Travellers enjoy full freedom without compromising or adjusting themselves for others. The participants agreed on the common benefit and the major motive for continuing their solo travel due to independence. The time spent alone allows individuals to realise the power of independence, discover who they are, and learn not to depend too much on others but rather to do everything by themselves.

In the previous sections, there has been a more in-depth discussion about independence. In this section, the participant highlighted how they connected with solo travel and the extent to which they experienced intense emotions during their solitary journeys. Expressing the existential transformation, the 35-year-old participant explained that,

> *"During each visit, I gained in-depth knowledge, participated in activities I desired, met new people, built a network, and everything was based on my preferences. From reserving a hotel to booking a flight, I did everything myself. The skills I developed during my travels supported me when I returned to my routine life. I usually*

hang around with friends when I'm going to college. If my friends are not around, I sometimes skip meals and even classes. I've realised that I depend on them a lot and adjust my schedule for them. It hurts when I feel like I'm not a priority to them. That's why I started travelling alone. Initially, I posted on social media to let my friends know I could handle things on my own, but later, I shared pictures just for my own memories, not to prove anything. I've noticed significant changes in my behaviour before and after solo travel. One lesson I learnt is that there are people around the world who have their own problems but still find happiness. I've realised that we shouldn't live our lives to impress or worry about others. Travelling solo has taught me to be independent."

(P35, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

In conclusion, it is not essential to rely on others or consistently adapt one's demeanour to make an impression. From the standpoint of solo travellers, self-representation centres on portraying oneself as independent. This mindset prompts behavioural adjustments, fostering the self-assurance to engage in solo pursuits, eschew the need to impress others and refrain from compromising one's standards for individuals who do not warrant such accommodation. Notably, the collective perspective of the study's participants underscores a sense of self-satisfaction derived from independently embracing new experiences without inconveniencing others.

- **Self-Love**

The concept of self-love is identified as a significant emotion experienced by solo travellers during their journeys. In the context of women travelling alone, researchers have observed that these travellers tend to prioritise self-love following their solitary expeditions in order to enhance their personal wellbeing (Hamid et al., 2021). Self-love is closely linked with

self-care. It is noted that not everyone prioritises self-care due to various roles, responsibilities, work pressure, and other factors in their lives. However, while travelling solo, individuals tend to focus on taking care of themselves, leading to improvements in their personal wellbeing. As a result of the changes they experience during their solo travels, participants establish a connection with their journeys. Solo travellers express their self-love through self-representation, which includes gaining a better understanding of themselves, finding happiness within, and discovering meaning in their lives.

Understanding oneself involves being aware of one's behaviour, attitude, strengths, and weaknesses. It is considered as a continual manifestation of one's psychological life (Bell & Laite, 2016). Researchers in the context of solo tourism have found that solo travel provides individuals with ample time for self-discovery (Pung et al., 2020; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023), leading to a better understanding of themselves and a greater willingness to take care of their wellbeing.

Through their participation in the ongoing discussion, solo travellers expressed that they see solo travel as an opportunity to learn about themselves. Even when they interact with strangers while visiting a destination, solo travellers usually spend the majority of their time alone, which allows them to get to know themselves better. In support of this, participant 5 stated that:

> *"One of the things I find relaxing is the freedom to just have a spontaneous idea without having to compromise because I'm clear in my various roles - as a hotelier, a mother taking care of my daughters, a wife, and a daughter to my parents. In these different roles, I often feel like I have been compromising to accommodate others. So, for me, solo travel is a way of feeling like I'm the centre of the world. I think sometimes I need this kind of freedom, just a few days, to recharge and regain my energy. Solo*

travel feels like a special gift that helps me take care of myself. It gives me the chance to rest, take a break from family responsibilities and work, and do things I want to do. I'm a good daughter, wife, and mother, and I'm a good worker too. But when I travel solo, I can focus entirely on myself. The self-satisfaction I get from doing the things I want makes me mentally strong. Solo travel feels like recharging my mind and body so I can stay active until the next solo trip."

(P5, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

According to the participant, subsequent to her solo travels, she observed a positive transformation within herself. She experienced a heightened sense of mental clarity and rejuvenation, enabling her to effectively cater to her personal, familial, and professional obligations. Consequently, she attributed a strong sense of significance to her solo travel experiences.

Additionally, solo travellers strongly connect with solo travel when they see the beauty of the world with their hearts. This allows them to find happiness within themselves through self-understanding and allocating time for self-fulfilment. Typically, people seek happiness outside, but solo travellers embrace the transformation of finding happiness within themselves. Participant 9 expressed her emotions through solo travel, adding to her self-representation that,

"At the beginning of my solo travels, I felt happy when my friends called me brave for travelling alone. I used to share my travel stories online, and it felt like a real joy. However, later on, I realised that from my family and friends, I wasn't praised for being bold, but rather for my patience and politeness. This surprised me. I also discovered that I found happiness in small things like completing a daily plan, cooking

my favourite food, buying little things, listening to my favourite music, and writing my thesis."

(P9, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

If an individual finds a way to make themselves happy, it would be considered a significant change in behaviour for solo travellers. They use their time alone to understand themselves and discover that they can make themselves happy. Additionally, solo travellers become more attached to travelling because it's one of the ways they seek meaning in their lives. Participant 17, recalled the following:

"I spent half of the year studying and working hard for career development. One day, I unexpectedly fell sick and realised that despite all my efforts, I hadn't prioritised my own happiness. Reflecting on my childhood interests, I decided to start travelling alone in my early 40s to visit historical places all around the world. Through my solo travels, I learnt more than I had from my past experiences. Initially, I was worried and felt like I was the only one facing problems. However, as I travelled to different countries and met people from diverse cultures, I realised how much I had to be grateful for in my life. Trust me, there are so many things in the world. It's okay to have problems; just face them with confidence. The experiences I gained gave me the courage to confront my health issues, and I promised myself to love myself more than anything else. Life is short, so learn to mature and see beauty in the small things. Even in negative situations, see them as a chance for personal development."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

In conclusion, solo travellers have undergone significant personal transformation, achieving a profound self-awareness, discovering intrinsic happiness, and embracing a deeper sense of purpose in their lives. The experiences shared by the participants served to authenticate the aforementioned observations. Simultaneously, another compelling reason for solo travellers who have developed a strong connection with solo travel is self-management.

- **Self-Management**

The concept of self-management involves the ability to control one's behaviour, emotions, and thoughts effectively (Raeburn, 2024). According to solo travellers, they have reflected on their travel experiences and have illustrated that they feel and believe that they have become better at controlling their emotions, managing negative thoughts and practising self-discipline in their activities.

When asked whether solo travellers had self-discipline or self-control before their solo travels, the answer is that they may have had some, but the emphasis is on the fact that solo travellers have reported an improvement in self-management after multiple solo trips. They have highlighted that while individuals can receive support for bookings and trip planning before travelling, once they reach their destination, they are solely responsible for everything until the end of the trip. This specific liminal period is considered to be influential in how individuals articulate self-discipline and develop self-control. The changes observed in their behaviour during the trip are likely to reflect in their routine life upon their return. However, it is important to note that these changes may not occur immediately after a single solo trip unless an individual is interested in recognising and accepting the changes to incorporate them into their behaviour.

Continuing on, participant 8 explained that the experience of planning, organising and managing the travel process helped him become more self-disciplined in balancing work life with personal responsibilities and studies. Further, he explained that,

> *"I struggled with balancing my work and personal life, often forgetting meeting dates and assignment deadlines. Prioritising and finding balance was a major source of stress. I would use work pressure as an excuse for neglecting important things in my personal life. While it wasn't a complete mess, my life felt disorganised. However, after a few solo trips, I learnt how to better manage my time. Before each trip, I would efficiently complete my work to free up time for travel. These experiences made me realise that if I could accomplish so much in a limited time, I could surely achieve more with the rest of my time. Reflecting on my behaviour and acknowledging my mistakes, I came to this realisation after several solo travels. Now, I proactively schedule meetings, events, and study deadlines in advance, and I give equal importance to my personal life. As a result, things are less chaotic now."*
>
> *(P8, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The slight changes in thought, the acceptance of mistakes, and the incorporation of these into behaviour all made the participant feel great about his travel. Therefore, solo travel does not always necessitate a major change in oneself; rather, it can be a small change that serves as a reason or starting point for significant changes.

- **Being More Self-Conscious**

This section explores how individuals express their emotions and strong beliefs through their solo travel experiences while considering others' perspectives. The study participants,

who were solo travellers, expressed a deep connection and passion for travelling alone. They described the bonds they formed during their travels as indescribable. Additionally, they reflected on their experiences, noting that they were more considerate, which allowed them to present themselves in a way that mirrored others while also positively revealing their true identity

The participant, 31, explained that she loves to travel alone. Whenever she does, she pretends to be a local by picking up their slang, dressing like them, and not drawing attention to herself as a tourist. She tries to blend in at the destination, even though her appearance might be different. She does this to stay safe, avoid unnecessary attention, and have the flexibility to move around without any problems.

Curiosity drives a solo traveller to form a deeper emotional connection with their journeys. When travellers are mindful of others and their surroundings, they cultivate a greater awareness of safety, making them more cautious while travelling alone and when they return to their daily routines. This heightened consciousness not only ensures safety but also provides the opportunity to learn about different cultures and gain valuable knowledge.

To explain how a solo traveller incorporated consciousness by pretending to others into their self-representation, participant 31 explained as follows:

> *"Before embarking on my solo travels, I made sure to thoroughly research my destination - including its culture and local customs. Upon arrival, I made an effort to dress similarly to the locals, though not identically, in order to blend in as much as possible. Naturally, my appearance would still give away that I was a foreigner, but I hoped to create the impression that I had been living there for some time. This strategy enabled me to explore the area without drawing too much attention from local vendors*

or travel guides. It also helped me avoid the hassle of dealing with persistent vendors and minimised the risk of falling victim to scams."

(P31, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Besides trying to blend in with the locals, solo travellers are also more aware of safety measures to avoid unwanted troubles and attract less attention in unfamiliar places due to a lack of preparation or travel skills. Participant 30 stated that,

"During pre-travel, I am usually unsure of the situation, and I am concerned about what might happen. Since I have not been in that situation before, I tend to think and double-check everything. I even confirm my ticket timings multiple times, even though I have them in my email and on my phone. I also make sure I have packed everything and double-check my chargers. I also ensure I have a battery bank and confirm my accommodation by messaging the hosts multiple times. I even check my bank account to budget for the trip. Being prepared and extra concerned about my safety and belongings has taught me to protect not only myself but also to take care of others when I am travelling with a group."

(P30, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

Engaging in pretence and prioritising self-consciousness are behaviours commonly associated with how solo travellers choose to represent themselves, as their actions adapt to perceived external judgements. Furthermore, solo travellers express apprehension about authentic self-disclosure, particularly related to matters of ethnicity, religion, and physical attributes such as skin tone and body weight, language, and gender. Participant 39 articulated a shift in self-expression prompted by considerations of external perceptions.

"I am proud to affirm my identity as a gay individual and to embrace my membership in the LGBTQ+ community. Initially, I struggled with confidence and sought solace in solo travels, distancing myself from the complexities of societal norms and concealing my true self. During these solitary journeys, I engaged in introspection, questioning why I felt compelled to hide my authentic identity and live a facade to conform to societal expectations. My lack of confidence hindered me from openly expressing my true self. However, through my interactions with diverse individuals in new destinations, I encountered like-minded friends who shared similar experiences of social stigmatisation. Engaging with them empowered me to cultivate the confidence to authentically express my identity. I gleaned valuable insights regarding the existence of communities that embrace individuals without judgement. My solo travels provided me with the realisation that external perceptions should not dictate my intrinsic identity. It is through these solitary explorations that I found communities characterised by openness and acceptance."

(P39, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

Some individuals adhere to their own sets of rules and behaviours, while others feel stigmatised and, therefore, conceal their identities or lack the confidence to face society. Based on participants' experiences, solo travel becomes a means of accomplishing their dreams. They engage in this to connect with others while maintaining their position in society and avoiding criticism or sarcasm. The fear of rejection or stigmatisation prompts individuals to hide their true selves. On the other hand, individuals from stigmatised groups who have become solo travellers have the opportunity to find acceptance and a supportive community that allows them to reveal their true identities beyond judgement.

In contrast to this situation, the influence of society also has a positive impact on one's self-representation. To illustrate this point, participant 3 shared that, due to the culture and societal expectations at the destination, I improved my communication and language proficiency. I also worked on grooming my personality. Expanding on this,

> *"I am not very fluent in English, and I am a reserved person who isn't very comfortable around new people. When I visited a European country, I noticed that people appreciate smart and confident speakers and don't prefer shy individuals. Since I didn't want to appear weak in front of others, I observed their behaviour and way of speaking. I used that opportunity to improve my communication skills and become more assertive. Whenever I didn't know something, I took the initiative to ask for help without any hesitation, and through this, I learnt the power of being proactive and confident."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Therefore, to sum it up, a solo traveller develops an emotional connection when he or she finds themselves embracing self-assertion *(being confident in self-expression and communicating clearly in public*), the power of independence (*being independent and relying less on others*), self-love (*better self-understanding, finding happiness within oneself, and finding meaning in one's life*), self-management (*achieving a work-life balance and effective time management*), and being more self-conscious (*pretending to be like others, and being a more appealing character by reducing self-handicapping and increasing self-esteem*).

d. Transformative Learning (Knowledge Integration to the Self-Transformation)

The concept of transformative learning, as posited by transformative learning theory, involves "the integration of others' perspectives, the acquisition of new skill sets, and the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness to develop a broader understanding of the world" (An

Nguyen & Hsu, 2023, p. 1366). Engaging with solo travellers presents opportunities to encounter diverse individuals, immerse in different cultures, and acquire new knowledge, thereby facilitating personal skill development and growth. Previous scholarly investigations have emphasised the transformative potential of volunteering in new environments (Bone & Bone, 2018), prolonged travel experiences for female explorers in foreign lands (Pung et al., 2020), and the enhanced learning outcomes for male solo travellers participating in novel activities (Pug et al., 2020). This exposure to varied cultures and experiential learning has been linked to heightened cognitive and physical competencies, as well as skill enhancement (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

Based on the gathered data, the study participants have identified transformative learning stemming from their travel experiences. They have implemented this acquired knowledge into their behaviour and witnessed changes in their self-representation. The specifics are delineated as follows:

- *Oneself-to-Oneself*

  Self-development *(learnt new skills and learnt new knowledge),* Being open-minded *(learnt to respect multiple cultural values and learnt to listen to others' opinions)*
- *Oneself-to-Others*

  A sense of responsibility *(being responsible for one's own actions and learning to be socially responsible)*

The following section explains the solo travellers' transformative learning reflected in their self-representation.

- **Self-Development**

Self-development has been identified as a major motivation for solo travellers. When travelling alone, solo travellers use the time by themselves as an opportunity to learn new things. It is not necessarily that solo travellers deliberately set out to learn new things or make it their ultimate purpose while travelling; instead, they use their time alone to do the things they desire. That experience turned out to be their motivation to continue their travel. The experiences they had as solo travellers caused them to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their behaviour. Consequently, these self-discoveries led to existential, learning, and behavioural transformations. Therefore, solo travel provides ample opportunity for travellers to recognise the changes within themselves.

In the context of their learning, it is inevitable to address self-changes with regard to self-development. The data collected indicates that solo travellers have experienced self-development through skill enhancement, personal growth, and improvements in personality. As these aspects have been identified as motivations, the researcher has synthesised the core elements that explicate transformative learning. In alignment with this, one of the 40-year-old participants articulated that,

> *"I am a Finnish nationalist, and apart from my native language, I have learnt more than seven languages, including Thai and Mandarin. The reason I emphasise this is because these two languages were particularly challenging for me. During my time in these countries, I was really impressed with the languages and motivated myself to learn them. Besides the relaxation, solo travel also offers numerous benefits. As a result of my solo travels, I developed my language skills and found a job in Thailand because I can speak Thai reasonably well. This has put me in a good position career-wise."*
>
> *(P40, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Participant 40 recalled an incident and expressed confidence in his ability to speak multiple languages, which made him proud. Some solo travellers also developed physical skills while enriching their knowledge about people and the world. For example, participant 36 mentioned that she did not know much about a certain community before visiting their places, but gained understanding and changed her perspective on judging people after learning more about them. She further explained that,

> *"Before travelling alone, my friends and family advised me not to go to India due to safety and risk issues. Their warnings strongly influenced me, so I avoided visiting whenever I had the chance. However, I was drawn to the attractions and eventually encouraged myself to visit. This experience made me realise how wrong I was about judging the community. I found that people were incredibly generous, offered great hospitality, and were very helpful. I learnt that sometimes, relying solely on others' opinions or trusting online and social media reviews may not always be the best approach. I discovered that every place has its good and bad aspects. Ultimately, I learnt from my mistakes and embraced the positive behaviour of the people from various communities living in different parts of the country."*
>
> *(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Therefore, gathering all the information, solo travel allows travellers to learn about themselves, aiding in their self-development.

- **Being Open-Minded**

The study's analysis identified a distinct attribute among the participants, where a majority of those who self-identified as open-minded had acquired this trait through their

experiences as solo travellers. Their journeys facilitated interactions with diverse individuals, fostering a deep appreciation for local customs and cultural nuances. The research underscores their development of a profound respect for diverse cultural tenets and an ability to attentively consider others' viewpoints. This examination elucidates how solo travellers cultivate an open-minded disposition and its manifestation in their self-representation. The participant 25 explained that,

> *"I absolutely adore coffee, no matter how many cups I have in a day. While I was travelling solo in Italy, I stopped by a coffee shop one evening to grab a cup. To my surprise, the owner, a kind elder, kindly corrected me, explaining that having coffee in the evening isn't customary in Italy. This encounter taught me the significance of Italian food culture. Before this, I didn't pay much attention to my eating habits; I would eat when I felt hungry. However, this experience inspired me to adopt healthier food behaviours."*
>
> *(P25, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Tasting local food and participating in gastronomy workshops are great ways for solo travellers to learn about the food culture of the places they visit. Solo travellers often seek authentic cultural experiences and enjoy interacting with locals. Without the distractions of companions, they may be more inclined to engage with the local community, try local cuisines, and learn about different customs and traditions. Solo travellers often seek authentic cultural experiences and interactions with locals. Without the distractions of companions, they may be more inclined to engage with the local community, try local cuisines, and learn about different customs and traditions. Aside from food culture, the appreciation of religion and rituals, language, music, arts, and their respective beliefs, solo travellers develop open-mindedness when engaging with both new and local individuals. Acquiring new knowledge and wisdom

becomes attainable when solo travellers approach their journeys with an open mind and devoid of expectations. This perspective is essential for solo travellers, as it facilitates a deeper understanding of different cultures and promotes meaningful interactions.

> *"Exploring a new culture, embracing unfamiliar experiences, and connecting with diverse individuals become feasible when approached without preconceived expectations. Developing friendships and familiarising oneself with local customs and values greatly benefits from an open-minded approach."*
>
> (P39, Male, Aged 50-59 years old)

In accordance with solo travellers, learning from their solo travels helps them become open-minded and further enhances their knowledge. Based on the experiences shared by solo travellers, this shift in mindset facilitates seamless interactions with others, is devoid of premature judgements, and enables adept navigation of new environments.

- **A Sense of Responsibility**

In addition to acquiring knowledge of new cultures and social norms, solo travellers assimilate a sense of personal accountability and social responsibility from their journeys. Consequently, their portrayal as solo travellers is indicative of their acquired knowledge and exhibits a mindful regard for others in their reflections.

One of the participants, 28, articulated that during his solo journey to Japan, he was captivated by the societal culture, encompassing public regulations, transportation protocols, and more. While accustomed to less stringent traffic rules in his home country, he found himself discomfited by his own comportment amidst the Japanese populace. Subsequently, he keenly observed the adaptive self-representation of individuals to conform to societal norms.

"When I was travelling in Japan, I had to admit that I used to jaywalk when there were no cars around, even if the pedestrian signal was red. However, I noticed that the local people never did this and would wait for the signal to turn green even if the road was clear. This made me realise that my behaviour was irresponsible. From that point on, I made sure to follow their rules and regulations. It was a new and wonderful learning experience for me, and I have since made it a point to act responsibly, especially in front of others. I learnt that breaking the rules when no one is around is not good behaviour. This experience taught me to always act responsibly."

(P28, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

In this instance, the solo traveller is observed through the lens of public perception regarding potential rule violations. This heightened awareness prompts the individual to integrate constructive behavioural adjustments. At the same time, besides impressing others, solo travellers are socially responsible by following the country's rules, trying not to engage in offensive activities, and respecting natural and cultural values. According to previous studies on self-representation, it has been shown that people have a concern for how they present themselves, mainly to make a good impression on others (Duguay, 2019; Ann & Schlosser, 2020; Nair et al., 2021). However, for solo travellers, self-representation goes beyond mere impression management. It also involves being conscious of revealing their true identity to adapt or blend in for safety reasons while keeping a distance from unknown risks and challenges. Additionally, solo travellers' self-representation to others includes not only making a good impression but also presenting themselves in a way that respects the existing culture and social norms.

Therefore, coinciding the solo travellers' self-representation based on the transformative learning, self-development *(learnt new skills and learnt new knowledge)*, being

open-minded *(learnt to respect multiple cultural values and learnt to listen to others' opinions)* from oneself to oneself perspective. Also, a sense of responsibility *(being responsible for one's own actions and learning to be socially responsible)* from oneself to others perspective.

4.3.3 Summary- Research Question Two

To summarise the findings on whether solo travel brings changes in solo travellers' self-representation, the researcher followed three steps arrived the following conclusions. Table 4.4 explains the steps and the results.

Table 4.4 Solo Travellers and their Self-Changes

Steps Used to Analysis	Findings
1. Using solo travellers' self-definitions to describe the changes that solo travel brought into their self-representation	**Solo travellers with 1-3 travel experiences:** • Solo travellers at this stage are more curious about their travel and are preparing themselves to challenge themselves by being alone and seeking adventure; • Solo travellers empower themselves to take care of their wellbeing; • Solo travellers were trying make their own limitations flexible and learn to bring positivity by figuring out the stressing point or enriching their happiness. **Solo travellers with 4-6 travel experiences:** • Solo travellers were much fascinated with travelling alone; • Solo travellers were able to satisfy their needs, desires and expectations without anyone's support; and • Solo travellers were being open-minded. **Solo travellers with 7-9 travel experiences:** • Solo travellers act more maturely. **Solo travellers with 10 or more times of travel experiences:** • Solo travellers were more mature and open-minded with minimal expectations. Therefore, based on the changes, solo travellers defined themselves as, • Adventure-Seekers (1-3 times) • Variety-Seekers (4-6 times) • Self-Discoverers (7-9 times)

	• Matured Learners or Survivors (10 or more)
2. Exploring solo travellers' reflections on significant collective moments that have changed their self-representation	**a. Sense of Authenticity** • ***Oneself-to-Oneself*:** Discovering a new version of oneself (*uncovering hidden skills and gaining a fresh and clear focus*), self-awareness (*recognising the power of the self, self-interest, and genuine feelings*), self-realisation (*admitting to changes and choosing a career*), and self-motivation (*praising oneself*). • ***Oneself-to-Others*:** Spontaneity (*interacting with strangers, trying new things while travelling, and stepping out of self-handicapping*). **b. Self-Reflection** • ***Oneself-to-Oneself*:** A self of curiosity *(self-interaction on one's self perspective)* and Self control *(survive in an extremely worst situation, control feelings and emotions, and control the level of fear and anxiety).* • ***Oneself-to-Others*:** A sense of curiosity *(self-reflection from one's own perspective).* **c. Existential Transformation** • ***Oneself-to-Oneself*:** Self-assertion (*being confident in self-expression and communicating clearly in public*), the power of independence *(being independent and relying less on others),* Self-love *(better self-understanding, finding happiness within oneself, and finding meaning in one's life),* Self-management *(achieving a work-life balance and effective time management).* • ***Oneself-to-Others*:** Being more self-conscious *(pretending to be like others and being a more appealing character by reducing self-handicapping and increasing self-esteem)* **d. Transformative Learning** • ***Oneself-to-Oneself*:** Self-development *(learnt new skills and learnt new knowledge),* Being open-minded *(learnt to respect multiple cultural values and learnt to listen to others' opinions).* • ***Oneself-to-Others*:** A sense of responsibility *(being responsible for one's own actions and learning to be socially responsible).*

(Source: The data collected from the participants)

Table 4.4 reveals that solo travel brings about changes in solo travellers' self-representation. However, this section is based on an analysis of solo travellers' overall travel experiences. The next section further explains self-changes based on the critical events encountered by solo travellers during their journeys. These critical moments triggered the solo travellers to identify self-changes and led them to realise their self-transformation.

4.4 Research Question Three: What Critical Moments May Trigger Solo Travellers to Make Changes in Their Self-Representation?

In the context of solo tourism, it offers travellers enough time and extended travel experiences to discover themselves. This self-discovery can lead to personal growth, new self-definitions, and a better understanding of their travel experiences (Objective One) (Teoh et al., 2021; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). To understand how solo travellers learn about changes in themselves, they can evaluate their beliefs, values, and feelings effectively and honestly (Objective Two) (Teoh et al., 2021; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). Self-evaluation is possible for travellers when they interact with themselves. Sufficient self-interaction during solo travel allows individuals to engage in effective self-evaluation (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). Therefore, the time spent alone plays a significant role in each solo traveller's self-awareness and realisation of changes. The travel experience leads to self-changes and transformation, and the depth of self-transformation is more pronounced when a traveller experiences challenges or encounters that challenge their core beliefs (Teoh et al., 2021).

Solo travellers may experience critical moments that trigger a shift in their initial perceptions, leading to self-transformation. While it is not entirely clear what factors cause this shift in their beliefs, there is limited understanding of the critical moments behind travellers' transformative experiences, regardless of the type of traveller they are. However, summarising existing identified trigger points generally include connection with *nature* (wildlife & scenic

attractions), *self-examination* (solitude, calmness, awareness), *spontaneity and novelty*, *aesthetic experiences* (intense art/music), and *self-development* (physical activities, overcoming limitations, and scientific discoveries) (Curtin, 2005; Farber & Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2009; Ulusoy, 2016; Kiirillova et al., 2017).

According to Kirillova's team (2017), solo travellers often encounter a range of emotions, feelings of transience, demarcation, heightened cognitive awareness, and a sense of connectivity. While the data collected from participants aligns with existing research findings, the triggering events differed and provided in-depth insight into why the situations faced by solo travellers during their journeys were considered critical events. The study examined the reactions of solo travellers to these situations, the lessons they derived from these experiences, and their subsequent incorporation into their self-representation. Additionally, the research explored how these experiences influenced behavioural changes in solo travellers based on their cognitive responses and travel experiences. Furthermore, it delved into the behaviours solo travellers aimed to incorporate and avoid as a result of these pivotal events.

The overall discussion aims to understand the final model the researcher intends to construct from the findings. Since the study focuses on solo travellers' self-representation, the critical events have been divided into those created by the solo traveller (*by self*) or by others (*external factors/parties*). Taking all of this into account, the findings for Objective Three attempts to explain how the experiences solo travellers gain during their travels trigger changes in their habitual behaviour by adding new discoveries and avoiding undesirable behaviour. In conclusion, the collected information from solo travellers strongly illustrates that solo travel is one of the reasons behind self-transformation, and the critical events experienced during travel strongly contribute to changes in solo travellers' behaviour and self-representation. Furthermore, the findings provide a clear understanding of areas in existing studies related to transformation and how self-transformation happens in a solo traveller's behavioural changes.

Figure 4.2 explains the steps of the analysis followed by the researcher to conclude the findings. The analysis technique Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis is used for research question three. It elaborates on the researcher's role in analysing this research question. Additionally, before analysing all the collected information, the researcher explained the validity and reliability of the information based on the qualitative research method approach.

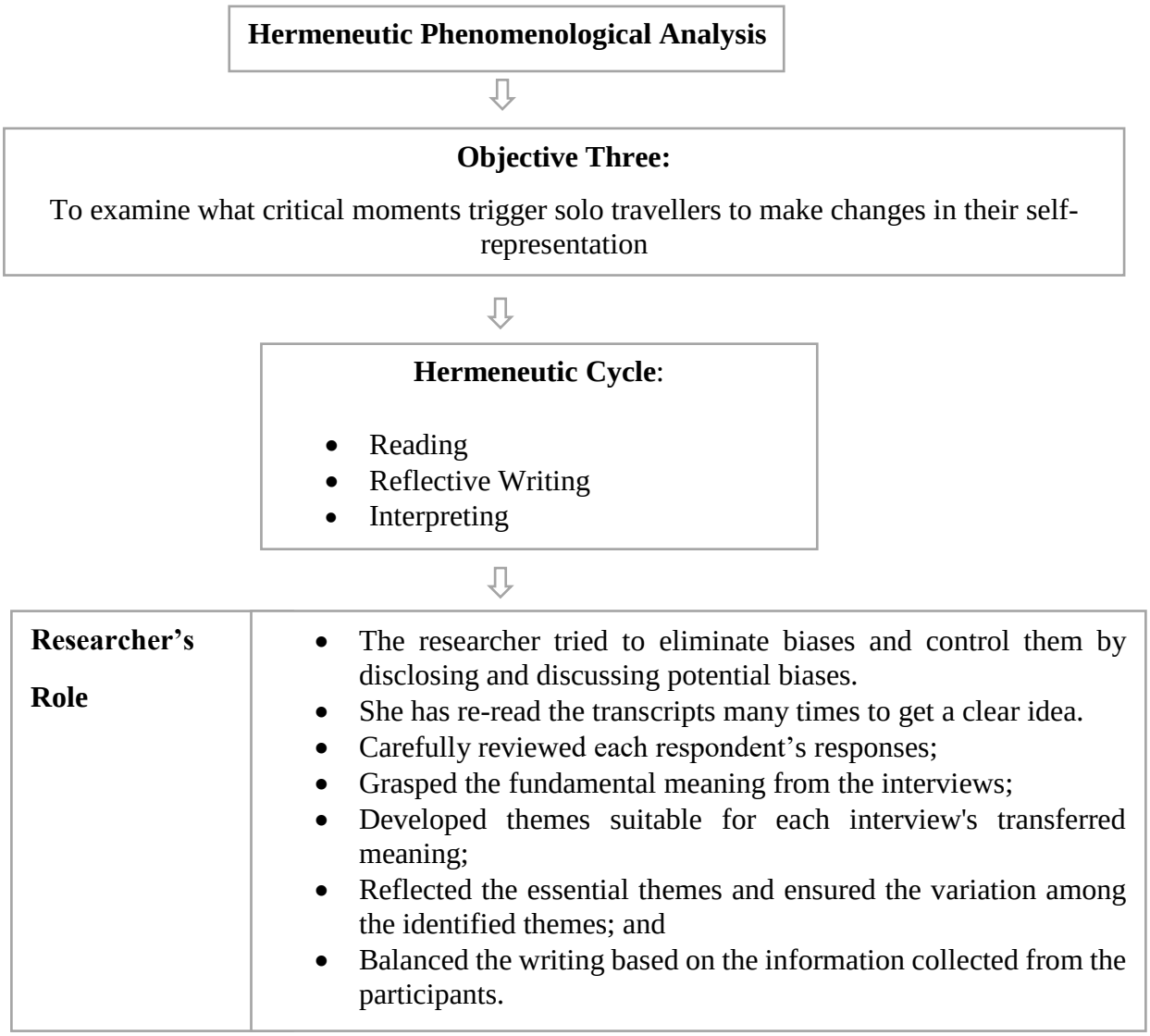


Figure 4.2 Procedure of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis (HPA) for both Research Question Three

(Source: Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis- Kafle, 2001; Author's Compilation)

Based on the information gathered from the participants, it is evident that critical events experienced by solo travellers served as a significant stimulus for them to recognise changes

within themselves during their solitary travels at the destination. The identified situations are explained in table 4.5:

Table 4.5 The Critical Events and Triggering Factors Behind Self-Changes in Solo Travellers

Cause of the Situation (The Generator)	Main Theme	Sub-Themes
The situation is caused by others (External factors)	Cultural Myopia	• Mixed-Gender Accommodations • The Absence of Judgemental Scrutiny • Conservative Community
	Hostility towards Tourists	• Terrorist Attacks • Unwelcoming Behaviour of Locals • Risk of Stalking
	Fraudulent Activities	• Extra Charges • Scams in Room Reservations
	Lack of Solo Travel Packages	• Collective Package • Unwelcoming Approach
	Social Harmony	• Unexpected Kindness from Locals
Solo travellers themselves cause the situation (Internal Factors)	Careless Behaviour	• Poor Travel Itinerary • Loss of Personal Belongings
	Emotional Connection	• Spiritual Connectivity • Learn Relaxation Activities • The Meaning of Life
	Self-Handicap	• Low Self-Esteem • Misperception
	Volunteer Activities	• Moving with Strangers • Physical Activities

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

From the perspective of solo travellers' experiences, the critical events they encountered during their journeys and the moments when they surprised themselves by

noticing changes in their own behaviours are identified. The significant moments experienced by the respondents are detailed as follows:

a. Examination of critical moments;
b. The rationale behind solo travellers' perception of situations as 'critical';
c. Evolution of self-representation in response to changes.

Objective Three is not only identifying the critical event but also the researcher explains how solo travellers express themselves in their self-representation. At the same time, to answer the question of how solo travellers realise their changes. As per the participants' sharing, they realise their self-changes when they do so by enhancing their self-belief at a certain moment in time, reflecting on self-changes, interacting with themselves through self-realisation after an incident, and evaluating themselves based on feedback from third parties, including family members, friends, and colleagues.

4.4.1 The Situation is caused by 'Others' (External Factors)

As per the study participants, while travelling solo, they noticed changes in themselves after experiencing unexpected incidents that had never happened to them before or that they had never anticipated during their solo travels. These incidents provoked reactions that they had never experienced before in their lifetime. Among the critical events identified, some occurred due to the self-handicapping and careless behaviour of solo travellers, as well as their adventurous engagement in their travels.

External factors, such as interactions with local residents and unfamiliar individuals at the destination, significantly influence the experiences of solo travellers. These encounters can prompt shifts in their dispositions, particularly pertaining to travel arrangements,

accommodation bookings, social dynamics, fraudulent occurrences, and other forms of misconduct. Consequently, solo travellers undergo self-transformations as a result of these factors.

a. Cultural Myopia

Numerous diverse cultures exist worldwide, each distinctly unique to its respective society. Within the scope of tourism, culture has been identified as a decisive factor impacting traveller behaviour and decision-making (Turner et al., 2002; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Correia et al., 2011), exerting substantial influence on tourists' selection of destinations (Jackson, 2001; Ng et al., 2007). In the context of solo travel, individuals embarking on solitary journeys who seek to immerse themselves in different cultures and expand their global knowledge tend to develop heightened open-mindedness. The current study is corroborated by contemporary research findings and is echoed in extant studies on solo tourism, indicating that solo travellers exhibit a genuine interest in acquiring knowledge of new cultures (Abbasian, 2019; Terziyska, 2021). However, from the perspective of Asian solo travellers, cultural values, including religion and traditional myths, remain constraints for them to travel alone (Hosseini et al., 2021).

The term 'cultural myopia' denotes an individual's inability to fully comprehend and appreciate other cultures due to the dominance of their native cultural influences (Hasan, 2015). This study delves into the correlation between cultural myopia and critical events experienced by solo travellers. It posits that solo travellers' own cultural values become more evident when they find themselves in a new cultural milieu. While solo travellers eventually exhibit greater openness, during the initial stages of their travels, their own cultural traits are more conspicuous, leading to hesitancy in promptly adapting their conduct in line with the new culture. The study's participants recounted instances during their travels that exerted both

positive and negative influences, ultimately prompting them to reconsider their long-standing behavioural patterns.

The researcher has identified and expounded upon three specific situations that contribute to alterations in the self-representation of solo travellers within the context of cultural myopia. These situations encompass mixed-gender accommodations, the absence of judgemental scrutiny, and immersion in a conservative community.

- **The Mixed-Gender Accommodations**

The data for the current study were collected from 40 solo travellers, the majority of whom were from the Asian continent. Their experiences showed that when they ended up in mixed-gender accommodations during their solo travels, it mostly happened accidentally. This led me to consider how they were taken into account and how they reacted at the time, which will be discussed in this section. As mentioned above, the situation is explained in three steps. These steps include the examination of critical moments, the rationale behind solo travellers' perception of situations as 'critical', and the evolution of self-representation in response to changes. To examine the critical moment, following participant 11, while travelling solo, she accidentally found out that she was going to share a room with someone of the opposite gender. Since she had already arrived at the location and it was almost midnight, she decided for the first time in her life to stay with them. She further explained that,

> *"…upon my return to the hostel that I had booked, I was surprised to find out that my roommates were of the opposite gender. Although I felt uncomfortable, I realised I had no other options for the night."*
>
> *(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

To elucidate how this situation has been regarded as critical from the perspective of the participant 11, she said that,

> *"When I arrived at my booked room, I was taken aback to find out that my roommates were male, which was a new experience for me. As a single child who had attended an all-girls school, it was something I had never encountered before. My gender has made me feel uncomfortable. I felt a bit nervous because I didn't have any prior experience with the culture where I'm from. But I am quite an independent person, open-minded, and an extrovert, and I like to experience different natures, which I am not used to. So I was courageous myself to use the chance to be brave."*
>
> *(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Participant 11's gender and unfamiliar situation, which differed from her culture, initially made her nervous. However, her personality and curiosity about experiencing something new encouraged her to embrace the situation. In that moment of bravery, she realised how much that unexpected situation taught her to recognise the changes within herself.

The significant aspect of the findings resides in the participants' self-representation when encountering challenging situations. In elucidating the concept of self-representation, a comprehensive portrayal of *oneself to oneself* is considered. The participant's display of fortitude in presenting herself confidently amidst unfamiliar circumstances illustrates a commendable demonstration of self-courage, facilitating the transcendence of self-imposed limitations.

> *"To ease my discomfort, I promptly introduced myself to one of my roommates (to know their intention and to study their behaviour) and asked them to lower their voices (projected as a brave girl and strong) so I could get some sleep. Also, I requested one of their chargers to charge my phone (opened for talk and created a good friendship*

zone). I take great pride in being regarded as courageous and continuously strive to push myself beyond my limits."

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

In detailing that, after comprehending the situation, the participant chose to calm down and strategise her next move. To ensure her own safety and avoid making incorrect assumptions about others, she introduced herself to strangers around her. This allowed her to study the strangers more closely. The incident also helped her discover her hidden talent for projecting confidence and handling difficult situations effectively by standing up for herself. Understanding oneself is an honest reflection of one's true feelings, and individual decisions are based on the knowledge of one's true self. When a female finds herself in a new and unfamiliar environment, she instinctively presents herself in a way that protects her from unexpected risks and serves the purpose of self-protection. Additionally, when representing *oneself to others,* she explained this by referring to a situation where she had to share a room with someone of the opposite gender.

"I enjoy when people compliment me with comments like 'You're a brave girl' or 'Wow, you're amasing' as it helps create a positive image of myself. I always share my stories on social media and I take some time to edit my pictures before uploading them. I am concerned about my online presence. Usually, my stories receive positive comments, and my travel stories are much appreciated by all my followers. I share my travel stories to attract other people and build friendships."

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

In this context, self-representation involves summoning self-courage, transcending self-imposed limitations, and safeguarding oneself while striving to make a positive impression on others and project a brave image to both known and unknown friends. The participant seeks to create a positive image in society and leave a lasting impression to fulfil her social needs through self-representation.

In unfamiliar situations, individuals may undergo immediate changes in their self-representation. The duration for which solo travellers embrace these changes depends on their own choices and the extent to which they are encouraged by others' compliments on their behaviour. Additionally, significant events experienced during solo travel serve as valuable lessons, helping travellers learn from their mistakes and avoid similar risks in the future. Some behaviours, such as engaging in nightlife, using alcohol or drugs, and pursuing sexual activities, may be adopted temporarily during travel. As travellers return to their regular routines, they will decide which behaviours to retain and which to discard based on their individual preferences.

To further explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the current situation experienced by participant 11 has been taken into account. The participant shared their experience that,

> *"The way I acted bravely that night in a new place made me feel empowered and taught me the value of being bold and smart regardless of gender. This experience helped me stop comparing myself to others and to not feel inferior. Previously, I had concerns about sharing a room with people of different genders, but I realised that judging everyone through the same lens is not always right. I surprised myself with my thoughts. I take pride in being seen as courageous and constantly strive to push beyond my limits."*
>
> *(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The aforementioned experience led her to facilitate the development of a favourable impression and prompted self-exploration. The participant has attested that, subsequent to the aforementioned incident, she acquired the ability to take pride in herself rather than engage in comparative self-assessment. She also resolved to refrain from behaviours that could lead to a loss of confidence and from drawing premature conclusions about individuals of the opposite gender. The overall experience of solo travel served the participant to underscore the importance of adhering to positive practices such as maintaining self-confidence, exhibiting courage, nurturing a robust sense of self-esteem, and abstaining from preconceived judgements of others prior to a comprehensive acquaintance.

- **The Absence of Judgemental Scrutiny**

In the context of solo tourism, especially for women, scholars have noted that societal and cultural values act as limitations for solo travel, particularly for those from the Asian continent (Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2019; Seow & Brown, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2021). The acknowledgement of existing knowledge, particularly in highlighting the Islamic religion and the experiences of Muslim solo travellers, as well as their adherence to Islamic rules and culture, are considered the most influential factors. This is particularly true for Indians (Sujood et al., 2023), Indonesians (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2024), Uzbeks (Gorji et al., 2022), Bangladeshis (Bernard et al., 2022), and overall Muslim solo travellers' travelling behaviour (Moghadam et al., 2011; Madhavi & Funnell, 2012). Due to these reasons, Muslim travellers are discouraged from participating in leisure activities, and travelling alone is not welcomed by their society (Asbollah et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2018; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2019; Fung, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2021; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2024).

The current study encompassed solo travellers of the Islamic faith, who encountered challenges akin to those faced by other female solo travellers. The research is not intended to

focus on challenges or risks from a gender perspective, but rather aims to underscore the instances in which these solo travellers recognised changes in their behaviour associated with their religious beliefs. Notably, participant 30 discerned changes in her behaviour linked to the freedom in her attire that she experienced during her travels. Reflecting on a critical moment, she recalled that,

> *"Due to my religious dress code and cultural norms, I wasn't able to participate in hiking or beach activities, even though I was interested in them. However, when I started my solo travels, I opted for lighter and more comfortable clothing, such as jeans and t-shirts. This made it easier for me to enjoy my activities without limitations."*
>
> *(P30, Female, Aged 18-19 years old)*

Through her experiences of travelling alone in foreign countries, she has discovered a deep sense of self-empowerment and liberation. This newfound autonomy has afforded her the freedom to pursue her preferences and present herself in comfortable attire, without the fear of societal scrutiny. It is imperative to highlight that this does not offend one 'cultural values or cultural norms; instead, it underscores an individual's entitlement to live life on their own terms, devoid of apprehension regarding external perceptions in challenging circumstances.

To elucidate the critical nature of this situation from the participant's point of view,

> *"I am a very social person and have always been an extrovert. I never give up on anything. The story of my first solo travel began with arrangements made by my over-protective parents. Whenever I wanted to do something, I used to have concerns about my society and the rules of my religion, so even though I did whatever I liked, I felt limitations or some restrictions. I never felt fully satisfied. But when I was out on*

my first solo travel, I felt comfortable and free to do things the way I wanted to. There was no judgemental lens around me."

(P30, Female, Aged 18-19 years old)

Based on what the participant has illustrated, the realisation of doing what she desired and achieving her dream without limitations allowed her to understand that at some point, compromising life may not be helpful. Life is not always about satisfying other people's expectations. Furthermore, her own personality truly encouraged her to embrace her own identity and develop self-confidence.

The significant aspect of the findings resides in the participants' self-representation when encountering challenging situations. In elucidating the concept of self-representation, a comprehensive portrayal of *oneself to oneself* is considered. During her travels outside of the country, she experienced the changes she desired, which were reflected in her self-representation. In support of this, the participant clearly stated that,

"I felt really burdened by not being able to do things the way I wanted. I am not against my religious rules; I'm a devout Muslim, praying on time and following religious practices. However, the strict rules held by the community are different. I choose attire that is more flexible and comfortable for me to do the things I prefer while still following my religion. When I made changes in my attire, I felt really happy about my independent actions."

(P30, Female, Aged 18-19 years old)

It is clear from her self-representation that one's self is brave enough to listen to oneself and strive for self-empowerment. Acting with care and independence, not only in thoughts but

also in actions, represents a significant change in one's self-representation. To enrich the discussion on these changes, it should consider a scenario where a solo traveller confronts critical events during their journey, leading to changes in their self-representation. Therefore, it is important to discuss the integral aspect of *oneself to others* in this context, as expressed by the participant aged 30.

> *"I felt happy about what I was doing and did not want to worry about how others felt about me.*"
>
> *(P30, Female, Aged 18-19 years old)*

By aligning with the thoughts of the individual, self-changes are enacted through self-representation. This entails self-care by independently fulfilling basic needs and desires without compromising one's existence, particularly in relation to fundamental desires. It is not always imperative to meet others' expectations or concern oneself with their perceptions of one's actions. The essence of authenticity to oneself and others is crucial. Exploring how this individual integrates changes in their conduct will yield deeper insights into the behavioural transformations brought about by solo travel and their manifestation in the self-representation of solo travellers.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the current situation experienced by participant 30 has been taken into account. The participant shared their experience,

> *"I've realised the changes in my actions, and I am comfortable with the changes I've brought into my life. When you satisfy yourself, you can generate a unique identity for yourself, so do what you want and pursue your dreams. At the same time, it's hard*

to satisfy everyone. You're the one going to live your life and not others. It doesn't mean you always want to impress others by doing what others expect from you. Instead, if you're confident in achieving your dreams, society will praise you. So, I learnt from my solo travels that loving yourself and following your dreams is key."

(P30, Female, Aged 18-19 years old)

Therefore, the above travel reflections revealed that the incidents the solo traveller experienced during her travel led her to adopt the thought of being independent in her lifetime and also to realise the truth of avoiding much worries about what others would think of her behavioural changes.

- **The Conservative Community**

The term 'conservative community' is often associated with cultural narrow-mindedness. It has been discussed that Islamic religious rules do not encourage women to travel alone (Moghadam et al., 2011; Madhavi & Funnell, 2012; Bernard et al., 2022; Gorji et al., 2022; Sujood et al., 2023; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2024). This is not specific to a particular religious group; it is a trend across the Asian continent, where societal behaviours are stronger than in Western societies (Wilson & Little, 2008). Female solo travellers often fear going to certain public places such as pubs, nightclubs, city areas, and entertainment venues like cinemas due to the risk of violence or sexual harassment (Wilson & Little, 2008).

However, recent studies have shown significant changes in the behaviour of female solo travellers, indicating a reduction in fear (Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2019; Seow & Brown, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2021; Yozukmaz, 2024). Further, the way of mistakenly judging others' behaviour based on gender has been dictated in a common challenge for female Asian backpackers who travel to the sex prevailing destinations, in terms of mistakenly judging

the behaviour as sexual workers (Teo & Leong, 2006; Muzaini, 2006). Despite this progress, violence against solo travellers, not just women, continues to exist in different parts of the world.

To relate this existing knowledge to one of the solo traveller's experiences during her journey, the respective participant shared the incident that led her to discover changes within herself. To explain the critical situation, participant 38 recalled that,

> *"When I was travelling alone in my country, I reserved a resort. When I reached there, the owners looked at me differently and asked a strange question: 'Are you allowed to come alone?' The way they looked at me conveyed that they suspected my behaviour. Even though they treated me well later, I couldn't sleep the entire night and felt scared."*
>
> *(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

To elucidate how this situation has been regarded as critical from the perspective of participant 38, she continued,

> *"The way my own people (same nationality) judged my behaviour (came alone for a different purpose other than travelling) was because I travelled alone, and the whole environment kind of created fear. I fumed as to why they had changed their look on a local woman who was travelling alone. If I had said I was from some other country, they would have taken extra care of me, so there is a difference in viewing and scaling the behaviour of local and non-local. Also, they called me by referring to my religion (Islam), and they asked weirdly how my parents allowed me to go alone. I stayed quite far away from the city, as I intentionally chose a room in the hills for hiking and*

relaxation near the mountains and waterfalls. One concern I had that night was that if anything were to happen at night, it might be difficult to get help."

(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

According to the sentiment expressed by participant 38, the aforementioned incident is considered of critical significance, as it led to the discovery of a new aspect of hers. While recounting the experience, she was advised that travelling outside the country would provide a greater sense of security than domestic travel. The influence of entrenched cultural paradigms, gender perspectives, religious understandings, and societal norms significantly contributes to the discouragement of women from undertaking solo travels. It is vital to clarify that the researcher's objective is not to underscore the constraints faced by female solo travellers; rather, the focus is on exploring the pivotal moments prompting solo travellers to unearth a newfound sense of self by supporting themselves to confront challenging circumstances and risks with heightened consciousness. She has learnt how to pretend to be more confident in risky situations and handle them in a smart way.

Continuing on, at the time, she discovered a new version of herself, which added more knowledge to the existing discussion, and this discovery reflected in her self-representation. The significant aspect of the findings resides in the participants' self-representation when encountering challenging situations. In elucidating the concept of self-representation, a comprehensive portrayal of *oneself to oneself* is considered. She has explained how she reacted at that time,

"I understood that the resort property owner looked at me differently and immediately jumped to a wrong conclusion about my behaviour. Although I was angry and embarrassed, I confidently introduced myself and explained where I worked,

implying that their judgement of my behaviour was incorrect. They treated me kindly afterwards, but the unfamiliar situation left me feeling uneasy for the rest of the night. I am usually very careful about security when staying outside. Although I usually enjoy being in new places, and sleep well on the first day of my travel. Here, I was especially conscious about security and ended up working on my laptop for most of the night, managing just a few hours of rest."

(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

At that moment, she realised that she had been judged unfairly. She composed herself emotionally and introduced herself, making the other person feel guilty about their incorrect assumptions. Her courage in representing herself and handling unexpected situations emphasised that she had learnt how to take care of herself and empower herself to deal with difficult situations. Her emotional statement expressed her appreciation for her decision to travel alone.

Besides self-care and empowerment, she also found the dark truth in her travel experiences: *"nothing would be powerless unless you stand for yourself"* and *"do not be afraid of the conservative community."* This reflection was evident in participant 38's *self-representation to others.*

"I am not an introvert, but I'm also not an extrovert. I don't want to appear weak in front of others. I had never experienced being so bold when speaking in front of others until this incident happened. It wasn't wrong to say the right things in front of others, even though there were many people against you."

(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

According to the solo traveller, they only care about the opinions of others if they are meaningful and will not compromise when others are wrongfully judged. Therefore, embracing the concept of self-representation, the participant empowered themselves, took care of themselves and acted bravely without compromising to the judgemental people's opinions based on others.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the respective participant 38 stated that,

> *"After this incident, I am not letting others wrongly judge me. If they are wrong, I don't mind indicating their wrongness to their face. Also, to avoid unnecessary risks and challenges, I started travelling outside the country. Behind the judgement, if I do travel within the country, I pretend that I was born in this country but currently reside in another country, portraying myself as a foreigner. This helps me to be free from unnecessary troubles. Moreover, I am more careful when choosing a destination and booking accommodations. I used to select crowded or busy places to stay, and if I want to visit the hills or remote places, then I'll take a day trip to avoid unnecessary situations."*
>
> *(P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

According to solo travellers, conservative communities create risky situations for them, which can help them discover their true selves and witness their self-changes. In summary, the solo traveller learnt how to adapt to new environments and respond to local expectations to avoid trouble. Additionally, she expressed concern about choosing destinations and started avoiding places that posed a threat to individual safety, specifically more conservative communities. Table 4.6 explains how solo travellers incorporated the changes.

Table 4.6 Solo Travellers' Self-Changes and the Critical Event of Cultural Myopia

Critical Situations	Triggering Factors	Oneself-to-Oneself	Oneself-to-Others	Incorporated Behaviour	Avoided Behaviour
A Mixed-Gender Accommodation	• Gender • Unfamiliar Culture • Personality	• Self-Courage • Self-Transcendence • Self-Protection	• Positive Impression • Self-Image	• Maintaining Self-Confidence • Exhibiting Courage • Nurturing a Robust Sense of Self-Esteem	• Abstaining from Preconceived Judgements
The Absence of Judgemental Scrutiny	• Gender • Culture and Religious Values • Personality	• Self-Courage • Self-Empowerment • Self-Care	• Sense of Liberation from a Compromised Life	• The Thought of being Independent	• It is not necessary to Live as Society Expects.
The Conservative Communities	• Gender • Culture and Religious Values • Social Norms	• Self-Empowerment • Self-Care	• Act bravely without compromising to the Judgemental People's Opinions	• Self-Pretention: To avoid unnecessary trouble from Locals.	• Do not Select Risky Destinations and Accommodation

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

b. Hostility towards Tourists

In the context of solo tourism, most of the literature on solo women travellers has witnessed various types of violence, including sexual harassment, violence, and abduction (Jordon & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2008; Seow & Brown, 2020). There is also discussion in existing studies about judging female travellers' behaviour when they visit destinations known for sex tourism (Teo & Leong, 2006; Muzaini, 2006; Yang et al., 2018).

Besides the identified risks and challenges, the local community's hostility towards tourists is also a growing concern for travellers. From the locals' perspective, tourists knowingly or unknowingly disregard the rules established by the community and undermine their cultural traditions and values (Pearce, 2009). Initially, they may tolerate and forgive tourists who violate the rules. However, over time, their unexpressed frustration and resentment towards those who flout the rules manifest in their behaviour, leading to animosity. For example, there was a 'tourists go home' movement in Spain in 2024, which was perceived as a threat to tourists and a reaction against mass tourism (Zindel, 2024). The researcher highlights the local violence against tourists, especially in the context of solo tourism, because the study participants experienced this as a critical moment during their travels, which became the reason behind their self-transformation.

In addition to the arrogant behaviour of locals, crimes such as local wars, terrorist attacks, and human trafficking are considered threatening factors for travellers. The increasing terrorism activities have a negative impact on tourism and the destination's image (Ender & Sandler, 1991; Flesicher & Pizam, 2002; Drakos & Kutan, 2003; Arana et al., 2008). Similarly, human trafficking is also considered a serious issue that adversely affects tourism activities (Derluyn et al., 2009; Hendrix, 2021). Therefore, considering all, based on the participants' shared information, terrorist attacks, unwelcoming behaviour of locals and the risk of stalking

have been identified as the critical moments, where solo travellers witnessed their self-changes in themselves.

- **Terrorist Attacks**

Terrorism has a significant negative impact on the tourism industry, as extensively discussed by scholars in the context of tourism (Kliot & Mansfeld, 1997; Drakos & Kutan, 2003; Arana & Leon, 2008; Bassil et al., 2019; Song et al., 2019). It has been indicated that the presence of risk can damage the destination's image and reduce its attractiveness. Additionally, it creates fear among travellers who were there during the attack movement, and it also affects the potential tourists who intend to visit. These situations can significantly impact the feelings of tourists (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011). However, how these critical situations trigger solo travellers to identify self-changes in their self-transformation is yet to be clearly studied.

To contribute to the discussion, one of the participants, 17, recalled an incident she experienced during a visit. Unexpectedly, this incident became an unforgettable moment in her life, and she realised the changes in herself. As she began to explain the situation, she said that,

> *"When I visited a European country, in addition to the language barrier, it was an entirely new environment for me. But when I had completed my trip and was ready to take my flight, I was waiting at the bus terminal to go to the airport. Unexpectedly, the entire environment around me became tenser. I heard the alarm, and the environment became noisier and pathetic. But unfortunately, due to the language barrier, I didn't understand what really happened there. Although I felt tense and afraid, the situation compelled me to listen carefully and pick up on the words that other people were speaking. I encouraged myself to get to know the situation with the support of others. I didn't imagine that would happen there; it was a terrorist attack.*

Meanwhile, I had another issue with getting my flight, and I learnt that my flight had been cancelled, and all my plans were cancelled."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

To elucidate how this situation has been regarded as critical, based on the situation, the participant was not expected to face that situation in her life. Further, she has explained how that situation became a critical or life-changing moment for her in the following way.

"First of all, I was not young, and it was my first time in an unfamiliar situation. I'm not an extroverted person, and the local language was different. I used to visit with a proper plan because I hesitated to ask for help from others. But that incident that I never imagined happened when I was at a well-known destination. Who would have thought that? When that incident was happening, I was totally clueless because people around me were speaking an entirely different language. Two things were on my mind: there was no one I knew, and how I was going to catch my flight. I was literally scared, and that fear pushed me to listen to the environment, to understand what people were saying and to speak to others to understand the situation. I calmed myself down and moved along with a group of people, and then I immediately moved to my hotel. When I think about the situation even now, I can't believe myself, how did I manage that situation (I could feel the goosebumps on my hand; it was so cool!)."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

Coinciding with the participant's experience, the situation became a critical moment when it was perceived as entirely new, and the participant was completely clueless. That entire situation produced fear. That fear stimulated her to identify her new version of being calm in

the situation, carefully observing the moment; though people around her were speaking in different languages, she carefully noticed and tried to communicate with others to get an idea about the situation. Although the participant was afraid, she handled the situation very carefully, though she did not have anyone she knew. The participant's personality is noted as introverted, and she likes to do everything by herself. But the fear of life stimulates her to act against the usual behaviour. Though age matters in the maturity level (Galambos et al., 2003), in this case, the participant's fear stimulated her to act firmly and maturely in a critical situation.

The significant aspect of the findings resides in the participants' self-representation when encountering challenging situations. In line with this, participant 17 expressed how she has represented herself by expressing self-changes; the researcher has used both oneself to oneself and oneself to others. The participant explained that even though she was scared and clueless during the incident, she has learnt to control her emotions, find the courage to empower herself and handle unexpected situations. Further, she found the meaning of life through fear of her life at risk due to the threatening situation and handling everything alone.

> *"I used to be calm in nature, but more sensitive and empathetic. I hated taking risks in life until I realised my health had worsened. However, once I decided to travel alone, I encountered some common challenges, but I never expected terrorist attacks in that destination. Despite the unexpected situation, I managed to control my emotions and empower myself to communicate with others, understand the situation, and move forward."*
>
> *(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

The participant was surprised to see the difference in her representation, especially in a dangerous situation where her life was threatened. She found the courage to empower herself

to handle the challenging situation and gained a deeper understanding of the value of her own life. To further illustrate the self-representation from one's own perspective to others', the participant expressed that,

> *"During that situation, I didn't have enough time to think about my nature. My nature usually doesn't allow me to ask for help or engage in much interaction with others. However, in that moment, without any hesitation, I made an effort to communicate with the people around me to understand the situation and step out of my comfort zone. I reacted bravely in that situation and am proud of that."*
>
> *(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

As a result, the situation stimulated the participant to act spontaneously and move along with the others without any hesitation. As the participant elaborated on her nature, she was extremely introverted and her social networking was too narrow. Since it is up to the person's actual personality, the incident explained that an individual's personality and actual behaviour would change based on the situation or the changes in the environment.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid and retain behavioural changes, the same critical event faced by the participant has expressed her behavioural changes, including what the respective participant has incorporated into the behaviour and avoided behaviour. Participant 17 said that**,**

> *"The experience of travelling solo has proven that I can handle situations alone and has helped me realise my own capabilities. There was a time when I depended on someone a lot, but now I have embraced an independent life, although this has led me*

to isolate myself from social circles. This experience has helped me reduce self-doubt and has given me the courage to believe that I can handle any situation."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

Based on the participants' experiences, it is clear that experiencing an unexpected situation during travel can significantly change a traveller's behavioural patterns in the long term. In the above case, it stimulated an individual's courage to come out from self-doubt. It also gave her the confidence to handle any situation alone. In general, human beings do not value their lives until something happens to make them value their time and their values. Therefore, solo travel is identified as one of the reasons behind one's self-transformation.

Simultaneously, there is an interesting aspect of self-change in solo travellers. They realise what behaviours they do not like to incorporate or want to avoid. In accordance with participant 17, she mentioned that,

"I do not like asking for help from others, but I've realised that it's okay to ask for help in an emergency. This situation has taught me the importance of expanding my social circle for my own benefit."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

According to participant 17, she realised that stepping out of her comfort zone and expanding her social circle is beneficial, rather than being extremely introverted. Based on the information gathered, participant 17 acknowledged the changes following the 'terrorist attack' incident. The participants, 2 and 28, were also learnt new skills and underwent significant changes after experiencing an unexpected terrorist attack. They were able to handle the situation and emerge from it as more confident individuals, both mentally and physically. This

experience also strengthened their belief in their ability to sustain themselves in any difficult situation.

- **The Unwelcoming Behaviour of Locals**

Rude and unwelcoming behaviour from locals has been noted as an increasing challenge for tourists nowadays (Zindel, 2024). Even though some tourists are confident enough to face challenges during their travels, sometimes the unwelcoming behaviour of the locals can emotionally affect them. However, these breakdowns can become a turning point for some tourists, leading them to discover a new version of themselves. This is an unexplored area of study, and it's also an interesting transformational story for solo travellers in this context.

In order to validate the statement above, participants 7, 12, 15, 17, 30, and 31 simply agreed that the incident of 'colour discrimination' emotionally affected them during their visit. For some of them, this situation played a significant role in identifying a new version of themselves. Surprisingly, all identified participants were female. Although it is not the main focus of the research, it raises the question of why male solo travellers do not experience such situations, generating curiosity.

Since the core values of the identified participants remain similar, the researcher has explained participant 12's experience by describing how the identified situation boosted her to discover changes in herself. Participant 12 recalled that,

> *"I felt bad because the local people looked at me weirdly when I was in the middle of some remote parts during my solo travel. As I was walking on the streets, I felt that people were looking at me weirdly, which made me uncomfortable. Not only did I feel uncomfortable, but the entire situation also created fear. At the same time,*

when I was at the supermarket, the staff there were rude when I was seeking their assistance. This continued throughout my travel in that particular destination."

(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

From participant 12's experience, she felt that the local people's approach towards her was rude. She strongly believed that her skin colour made her stand out and differentiated her from the local people. She realised that the situation had become critical and essential at a certain point. To elucidate how this situation has been regarded as critical, participant 12 illustrated that,

"I am quite interested in adventure trips, quite reserved, love quieter places, and am more religious. The time when I felt embarrassed, self-doubt about my self-presence, and without doing anything, others sarcastically looked at me, I felt really scared and embarrassed."

(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

The participant realised that people were looking at her differently without any reason, which made her feel uncomfortable and embarrassed due to the local people's discriminatory behaviour based on colour. The way she handled the situation alone added value to the current discussion. Her experience, natural traits, and others' discriminatory behaviour became the reasons for her to discover a new version of herself.

The significant aspect of the findings resides in the participants' self-representation when encountering challenging situations. The participant 12, explained her self-representation from *oneself to oneself* perspective in the following way.

"I felt really embarrassed when people looked at me strangely, and I was asking myself if my dress was inappropriate or if I had done something wrong to them. I tried my best to leave quickly."

(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

From participant 12's experiential representation of self, at the moment, she felt embarrassed and had self-doubt about whether she had done anything wrong or against the local culture. This representation is entirely different from others' representations of oneself to oneself. Though it has been seen as a negative, one's self-doubt has been introduced as the new beginning for the participant to discover the changes in her representation.

Simultaneously, the time, *one's representation on others' perception*, the participant 12 explained that,

"Since I felt bad about myself, I tried to escape from that place as much as I wanted. I was really angry why they treated me like this and literally got scared. Since I was alone, also at a kind of risky place, I didn't want to express my real feelings towards the people I met in that place."

(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Coinciding with the participant 12's truth self-representation based on others, since she was alone at the moment, the discrimination from others made her hesitant to express her true feelings towards them. The literature discusses how individuals may alter their self-representation based on others' perceptions in order to make a good impression (Gilly, 2003; Jensen et al., 2003; Naomi & Manuela, 2006; Zarghooni, 2007; Luery, 2009; Wong, 2012; Lilleker & Michalska, 2013; Kapidzic & Herring, 2015; Yang & Brown, 2015; Hall & Caton,

2017; Twomey, Conal & O'Reilly, 2017; Holmberg et al., 2018; Nichol et al., 2019; and Mahmud & Wong, 2021). However, due to the discrimination she faced, she did not express her true feelings towards others, not to impress or fit in with society, but to avoid unnecessary risk. Therefore, one's self-representation can change based on the situation created by others, and there is no obligation to impress others. Instead, individuals may make adjustments based on the situation if necessary.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes after going through the critical event of 'colour discrimination' by locals can be further illustrated through the respective participant's experiential sharing. Firstly, when looking at what lesson participant 12 experienced from this situation, as from her statement, she mentioned that,

> *"I learnt to be more confident and developed my capacity level to pass the negative people around the world."*
>
> *(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Passing through and tolerating the conservative community is not an easy task. Although tourism is an entertaining event, there are many challenges in the industry that sometimes test tourists' tolerance levels. In recent days, as mentioned above, locals' objections against tourists are considered an emerging challenge and probably affect the destination's image, having a considerable effect on the tourism industry. However, it is unclear whether the respective stakeholders of this industry have given enough consideration to this issue.

Participant 12 mentioned that she learnt not to mind others' concerns if she knew herself well and that this experience helped her establish an identity for herself, giving her courage and confidence to handle everything by herself. Cooperation and comparison with others are

common behaviours of human beings. If an individual compares for a better life from a competitive perspective, and that ends on a good note, it can be positive. However, if comparison leads to lower self-esteem, it always ends on a negative note.

Besides cooperating with the changes in behaviour, what are her behavioural changes after this critical event? Participant 12 avoided incorporating with her behaviour; the researcher captured participant 12's experience in the following way:

> *"Avoid travelling alone to unnecessarily risky places; don't doubt yourself because of others' reactions."*
>
> *(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Participant 12 mentioned that she decided not to visit risky places due to local discrimination. Even though these destinations are not recognised as risky, the locals' arrogant behaviour negatively affects tourists' destination choices. This incident has affected her, and for her safety, she decided not to visit racist countries or destinations with a strong local influence in future. However, after realising that she should not doubt herself based on others' perceptions, she continues to travel alone but with a concern for the locals' behaviour. Therefore, if an unexpected event happens during travel, it explains that it stimulates individuals to identify hidden skills or make changes in behaviour by adding or avoiding undesirable ones.

- **The Risk of Stalking**

In general, stalking is a common risk that travellers face these days (Derluyn et al., 2009; Hendrix, 2021). The study participants expressed that they faced challenges from stalkers during their visits. From a general perspective, all have one common opinion: for solo travellers

who are naturally calm and new to travelling alone, stalking is considered a serious issue for them. However, in reality, when a solo traveller experiences stalking for the first time, it will be a threatening situation regardless of how many times they have travelled alone. How they handle such a situation might be expected to be better for first-time solo travellers compared to those with more experience.

The study participants who went through this challenging situation were noted to be multi-time solo travellers, and the researcher was not able to demonstrate how solo travellers who have only travelled alone once handled such situations. However, the researcher revealed with respective solo travellers who have experienced such situations, including participants 16, 18, 24, 25, and 30, that if they face such situations in the future, they know how to handle them and take precautionary safety strategies.

The self-transformation story begins with solo travellers encountering an unfamiliar situation for the first time, which empowers them to handle these challenges alone. How they manage this situation leads to a current discussion of critical events, triggering solo travellers to discover hidden skills and turn their experiences into new lessons to incorporate into their actual selves, resulting in behavioural changes in the long term.

In line with the current discussion, participant 24 recalled the situation and explained why she thinks of it as critical, and how that experience changed her.

> *"When I am alone as a woman, and I felt a little bit of threatened or just uncomfortable by some person, usually a man or men. I have had some occasions, where group of men followed me when I was alone at my accommodation and came sites."*
>
> *(P24, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

As per participant 24, a group of men followed the participant when she was at the accommodation or campsite; they followed her and created a threatening situation. To elucidate how this situation has been regarded as critical, the participant provided further details as follows,

> *"I am quite extrovert; I like to challenge myself, and I'd like to do all the adventurous things. But, there are times when I act in opposition to my nature. From my experience, I felt a little bit threatened or just uncomfortable by some people, usually a man or men. It's a scary thing because I am female and alone, and I just feel like the people around me don't make me feel so safe."*
>
> *(P24, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

In previous cases, some of the solo travellers' personalities triggered a situation to the critical; however, at this point, even though the participant is extroverted, brave enough to take risks, and has enough experience travelling alone, she feels uncomfortable and unsafe when encountering unfamiliar situations. Despite her experience and brave personality, her gender acts as a triggering factor, causing her to perceive situations as critical.

The significant aspect of the findings resides in the participant's self-representation when encountering challenging situations. Participant 24, explained, how she has represented herself from *oneself to oneself* that,

> *"At the time, I felt unsafe and threatened because I was alone. I calmed myself and quickly managed to leave the lonely place for a public one. I felt that I should have moved to a crowded area so that I could avoid the attention of those stalkers. It worked well, and I handled the situation without it becoming dangerous."*
>
> *(P24, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

At that moment, when her inner feelings sound scary and dangerous, she quickly courage herself to act. While sharing her experience, participant 24 expressed that she wondered how smartly she handled that situation. Her presence of mind and smart way of thinking helped the participant escape dangerous situations.

Simultaneously, did she consider anything about others, *oneself to others*, when experiencing the critical event of stalking? Then the participant 24 said,

> *"At the time, I hadn't considered anyone or done any favour to anyone. After that incident, not for the purpose of impressing others but to guide potential solo travellers, also an active social media influencer, where I posted my stories on my Instagram page under the title of 'to be brave in unexpected situations during your solo travel'. It may be useful to my followers. I am happy that I may influence the followers who are interested in solo travel, especially women. The post on how I handled the situation at least gives an idea to the potential travellers, who can get an idea about the destination and safety precautions."*
>
> *(P24, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

In this case, the respective solo traveller explained that her presentation was based on others; she generated content in order to raise awareness. Even though it does not impress others, her actions towards the post on social media aid her in building an image among followers.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes from this incident, solo traveller 24 said she has learnt how to protect herself and what to avoid to prevent risks during solo travels.

"The power in training myself to protect myself and empower myself to manage those situations without becoming dangerous. At the same time, I thought it was also good to avoid some lonely places to go camping and avoid creating such unwanted situations."

(P24, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

Coinciding with the participant's experience of self-transformation, she has decided not to go to a more isolated place to go camping. Also, she has learnt to trust herself and be empowered to handle the situation alone. The participant learnt valuable lessons from her experience with stalking, including the importance of self-protection, maintaining a presence of mind, and having the training to empower herself in challenging situations. While her bravery was commendable, she recognised that avoiding adventurous activities in isolated or unfamiliar destinations is wiser unless she is well-informed and has taken sufficient safety precautions.

Table 4.7 summarises participants' self-transformation under the theme of hostility towards tourists, including terrorist attacks, the unwelcoming behaviour of locals and the risk of stalking during critical moments during their visits. Under each situation, the researcher explained the situation, why each situation is considered to be critical, how solo travellers represented themselves in each situation and the participants' behavioural changes behind those situations.

Table 4.7 Solo Travellers' Self-Changes and the Critical Event of Hostility towards Tourists

Critical Situations	Triggering Factors	Oneself-to-Oneself	Oneself-to-Others	Incorporated Behaviour	Avoided Behaviour
Terrorist Attacks	• Age • Unfamiliar Situation • Personality	• Self-Motivation • Self-Control • Self-Empowerment • Meaning of Life	• Spontaneous	• Emphasises the Value of Life • Believe in Self	• Try not to be an Extreme Introvert
The Unwelcoming Behaviour	• Unfamiliar Situation • Personality	• Self-Doubt • Self-Embarrassment	• Concealing True Emotions for Personal Safety	• Believe in Self • Develop Self-Confidence	• No need to Embarrass Yourself if you have not done anything wrong • Do not Select Risky Destinations
The Risk of Stalking	• Gender • Unfamiliar Situation	• Self-Empowerment • Self-Protection	• Self-Image	• Believe in Self • Presence of Mind	• Do not Select Risky Destinations

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

c. Fraudulent Activities

The incidence of fraudulent activities targeting tourists has been on the rise, with a close connection to tourists (Xu et al., 2021). These frauds not only harm the personal security of tourists but also target their money (Li & Pearce, 2016). These activities are often referred to as cheat, deception, dishonesty, fake, fraudulent, and scam (Xu et al., 2021), and have been discussed in relation to selling fake products (Wu et al., 2014; McKercher & Lui, 2014; Huang & Pearce, 2019), unhealthy business practices and scams in tour services (March 2008; Keating, 2009; Min & Juan, 2011; Wang, 2019), harassment (McElroy et al., 2007), fake reviews (Ahmad & Sun, 2018; Ahktar, 2019), and fake promotions (Hersh, 2014).

In the context of solo travel, scholars have covered scam activities such as taxi drivers overcharging, robbery, and fake tour promotions (Valaja, 2018). However, how do individual travellers deal with such situations? Do these situations prompt solo travellers to make changes? If changes occur, how do they adapt their behaviour, and how does this reflect in their self-representation? Understanding these aspects is crucial in the context of solo tourism.

Therefore, based on the information collected from the participants, the researcher explained that charging high, scams in room reservations, and fake reviews have been identified as the critical events that triggered solo travellers to discover changes in themselves.

- **High Price**

The high charges are a common challenge, especially for solo travellers (Hammid et al., 2021). However, there is an interesting story that begins with how and where solo travellers encounter such situations and how the situation becomes the reason behind one's self-changes in self-representation.

Participants 3, 12, 18, 20, 21, 26, 27, and 36 experienced fraudulent activities and were victims of tourist scams, including high charges, being forced to buy fake products, and fake

promotions. One of the participants, who related his experience with the current discussion, has an inspiring story.

If a scam occurs in an unexpected place, there is a higher likelihood of fraudulent activities. When such situations happen in unfamiliar locations, it becomes evident that scams can occur in places where they are least expected. This teaches new lessons to those individuals who experience such situations, and that experience surprised the respective victims to discover the changes in themselves.

To add more value to the current discussion, the researcher added participant 3's experiential sharing to explain how such a situation became significant and memorable in his life. The participant 3 explained that,

> *"There were many things that surprised me during my solo travel. I am not a frequent visitor to temples, and I didn't know much about that spirituality. When I went to visit a temple (Buddhist), the sellers around the temple grounds told me I should buy flowers and other items for the ordination and that it was a compulsory ritual. Since I didn't know anything, I went in the evening, and the particular vendor said they only had one basket, so I had to hurry and buy. But the price was too high."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Here, the respective participant, forced by the local vendors by saying the fake information. The scammers used, participant innocence, the using the tag of not-local, and the way of her presence was clearly let those people know that the participant did not know anything about the rituals.

To elucidate how this situation has been regarded as critical, the participant said that,

"I am quite introverted, and I do my work. At the same time, I am open to all cultures and respect their values. I also like to be honest and appreciate honest behaviour. The vendors forced me to buy items with false information. I didn't realise until later that the price of the items was much lower than what I had paid. I also found out from my friends, who shared the same religion, and saying that buying those things was not necessary. Although initially angry at the scammers, I quickly became frustrated with myself. I realised that my ignorance made me a victim."

(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Towards the participant's elaboration, it was clear that he was cheated by the local vendors who told him fake information. Even though, in general, it is considered to be a common scam, from the respective participant's point of view, this situation is signified as critical. Based on the shared information, the participant has honest behaviour and appreciates the honest behaviour of others as well. So when this scam happened by saying false information, he was unable to tolerate the things that happened to him due to his personal traits. Also, the participant did not believe that scam activity would be done in a holy place.

Furthermore, he realised that the entire situation occurred due to his lack of self-awareness. Not having full knowledge or making some preparations about the places he was going to visit and the cultures there should have been the basis for his travel preparations. He strongly believes that if he had at least prepared that much, he could have avoided such a situation. His self-disappointment also contributed to why this incident was considered critical by the participant involved.

The moment of his self-representation reflected the significant aspect of the findings, which resides in the participant's self-representation when encountering challenging situations.

To explain the concept of self-representation, the participant's expression of *oneself to oneself* is taken into account to explain how he expressed himself during that time.

> *"That moment, when vendors were telling me it was mandatory to buy, and they kept insisting and asking me to buy, it was very difficult for me to say no. I wasn't very familiar with the ritual, and I believed that the people around the holy place would not lie, so I ended up buying it."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In this situation, the participant has become a victim due to his innocent presence. The way he represented himself, like he believed the people around the holy place would behave honestly, and he expected that other people would also show honesty in their behaviour as like him. Therefore, the participant's innocence in believing others and lack of knowledge about the religion and its rituals all forced him to participate in the scam voluntarily.

Simultaneously, the solo traveller's self-representation was influenced by others, which also shaped his overall perception of himself. In reference to the participant's statement mentioned above, he detailed that he did not have a strong sense of self to refuse assistance when asked by others or to resist emotional persuasion or innocence from others. He tended to accept their offers based on these factors. According to him,

> *"I used to think and have thought of, if I say know that would hate others feeling, what they think about me. Naturally, I was unable to say no to others. "*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The participant's inability to say no to others and his consciousness of what others would think about him, a kind of people-pleasing personality, reflected in his presentation. However, it is arousing curiosity about how this situation is a reason for this participant's self-transformation.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the researcher has highlighted participant 3's statement to emphasise that a critical event is one of the reasons behind one's self-changes and thus leads to self-transformation. By adding more value to the current discussion, participant 3 shared what he had learnt from the situation in the following manner.

> *"This incident was a significant learning experience for me. My frustration during solo travels stemmed from my unawareness that some people took advantage of my generosity. Therefore, I began to question why I should create such opportunities for others to benefit from me. I am learning to be confident to say no to others when I feel unable or unprepared to engage in certain matters. Aside from a few individuals, I've realised that most people won't remember all of my sacrifices and efforts. Consequently, there is no need to please everyone at all times. Additionally, vendors will use various strategies to sell their products in a new place, so I don't need to worry about their thoughts if I choose to say no. Learning to say no is a powerful skill that boosts confidence and helps avoid unnecessary troubles."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Coinciding with the emotional sharing of the participant's learning from the incident of fraudulent activity of charging extra, he generated the smart personality of saying no to others

if he is not in a position to accept it. At the same time, participant 3 further stated what he learnt to avoid some of his behaviour,

> "*After this incident happened to me, I am very careful when making purchases at unfamiliar places. Before buying anything, I make sure to check with other vendors who sell the same items. Then, I can make a final decision on whether to buy or not. Now, before going anywhere, I thoroughly research many things and make sure my ignorance would not be the reason for my potential challenge during my travels."*
>
> *(P3, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Here, self-ignorance related to a lack of travel preparation includes a lack of knowledge of the destination, local people, and culture that travellers intend to visit. There are many known and unknown risks when travelling alone. However, if self-ignorance is a reason behind all the challenges a solo traveller experiences during travel, then it should be avoidable. Therefore, coinciding with the worst experience, participant 3 learnt to say no with a confident note and avoid unnecessary trouble due to self-ignorance, not trusting unknown people, and not making purchases before doing enough price evaluation.

- **Scams in Reservations**

Solo travellers are generally more conscious and careful when reserving accommodations because they are travelling alone. However, in reality, even with proper booking and a set itinerary before travelling, unexpected situations can still arise when they reach their destination. The collected information from the respondents witnessed this situation, there were many which related with reservations including, the reserved rooms difference from the online booking, offering different rooms, charging extra money and moreover those

situations which have been identified as a self-changing moment for those solo travellers who have experienced during their travels. Among them, one of the participant's story significantly connected with the self-transformation.

The situation related to the scams in room reservations, the participant has undergone in an unfamiliar destination, where participant 1 recalled that,

> *"I once visited a city in Canada where English was not the primary language, and I regretted travelling alone due to language barriers. I had booked a room for three nights, but the hotel's system mistakenly showed that I had only booked for two nights. I only found out about this mistake at the end of the second day when the hotel staff asked me to leave and began shouting in their native language."*
>
> *(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

According to participant 1, in an unfamiliar destination, though he had reserved the room for three nights, he had only gotten to know the respective property management recorded for two nights. An issue was found in the particular hotel property; however, the hotel staff treated the participant at the moment like he was illegally staying in their property. That moment triggered the participant to recall the *incident as critical* because his integrity and morals were unexpectedly doubted. The participant 1 described in his terms that,

> *"That was my first time travelling alone to a foreign country. Although I had prepared beforehand, I never expected to feel so lost and overwhelmed. It was the first time I felt embarrassed for not knowing the language, and I regretted my decision to travel. For a few moments, I felt destabilised, and even though there was nothing wrong on my part, the hotel staff made me feel like a dishonest person. That day, I felt*

incredibly lonely and isolated, like I had nobody to turn to. I am not loud; I conduct myself quietly and honestly and have not engaged in any fraudulent activities."

(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

According to him, the normal situation turned into a critical time when the hotel staff doubted his integrity and morals. They were not ready to hear what he was trying to prove his rightness, and they did not consider that he was not the one who could speak their native language. All the reasons triggered the participant to come out of his tolerance level to identify the hidden skills within himself. As per the participant, he values integrity and morals and generally has a calm and quiet personality. However, the situation turns out to be critical when one accuses oneself of lacking integrity and morals without sufficient evidence.

Therefore, the moment of his self-representation reflected the significant aspect of the findings, which resides in the participant's self-representation when encountering challenging situations. To illustrate the self-representation deeply, participant 1's *oneself to oneself* has been explained from what he shared with the researcher of the current study.

"After a few minutes, I felt highly unsettled and realised that there was no one to assist me except myself. However, I became more confident when I saw that I had all the email evidence of my booking. Even though I was initially overwhelmed, I quickly understood that I should not stay quiet. I spoke up confidently and presented all my booking emails, firmly requesting a refund. I was surprised at how loud my voice became, but I was determined to get my refund."

(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

Since his morality and integrity have been doubted, as he said, his tolerance level was exceeded, and he raised his voice against those who accused him wrongly, in contrast to his nature. Here, the participant is self-determined at the moment to maintain self-respect. According to the bystander effect, if an individual becomes a victim and does not receive help from others, they would stand up for themselves. Similarly, participant 1 also stands up for himself and defends himself rather than expecting help from others.

Simultaneously, to further explain the self-representation from *oneself to others'* perspective, participant 1 explained that,

> *"I used to keep calm and mostly avoid asking for help from others. In a way, I didn't like creating situations that forced me to argue or please others. However, when those people didn't realise their mistake and accused me, it compelled me to speak up for myself. I used to keep my personal life private and only shared my photos with known groups on WeChat. However, I was so upset that I posted about the situation on the same platform with a brief caption because I felt it was necessary to voice out in such situations."*
>
> *(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

The participant represented himself as he wanted, without caring about what others would think about him. However, he also had a hidden self, not very expressive to others. When a situation arose that triggered his self-respect, he identified his hidden self and became more public, voicing out for himself and expressing the issue on his social media platform. This became possible for the participant once the situation occurred.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the participant further explained the changes that happened in his self after this

situation, especially in his behavioural changes, what he has added and avoided. He continued that,

> *"Defending is necessary when it becomes a necessity. It's important to defend yourself when your dignity is at risk. This is a lesson I learnt during my solo travels. I could have avoided this situation if I had confirmed the nights of stay during the check-in time. I was too tired when I checked in, so I didn't pay much attention. However, after this incident, I learnt to avoid such mistakes by checking all details before entering the accommodation."*
>
> *(P1, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

The solo traveller learnt the importance of speaking up at the right moments. Through their journeys, solo travellers empowered themselves to handle everything independently. Most participants in the study agreed that "solo travel allows you to identify, empower, and affirm yourself." They gained valuable lessons from the unexpected situations they encountered during their travels, highlighting how much they truly learnt. Additionally, the traveller resolved to confirm all details during check-in in the future to avoid challenges arising from their ignorance.

Summarising all, the situation of 'scams in room reservation' has been identified as a critical event, which is one of the reasons behind the solo travellers' self-transformation. Table 4.8 explains the summary of the fraudulent events of charging extra and scams related to room reservations and the changes due to these events.

Table 4.8 Solo Travellers' Self-Changes and the Critical Event of Fraudulent Activities

Critical Situations	Triggering Factors	Oneself-to-Oneself	Oneself-to-Others	Incorporated Behaviour	Avoided Behaviour
High Price	• Personal Traits • Location of Scam • Self-Disappointment	• Innocent Self • Self-Doubt	• People-Pleasing Personality	• Say No to Others • To Properly Prepare for Travel	• Self-Ignorance • Do not trust always Unknown People • Impulsive Purchasing Behaviour
Scams in Room Reservations	• Unfamiliar Situation • Personality • Language Barrier • Harming to One's Integrity and Self-Morals	• Self-Determination • Self-Empowerment	• Voice-Out • Self-Expression (Possible –Self)	• Voice-Out at the Needful Situation	• Self-Ignorance

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

d. Lack of Travel Packages

The current study focuses on solo travel due to its increasing demand in the tourism and hospitality industry (Chiang & Jagartnam, McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Yang, 2020). The results show that travellers' behaviour has shifted from collectivism to individualism (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Laesser et al., 2009; Ejupi & Mederic, 2022). However, information collected from solo travellers in this study indicates that despite the shift in preference from group to solo travel, the industry still lacks solo travel packages, hotels, restaurants, and other leisure activities. The tourism and hospitality stakeholders continue to focus on attracting large groups of travellers rather than catering to single travellers (Yang, 2021).

This section explains the two major situations noted by the study's participants as critical and also the reasons for their self-transformation. They include the collective package (*ignoring the solo travellers*) and the unwelcoming approach (*during peak times in restaurants*).

- **Collective Packages**

The situation experienced by some of the participants, including, 2,6,21,23,27 and 31, stated that, sometimes they felt embarrassed at the moment when they were at the tourist attractions especially in theme parks, sky towers, cable cars, zoo and these were places where respective stakeholders demands group travellers. Among those who experienced this incident during their solo visit, participant 23 shared that, the incident he experienced in one of tourist attraction has changed him into acting stronger and also learnt how to control the emotions. He stated that,

"It was my first cable car experience to go the one of the famous tourist destination, so initially it was so costly to get a one cable car for one, so I got the

standard one and where since it was for six people, I was asked to join with the other set of people who came as a group."

(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Based on the participant's statement, it is evident that most leisure activities are more welcoming to groups rather than individuals. Additionally, for solo travellers, the package cost is higher than for group travellers. This often puts solo travellers in a situation where they have to join other people. Participant 23 further elaborates on how this general situation becomes critical from their perspective.

"I didn't mind joining with others since the situation required it, but I was quite uncomfortable taking pictures and recording the moment because I used to be concerned about what others would think about me. Moreover, the staff who were capturing the pictures of customers approached the group of people and not me. I felt really bad about why they ignored me, and it was a little embarrassing for me. So many questions came to my mind, like why they wanted to do such things and why they didn't treat all customers equally. Meanwhile, I also thought I should have come with my friends and worried a bit about travelling to such places. But thank goodness, all such situations taught me how to be strong in a vulnerable society while alone."

(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Participant 23 mentioned feeling ignored and unwelcome by others without any reason. He also expressed frustration about the high cost of the travel package for solo travellers. At first, he questioned his decision to travel alone, asking himself, '*what am I doing here alone?*'.

However, he also felt proud of his ability to travel alone in such places, stating, '*I really admired myself for being with a stable mind and not allowing other factors to spoil my mood*.'

Therefore, the moment of his self-representation reflected the significant aspect of the findings, which resides in the participant's self-representation when encountering challenging situations. To illustrate the self-representation deeply, the participant 23's *oneself to oneself* has been explained from what he shared with the researcher based on the current study.

> *"During that time, I felt really bad, and my expression changed in a fraction of a second because I didn't expect them to do that to me. I was frustrated and confused, wondering if the staff were doing it on purpose because I'm different from others. Obviously, many thoughts were running through my mind."*
>
> *(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Based on the participant, the true expression is a true indication of what an individual feels. The expression of self-disappointment due to the situation created by others. Simultaneously, the representation of self is changed in a fraction of a second after considering others. The participant 23 further explained that,

> *"Though I had many doubts, expressed my disappointment, and of course I fumed on them, it's a natural right. But, since those people at a time can cover a large group instead of one, it would be a profitable decision. Also, nothing will happen if I curse them or show my disappointment. I controlled all my emotions and not said anything out of my mouth."*
>
> *(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The participant's presentation was based on others; during the situation, he controlled his anger and disappointment in others. Because the participant has understood the reality of the situation and made any changes to show the anger of those people who work for money, there are other ways to express feedback and suggestions, for example, customer feedback or a suggestion box. The participant handled the situation sophisticatedly in a public place. There is an interesting section about how the situation is a reason behind the respective solo traveller's self-transformation.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the participant further explained the changes that happened in his self after this situation, especially in his behavioural changes, what he has added and avoided. He continued that,

> *"The in-depth truth I learnt is to control my emotions and not keep expectations during travel. I've learnt to enjoy the moment and not spoil the mood by developing anger toward others. I believe I have matured enough to see the situation from both sides. This is the biggest change in me because I believe that ego starts when one stands on their point, insisting they're right and refusing to budge. Although I got hurt from that incident, their actions won't stop my trip. If I dwell on the situation all day, then I believe my whole day may not go well. It also made me proud at the moment, after going through the day that I passed by experiencing an unexpected situation."*
>
> *(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Summarising the experience of participant 23, he shared his experience and the changes he recognised after an incident. He learnt to control his emotions and gained confidence in handling any situation. As a result, he realised the maturity in his behaviour. The truth, highlighted by most participants in this study, is that *'travel experience would be great*

if you don't have any expectations.' Therefore, it is best to keep the expectations at zero. If you do have expectations, try not to get too excited about them, as they could lead to disappointment or hurt you.

Similar to the above situation, the solo travellers of this study discovered the common issue that created the most embarrassing situation, which was the unwelcoming approach of the restaurant's staff during peak times. It has been discovered in the solo tourism context, especially in female-oriented studies, under the challenges they faced during their travels (Yang, 2021).

This situation was experienced by many of the participants, especially participants 2, 4, 6, 14, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31, and 38. Most of them mentioned feeling embarrassed during the incident. According to the participants' recollections, one participant said, *'I felt uncomfortable and felt like people were staring at me, so I rushed and left my meal halfway through, P4.'* Another participant shared, *'as I approached a restaurant, the staff said there were no available tables. However, when I looked inside, I saw some seemingly empty tables. When I inquired about them, I was told they were already booked. At the same time, a random group of people arrived and were welcomed by the staff. They were allowed to choose their table freely. If the tables were already booked, shouldn't they have been allocated? It was obvious from their expressions. I was really disappointed and frustrated with the entire hospitality system, P24.'* The other participant mentioned, *'since I've had similar experiences while travelling, I now prefer to eat at street food shops and avoid restaurants that approach me during peak times, P31.'*

Coinciding with all, the experiences of solo travellers have revealed unwelcoming practices among restaurants, particularly during peak times. This has led to a sense of dissatisfaction and has fostered negative feelings towards both the local people and the destination. However, solo travellers have noted that learning to navigate these unexpected

situations has led to an increase in confidence and the ability to handle embarrassing scenarios, ultimately allowing them to coexist more harmoniously with conservative or diplomatic individuals.

e. Social Harmony

In the context of solo tourism, especially in studies focusing on women, researchers have covered the motivations, challenges, and risks. Seow and Brown (2020) found that solo travel allows travellers to discover inner beauty in themselves and others. For example, kindness from strangers has been identified as a motivation for women solo travellers (Seow & Brown, 2020; Hamid et al., 2021). What's surprising is that the study's participants also mentioned that kindness from strangers was a reason they felt motivated to travel alone. Furthermore, the interesting part of their accounts is related to the current discussion about solo travellers. They shared that kindness from unexpected strangers in an unfamiliar environment was not only a motivation, but for some participants, it also led to critical situations that encouraged them to learn new things and prompted self-change. This is a new insight identified in the current study.

In order to explore the connection between unexpected acts of kindness from strangers and changes in self-representation, the researcher analysed the stories of participants 2, 4, 5, 10, 13, 20, 26, and 27. These participants experienced similar situations during their solo travels. The kindness they experienced included voluntary approaches for comfort (2, 27), open-hearted volunteer assistance (4, 5, 20), and unexpected career advice (10). These experiences had a positive influence on self-changes of solo travellers and encouraged them to continue travelling alone. However, when unexpected kindness from strangers crossed a certain limit, it became annoying and was considered harassment by the participants who experienced it (13, 26). Unfortunately, for the travellers in the early stages of solo travel, such incidents

became discouraging and created fear, especially among young travellers (P13). Despite this, some young travellers viewed such incidents as learning opportunities that triggered them to find a new version of themselves. For some solo travellers, this situation led to significant self-changes (P26).

Overall, unexpected kindness significantly contributed to the current participants' changes in self-representation. Therefore, this situation illustrates both positive and negative experiential views and provides a valid reason for discussing critical events and changes in the self-representation of solo travellers. Unfortunately, for travellers who were in the early stages of solo travelling, this kind of incident has become a discouraging factor and created fear among those travellers, especially the young generation (P13). At the same time, even though they were young, if they take that incident as a new learning experience and it triggers them to react and find a new version of themselves, it can lead to self-realisation and become a strong reason for self-change among solo travellers (P26).

Coinciding with all this, the unexpected kindness, a kind of harmonious situation, significantly contributed to the current participants' changes in their self-representation. Therefore, the same situation is illustrated under both positive and negative experiential views, and the valid reason for the current discussion on the critical events and the changes in the self-representation of the solitude travellers is added.

- **Unexpected Kindness from Locals** ***(****On the Positive Experiential View****)***

Among the study participants, the unexpected kindness received from the locals has been considered one of the situations that triggered travellers who travelled alone to bring changes in their self-transformation, and that would reflect in their self-representation. In the explanation in detail, among the collected information from participants 2, 4, 5, 20 and 27, participant 4's experience has been explained in terms of the process of self-transformation and

changes in self-representation. Participant 4 expressed that, in an incident, she received an unexpected kindness from a taxi driver in the following way*:*

> *"On my first day and first time in Thailand, I was supposed to take a taxi (transportation is different from China) to reach my hotel. The driver was not fluent in either Chinese or English, so I thought he would be rude. However, unexpectedly, he tried to speak in broken English and was very kind to me."*
>
> *(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In accordance with participant 4, when she received unanticipated kindness from a strange person in a new destination. At the same time, the participant said it was her first time travelling alone outside of her country. As she explained, since she did not have enough experience on the outside, she thought that the outsiders or the local people would treat her differently. However, in reality, once she reached the place, she experienced something entirely different from her pre-perception of others, and that incident made the travel happier and more exciting, allowing her to develop a strong connection with her solo travel. She detailed how a common situation transferred into a critical one in the following manner:

> *"The time when things happened directly opposite to expectation, the warmest welcome from the stranger, I never thought how a stranger would be very kind towards me, and as I was first in my life, I came alone without my parent and received with warm, hard, I felt really happy and felt safe outside. Also, I am an independent lover and a family-oriented person who avoids risky operations. It doesn't mean that I don't like to take risks, but I don't like to make a big scene and bother others. So, movement*

generated by unknown persons is much less. So this moment was always unforgettable and a bond with this type of travel."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

The incident has been recognised as the triggering point, where the participant really got the courage to continue her travel. By summarising this, the participant's personality, unexpected kindness from a stranger, and a contradiction between her own thoughts are identified as the triggering factors from her point of view.

Therefore, the moment of her self-representation reflected the significant aspect of the findings, which resides in the participant's self-representation when encountering challenging situations. To illustrate self-representation more deeply, participant 4's description of themselves has been explained based on what she shared with the researcher in the current study.

"First, as I got into the taxi, I doubted myself and wondered how I would handle all the situations alone. I didn't have much experience interacting with strangers, so I felt a little fearful. I also had the perception that the taxi driver might be rude. Since I booked through a taxi app, I didn't initiate a conversation. However, after the taxi driver responded, it was clear that he was trying to communicate with kind words and treating me in a good manner. At that moment, I felt safe and also guilty for pre-judging someone based on their appearance and my preconceptions. This incident really encouraged my decision to travel alone, as I realised I would have missed the chance to learn about the outside world and its people."

(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Therefore, this summarises the significant aspect of oneself at the moment due to her inexperience, pre-judgment, self-doubt, and fear of solo travel. Her personality did not let her initiate talk with others, and she remained silent for a few seconds. When she realised that she was wrong, she represented herself comfortably and felt safe. Simultaneously, she explained how she represented herself based on others in the following way:

> *"I used to not express my bad mood on my face to avoid spreading negative vibes due to my mood swings. Even when I feel sad, angry, or upset, I try my best to hide it when I'm out in public. Initially, I would hide my frustration and fear, but after receiving unconditional kindness from an unexpected stranger, I felt happy and safe inside. This made me believe that my solo travels would be filled with happiness and memorable experiences. This behaviour helps me to connect with people and creates a pleasant environment. In addition, I post all my travel stories and share them with everyone, which keeps me happy and active."*
>
> *(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

It is evident that the participant's presentation changed based on the influence of others. Before the incident, she did not express much about her self-doubt and fear of the taxi driver, as she wanted to avoid drawing negative and unwanted attention from others. Although she was not expressive at the time and was hiding her true emotions, she felt comfortable and safe after realising that the environment was secure. These inner feelings of safety allowed her to initiate a conversation with a stranger. Additionally, she expressed her true feelings on her social media as a way of commemorating the day, which was a contributing factor to the changes.

Therefore, to explain how solo travellers adapt to, avoid, and retain behavioural changes, the participant further explained the changes that happened in her after this situation, especially in her behavioural changes, what she has added and avoided. She continued that,

> *"I learnt to be self-courageous, develop confidence, and cherish each moment in life. At the same time, I felt guilty when I was wrong in my own perception. This experience taught me that measuring everyone with the same scale is not appropriate."*
>
> *(P4, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Based on her experiences, the participant learnt to cultivate self-courage and appreciate life's moments. At the same time, she realised that she did not want to engage in the behaviour of pre-judging others. Instead, she decided to take the necessary time to evaluate others before coming to conclusions, avoiding the risk of making incorrect judgments.

- **Unexpected Kindness from Locals** *(On the Negative Experiential View)*

As mentioned above, receiving unexpected kindness from strangers has been identified as one motivation for solo travellers to continue travelling alone. However, some solo travellers experienced that sometimes the unexpected kindness becomes annoying and feels like harassment. One of the young solo travellers, also a participant of the current study, has thought not to travel alone due to the experience she had during her travels. As she said,

> *"While travelling solo in my country, I visited a village where, initially, I received compliments from the elderly men, which made me feel happy and flattered. However, their behaviour soon made me feel uncomfortable and unsafe. They*

continued to make flirtatious comments, touched my hands, and remarked on the softness of my skin, which made me reluctant to stay there alone."

(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

The kindness and warmth made the participant feel uncomfortable. She further explained how that situation significantly influenced her decision to travel alone.

"I am an introvert, feeling scared and having limited friends. I felt uncomfortable and unsafe, and wanted to return home as soon as possible after encountering this situation."

(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

Of her nature, and also when she felt the situation was unsafe to her, at that moment, from the participant's view, the situation was assumed to be a critical one. How did the participants react at the same time? She expressed how she had represented herself *at that moment based on oneself to oneself in the following way:*

"At first, I accepted their comments out of respect. However, as they continued to bring it up repeatedly, I began to feel uncomfortable and unsafe. I quickly left the area before the situation escalated further."

(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

Under the guise of courtesy and respect for elders, she initially accepted compliments such as, 'you're looking beautiful.' However, when the person began repeatedly making the same remarks, touching her hands, and giving compliments in a way that made her feel

uncomfortable and threatened, she realised the situation was not safe and promptly left. Reflecting on the experience, she expressed that she had not been able to convey her true feelings and had prioritised her safety. As she said,

"During this situation, I didn't show my real feelings about how awkward I was because of those elders' behaviours. Instead, I quickly left the place on a good note."

(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

It is understandable why she did not express annoyance at the elders' verbal and physical actions. Initially, she was alone, and her response was influenced by her cultural background, causing her not to express genuine anger towards the elders. Concerned for her safety, she immediately walked away without appreciating their behaviour. However, this incident has affected her confidence in travelling alone.

As the results reflected in her behavioural changes, including what she adapts to, avoids, and retains. She continued that,

"I learnt how to care for myself in tough or uneasy situations. Also, it is not good to go alone at all times. Still, I have a fear of travelling alone. I will travel outside of the country but not inside my country except for known places."

(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

The participant respected older individuals but did not tolerate their inappropriate behaviour. Despite societal expectations to obey elders, the participants felt uncomfortable and unsafe due to their behaviour. It is important to take bold and immediate action when faced with unwanted advances in order to protect oneself. She learnt self-care and how to safeguard

herself from dangerous situations. She also learnt not to blindly trust everyone, as not all elderly people are trustworthy. This incident has created fear and discouraged her from travelling within countries, generating self-doubt about travelling alone.

However, a similar situation was experienced by another young solo traveller (P26). She has taken her experience as a lesson, which led her to make changes in her behaviour. She has also used the experience as motivation to keep on travelling alone. In the above situation, participant 13 considered courtesy and did not express her true feelings. Meanwhile, participant 26 acknowledged that her weakness in saying no became a reason for facing this situation. She explained that,

> *"When I was travelling in Europe, I met a guy who spoke my language. He approached me, and we had a nice conversation. Since he spoke my language and claimed to be a citizen of the country, I started talking to him. He said he knew a lot of places around the area, so being new to the place, I asked for details about the nearby places. Later, he offered to show me around. Since the places were close by and I didn't know how to politely decline, we visited them together. However, he didn't let me go alone, which made me feel uncomfortable and annoyed. When I received a call from my family, I used it as a distraction and told him I had to go home. I thanked him for his time and left immediately."*
>
> *(P26, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

While visiting an unfamiliar destination, the participant met someone who spoke the same language, prompting her to strike up a conversation. Initially introducing herself as an extrovert, she engaged in conversation with the person she had just met. However, she later felt unsafe and sought a way to escape the situation. This experience instilled fear in her, but it also

served as a valuable lesson, ultimately boosting her confidence and providing insight into what not to do during her future solo travels.

> *"I've learnt that if a stranger approaches me while I'm travelling solo, it's okay to greet them, but I shouldn't reveal too much personal information. Next time, if someone approaches me, I won't share much about myself or my whereabouts. This is my most important lesson from solo travel. I've also learnt to have the courage to say no if I'm uncomfortable with a situation"*
>
> *(P26, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

By comparing two participants, 13 and 26, it is evident that they both experienced unexpected kindness in similar situations. Their reactions emphasised safety without revealing their exact feelings. However, their reflections differed. While both felt fear, participant 13 was hesitant to travel alone, and participant 26 took her experience as courage to engage in more solo travel, regardless of whether it was inbound or outbound.

The key points are detailed in table 4.9. This section explains that solo travellers discover hidden skills and a new version of themselves through their experiences. Their behavioural changes are attributed to the lessons learnt from their travels. In conclusion, solo travellers have identified cultural myopia, hostility towards tourists, fraudulent activities, lack of solo travel packages, and social harmony as critical events that serve as turning points for self-transformation.

Table 4.9 Solo Travellers' Self-Changes and the Critical Event of Lack of Travel Packages and Social Harmony

Critical Situations	Triggering Factors	Oneself-to Oneself	Oneself-to-Others	Incorporated Behaviour	Avoided Behaviour
Collective Packages	• Ignorance of Others • Unwelcoming Approach • High Cost	• Self-Disappointment	• Do not Express the Actual Emotions	• Thinking from Others' Perspective • Cherish each Moment in Life • Controlling Emotions • Matured Behaviour	• Do Not keep Expectations while Travelling
Unexpected Kindness from Locals (Positive)	• Less Travel Experience • Personality • Contradiction between Own Thoughts	• Rigid to Speak with Others • Self-Doubt	• Do not Express the Ectual Emotions (in person) • Safety Consciousness • Narrator on Social Media	• Self-Courage • Develop Self Confidence • Cherish each Moment in Life.	• Pre-Judgement • Come Out from a Comfort Zone
Unexpected Kindness from Locals (Negative)	• Less Travel Experience • Personality • Unexpected Approach from unexpected Group of People • Cultural Influence (P13)	• Self-Fear • Uncomfortable and Unsafe Feelings	• Safety Consciousness • Courtesy	• Self-Care • Self-Courage • Learnt to Say No	• Do not Trust Everyone • Travelling Inbound (P13) • Do not Reveal

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

4.4.2 Solo travellers themselves cause the situation (Internal Factors)

According to the study, participants who are solo travellers, they face challenges and discover aspects of themselves that they were not previously aware of. This is not only due to the situations created by others or whom they meet during their solo travels but also due to the situations they create themselves. These self-created situations may include their careless behaviour, emotional connections, self-handicapping and other voluntary activities they engage in during their solo travels.

The compilation of travel narratives and experiences contributed by solo travellers underscores the distinctive characteristics of solo travel. Participants in this study articulated that travelling alone enhances independence and self-empowerment, facilitating individuals in uncovering their authentic selves. Solo travel allows travellers to develop personalised strategies to mitigate boredom while providing enriching experiences. Moreover, it offers significant opportunities for self-reflection and personal development. Encounters with unforeseen circumstances frequently present challenges stemming from individual decisions, which serve as pivotal moments in their journeys and act as catalysts for self-transformation. The insights obtained from participants, as shared with the researcher, highlight the substantial impact of solo travel on personal growth and self-discovery.

a. Careless Behaviour

Careless behaviour is common among all human beings. In the context of solo tourism, solo travellers witnessed their careless behaviour as a reason for them to identify their hidden selves, for instance, poor travel plans and loss of personal belongings. The following sections explain in detail how these situations generated the situation to identify self-changes. The experiences shared by the solo travellers of this study have expressed the self-transformation and behavioural changes due to their transformation.

- **Poor Travel Itinerary**

The travel itinerary is an essential component of any trip. Unlike other types of travellers, solo travellers have the freedom to create a travel plan that suits their preferences (Yang, 2020). However, in their pursuit of new experiences, solo travellers may sometimes neglect to develop a comprehensive travel plan (Yang, 2020). Nonetheless, things do not always go as expected. Travellers who encountered challenges due to a poorly planned itinerary often find that these situations help them discover their inner strength and realise their ability to manage unforeseen circumstances.

Among the 40 participants in the study, nearly all developed preliminary plans for their solo travel, outlining their intended destinations and activities. However, five participants—specifically participants 2, 7, 22, 30, and 36 experienced challenges stemming from poorly constructed travel itineraries. Participant 2, in particular, recounted a specific situation that exemplified these difficulties.

> *"On my first trip to India, I decided to go on a solo adventure and explore a remote area. At 11 p.m., I realised that the transportation system was very different from what I was used to in China. With no public transit options available, I found myself in a vulnerable position with no assistance."*
>
> *(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Based on the participant's shared experience, he was inadequately prepared and possessed only limited knowledge about the location, apart from its geographical coordinates. Crucially, he found himself alone in an unfamiliar setting during the late evening. From the participant's perspective, he identified this circumstance as critical for the following reasons:

"I found myself in an unknown place for the first time in my life, which was unexpected. At that moment, I was feeling blind and shocked. Furthermore, the location was rural rather than urban, which made me feel frustrated.… I'm sorry, I'm not very good at making travel plans. I had some rough plans, but I made a mistake in calculating the travel time. I didn't gather enough information about transportation options. Sometimes, I don't take things seriously enough when it comes to travel plans and depend on others because my friends usually organise the travel plans for our group trips."

(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

The participant felt that this situation was critical because he realised it happened due to his overconfidence in being able to manage everything without a plan in unfamiliar places. Until that moment, he had taken everything too lightly. Furthermore, from his past experiences, he tended to rely on his friends for travel plans and paid little attention to the details. This introspection prompted him to acknowledge that his negligent behaviour contributed to the predicament he faced. While he typically considered himself a confident individual who has faith in his abilities and exhibits minimal concern regarding locations and transportation systems, the incident served as a pivotal realisation that unexamined confidence in unfamiliar situations may not always yield favourable outcomes.

Simultaneously, during the time, the way he represented and what he thought about at the moment would add more insights to the current discussion. To explain the self-representation concept, firstly, from the point of view of participant 2, the first part of *oneself to oneself* proclaimed by him in the following way:

"I realised that I had put myself at risk because of my overconfidence, not taking anything seriously, and being quite dependent on others for travel itineraries. However, I stopped blaming myself, became aware of the situation, and responded quickly."

(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

At the moment, though the participant was scared and fully blind to what to do, he reacted quickly to safeguard himself. Upon realising his own mistakes, he refrained from blaming himself and instead focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the situation. Despite feeling scared, he quickly assessed the available transportation options and made a smart decision. Further, he has explained his representation based on *oneself to others* in such a way:

"I quickly scanned the available transport services and found that only a taxi was available at the moment. The drivers quoted a high price, but I didn't negotiate; I simply got into the taxi. At that point, I managed to calm myself down and didn't let the driver see that I was panicking. Otherwise, the situation could have become more risky than it already was. I later shared my experience on WeChat with my close family and friends. I take pride in how I handled this unexpected transportation issue in an unfamiliar place. I think it's pretty cool that I managed to navigate it successfully. Even though my friends and family were initially worried about me, they praised my bravery afterwards. I really enjoy the feeling of being encouraged to take on new challenges."

(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)

The participant demonstrated courage by presenting himself in front of strangers during a risky situation (*he refrained from expressing his genuine emotions to others because he was concerned for his safety*). From others' perspectives, his composed demeanour suggested that

he knew everything, as he did not show his fear and appeared to be oblivious to the transportation challenges he faced. At the same time, he shared information on WeChat, portraying himself as a survivor in that situation.

During the interview, he explained, *"after sharing this situation, I created a positive image among my friends. My parents sometimes worried about me when I travelled alone, but after I shared my experience, they were initially concerned. However, later, my father said he started to believe that I could handle such situations."* Overall, the incident not only helped him realise his mistakes but also allowed him to learn and build an image among his social circle.

To connect this situation with his self-transformation, what he found good learning to *add to his behaviour*, he stated that,

> *"Now, I think twice before executing anything and make sure to have a proper plan before going anywhere. Even if you find yourself in a risky situation, it's important to maintain your composure and not panic. Showing panic to others can make the situation worse. I felt surprised but also pleased with myself for being able to stay calm and handle the unpredictable situation."*
>
> *(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

The incident has increased the participant's self-awareness (*strengths and weaknesses*), self-focus (*not depending on others too much for anything*), self-realisation (*positive self-criticism and lessons from the self-delusion*) and self –projection (*confident and a smart projection in a risky situation*) and learnt to care about the self. Therefore, the participant 2, embraced self-improvement through caution and planning.

Simultaneously, from this incident, he learnt to *avoid some of his behaviour*. By detailing that, he stated that,

> *"I've realised that overconfidence and self-delusion are not always good.*
>
> *(P2, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Therefore, the participant realised that he had been deluding (*over-confident*) himself and learnt to rely less on others. Steps to balance the self-delusion (*not to be over-confident*). In conclusion, the findings indicate that solo travellers encounter challenges not solely due to external factors but also as a result of internal conflicts. Such experiences present opportunities for introspection and serve as significant catalysts for self-transformation and development.

- **Loss of Personal Belongings**

Under the careless behaviour, in accordance with the study participants' the loss of personal belongings, for instance, cash wallet (P3, P7, P11, P23) and travel documents (P3, P27, P30) have been discovered from them as the critical events which triggered them identify their hidden self and explained their self-transformation. Among them, one of the participants shared how her experience of losing personal belongings became a reason for her self-transformation.

> *"First up, fall, I was shocked how it happened, and all my day plan was depending on the money I lost."*
>
> *(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The participant was initially shocked by what had happened, as her entire day's plans depended on the money she had lost. She explained how this situation became pivotal in her life and led to her self-transformation experience.

> *"The time when I was shocked because I didn't expect it would happen in a pretty famous destination. I was clueless about whether it had happened due to my carelessness or someone who had picked up, and my whole day's plan fully depended on the money I lost. But I have by nature, I am an independent lover, a family-oriented person, and avoid risky operations; it doesn't mean I am risk-averse, but I don't like to make a big scene and bother others".*
>
> *(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

From the participant's view, at the moment, she experienced it for the first time in her life, and she did not expect that it would happen at a famous destination. Besides, the entire day's plan depended on the money the participant lost on the day. Moreover, the participant is independent by nature, and she does not like to ask for help from anyone. Therefore, she spent the whole day with whatever money she had. As per the participant, it let her learn new lessons in her life. The interesting section is how this participant expresses herself at the moment. To explain the self-representation concept, she recalled her *oneself to oneself*, representation, that,

> *"I blamed myself for being careless and realised that crying or cursing those who caused this situation wouldn't change anything. I accepted my mistake and made a plan for the rest of the day. At the same time, I felt relieved that I only lost the money I had intended to spend that day. I took pride in exploring the nearby places within walking distance. Although I felt a little bad about the situation, I was proud of myself*

for handling it positively. Despite the challenges, I managed to get some exercise and made it through the day with just a bottle of water and a sandwich."

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

At that moment, she blamed herself for being careless. However, in a fraction of a second, she realised that hurting herself would not solve anything. Instead, she acted wisely and reframed her situation. She decided to walk instead of using transport and learnt how to get through a day with a small amount of food. When she shared this experience with the researcher of the study, she mentioned that she still remembers that day. This experience taught her to approach various situations in her life more wisely.

Although the participant initially blamed herself, she encouraged herself to act smartly. Furthermore, she explained her presentation based on *her experiences with others*.

"I am not a person who shares everything on social media or shares everything with my beloved loved ones because I do not like to bother or make others worry about me. I didn't express my real feelings about that. Instead, I said I was a smart and much stronger girl."

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

To illustrate Participant 11's self-representation as perceived by others, she used to hide her true self and was not very expressive in reality. Following a particular incident, she never expected to face such challenges in a well-known tourist destination. This frustration has influenced her efforts to present herself as a strong individual. At the same time, she was concerned about how her family and close friends would react if they found out, fearing that they would be worried about her.

The participant declared that she had learnt a meaningful lesson in her life, and that significantly influenced her to bring changes to her habitual behaviour. The results reflected in her behavioural changes, including what she adapts to, avoids, and retains.

She continued that,

> *"I learnt to encourage myself, to stay calm in any situation and trained myself to take care of my own wellbeing. I empowered myself to control my emotions and act smart in dangerous situations. Instead of blaming others, it is important to correct our careless behaviour. Although I did not express my frustration at the time, I shared my frustration by informing my friends and providing reviews about the destination. As I am from the tourism industry, I have a responsibility to avoid such situations that create a negative image for tourists visiting destinations."*
>
> *(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In conclusion, the participant added self-courage, self-empowerment, vigilant behaviour, and the avoidance of carelessness. Moreover, she realised that she should act responsibly rather than being a hidden self, sharing her experience with her circle first so that the other solo travellers would benefit from the shared information. Moreover, this responsible act would support the respective tourism stakeholders in mitigating the changes that would create a negative image of the destinations.

g. Emotional Connection

The scholarly team of Hamid (2021) noted that seeking behaviour can serve as a tool for emotional healing and can enhance the chances of discovering one's true self and finding meaning in life. This connection is often made through travel, which can reflect positively on

one's behaviour (Bruner, 1991). In this context, scholar Hamid and his team (2021) identified solo travel as a significant platform for personal wellbeing, particularly for women travellers. They found that these women emotionally connect with their travels, using them as an opportunity for self-discovery (Hamid et al., 2021). Additionally, individuals who choose to travel alone, regardless of gender, remain motivated to stick with their decision due to the unique experiences and benefits they gain from their travels.

As per the solo travellers, they felt an emotional connection with the choice and found a change in themselves due to remarkable incidents related to spirituality, relaxation, and situations that taught them a lesson about understanding the meaning of life.

- **Spiritual Connectivity**

The scholarly team of Hamid et al. (2021) stated that spirituality is one of the satisfactions that solo women travellers gain from their travel. However, except for the gender, the studies of participants (P1, P4, P11, P24, P36 and P39) demonstrated that they experienced spiritual connectivity during the travel. For some participants, the connection with spirituality brought changes in themselves. To explain it in depth, the participant 36 expressed her feelings in the following way:

> *"I come from a family where my parents gave their children complete freedom. When I decided to travel, they encouraged my decision. During my trip to India, I visited Hindu temples, and by chance, I joined a yoga class. Although it was unplanned, I believe it was the best experience of my life. The changes that took place within me surprised even myself."*
>
> *(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

The unexpected incident in the respective participant's life brought changes in her, and the way she surprised herself when she connected with spirituality. She continued to explain how this situation is considered to be a critical one in the following way:

> *"I accidentally joined a yoga class, and in the middle of the sessions, I began asking about stories related to Hinduism. Later, the principles and concepts I learnt inspired me a lot and guided me on my spiritual journey. The first time I sat quietly in a place and meditated for 30 minutes, I surprised both my parents and myself. Not only did I notice changes in my physical appearance, but I also felt calm and peaceful in my mind."*
>
> *(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

The participant recognised the changes occurring within her and was surprised to feel these transformations. That moment, when she experienced the unexpected magic in her life, became a pivotal event for her, representing a significant self-transformation. This leads to an interesting question: how did this situation influence her self-representation?

The interesting section is how this participant expresses herself at the moment. To explain the self-representation concept, she recalled her *oneself to oneself*, representation, that,

> *"The moment I felt calm inside myself and a sense of maturity in my behaviour was surprising. It didn't happen suddenly; small actions made me realise the changes. I've always struggled to sit still without thinking about anything, making it hard to concentrate. However, out of curiosity, I tried yoga for the first time in my life and attempted to concentrate for 10 minutes. By the end of my journey, I had developed my ability to focus for 30 minutes. To me, this has been the best gift I could give myself.*

Nowadays, I can listen to others better and have started to experience what it means to be patient."

(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

Participant 36 has realised the internal changes in her self-representation, including increasing her patience level, where her self-concentration has increased. Further, she explained that the changes reflected in her self-representation and let others to recognise the changes for example, "*when my parents talk to phone during my travel, they told me they surprised that, I was on the call with me more than 10 minutes, then I realised that something good thing has happened in myself* ". The statements illustrated that changes can be reflected in one's self-representation.

Further, she explained her presentation based on *oneself to others*, and that answer included any changes she had considered or given importance to others.

"I didn't have a strong opinion on other religions, nor was I in a position to impress others. However, when I felt impressed by Hinduism, I decided to change my dress code to show it the respect it deserves. At that time, I was particularly focused on my behaviour, including my actions, facial expressions, and reactions. Since I didn't fully understand the religion, I made an effort to ensure that my actions were appropriate and that I wouldn't unintentionally offend the community. I am always careful about how I represent myself in relation to others."

(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

In summary, the participant presented herself to others with a strong sense of responsibility and respect for different cultures and communities. This approach to self-

representation was not an attempt to impress others or gain attention. Instead, her personal interest, combined with her commitment to not harming others' cultural norms, led her to make changes in her self-representation based on the perspectives of those around her.

Since the participant declared that she believed the self-changes, by any chance, the situation she has undergone and the detailed results she reflected in her behavioural changes, including what she adapts to, avoids, and retains.

She continued that,

> *"I admitted that each society has to have a strong cultural background, and there is no harm in developing faith in religion instead of developing superstition. Also, I learnt that we should have a broader view of people and their culture and the freedom to choose our preferred lifestyle."*
>
> *(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Participant 36 highlighted the importance of respecting other cultures and having faith in different religions as a pathway to fostering positive energy within oneself. She emphasised the need to approach these beliefs with balance, avoiding extreme views. She acknowledged that the choice of what to embrace or reject depends on individual rights. Furthermore, she noted that learning valuable lessons from various cultures is commendable. After her experience, she also reflected on behaviours that she decided to avoid.

> *"After I started following Hinduism, I decided to avoid eating meat and to become a vegetarian. After reading the Vedas, Puranas, and legendary Hindu novels, I was inspired to change my eating habits. It was difficult at first, but eventually, I adapted and came to love it."*
>
> *(P36, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Deciding what to add or avoid is entirely a matter of personal choice. The situation provided an opportunity for participants to make changes in themselves. Participants 34 and 37 likely described the behavioural changes they experienced after undergoing events that enhanced their relaxation and gave them a deeper sense of meaning in life.

Participant 34 (*Male, 18-29 years old*) shared that he chose to travel solo to relieve stress from his studies and to cope with a recent breakup. During his travels, he showed interest in participating in adventure activities, including hiking, cycling, and diving. He also took the opportunity to pursue his dreams. While travelling, he admitted to being afraid during some of the adventure activities; however, the stress and emotional burdens he carried motivated him to participate more actively. Moreover, his interest in these activities, along with increased self-confidence, helped him present himself as brave and capable in front of others. He noted that solo travel encouraged a sense of self-indulgence. Additionally, he connected with strangers, forming friendships along the way. His friendly demeanour impressed those he met, resulting in him having more friends in various countries. When asked whether travelling alone made any changes in his life, he expressed that the experience brought about significant change for him. He recalled,

> "*I learnt to see the happiness in everything because I met many people during my travels and saw how hard they worked, even though they had many problems. Compared with their problems, I don't think I have many. I'm not mature enough to face problems, but my experience has taught me to see happiness in a difficult situation."*
>
> *(P34, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Summarising the participant's opinion on travel, he expressed that his experiences allowed him to reflect on life, appreciate the beauty in every moment, and find happiness in each experience. Additionally, participant 34 explained that,

> *"For a long time, I struggled with low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority, which contributed to my stress. However, my solo travels and the time I spent alone allowed me to explore my dreams and step out of my comfort zone. These experiences helped me find happiness and brought about positive changes in my behaviour."*
>
> *(P34, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

In summary, the participants worked to reduce feelings of inferiority. Participant 37, a 50-59-year-old woman, remarked, *"solo travel means a lot to me; it taught me the meaning of life."* Although her experience differed from that of Participant 34, both participants found profound meaning in their travels. Participant 34 shared, "*after my relationship ended, I felt lost in life. To escape the stress and pain, I chose to travel alone. It was during this time spent in solitude that I discovered the meaning of life. I realised we should live for ourselves, trust ourselves, and not depend too heavily on others. The strength gained from being independent gave me the power to restart my life*." Thus, solo travel transcends mere exploration; it has the potential to bring about significant changes in a person's life.

Table 4.10 provides an overview of self-representation and behavioural changes influenced by individual circumstances (internal factors).

Table 4.10 Solo Travellers' Self-Changes and the Critical Event (Internal Factors)

Critical Situations	Triggering Factors	Oneself-to-Oneself	Oneself-to-Others	Incorporated Behaviour	Avoided Behaviour
Careless Behaviour: Poor Travel Itinerary	• Over-Confident • Unfamiliar Destination • Careless Behaviour • Self-Frustration	• Self-Projection • Self-Trust	• Do not Express the Actual Emotions • Safety Concern • Self-Image	• Self-Awareness • Self-Focus • Self-Realisation • Self-Care	• Self- Delusion • Do not Depend on Others
Careless Behaviour: Loss of Personal Belongings	• Careless Behaviour • Destination Image • Budgeted Travel	• Self-Blame • Self-Courage	• Do not Express the Actual Emotions • Self-Image	• Acknowledging Own Mistakes • Being Vigilant • Self-Courage • Self-Empowerment • Socially Responsible	• Being Careless
Emotional Connection: Spiritual Connectivity	• Self-Changes	• Self-Realisation • Self-Concentration	• Self-Consciousness • Self-Integrity	• Self-Control • Socially Responsible • Evolving Grooming Style	• Being Non-Vegetarian
Emotional Connection: Relaxation and Meaning of Life	• Self-Fulfilment • Stress • Relationship Issues • Self-Handicap	• Self-Reluctance • Self-Empowerment • Self-Trust	• Spontaneous • Self-Image	• Come Out from a Comfort Zone • Cherish each Moment in Life.	• Do not Depend on Others • Reduce Inferior Complexity

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

4.4.3 Summary- Research Question Three

The aim of Objective Three is to justify the findings related to how self-transformation occurs in solo travellers and how this transformation is reflected in their self-representation. The comprehensive information gathered from the study participants highlights their unforgettable life experiences. Among these, the researcher has identified certain situations as 'critical events' due to their significant positive impact on each solo traveller's transformation. Although existing literature has investigated critical events that contribute to transformation from a broader perspective, this research enriches the understanding, specifically within the realm of solo tourism. It articulates how certain circumstances initiate changes in travellers' behaviours. The situations identified from the perspective of solo travellers were categorised into two types: external factors, which are influenced by third parties, and internal factors, which originate from the travellers themselves. The collective feedback from participants highlighted several external factors, including cultural myopia, local arrogance, violence, fraudulent activities, a lack of solo travel packages, and issues surrounding social harmony. Additionally, the internal factors revealed by participants included careless behaviour, the desire for emotional connection, self-handicapping, and involvement in volunteer activities.

In conclusion, the findings highlight that solo travel represents a distinct form of exploration compared to other travel types. The time individuals dedicate to solitude fosters self-transformation and creates a space for introspection, which is often absent in the busy world. While solo travellers may travel independently, they frequently carry digital devices like mobile phones, laptops and other gadgets. Although these devices may diminish the extent of solitude experienced, solo travel still permits valuable moments of aloneness. Recently, a trend has emerged among solo travellers advocating for 'extreme escapism,' wherein individuals intentionally disconnect from digital devices to fully embrace their solitary

experiences. In summary, solo travel serves as a significant tool for those who voluntarily choose, enhancing the meaning of their life and generating self-fulfilment.

4.5 Research Question Four: How Do Solo Travellers Adhere to the Changes in their Self-Representation?

The current study focuses on conceptualising solo travellers' self-representation within the context of liminality to understand how solo travel influences the solo travellers' self-representation and also the reason for their self-transformation. To explain the final model, this section is divided into three major parts based on the phases of liminality:

- **Stage of Separation** (*Pre-Liminal Phase*): In this stage, a solo traveller detaches from their routine life and companions.
- **Transition** (*Liminal Phase*): During this phase, solo travellers' experience changes in their sense of self based on critical situations encountered during their journey. Here, individuals exist in an 'in-between' state, not fully identifying with either the old self they are leaving behind or the new self that is emerging (Kennett-Hensel, Sneath & Lacey, 2012).
- **Re-Incorporation** (*Post-Liminal Stage*): This stage occurs when solo travellers recognise the changes they can incorporate into their behaviour, allowing them to establish a new sense of self.

Based on the collected information and existing literature, the researcher of this study has identified subsections corresponding to the major liminal phases. If solo travel represents a liminal period that triggers self-transformation, the study aims to explain how this transformation process occurs, supported by logical reasoning and theoretical frameworks.

Figure 4.3 explains the steps of the analysis followed by the researcher to conclude the findings. The thematic analysis technique was used for research question four. Therefore, the following figure elaborates on the researcher's role in analysing both questions. Additionally, before analysing all the collected information, the researcher described the validity and reliability of the information based on the qualitative research method approach.

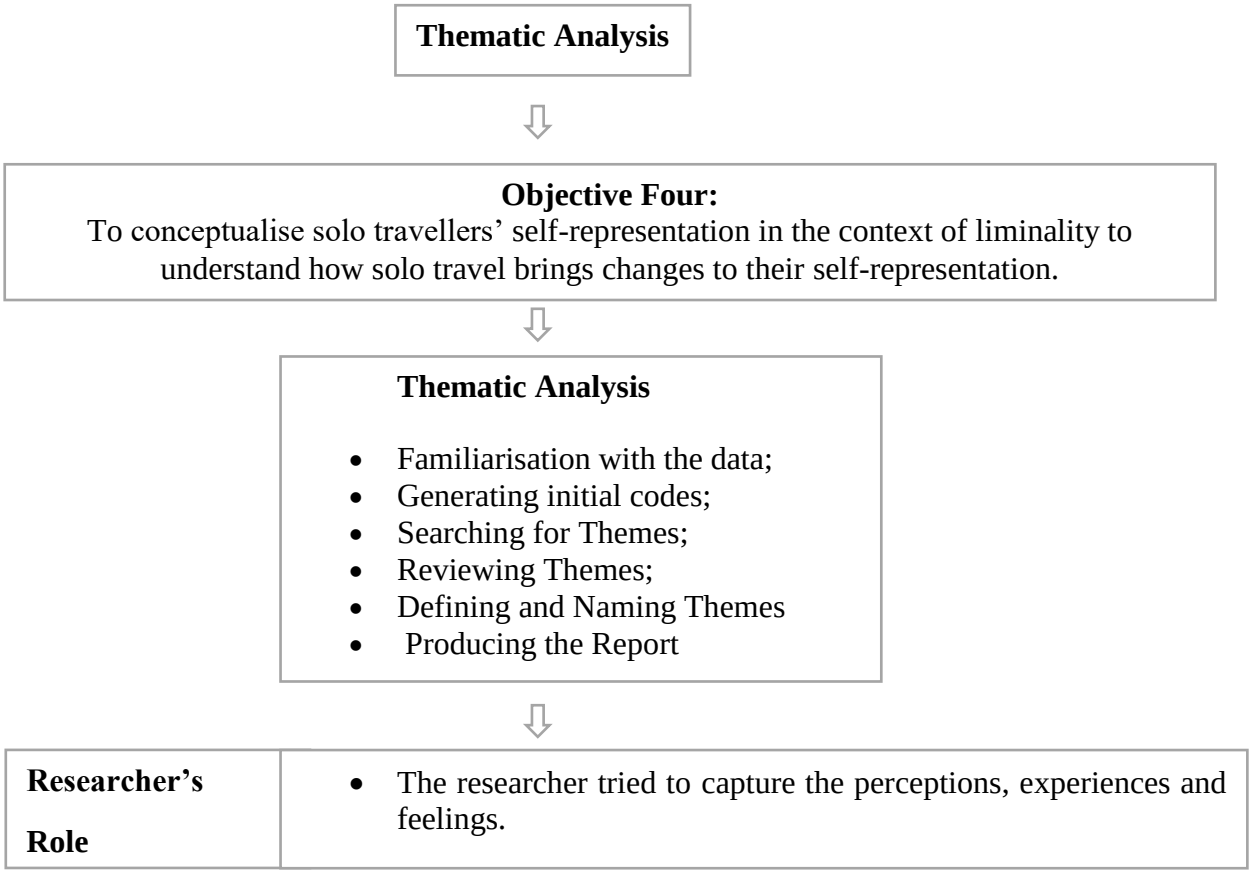


Figure 4.3 Thematic Analysis for the Objective Four

(Source: Braun and Clarke (2006) and Author's compilation)

4.5.1 Stage of Separation (Pre-liminal Phase) and Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

The pre-liminal stage explains that an individual disassociates him/herself from the usual routine practice in life. Previous studies related to travel and tourism have identified three primary stages of travel: pre-travel, during-travel and post-travel stages. These studies include

works by Jeng & Fesenmaier (2002), Fotis et al. (2012), Wong et al. (2019) and Pop et al. (2020). This study focuses on the self-representation of solo travellers during these stages. It also situates the concept of liminality and transformative theories to understand the experiences of solo travellers better. Although past studies have recognised these stages, it is worth noting that solo travellers may experience them differently since they do not have a companion. Even though some join with strangers, the travel experiences of solo travellers still vary. The study's findings provide compelling evidence of the differences among solo travellers and how they represent themselves during their travels. The concept of liminality is used to situate this representation, which assimilates the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases.

The data collected from 40 solo travellers has yielded insights into their self-representation through the lens of liminality, offering valuable insights into the solo tourism context. The pre-liminal phase is also called as separation stage, where a solo traveller detached from the comfort zone, friend circle, family and relations, familiar environment(home/job), current jobs, roles and responsibilities (temporarily) (Familiar, safe place and people).

The stage of separation explains how solo travellers prepare to leave behind their familiar backgrounds. Beyond the strong reasons and motives, how do the travellers represent themselves during this period? By emphasising self-representation, the experiences of the respondents are discussed under two major classifications: oneself to oneself, where solo travellers exhibit (a) Excitement (*blank mind, mixed feelings, sleepless nights*); (b) Lack of Self-Confidence (*language barrier, lack of prior experience, feelings of inferiority, safety issues*); (c) Self-Courage (*being more attentive, self-belief*); and (d) Self-Preparation *(travel itinerary, mind map*). Simultaneously, the ways in which solo travellers present themselves when considering others in the stage of separation are highlighted by (a) Changing Roles and Emotional Attachment (*relying on parents and loved ones*), (b) Pathetic Feelings and Anxiety

(*concealing genuine emotions*, *hesitance*); (c) Seeking Attention (*special treatment*); and (d) Physical Appearance (*personal grooming*).

a. Excitement

One's excitement is considered an expression of one's inner thoughts and passion towards what one likes and thinks to be involved (Aron & Aron, 1996). In such a way, it relates to solo travellers; they were much more excited about their travel.

The current study's respondents highly agreed that they had a blank mind before travels about how it would be and their excitement increased through what they knew from their collection of information from their searches about solo travel and what lens they had seen. As the way respondent shared his experience:

> *"Before making my first solo travel, I had yet to learn how it would be. How do you select safe accommodation, make travel safe, etc? I spent countless hours on the internet and went through solo travellers' blogs to get some ideas about solo travel and the destination I planned to visit. I was super excited. How would mine be? Will it be able to handle all the surprises?"*
>
> *(P8, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Not only does a blank mind contribute to their excitement, but it also leads to mixed feelings, resulting in a complex mix of confusing and inexplicable emotions—both positive and negative. This turmoil often results in self-doubt. They may wonder if they can handle it all or whether they should embark on a solo journey. According to responses, this sense of doubt lingers until they reach a point of self-trust. Before beginning their travels, many individuals are surrounded by their close circle and typically travel with companions in a

familiar environment. However, when it comes to solo travel, each traveller must learn to care for themselves, confront both expected and unexpected challenges and manage everything independently, as there will be no one there to assist or protect them. As shared by some respondents, feelings of insecurity naturally arise among solo travellers, particularly during the initial stages of their journeys. As one respondent recalled:

> *"No one felt the same way I did because I was happy, excited, worried, and confused. I was pleased and excited because I was going to visit a new place, meet new people, create some beautiful memories, fill my gallery with colourful pictures, make my dream come true, I could independently enjoy my vacation, etc., but all these factors made me afraid and worried too. A few days before my first solo travel, all my excitement turned to worries. I started to overthink whether the new people that I'd be meeting in the new place would be good-hearted, would be helpful, would be able to manage things alone, would enjoy my own company, or would I miss my family and friends; what should I do if any stranger talk to me kind of both positive and negative thoughts."*
>
> *(P7, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Due to their mixed feelings about the excitement of their journey, they often found themselves facing sleepless nights. For solo travellers, these sleepless nights began the moment they decided to travel alone. However, these experiences have become cherished memories and they represent golden days filled with dreams and interests. As Participant 23 stated:

> *"I can't express the excitement I felt during that time. I dreamt a lot about my upcoming trip. As the days drew closer to my travel date, I imagined my journey, the*

different people I would meet, and how much I would enjoy myself there. Most nights, I dreamt about my destination and mentally lived out my adventures, often struggling to sleep because I was so immersed in thoughts of my travels."

(P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)

Therefore, subsuming all, at the beginning of their travel, solo travellers are excited about their travels, encompassing both positive and negative emotions. This excitement can be attributed, in part, to a lack of self-confidence.

b. Lack of Self-Confidence

Self-confidence has been identified as a motivating stimulus, particularly in the context of solo travel among women, as it plays a significant role in their preference for solo tourism. (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; and Yang, 2020). However, solo travellers earn self-confidence or boosts their confidence after solo travels. At the beginning of the stage, most respondents said they did not have enough confidence to travel alone.

One reason behind the lack of self-confidence is the language barrier. The current study consisted of multiple nationalities with different native languages. The common language all shared was English. Therefore, at the beginning of the travel, when travellers choose to travel alone to other countries that speak different languages from their native language, they feel less confident due to the language barrier.

Participant 17 explained that:

"Although I have known English for some time, as it is not my native language, I was not very confident about managing my travel alone. I feel more comfortable using my own language, especially when it differs from the local language, which makes communication more challenging for me. Before travelling alone, I felt hesitant because of this language barrier."

(P17, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)

However, after their travels, the experiences they gained allowed them to meet diverse communities. This exposure helped them overcome their hesitance regarding language barriers and reduced feelings of inadequacy related to their language skills. By confronting their fears of communicating with speakers of different languages, they found the motivation to continue travelling alone in the long term. However, in the short term, before gaining sufficient experience, a lack of self-confidence could lead to inferior complexity. While this issue can vary from person to person, it was commonly observed among the study respondents. As one of the respondents noted:

"I do struggle with an inferiority complex due to past experiences where people have belittled me by comparing my skin colour to theirs, particularly when interacting with strangers, especially those who are fair-skinned. In my early adulthood, I realised that this complex caused me to shy away from public gatherings and posting pictures, among other things. Consequently, I had self-doubts about my ability to travel solo and how to engage with others. Though I have decided to travel alone to overcome all my self-doubt, I still have some hesitation regarding my feelings of inferiority complex".

(P21, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

Along with those, participants with a heightened safety consciousness often feel a decrease in self-confidence, particularly among female solo travellers who are concerned about their safety. Participant 24 specifically stated that:

> *"I'm very keen on my safety. When considering safety, the first thing that comes to mind is the freedom from harassment, especially sexual harassment. Before making all the travel arrangements, I surfed the internet. I searched whether the country was safer for female solo travellers and whether there was any sexual harassment reported against either local women or foreigners. As a result of my search, I found a few cases that shattered my confidence."*
>
> *(P24, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

Subsuming all, though all have a safety concern before travelling alone, especially among female travellers, they also have concerns about harassment. From their perspective, they feel fearful and unsafe, which can ultimately decrease their confidence.

Though solo travellers do have mixed feelings before their travel, one thing that keeps them focused and leads to their passion for travelling alone is none other than solo travellers' self-courage. The following sections detail how they prepare themselves before their travel begins.

c. Plug-up Self-Courage

Before travelling alone, many respondents in the study initially experienced mixed feelings, leading them to doubt themselves. These feelings included a lack of self-confidence, developing an inferiority complex and sleepless nights. However, they found the courage to stick with their decision to travel solo. One of the strongest motivating factors behind this

decision was self-courage. When travellers felt down, they pushed themselves to prepare for their journey by addressing their weaknesses and fears. This preparation included being more attentive to pre-travel arrangements, ensuring they had everything they needed, such as chargers, power banks, cables and other electronic devices. By doing so, they aimed to avoid panic in uncertain situations and to protect themselves.

Participant 8 remarked that:

> *"When I decided to travel alone, the foremost thing I did was prepare the checklist. I did that to have a clear picture and plan my trip without disruptions. I have prepared a checklist for the actions and steps to be taken when planning the trip and for the things to be taken with me. I have included categories like medicines, essentials, electronic gadgets, clothes, etc. I was worried about whether I could get emergency medications such as painkillers, acidity prevention, etc. I even took chargers, cables, and power banks to keep my mobile charged, which are essential in a new environment. Ensuring mobile charge is beneficial in two ways: one can take pictures, and the other, most importantly, we can stay connected with our people despite distance. I made checklists for medicines or gadgets and created a checklist for my clothes, saving my luggage space and helping me decide on my stay. This practice is advisable to all travellers because it ensures the safest and most convenient stay during the trip. At the same time, when travelling alone, we can't ask for chargers or any other items missed by strangers, or we can buy all of them, as it is not cost-effective. Most importantly, these small details can also ruin our mood."*
>
> *(P8, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

On the other hand, the respondents acknowledged that, in terms of lessening their fear of self-confidence when travelling alone, they trusted themselves that they could go ahead with their decision to travel alone. Participant 40 stated that:

> *"Travelling alone has always been my dream. However, as I got closer to making it a reality, I felt scared and unsure if I could do it. Many times, I considered cancelling my travel, but I also thought about why I shouldn't trust myself and pursue something I truly want in life."*
>
> *(P40, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Solo travellers' self-courage has played a major role in motivating them to begin their solo travel. In addition to all, solo travellers also self prepared in terms of preparing with *an itinerary ("... thoroughly prepared itinerary plan made me feel comfortable and confident in the new, unfamiliar environment and made my travel easy- P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old);* and also *mentally prepared* the self before their travel. For instance, *"we spend most of our time with our loved ones, and they are the ones who provide the most incredible support in our thin and thick lives. So, without them, travelling alone is the biggest challenge because we have to be mentally prepared to be the only ones who will be there in the new environment (P15, Female, Aged 40-49 years old).*

Therefore, how did solo travellers mentally and physically prepare themselves before their solo travels, and how did they represent themselves in the stage of separation? However, the above experience sharing of solo travellers detailed only how they see themselves. To have a comprehensive knowledge of how they represent themselves, there is a need to understand how travellers have given importance to others. The following section explains the solo travellers' self-representation based on oneself to others.

a. Changing Roles and Emotional Attachment

One's self-representation is also based on how others think about themselves or how they want to present themselves in front of others, which explains the part of self-representation. In the beginning, solo travellers have to think about others, particularly what role they hold in their lives, which has a significant impact on their self-representation at the stage of representation. When it comes to family, this would have a significant influence on the solo travellers' travel decisions, whether to travel alone or not (Yang & Tung, 2018).

The relationship status of respondents—whether they are single and living independently from their parents, single but living with their parents, in a committed relationship, married, or divorced—significantly influences their decisions to travel alone. When comparing those who are single and living independently with those who are divorced, committed, in a relationship, single but living with their parents, or married, it becomes evident that the former group faces fewer complications when deciding to travel alone. In contrast, individuals in other categories tend to consider their roles and responsibilities more carefully before making travel plans. For example, those who live with their parents often seek permission or face concerns from their parents regarding their travel decisions. One participant, for instance, highlighted this point by stating:

> *"I am a person who is dependent on my family a lot. Since childhood, my parents have made all the decisions; they have decided what is good for me. I couldn't go beyond them because I was financially dependent on them. Financial dependency made it hard to make decisions on my own because whatever my choices were, ultimately, I had to ask my parents to fulfil them."*
>
> *(P21, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

In contrast, single individuals may live with their parents and still be financially independent; while they can decide on their travel plans, they have concerns about their parents and place a high value on their loved ones. They strive to ensure that their presence and activities during their trips do not cause any worry for those who matter most to them. Similarly, those who are married or in a relationship often feel responsible for their partners and have similar concerns. For instance, participant 16 stated that:

> *"I do have concerns about doing solo travel; what would my partner tell me if I told him I want to do solo travel? I knew he would not object to my preference, but I was reluctant to ask about it."*
>
> *(P16, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

Before travelling alone, some individuals may feel reluctant or concerned about what their parents or partners might think about their decision. Their sense of responsibility and their roles within their families can impact their willingness to board on solo travel. However, supportive partners have often contributed to the success of solo travellers who are married.

b. Pathetic Feelings and Anxiety

In addition to the role that travel plays in their lives, societal fears also influence solo travellers, putting significant pressure on them before their travels. This theme of concealing genuine emotions highlights that anxiety and fear levels that vary among participants based on age and gender. Notably, female solo travellers often experience higher levels of anxiety before their travels.

According to the study respondents, many individuals expressed fear or hesitance about travelling alone but did not communicate these feelings to those around them. They believed

that if they represented their fears about travelling alone, they would not receive permission from their parents, partners or loved ones in the future. As a result, they concealed their actual feelings, particularly those who were married, living with their parents, or in a relationship. For instance, one participant shared her experience:

> *"I think exactly one week before my solo travel, I heard the news that a woman solo traveller faced harassment during her travel. That shook my confidence and made me afraid. But I didn't show my real feelings to my parents, and I didn't discuss the news with them, even because otherwise they would not let me go alone."*
>
> *(P12, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In the meantime, another set of solo travellers hesitate to express real emotions to their close circle and friends to maintain their brave image. Travelling alone is still considered unique and adventurous among all types of travellers, so the calling of a solo traveller is a proud moment, as per solo travellers. To add value to this, participant 20 expressed that:

> *"When I decided to travel alone, I shared it with my friends. From that moment, they praised me a lot and said I was brave enough. The way they treated me was surprising, and I enjoyed the moment as they took me as an example to think about travelling alone. After that, though I felt fear and self-doubt about travelling alone, I hid my real feelings from my friends' circle to maintain the image I built in them."*
>
> *(P20, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Therefore, before travelling alone, travellers may be honest with themselves but sometimes conceal their actual feelings and emotions from their close friends and family. They

fear that acknowledging these emotions will prevent them from travelling alone in the future and might cause unnecessary worry for their loved ones. Additionally, there is a tendency among solo travellers to maintain an image that discourages the expression of their real emotions. This can lead to a phase where solo travellers may seek attention from others.

c. Seeking Attention

Before travelling alone, in accordance with solo travellers, they expect special treatment from their family and friends, especially those whose ages fall under 40. Travellers love to share their excitement on their solo travel with close friends and enjoy their praise; they enjoy being treated as valued members of my family, friends and associates. As participant 13 said that:

"I remembered the time when I shared my travel plan with family and friends; I felt that I was treated as a valued member of my family and friends."

(P13, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)

Therefore, solo travellers enjoy the moments leading up to their solo travels, appreciating how those in their close circle treat them. However, they may hide their emotions for their benefit and worry about who genuinely cares for them. Additionally, solo travellers often think about strangers and the communities they choose to visit alone. For instance, some travellers put extra effort into their physical appearance.

d. Physical Appearance

The physical appearance of travellers is an important aspect of their personal grooming before their travel. In this context, travellers place significant emphasis on their choice of clothing and overall appearance. To avoid attracting unwanted attention, individuals opt for

modest clothing that is not overly eye-catching. This approach involves two key considerations: first, selecting dresses that are not too colourful to prevent drawing attention from strangers. For example, one participant mentioned that:

> *"I spent quite a long time choosing my dresses. Not colourful, shiny, and also not many branded clothes to avoid unwanted attention from strangers."*
>
> *(P14, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

In contrast to that, to avoid unwanted attention, also be careful with the cultural values of a destination. This helps solo travellers to pretend to be the locals and make safe moves during their travels.

> "*People jump quickly to their judgements by looking at others' dress. Before my solo travel, I consciously pick all my dress according to the places that I'm planning to visit; I also go through all the official websites of the destination I planned to visit to check whether is there any dress restrictions because the I wanted to ensure that my dressing won't make me odd man out there in the destination. Also, I am highly concerned about the cultural factors influencing clothing decisions to avoid unwanted attention to the dressing. On the other hand, I have decided to consciously select a dress to avoid stereotypical responses from local people in the visiting areas and to avoid grabbing negative attention from the local community."*
>
> *(P26, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Coinciding with all the shared experiences, solo travellers' representation is based on how they feel and their concerns for others. The following table 4.11 explains the summarised form of how solo travellers represent themselves.

Table 4.11 Stage of Separation (Pre-Liminal Phase) and Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

Rites of Passage: Separation (Pre-Travel Stage)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
Oneself to Oneself (Self-Concept)																																								
Excitement: *Blank mind* (no idea about the solo travel)	✓M							✓M		✓M					✓F		✓F				✓F					✓F		✓M						✓F	✓F	✓F				
Excitement: *Mixed Feelings* (the accumulation of confusing and inexplicable emotions, both positive and negative, may persist until one has their first travel experience or reaches the point where they feel safe or settled themselves)		✓M				✓M	✓F					✓F	✓F											✓F				✓M				✓M		✓F			✓M		
Excitement: Sleepless nights (excited about the visit (*extremely*) and dreaming).					✓F	✓M	✓F			✓M	✓F	✓F								✓F		✓M	✓M		✓F				✓F			✓F			✓F	✓M	✓M
Lack of self-confidence: *Language barrier* (it may persist until one has felt confident.)	✓M	✓M			✓F	✓M	✓F			✓M	✓F	✓F					✓F							✓F								✓F							
Lack of Self-Confidence: L*ack of prior experience* (it may persist until one has their first travel experience and believes their decision to travel was right.)		✓M			✓F	✓M	✓F		✓F	✓M	✓F	✓F		✓F	✓F			✓M		✓F		✓M	✓M		✓F				✓F	✓F		✓F			✓F		✓F		
Lack of Self-Confidence: *Inferior complexity* (an individual feels less confident due to a difference in skin colour. It implies that the person believes their skin colour makes them inferior to others).			✓M		✓F		✓F				✓F										✓F			✓F						✓F						✓F		
Lack of Self-confidence: *Safety issues* **(**Sexual harassment can cause individuals to feel fearful and unsafe, which can ultimately lead to a decrease in their confidence.					✓F		✓F					✓F									✓F			✓F														
Plug-up Self-Courage: *Being more attentive in pre-travel preparations* (to ensure they have everything they need, including chargers, power banks, cables, and other electronic devices).	✓M	✓M			✓F		✓F	✓M	✓F			✓F		✓F	✓F			✓M	✓M		✓F	✓M			✓F		✓M		✓F			✓F			✓F	✓M	✓M
Plug-up Self-Courage: *Boost the Self-Belief* (encourage the self every step of the way before embarking on solo travels).			✓M	✓F	✓F	✓M	✓F	✓M			✓F	✓F	✓F	✓F	✓F	✓F		✓M	✓M		✓F		✓M		✓F	✓M	✓M		✓F	✓F		✓F			✓F	✓F	✓F		✓M	✓M
Self-Preparation: *A full prepared Itinerary plan*				✓F							✓F					✓F		✓M	✓M		✓F					✓F		✓M	✓F				✓F						✓M
Self-Preparation*: Mentally prepare the self for the upcoming travel* (to be very strong in any situation) and create a full mind map for the travel (prefer not to put self at risk, so be extra cautious, keep all travel ideas organised**,** and ensure nothing is forgotten).	✓M											✓F			✓F							✓M			✓F		✓M		✓F			✓F		✓F					
Oneself to Others (Self-Presentation)																																							
Changing Roles and Emotional Attachment: *Relied on their parents* (acting in accordance with their wishes and waiting for their decisions (until they become financially independent).	✓M	✓M		✓F							✓F							✓M		✓F	✓F	✓M				✓F				✓F			✓F			✓F		
Changing Roles and Emotional Attachment: *Relied on their partners or loved ones* (for advice or reassurance. However, even independent individuals still show concern and commitment towards family and relationships). Although people may be independent in their decision-making and solo travel, they still value the importance of their loved ones. They strive to ensure that their presence and activities during their trip do not cause any worry to those who matter most to them.					✓F		✓F							✓F		✓F			✓M					✓F		✓M									✓F			✓M
Pathetic Feelings and Anxiety: *Concealing genuine emotions from others* (the level of anxiety and fear varies among participants based on age and gender, with higher levels observed in females).			✓M	✓F			✓F					✓F		✓F		✓F			✓M			✓M				✓M									✓F			
Seeking Attention: *Special treatment* (Individuals love to share their excitement on their solo travel with close friends and enjoy their praise; they enjoy being treated as a valued member of my family, friends, and associates).		✓M		✓F		✓M	✓F		✓F			✓F	✓F	✓F						✓F		✓M								✓F					✓F			
Physical Appearance: Personal grooming (before travelling, individuals spend time grooming themselves to look and feel their best; individuals pay more attention to their clothing selection. To avoid attracting unwanted attention, individuals choose modest clothing that is not attention-grabbing).				✓F	✓F	✓M	✓F	✓M			✓F	✓F		✓F	✓F	✓F			✓M				✓M		✓F	✓M		✓M	✓F		✓F			✓F	✓F	✓F		✓M	✓M

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

(Note: **✓M: Male Solo Traveller; ✓F: Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 1-3 Times); ✓M Male Solo Traveller; ✓F Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 4-6 Times); ✓M Male Solo Traveller; ✓F Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 7-9 Times); ✓M Male Solo Traveller; ✓F Female Solo Traveller (No of Solo Travels: 10 and above))**

4.5.2 Stage of Transition (Liminal Phase) and Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

In the liminal phase of solo travel, a transition occurs where the traveller's new version is based on their experiences and critical situations gained during their travel. This second stage is an 'in-between' state where the person is uncertain about the emerging self or the self that is about to be removed (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012). The liminal stage is considered significant because it allows travellers to reflect on the transformation of their self through the changes and situations they experience during their travel.

The situations the solo travellers encounter during this stage would be reflected in their post-travel self-representation and, if they intend to travel solo again, in their upcoming solo travel. The severity of a situation can vary greatly depending on an individual's personality, upbringing and socio-demographic background. These factors can influence one's perception and understanding of the situation from a unique perspective. How they handle and overcome a situation is what determines their transformative experiences. It is not a requirement for every solo traveller to encounter difficult situations during their journey. The overall experience is what counts, as it leads to self-transformation. During their travels and while facing critical situations, solo travellers came to believe that they were changing authentically (*self-authenticity*), and their self-reflection indicated their integrated new knowledge (t*ransformative learning*) and values (*existential transformation*) in their self-representation.

Under the transition stage, the existing studies highlighted that tourists' experienced uninhibited liminal behaviour during these liminal time (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Weichselbaumer, 2012; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005; Shields, 1991; Foley & Hayllar, 2007; Ryan & Kinder, 1996). To what extent individuals change or invert their routine lifestyle lies on a continuum from minimal to radical and reflects their individual characters; however, this is yet to be studied in tourism-related studies.

By highlighting this empirical gap, the researcher found the answer from objective three, that when solo travellers encounter critical events during their travel, it brings changes to their self-representation. To capture the moment of truth, the researcher has used 'Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis'. From the derived findings, the researcher used the thematic analysis and found major themes to explain the process of transition, where a solo traveller experiences the changes in their self-representation based on what situation they faced, how it triggered them to discover their abilities and realising their changes in their self-presentation by comparing with their actual representation before their solo travel. Therefore, based on the collected information, the solo transition phase includes the following steps:

- Encountering Critical Events;
- Recognising Triggering Factors;
- Experiencing Empowerment and Self-Reflection;
- Recollecting the Significant Moments; and
- Achieving Self-Realisation

In the initial step of *encountering critical events*, the researchers noted that "the transformation process only occurs when individuals experience travel challenges or moments that trigger a shift in perspectives or behaviour" (Teoh et al., 2021, p. 368). This study emphasised that the critical events faced by solo travellers during their travels serve as pivotal moments that can inspire personal change and alter their self-representation. Based on the gathered information and the findings related to Research Question Three, the challenges encountered by solo travellers were classified into two categories: critical events created by others and those created by the travellers themselves. The extent to which solo travellers

perceive these unfamiliar situations as pivotal events in their lives depends on *triggering factors*, and this has been identified as the second step.

During these moments, solo travellers learn to rely on themselves to navigate challenges, which allows them to realise their own strength and discover a new version of themselves. This experience can be understood in the context of the "Bystander Effect," where individuals may not receive assistance from others in difficult times. As a result, they learn to be courageous and to overcome challenges independently (Bazinet & Van Vliet, 2020). Therefore, when solo travellers encounter such critical events during their solo travels, they can identify their new version of themselves when they attempt to *empower themselves* to handle the difficult situations they face. Therefore, when solo travellers face critical events, they can discover a new version of themselves while empowering themselves to handle these challenging situations. This has been highlighted as the third step in the transition stage.

In the moment of encountering various situations, travellers may not fully understand how their reactions differ from their usual self-representation. However, self-evaluation becomes possible after these events, especially when they find themselves alone. During these solitary moments, self-introspection (Kirillova et al., 2017) allows travellers to calm their minds and reflect on their experiences. By *recalling their thoughts and reactions* to situations they faced, they can evaluate their true selves against their perceived self-representation.

Under the recollection process, travellers' authenticity in their travel experiences can act as a triggering point, motivator, or source of value (Yeoman et al., 2007). This may explain why travellers seek out authentic experiences and often undergo self-transformations. The moment when they are recollecting their reflection, they connect themselves with self-discovery, emotions and learnings. When travellers step outside their comfort zones and encounter unfamiliar environments (Tiberghien, 2020) and adventurous situations (Noy, 2004), they become psychologically disconnected from their usual surroundings, social circles and

routines. This disconnection enables them to pursue authentic experiences (Tiberghien, 2020), leading to psychological changes that are reflected in their behaviour (Wang et al., 2021; Tiberghien, 2020).

At the end of this transition process, solo travellers *achieve their self-realisation.* During this process, solo travellers compare how they represented themselves before embarking on their solo travels with the situations they encountered during their journey. This reflection reveals the changes in their self-representation. As per findings from the collected information from the responses, one's transition is connected with their cognitive, affective and self-changes. The evidence of self-realisation would reflect on their self-definition of how they saw themselves at the end of encountering such critical moments.

At the same time, as the outcome of self-realisation, solo travellers develop 'self-efficacy,' which is their belief in their own ability to handle difficulties independently. Research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs play a significant role when individuals encounter tough conditions, serving as an expression of positive emotions during these challenges (Bandura et al., 2003; Caprara et al., 2022). This positive emotional experience can lead to greater satisfaction and personal wellbeing (Gerbino et al., 2016; Caprara et al., 2022).

In accordance with the respondents, as a result of their self–realisation, they strongly believed in themselves and their capabilities. For instance, participant 32 said that:

> *"I started my journey out of curiosity, and more than I expected, my travel experiences taught me a lot, and they brought changes to both my body and mind. The challenging movements and the entire solo travel experience let me realise one thing: I can manage anything. Though some of the incidents sound scary, annoying and sometimes worse, at the end of that, it all surprised me because I learnt more about myself. I trusted myself and my capacity."*
>
> *(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Therefore, during the transition stage, solo travellers experiencing the expected and unexpected situations, these let them empower themselves and also develop their self-efficacy. Coinciding all, the transition stage is detailed in the following table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Stage of Transition (Liminal Phase) and Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

Critical Events	Themes	Sub-Themes
Encountering Critical Events		
Created by others	Cultural Myopia	• A Mixed-Gender Accommodation • The Absence of Judgemental Scrutiny • The Conservative Communities
	Local Arrogance, Violence	• Terrorist Attacks • Unwelcoming Behaviour • The Risk of Stalking
	Fraudulent Activities	• Inflated Charges • Scams related to Room Reservations • Fake Reviews
	A Lack of Solo Travel Packages	• Collective Packages
	Social Harmony	• Unexpected Kindness from Locals (Positive/Negative)
Created by themselves	Careless Behaviour	• Poor Travel Itinerary • Loss of Personal Belongings
	Emotional Connection	• Spiritual Connectivity • Relaxation and Meaning of Life
Recognising Triggering Factors		
Created by others	Cultural Myopia	• Gender; Unfamiliar Culture; Personality; Culture and Religious Values; Social norms
	Local Arrogance, Violence	• Age; Unfamiliar situation; Personality; Gender
	Fraudulent Activities	• Personal Traits; Location of Scam; Self-Disappointment; Unfamiliar situation; Personality; Language barrier; Harming one's integrity and self-morals
	A Lack of Solo Travel Packages	• Ignorance of Others; Unwelcoming approach; High cost

	Social Harmony	• Less travel experience; Personality; Contradiction between own thoughts; Less travel experience; Unexpected approach from an unexpected group of people; Cultural values
Created by themselves	Careless Behaviour	• Over-Confident; Unfamiliar Destination; Careless behaviour; Self-frustration; Destination image; Budgeted travel
	Emotional Connection	• Self-changes; Self-fulfilment; Stress; Relationship issues; Self-handicap
Experiencing Empowerment and Self-Reflection		
Created by others	Cultural Myopia	Oneself to Oneself • Self-Courage; Self-Transcendence; Self-Protection; Self-Empowerment; Self-Care Oneself to Others • Positive Impression; Self-Image; Sense of Liberation; Act Bravely
	Local Arrogance, Violence	Oneself to Oneself • Self-Motivation; Self-Control; Self-Empowerment; Meaning of Life; Self-Doubt; Self-Embarrassment; Self-Empowerment; Self-Protection Oneself to Others • Spontaneous; Concealing True Emotions; Self-Image
	Fraudulent Activities	Oneself to Oneself • Innocent Self; Self-Doubt; Self-Determination; Self-Empowerment Oneself to Others • People-Pleasing Personality; Voice-Out; Self-Expression
	A Lack of Solo Travel Packages	Oneself to Oneself • Self-Disappointment Oneself to Others • Do not express the Actual Emotions
	Social Harmony	Oneself to Oneself • Rigid to Speak with Others; Self-Doubt Uncomfortable and Unsafe Feelings Oneself to Others • Safety Consciousness; Narrator on Social Media; Courtesy

Created by themselves

Careless Behaviour	Oneself to Oneself • Do not express the Actual Emotions; Safety Consciousness; Narrator on Social Media; Courtesy Oneself to Others • Do not express the Actual Emotions; Safety Concern; Self-Image
Emotional Connection	Oneself to Oneself • Self-Realisation; Self-Concentration; Self-Reluctance; Self-Empowerment; Self-Trust Oneself to Others • Self-Consciousness; Self-Integrity; Spontaneous; Self-Image

Created by others and themselves

Recollecting the Significant Moments	
Sense of Authenticity	Oneself to Oneself • Discovering a New Version of Oneself (Uncovering Hidden Skills, Gaining A Fresh Clear Focus) • Self-Awareness (Recognising the Power of The Self, Self-Interest, Genuine Feelings) • Self-Realisation (Admitting to Changes and Choosing A Career) • Self-Motivation (Praising Oneself) Oneself to Others • Spontaneity (Interacting with Strangers, Trying New Things while Travelling, Stepping Out of Self-Handicapping)
Reflecting on Self-Discovery	Oneself to Oneself • A Self of Curiosity (Self-Interaction on One's Self-Perspective) • Self-Control (Survive in an Extremely Worst Situation, Control Feelings and Emotions, Control the Level of Fear and Anxiety). Oneself to Others • A Sense of Curiosity (Self-Reflection from One's Own Perspective)
Connecting Reactions to Emotions	Oneself to Oneself • Self-Assertio (Being Confident in Self-Expression, Communicating Clearly in Public) • The Power of Independence (Being Independent, Relying Less on Others) • Self-Love

	(Better Self-Understanding, Finding Happiness within Oneself, Finding Meaning in One's Life) • Self-Management (Achieving a Work-Life Balance, Effective Time Management) Oneself to Others • Being more Self-Conscious (Pretending to be like Others, Being more Appealing Character, Reducing Self-Handicapping, Increasing Self-Esteem)
Connecting Reactions to Learnings	Oneself to Oneself • Self-Development (Learnt New Skills and Learnt New Knowledge) • Being Open-Minded (Learnt to Respect Multiple Cultural Values, Learnt to Listen to Others' Opinions) Oneself to Others • A Sense of Responsibility (Being Responsible for One's Own Actions, Learning to be Socially Responsible)
Achieving Self-Realisation	
Cognitive Stimulation	• A Choice of Independence (Convenient Travel, Flexibility in Travel, Freedom in Travel, Personalised Gift, Own Peace of Time, No One There to Judge) • Self-Empowerment (Self-Learning, Self-Consciousness, Step Out from A Comfort Zone, Self-Care, Self-Capability, Self-Interest, Dream-Catcher) • A Self of Accepting Challenge • Finding New People & New Learning (Open-Minded)
Affective Stimulation	• *Personal Wellbeing* (Problem-Solver, Positive Energy, Escape from Routinised Life, Relaxation, Tool for Happiness) • *Life-Long Experience* (Unimaginable Travel Experience)
Self-Changes	• *Self-Discovery* (Self-Identity, Self-Awareness, Self-Exploration) • *Changes in a Self* (Increased Level of Maturity, Changes in the Character, Goal-Oriented, Self-Trust) • *Self-Development* (Personal Growth, Skill Development)
Self-Efficacy	• Believing in One's Own Capabilities

Created by others and themselves

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

4.5.3 Stage of Re-Incorporation (Post-Liminal Phase) and Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

The post-liminal stage, also known as re-incorporation, is the third stage in the process of self-change. During this stage, individuals recognise and integrate the changes they have experienced into their behaviour, which then influences how they represent themselves. This entire process is shaped by the experiences shared by travellers. It can be broadly classified into three main steps:

- Revisiting travel experiences: This involves recalling past travel movements.
- Deciding on temporary behavioural changes: Here, solo travellers adopt changes that differ from their habitual behaviours for a limited time.
- Deciding on long-lasting behavioural changes: Solo travellers think of incorporating new changes into their habitual behaviours permanently.

- **Revisiting Travel Experiences**

Solo travellers reflect on their travels when they are heading home or after returning. During this reflection, they recall a range of moments, such as happy, sad, challenging, or even boring—by reviewing their travel diaries, revisiting photos and videos they captured and checking the travel updates they shared on social media.

From respondents, some of the solo travellers returning to their home after their visit, as they stated via travelling on flights, trains, buses or in their personal transports while listening to their favourite music or while relaxing moment on the way home, they used to recall their travel movements. As participant 11 recalled that:

"I didn't think about much until I caught my flight. But the moment I sat down in my window seat, I realised that I had almost completed my adventurous journey. I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing I had successfully finished my solo travels. During the flight, I took the time to check my photos. How many pictures did I take? Amazing! I could barely remember most of the pictures I captured during my travels, but after reviewing them all, I felt truly happy and proud of myself."

(P11, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Other than checking the photos or videos, another set of respondents recalled their travel moments when they recheck their travel diaries.

"I used to write in a diary every day after my travels. Even on days when I felt exhausted and tired, I would still manage to jot down some notes and expand on them whenever I had the time. Along with my writing, I attached the souvenirs I collected during my trips, such as tickets, photos I took, sand, seashells, and many other mementoes. When I look back at my travel diary, it feels like opening a treasure trove. I recorded where I went, what I saw, and how I felt my emotions and experiences. Re-reading my diary brings back a range of feelings: happiness, sadness, pride, and sometimes uncontrollable laughter. The feelings I experienced were truly amazing."

(P32, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)

Except for those travellers interested in writing travel diaries, another set of travellers, who falls in between ages 18 and 39 used to post their travel stories on social media (*most of the respondents of this study used Instagram, WeChat, and Facebook*) and keep on the status about their travel. From here, some of them keep posting during their travels and the rest of

them post detailed stories on social media once they complete their travel. This behaviour slightly differs from other age-category travellers, where one of the participants stated:

> *"I wrote my travel story and thought of sharing it on my social media, but when I revisited it, I realised it was too lengthy. My family will certainly read it out of love, as they have no choice, but how many of them actually have the time to read such a long story? So, I decided to keep it for my own memories instead."*
>
> (*P18, Female, Aged 40-49 years old)*

In addition to the photos taken, videos recorded, travel diaries written, and social media posts shared, solo travellers often experience a sense of pressure when their trips come to an end. Beyond simply enjoying the memories, many find it stressful to return to their daily routine. Participant 23 noted that they felt this pressure upon returning home.

> *"When I think my travel is completed, immediately one thing came into my mind was, I need to get up in the morning, work for every day, and cover up duties, also start to save money for the next travel, and so many routine activities pop up, which stressed me a lot"*
>
> (*P23, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

Therefore, in conclusion, when the travel ends, solo travellers have positive emotions towards their travel experience; however, they also have mixed feelings when thinking back to their monotonous work and their routinised lifestyle.

- **Temporary Behavioural Changes**

The term ‘temporary behavioural changes’ refers to the new behaviours that travellers may adopt during solo travel, which can sometimes contradict their habitual behaviour. These changes can stem from the individual’s lifestyle or from their broader cultural background, including aspects such as religion, food, beliefs and language. However, once they return home, the travellers typically revert to their habitual behaviours.

Firstly, some solo travellers have control over their leisure activities, which can include tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, night parties and adventurous activities. The respondents in the current study are primarily from Asian countries, where smoking and drinking are often viewed as casual behaviours, similar to those in some Western cultures.

However, in many developing, cultural and religious contexts, smoking and alcohol consumption are considered harmful and culturally inappropriate (Room, 2004). In some of these countries, these behaviours are forbidden for women (Room, 2004), while in certain Islamic countries, they are strictly prohibited for everyone (Islam & Johnson, 2003). Supporting this discussion, one of the respondents stated that:

> *“During my travels, I smoked, drank, and enjoyed the nightlife. I realised that once I returned home and settled back into my routine, it wouldn’t be possible for me to engage in such entertaining activities. So, I fully embraced these experiences while away. Once I got back home, I made up my mind to adapt to my daily routine.”*
>
> (*P29, Male, Aged 18-29 years old)*

Those who live with their parents or are married and in relationships engage in risky activities, which can be seen as temporary behaviours. From their perspective, although they participate in activities such as skydiving, scuba diving, mountain biking, surfing, hiking,

swimming and camping, most of them choose to keep these activities hidden from their parents, spouses and loved ones. They do this because they do not want to worry the people who care about them. Additionally, they fear that if their family members knew about these risky activities, they would never be allowed to go alone next time.

> *"I went skydiving during my solo travel, but my parents didn't know about it. If I told them, they would really worry about me, and moreover, they wouldn't allow me to do solo travel next time."*
>
> (*P26, Female, Aged 18-29 years old)*

At the same time, when it comes to the dress code, female solo travellers are usually very careful about their clothing. However, female solo travellers from Islamic countries have more freedom to choose comfortable attire while travelling outside their country. Once they return home, they revert to their usual lifestyle. Participant 38 expressed her perspective on this situation, stating:

> *"My country is one of the religious countries where we should wear our religious dress. I liked to go hiking, but with the dress code, it was quite uncomfortable, as there was too much sweating, it was heavy, long, and not proper for hiking activities. However, when I did my solo travel out of the country, I wore comfortable attire with the same decent dress code. I finally made my hiking trip comfortable."*
>
> (*P38, Female, Aged 30-39 years old)*

The convenience and the selection of the dress code are all dependent on the individual, and those differ from person to person. Along the same line of religion, solo travellers who

have identified with Hinduism do have freedom in selecting food when they are out of their family. As one of the participants shared,

> *"My family is too devotional and strictly follows some religious rules, particularly food. On Tuesday and Friday, we should be vegetarians. But when I started travelling alone, I did have freedom in selecting my food as I preferred."*
>
> (*P27, Male, Aged 30-39 years old)*

By subsuming all the above behavioural changes that solo travellers practised while they were alone, it is noted that once they return to their regular lifestyle, they tend to revert to their habitual behaviours. However, the changes mentioned are based on the responses from participants in this study and may vary from person to person. Solo travellers who favoured any of these changes may choose to adopt those behaviours permanently.

- **Long-Lasting Behavioural Changes**

Solo travellers consider incorporating the new changes into their habitual behaviours permanently if they wish. When solo travellers encounter unexpected critical events during their travels, those moments of travel experience allow them to learn not only about themselves but also about different people from various parts of the world. As a result, their ability to handle difficult situations reinforces their belief in their capabilities. Their unbelievable experiences lead them to discover new changes in their behaviour toward self-representation, empowering them to decide how to incorporate their desired changes into their habitual behaviours.

The transformative experiences of travellers are reflected in their consciousness and how effectively they integrate the new changes they have discovered into their lives. The extent

to which these behavioural changes become habitual is influenced by how consistently they practice these new behaviours (House & Kloesel, 1992). Based on the experiences shared by the respondents, they are determined on what practices to adopt and what to avoid in the long term. These new behavioural changes were evident in their self-representation. At the end of their solo travels, the researcher reveals that solo travel plays a significant role in altering the self-representation of solo travellers. The following table 4.13 illustrates the behaviours they incorporate based on the findings.

Table 4.13 Stage of Re-Incorporation (Post-Liminal Phase) and Solo Travellers' Self-Representation

Situations Created By Others	Hold on Desirable Behavioural Changes	Avoid Undesirable Behavioural Changes
Cultural Myopia		
• A Mixed-Gender Accommodation • The Absence of Judgemental Scrutiny • The Conservative Communities	• Maintaining self-confidence • Exhibiting courage • Nurturing a robust sense of self-esteem • The thought of being independent • Self-prevention: to avoid unnecessary trouble from locals	• Abstaining from preconceived judgements • It is not necessary to live as society expects. • Do not select risky destinations and accommodation
Hostility towards Tourists		
• Terrorist Attacks • The Unwelcoming Behaviour • The Risk of Stalking	• Emphasises the value of life • Believe in self • Develop self-confidence • Presence of mind	• Try not to be an extreme introvert • No need to embarrass yourself if you have not done anything wrong • Do not select risky destinations

Fraudulent Activities		
• High Price • Scams in Room Reservations	• Say no to others • To properly prepare for travel • Voice out at the needful situation	• Self-ignorance • Do not always trust unknown people • Impulsive purchasing behaviour • Self-ignorance
Lack Of Travel Packages		
• Collective Packages • Unexpected Kindness From Locals- Positive/Negative	• Thinking from others' perspectives • Cherish each moment in life • Controlling emotions • Matured behaviour • Self-courage • Develop self-confidence • Cherish each moment in life. • Self-care • Learnt to say no	• Do not keep expectations while travelling • Pre-judgement • Come out from a comfort zone • Do not trust everyone • Travelling inbound • Do not reveal
Situations created by themselves	**Hold on Desirable Behavioural Changes**	**Avoid Undesirable Behavioural Changes**
Careless Behaviour		
• Poor Travel Itinerary • Loss of Personal Belongings	• Self-awareness • Self-focus • Self-realisation • Self-care • acknowledging own mistakes • Being vigilant • Self-empowerment • Socially responsible	• Self- delusion • Do not depend on others • Being careless
Emotional Connection		
• Spiritual Connectivity • Relaxation • Meaning of Life	• Self-control • Socially responsible • Evolving grooming style • Come out from a comfort zone • cherish each moment in life	• Being non-vegetarian • Do not depend on others • Reduce inferior complexity

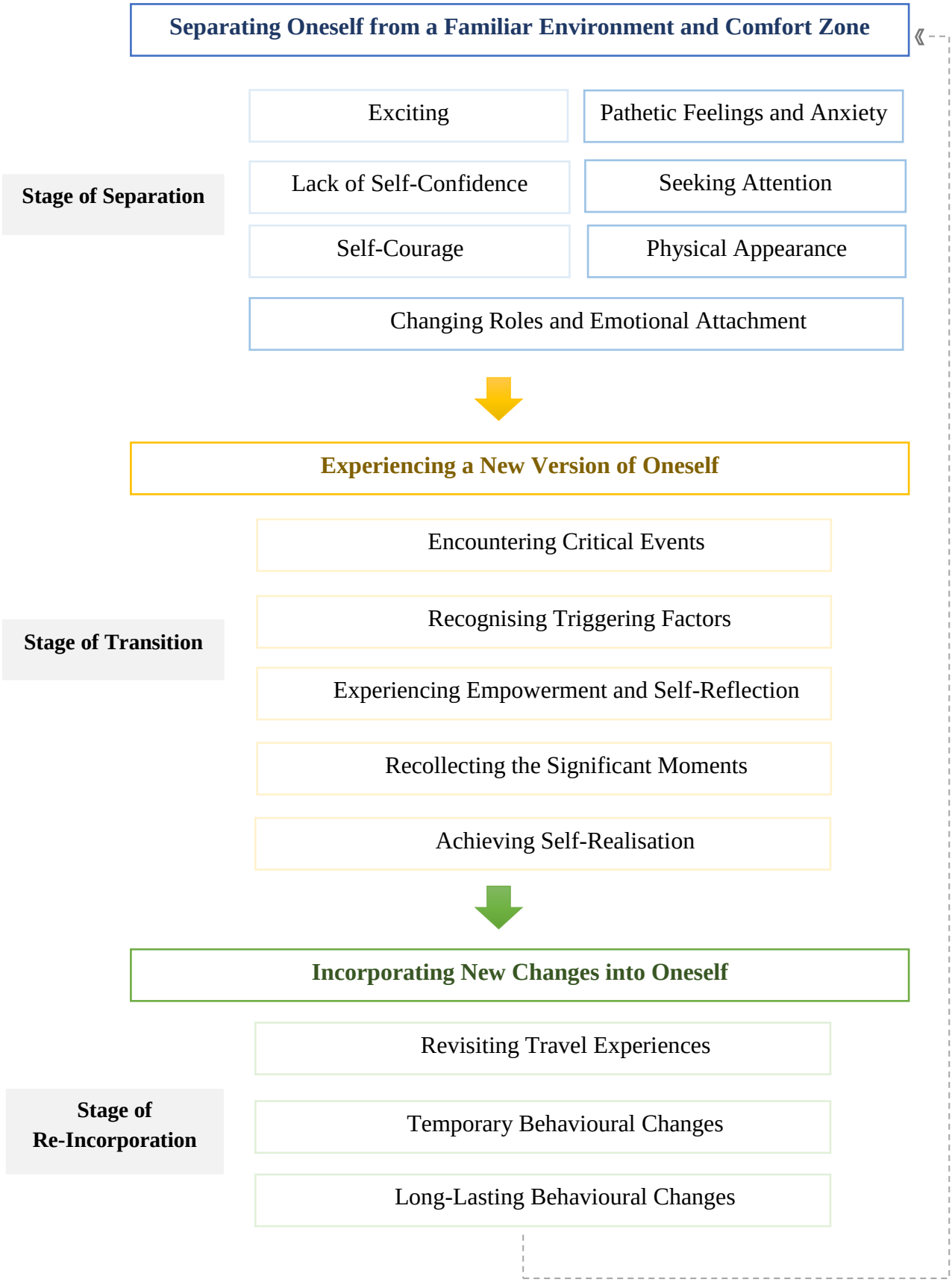
(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

4.5.4 Summary- Research Question Four

Based on the findings, by situating the concept of liminality, the researcher has explained that solo travel brings changes to solo travellers' self-representation, which is explained through three stages: separation, transition and re-incorporation. At the separation stage, solo travellers dissociate themselves from their familiar environment and comfort zone. During their time of solitary travel, when solo travellers encounter unexpected situations, it empowers them to overcome these challenges. At the end of the process, solo travellers build trust in themselves and develop self-efficacy, believing they can manage each situation.

The solo travel experiences enable solo travellers to incorporate new changes into their habitual behaviour based on their preferences. Simultaneously, they are keen to adopt behaviours that differ from their usual habits during their travels. This is because, upon returning home, they recognise they may not be able to maintain those behaviours, which are classified as temporary in the current study. In contrast, the changes that solo travellers admire and decide to incorporate into their behaviour are classified as long-lasting.

At the end of the findings, it is clear that solo travel brings changes to solo travellers' behaviour. These changes in behaviour are reflected in their self-representation, serving as an indicator for both the travellers themselves to realise their transformation and for those around them to recognise these changes. Thus, the current study justifies that solo travel is a catalyst for self-change in self-representation. According to the findings, the current study conceptualised the following model, as explained in Figure 4.4.



4.4 Model of How Solo Travel Brings Changes to One's Self-Representation

(Note--------Solo travellers find the courage to do solo travel again)

(Source: The author's compilation is based on the information collected from the study's participants)

Figure 4.5 provides an overview of this chapter.

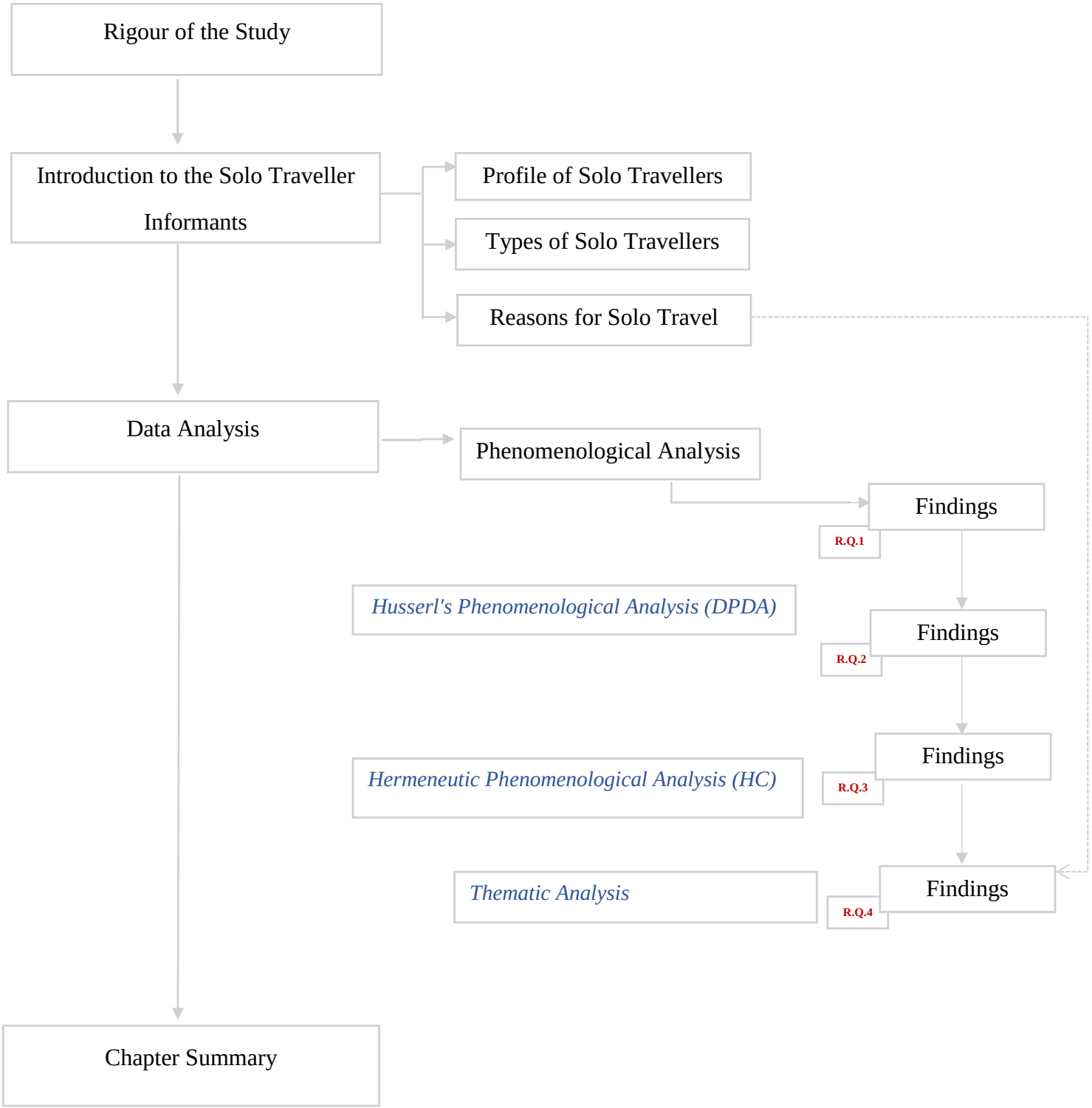


Figure 4.5 Summary of Chapter Four

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses all four research objectives whilst drawing on existing knowledge in the contexts of solo tourism and self-representation. After a thorough discussion of the results, this chapter outlines the contributions of this work to academic knowledge and the practical implications of its findings. This chapter also addresses the identified empirical gaps and acknowledges the research limitations. Several directions for future research are also recommended, and a brief conclusion is presented at the end to provide readers with an overview of the whole study.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

This research aims to explore how solo travellers represent themselves during their travel. To explain the concept of self-representation within the context of liminality, the researcher identified four empirical gaps from systematic reviews of solo tourism and self-representation.

If solo travel is considered an emerging trend in tourism, then what motivates individuals to choose this form of travel? Whilst previous studies have covered the associated motivations, risks and challenges, most of them have focused on the perspectives of female solo travellers, thus leaving a significant bias and knowledge gap regarding male solo travellers. Additionally, although solo travel can lead to self-transformation, the specifics of how this transformation occurs remain unclear despite the availability of related studies (Pung et al., 2020; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

Moreover, if self-transformation does occur, then how do individuals emerge with their new sense of self? If solo travel is recognised as a tool for changing behaviours or altering initial perspectives, then how this transformation takes place and affects the self-representation of solo travellers warrants further investigation. Self-representation concerns how a person

communicates his/her identity, which is closely tied to his/her behaviour (Larsen, Lawson & Todd, 2019). With solo tourism being identified as an emerging trend, studying the behaviour of solo travellers can help tourism stakeholders better understand this niche market. The subsequent sections discuss each finding related to the following research objectives:

- RO1: To identify how solo travellers define themselves.
- RO2: To interpret how solo travel would cause changes in the solo traveller's self-representation.
- RO3: To examine what critical moments trigger solo travellers to make changes in their self-representation.
- RO4: To conceptualise solo travellers' self-representation in the context of liminality to understand how solo travel brings changes to their self-representation.

RO1: To identify how solo travellers define themselves

This research objective aims to emphasise the time that each individual spends reflecting on his/her experiences, engaging in self-dialogue and evaluating his/her values and beliefs. To explain that solo travel leads to changes in one's self-representation, the researcher sought to understand how the participating solo travellers (hereinafter referred to as 'participants') define themselves in such context.

Husserl's phenomenological analysis, also called the 'descriptive analysis of the phenomenology process', was used to gather in-depth ideas about how solo travellers define themselves. The researcher identified significant themes from the participants' answers, including choice of independence (*convenient travel, a personalised gift, flexibility in travel, freedom in travel, no one there to judge and own pace of time*), self-discovery (*self-awareness, self-exploration and self-identity*), self-development (*personal growth and skill development*),

self-empowerment (*a sense of accepting challenges, dream catcher, self-capability, self-care, self-consciousness, self-interest, self-learning and stepping out from a comfort zone*), personal wellbeing (*escape from routinised life, positive energy, problem solver, relaxation and tool for happiness*), finding new people and learning new things (*open minded*), loneliness (*boredom*), changes in oneself (*changes in character, goal oriented, increased level of maturity and self-trust*) and life-long experience *(unimaginable travel experience*). After gathering the participants' new self-definitions, the researcher found that most of these definitions were similar to those identified in previous studies related to motivations and how far it contrasts with the existing studies, such as those of,

Solo travellers can enjoy the independence they desire. Solo travel allows individuals to plan their travel as they wish, thereby giving them more freedom during their travels. Independence in solo travel also means a convenient, flexible and personalised travel without the fear of being judged. Whilst convenience, freedom and flexibility are the most commonly cited benefits of solo travel (Wilson & Little, 2008; Smith et al., 2017; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010), the personalised nature of the experience and the freedom from judgement give this form of travel a more profound significance for solo travellers. '*Solo travel is a personalised gift that one can give to oneself. You do not have to compromise your interests for anyone else's; it is a chance to unwind and explore independently*' (P5). This participant explains how solo travellers benefit from their choice of travel because personalised travel encompasses all three elements of solo tourism *(convenience, flexibility and freedom*), allows travellers to plan their trip from start to finish and the travel generates itself. Solo travellers are also given more freedom to choose what they want to do at their destination and can remain independent throughout their travel. Previous studies have also highlighted independence, which provides travellers with convenience and flexibility in changing their travel plans and the freedom to

decide where, when and how to go to their destination. In sum, a solo traveller has complete control over his/her entire itinerary.

Apart from the freedom to decide or execute one's travel, the real independence lies in the fact that '*there is no one to judge you, and you can feel the freedom to create your world, away from your busy and routine life*' (P38). Although the world is moving towards technological advancement, some communities continue to spread negativity about others' preferences. In certain negative societies, individuals tend to conceal their true identity just to fit in, which can lead to anxiety as social situations tend to involve judgement (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). This judgment is closely intertwined with the concept of self-representation and may affect one's social behaviour, self-concept and information processing (Schroeder, 1995). However, the participants were proud of being solo travellers because being alone gave them the chance to experience different cultures around the world, allowed them to leave circles that criticise them and helped them gain experiences that paved the way for them to live happy lives. Although these participants eventually returned to their society after their travels, the level of impact has been considered low, and their entire travel experience strengthened them without taking negativities into account.

Solo travellers can explore their true selves through their travel experiences. The researcher highlighted self-awareness, self-identity and self-exploration as sub-concepts of self-discovery. In his study of solo travel and the associated challenges, Yang (2020) identified self-discovery as a significant benefit and a key factor that inspires individuals to travel solo.

How much does an individual know about himself/herself (*self-awareness*), what kind of a person s/he is (*self-identity*) and how can s/he comprehend his/her inner self (*self-exploration*)? Previous studies show that through self-discovery and self-exploration, solo travellers often experience a common feeling that helps them define themselves. Suppose that self-awareness refers to one's capacity for introspection (Fleming, 2021). In this case, the

process of comprehending one's inner self emerges as an authentic intuition stemming from one's personal travel experiences that is catalogued as self-exploration. This process can thus be regarded as an elevated manifestation of self-awareness (Fleming, 2021), which allows individuals to attain a more profound comprehension of themselves and make decisions that are aligned with their requirements and aspirations based on their accumulated experiences. One participant shared, '*being a solo traveller and travelling solo provided an opportunity for me to know who I am, and it allowed me to identify my unique talents, such as photography*' (P1). The quality of time provided by solo travel also enables travellers to self-examine and understand themselves.

Solo travellers can also explore and discover new things by themselves. The participants expressed that they had observed internal changes during their solo travel, such as in their maturity levels, actual character, ways of achieving their objectives and self-trust. Along with the results of previous work, the above findings further highlight the uniqueness of solo travel and explain why travellers are increasingly leaning towards solo travel. Whilst an increase in maturity was amongst the outcomes of solo travel commonly mentioned by the participants, this change has received limited attention in the literature. Hamid et al. (2021) identified happiness, empowerment and escapism from stress as well as self-realisation and self-growth as positive changes resulting from solo travel. A solo traveller has the power to control his/her life with the support of his/her travel experiences. However, travelling alone is not always easy. If someone fears facing the world, then s/he becomes reluctant to approach new people or move out of his/her comfort zone due to introversion, shyness, reservations and limited experience. Whatever a solo traveller expects to achieve from his/her travel will bring changes to his/her character. As one participant mentioned, '*I have become more passionate because I can proudly say that I have taken many adventurous trips alone. Live your moment, and you will find a way to make yourself happy. Think boldly, be open minded and self-*

confident, show less fear when expressing your opinions and stand firm by saying no if you cannot do it' (P32).

Self-trust refers to one's confidence in his/her own abilities (Kassar, 2021). From the perspective of solo travellers, the experiences they gain from their journeys allow them to face the realities of life and perceive the world with a more mature outlook.

Solo travellers can empower themselves to explore and discover new things by themselves. From female solo travellers' perspective, women empower themselves to achieve self-growth and make their own decisions. As a result, they strongly believe that travelling alone gives meaning to their lives and allows them to experience life-changing moments (Hamid et al., 2021; Seow & Brown, 2020; Wilson & Harris, 2006). However, to have an in-depth meaning carrying from the word of empowerment from the solo travellers' experiences, irrespective of gender differentiation, solo travel allows individuals to empower themselves through self-learning, enhancing their self-consciousness, stepping out of their comfort zones, promoting self-care, realising their own capabilities, learning about their real interests, fulfilling their dreams and accepting challenges.

Self-empowerment was commonly cited by the participants as an outcome of their solo travels regardless of the number of trips they have undertaken. Those participants who travelled solo one to three times feel empowered due to their heightened self-awareness and self-care and their courage to embrace challenges. Meanwhile, those participants who had completed four to six solo trips feel empowered to manage situations on their own, and those participants who have gone to more than seven solo trips feel empowered to be open minded, learn new things from the outside world and enhance their self-capability.

Frequent solo travellers (having travelled more than ten times alone) are often empowered to embrace changes in their lives and integrate the valuable lessons they had learnt from their trips. Solo travellers are also known for their ability to take care of themselves. Given

that they go on their trips alone without any assistance, they naturally take ownership of their wellbeing.

Self-empowerment is also related to self-consciousness. Previous studies have defined self-consciousness as '*the ability to become aware of one's states, especially (but not only) mental states (perceptions, emotions, and attitudes), as one's states*' (Zhang et al., 2008, p. 530). This definition explains how individuals become aware of, care about and evaluate themselves. Self-consciousness can be viewed from the private and public perspectives. Public self-consciousness involves trying to impress others and concealing one's personal desires if they are considered awkward or a hindrance to socialisation. By contrast, private self-consciousness involves being true to one's conscience (Zhang et al., 2008). Self-consciousness has been highlighted in the current discussion due to its significant influence on solo travellers' self-representation. The participants reported mixed levels of self-consciousness; some are motivated to go on solo trips to impress others despite having concerns about their own safety, whilst others are concerned about the local culture and their physical appearance.

Solo travellers are also empowered to take care of themselves as travelling alone provides individuals with enough time to focus on themselves. As one participant shared, '*solo travel is an opportunity to challenge your self-confidence and embrace unexpected experiences. It teaches you how to take care of yourself*' (P13). A solo traveller does not need to depend on others and does not expect others to fulfil his/her needs. Depending on others during solo travel gives rise to the problems of compromising, adjusting and constantly looking for others to offer comfort or consolation. Solo travel is not only adventurous entertainment but also imparts valuable lessons that allow travellers to realise the power of self-reliance.

The researcher also emphasised the difference between capability and ability, with the former being inherent and remains fixed over time, whilst the latter being generated through lessons and experiences gained from the environment (Acorn, 2023). In the context of solo

travel, ability would be innate, whilst capability can only be achieved through the lessons and experiences gained during travels. Studies on female solo travellers reveal that women only realise their self-capability when facing challenges during their travel (Jaworski, 2020; Hamid et al., 2021). The researcher reinforced this argument by showing that solo travellers only realise their own capabilities when facing critical situations in their journey. Moreover, the lessons and experiences they gained during their travels allow these travellers to identify their own capabilities in solving problems, pursuing their dreams, bypassing their limitations, overcoming their fears, becoming more open-minded and freely expressing their opinions.

Solo travellers can find their own path to happiness. Happiness is one of the most popular motivations identified in the solo tourism literature (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008; Laesser et al., 2009; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Bianchi, 2016; Chung et al., 2017; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Seow & Brown, 2020; Mokhrarian & Pendyala, 2018; Osman et al., 2017; Yang, 2020). Travelling alone allows individuals to develop autonomy and maturity, increase their self-assuredness and self-esteem, improve their decision-making skills and build their confidence to face new sensations and feelings (Carels et al., 2022).

Solo travellers can make themselves happy when they perceive themselves as problem solvers, escape from their routines and engage in relaxing activities. In this case, travelling alone can be perceived as a tool for happiness. The firsthand experiences shared by solo travellers only show that anyone can travel alone and find happiness regardless of age. Travelling can bring about positive changes that motivate individuals to create and cherish their happiest moments. Unlike group travellers, solo travellers do not want to compromise themselves for others and can find their own ways to make themselves happy, take care of themselves and solve their problems.

According to solo travellers' self-definitions, their learnings, experiences, expectations, satisfaction and disappointments can all be reflected in how they see themselves. Connecting these self-definitions to Massolws's hierarchy of needs reveals that solo travellers are able to fulfil their basic needs (*self-autonomy and knowing their strengths and weaknesses*), safety needs (*knowing the mechanism to protect themselves, pretending like locals, language fluency and developing skills in using maps to avoid unnecessary risks*), social needs (*friendships, network creation, love, connection with their interest, spirituality, leaving comfort zones, freedom in revealing identity, moving with new people and learning about new cultures*), esteem needs (*confidence, goal achievement, pursuing dreams, self-courage, self-control, being responsible, respecting people, feeling positive even in the worst situations, skills development and personality development*) and self-actualisation needs (*problem solving and intellectual thinking, being matured, spontaneous and open minded, acceptance of reality, self-trust, taking ownership of own happiness, self-satisfaction and sense of self*) during their travels, and their fulfilment of these needs is reflected in how they identify themselves as 'solo travellers'.

According to theory of expectancy disconfirmation, consumers generate different expectations on the services they expect to receive based on their personal experiences, promotions (e.g. e-word of mouth and other communication tools) and their own scales for measuring their satisfaction. For example, before their travel, solo travellers generate their expectations on their travel and their destinations based on the information they collect online (*social media platforms and travel and tourism websites*) and from their friends and acquaintances. Travellers also automatically generate expectations when planning their itineraries. Their expectations and real-time experiences determine how satisfied or happy they are about their travel. Similarly, the finalised self-definitions explain solo travellers' judgement based on their learning, travel experiences and personal satisfaction levels.

RO2: To interpret how solo travel would cause changes in the solo traveller's self-representation

This research objective aims to answer how solo travel could lead to changes in the self-presentation of solo travellers. All 40 participants agreed that solo travel profoundly impacted their lives in two ways, namely, (i) through their travel experiences and (ii) the specific circumstances they encountered during their travel. Therefore, the researcher investigated how solo travel would cause changes in solo travellers' self-representation in two steps, namely, (i) by using solo travellers' self-definitions to describe the changes in their self-representation, and (ii) by exploring solo travellers' reflections on significant collective moments that have changed their self-representation.

The first step revealed that solo travel made the participants perceive themselves as independent, open-minded people who are able to find their true selves, discover changes within themselves, empower and develop themselves, make themselves happy and find their own mechanisms for escaping boredom and gaining an incredible travel experience. To further elaborate on these findings, the researcher divided the participants based on their solo travel experiences (times of travel) and then explained the changes in their self-representation.

The participants who travelled solo one to three times defined themselves using the terms 'self-discovery' (*self-awareness*), 'choice of independence' (*convenient travel, flexibility in travel, no need to compromise and own peace of time*), 'self-empowerment' (*self-learning, self-consciousness, leaving comfort zones, self-care, self-trust, pursuing dreams* and *accepting challenges*), 'self-development' (*personal growth*), 'personal wellbeing' (*problem solver* and *positive energy*) and 'life-long experience' (*unimaginable travel experience*). Due to their new self-definitions, the researcher described these participants as 'adventure seekers' (*showing more curiosity about travel and enjoying their travel motivations, especially the independence in their choice of travel*) who are highly conscious of their safety. Given that these participants

also force themselves to fit into society, try to differentiate themselves from others and present a brave face to their friends and family members, these participants can also be described as ‘attention seekers’.

Although the participant groups who travelled solo one to three times and four to six times demonstrated similarities in their experiences, the latter felt a stronger connection to their travel. A shift from curiosity to passion can be observed amongst these participants, who were fascinated with the idea of travelling alone. The researcher thus described these participants as ‘variety seekers’ due to their appreciation of the independence and freedom that come with solo travel and their active search for diverse experiences, such as visiting different places, meeting new people and learning new things. These participants are also at the initial stage of their self-discovery where they actively seek opportunities to learn and grow. These travellers courageously embrace solo travel as a means to enhance their personal growth and wellbeing, escape from stressors, monotonous routines and toxic environments or find a positive outlet for fresh thoughts.

Those participants who travelled solo seven to nine times mentioned the same benefits of solo travel as those who travelled solo four to six times. They described solo travel as convenient, flexible and liberating based on their past experiences. They particularly excelled at planning their own trips according to their preferences. Their long-term experiential learning helped them become more self-aware and led to their personal growth. However, some of these participants felt loneliness and boredom during their travels. Nevertheless, each of them took ownership of planning their solo travels and their lives based on their preferences. They also act maturely when sharing information and demonstrated curiosity about self-discovery. Therefore, the researcher defined these travellers as ‘self-discoverers’. In addition to their travel motivations and curiosity, these travellers utilised their time to build their self-identity and empower themselves to take care of their own needs. Empowering oneself is considered

the best way to achieve self-sufficiency, that is, to take care of oneself and handle any situation without relying on others. Having fewer expectations leads to fewer problems and less room for sadness.

Those participants who travelled solo ten times or more were identified as ‘matured learners’ and ‘survivors’. Similar to those participants who travelled solo seven to nine times, this group demonstrated courage and self-awareness yet maintained an energetic and enthusiastic approach to learning new things with a mature perspective. They engaged with the world and interacted with people openly, and they believe that being open minded and warm hearted always benefits them in building relationships with new people and learning new things.

In sum, the first step illustrated how solo travel changes the behaviour, thought process and personality of solo travellers. These findings offer a portrayal of solo travellers and their behaviour that has never been seen in previous studies.

The second step utilises transformative learning theory to explore the participants’ reflections on significant collective moments that have changed their self-representation. A transformative travel experience occurs when individuals are placed in a new and challenging context, which pushes them to develop new perspectives and responses and ultimately changes their behaviour, lifestyle and relationships with the world (Phillips, 2019, p. 68). Transformation takes place when travel experiences meet tourists’ needs and fulfil their deep intrinsic desires (Pung et al., 2020; Teoh et al., 2021).

The researcher used transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2018), Peirce’s theory of experience (Misak, 2018) and value and attitude change (Christie & Mason, 2003) to explain how solo travel changes travellers’ self-representation. According to these theories, a transformative experience is an accumulation of existential transformation, learning transformation and behavioural change (Pung et al., 2020). If it explains the existential and

learning transformative experience, the self-authenticity and the self-reflection become inevitable components to explain the transformative experience of a solo traveller. One is belief in their self-changes or their so-called authenticity (*believing in oneself and acknowledging the truth of changes*), and the self-reflection resulting from these changes (*the ability to discover changes in oneself and witness one's own cognitive, emotional and behavioural stimuli*) would lead to different forms of existential, learning and behavioural transformations (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

The researcher explored the changes in the participants' self-representation based on the identified transformation aspects, including authenticity, self-reflection, existential transformation (*emotions attached to travels bringing significant reasons for self-changes*) and transformative learning (*new learning from others bringing changes in perception*). The exploration was conducted from the oneself-to-oneself and oneself-to-others perspectives.

According to the oneself-to-oneself perspective, solo travellers represent themselves by discovering a new version of themselves (*uncovering hidden skills and gaining a fresh and clear focus*) and by developing their self-awareness (*recognising the power of the self, self-interest and genuine feelings*), self-realisation (*admitting to changes and choosing a career*) and self-motivation (*praising oneself*). However, this representation differs when these travellers start considering others. For instance, spontaneity (*interacting with strangers, trying new things whilst travelling, and stepping out of self-handicapping*). Authenticity not only acts as a motivator, motive or interest but also serves as an input or triggering factor that can change one's behaviour (Yeoman et al., 2007). Authenticity can be defined as the genuine thought of travellers about their desire for honesty and verisimilitude (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). In volunteer tourism, authenticity positively impacts volunteer tourists' interaction and engagement with locals and pique their interest in the local culture and lifestyle (Magrizos et al., 2021). These travellers also contribute to local wellbeing, challenge themselves and escape social constraints

(Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). A recent quantitative study on transformative experience in the context of solo tourism reveals that solo travel experiences significantly affect authenticity. Apart from highlighting how solo travellers challenge themselves to uncover their hidden skills, the above findings also offer new insights into how these travellers use their time alone to realise who they are and to gather the courage to overcome their limitations. These findings also document these travellers' reactions during their travels, which are connected to their sense of authenticity.

The findings highlight *self-reflection* as an essential determinant of one's self-changes. According to the oneself-to-oneself perspective, travellers express their curiosity (*self-interaction on one's self-perspective*) and self-control (*survival in an extremely bad situation, control of feelings and emotions and control of fear and anxiety*). These travellers' representation based on others also reflects their sense of curiosity (*self-reflection from one's perspective*). Subsuming the core value derived from the self-reflection from the changes caused by solo travellers' self-representation is new learning. The participants empowered themselves when facing situations alone, and they described their travel experiences as incredible and invaluable. Self-reflection can be understood as '*an active thought process requiring self-examination arising from an action or experience and leading to a new understanding or appreciation of a concept*' (Dellaportas et al., 2022, p. 4), a metacognitive determinant in one's behavioural change (Duffy, 2007) and an essential tool for self-growth and development (Middleton, 2017).

Solo travellers can be perceived as learners who learn about themselves and the world from their solitary travels (Bueddefeld & Duerden, 2022). In sum, self-reflection is an essential key determinant that triggers one's existential and transformative process (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023), thereby emphasising the meaningful changes resulting from self-learning. The above

findings provide an in-depth explanation of how solo travel brings changes to one's life as reflected in his/her self-representation.

Existential transformation explains the emotions associated with travel and the significant reasons for personal change. When asked about how they express themselves in relation to their circumstances and emotions, the participants reported feelings of self-assertion (*confidence in self-expression and clear communication in public*), independence (*relying less on others*), self-love (*a better understanding of oneself, finding happiness from within and discovering meaning in life*) and self-management (*achieving work–life balance and effective time management*), all of which strongly influenced how they connected themselves to their experiences and recognised their self-worth.

Previous studies support these findings by defining existential transformation using different concepts, such as 'peak episodes of emotions', 'serendipitous moments' and 'meaningful experiences' (Kirillova et al., 2017), which illustrate how travellers connect with the moments they encounter during their journeys.

The participants reflected on how they present themselves to society to further explain their self-representation from the perspective of others. This presentation often involves being more self-conscious, such as trying to conform to others' expectations and presenting a more appealing image by reducing self-handicapping behaviours and boosting self-esteem. Individuals' views of their representation are influenced by their awareness of how others perceive them, which can lead to anxiety, social stigma and concerns about societal judgements.

Solo travel offers a way to reduce such anxiety and alter perceptions of society. The findings suggest that solo travel significantly influences travellers' self-representation, and this transformation can be categorised as an existential transformation that enhances one's self-awareness regarding existential anxiety and encourages him/her to re-evaluate his/her priorities

(Kirillova et al., 2017). As a result, solo travellers can assess themselves more thoughtfully and leverage their abilities to present themselves positively, which aligns their outer representation with their true selves.

Transformation amongst volunteer travellers occurs after experiencing a cultural shock (Brown, 2009; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Pung et al., 2020), amongst adventurous travellers after escaping their comfort zones (Buckley, 2012) and amongst nature-based travellers in response to the changes they observe in their surroundings (Walter, 2016). These experiences contribute to these travellers' learning process and self-awareness and ultimately prompt them to engage in self-discovery (Pung et al., 2020). Whilst the findings of this research somewhat align with those of previous studies, these findings specifically illustrate the insights from the literature within the context of solo tourism and illustrate how existential changes are reflected in self-representation.

Transformative learning refers to the process of acquiring new knowledge and perspectives through interacting with others, which leads to changes in one's perception. The quality of time spent by solo travellers in their journeys allows them to learn new things, and this learning produces new knowledge, new skills and new versions of themselves (Pearce & Foster, 2007; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011). The participants' transformations are reflected in their self-representation. This journey of self-development encompasses various aspects, such as learning new skills and knowledge, becoming open minded by respecting diverse cultural values and listening to others' opinions and fostering a sense of responsibility by being accountable for one's actions and learning to be socially responsible. These changes illustrate the evolution of travellers from focusing on themselves to having a broader awareness of others.

These findings shed new light on how solo travel impacts travellers' lives and leads to changes in their self-representation and reveal that solo travel significantly contributes to

personal changes as reflected in how individuals present themselves. The unique experiences, personality traits and challenges faced by solo travellers during their journeys all contribute to changes in their self-representation.

RO3: To examine what critical moments trigger solo travellers to make changes in their self-representation

The first two objectives explained that solo travel changes travellers' behaviour and their travel experience leads to changes in their self-representation. Moreover, the depth of self-transformation becomes more pronounced when travellers encounter challenges to their core beliefs (Teoh et al., 2021).

Other than travel experience in general, solo travellers may experience critical moments that may shift their initial perceptions, thus leading to self-transformation (Teoh et al., 2021). However, the situation or factors that trigger such shift remain unclear, and the critical moments that drive travellers' transformative experiences have received scant research attention. Some of the trigger points identified in the literature include connection with nature (*visiting wildlife and scenic attractions*), self-examination (*through solitude, calmness and awareness*), spontaneity and novelty, aesthetic experiences (*intense art and music*) and self-development (*physical activities, overcoming limitations and scientific discoveries*), which are within the context of volunteer and nature-based tourism (Curtin, 2005; Farber & Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2009; Ulusoy, 2016; Kiirillova et al., 2017). However, how solo travellers perceive these situations as critical factors in their transformative journeys is yet to be fully understood.

According to Kirillova (2017), solo travellers often experience various emotions, including transience, demarcation, heightened cognitive awareness and a sense of connectivity. As a result, their experiences during travel can significantly change their sense of self. Whilst

the data collected from the participants align with the findings of previous research, their triggering events widely varied, thus offering in-depth insights into why the situations faced by solo travellers during their journeys are considered critical. The researcher focused on the participants' reactions to critical events during their journey, the lessons they learnt and how their experiences shaped their self-perceptions and behaviours under the influence of their cognitive responses and overall travel experiences. The researcher also investigated the behaviours that solo travellers intended to adopt or avoid in response to these significant events. The overall discussion aims to determine the final model that the researcher intends to construct based on the findings. Given that this study specifically focuses on solo travellers' self-representation, the critical events were categorised into those created by solo travellers themselves and those influenced by external factors or parties.

The findings for the third research objective explain that the experiences gained by solo travellers during their journeys trigger changes in their habitual behaviour, which allows them to discover new insights and avoid undesirable behaviours. In sum, the situations and movements of solo travellers are amongst the most significant factors that drive changes in their self-representation.

The researcher conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis to clearly illustrate how solo travel changes one's self-representation, to guide the examination of critical moments, to identify the rationale behind solo travellers' perception of situations as 'critical' and to track the evolution of self-representation in response to these changes. Based on the information collected from the participants, the situation caused by others was categorised as 'external factors', whilst the situation caused by travellers themselves was categorised as 'internal factors'. Situations in the former category include cultural myopia (*an individual's inability to fully comprehend and appreciate other cultures due to the dominance of their native cultural influences*), hostility towards tourists (*terrorist attacks, unwelcoming behaviour of*

locals and the risk of stalking), fraudulent activities (*charging high, scams in room reservations and fake reviews*), lack of solo travel packages (*ignoring solo travellers*) and social harmony (*solo travellers discover inner beauty in themselves and others*), whilst situations in the latter category include careless behaviour (*self-ignorance in poor travel plans and loss of personal belongings*), emotional connection (*an emotional connection with the destination of choice and internal changes resulting from remarkable incidents related to spirituality, relaxation and situations that teach travellers a lesson about the meaning of life*), self-handicapping (*self-resolving own limitations*) and volunteer activities (*participating in new activities to discover themselves*).

The findings starkly contrast those reported in the literature. Specifically, this study investigated not only the situations but also how each traveller reacted to each situation, what they had learnt and how they incorporated their learnings into their lives, which would ultimately result in their self-transformation.

For *cultural myopia*, previous studies reveal that culture significantly impacts traveller behaviour and decision making (Turner et al., 2002; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Correia et al., 2011) and plays a crucial role in tourists' destination choices (Jackson, 2001; Ng et al., 2007). These findings are in line with the present study and with the context of solo tourism, thereby suggesting that solo travellers are genuinely interested in learning about new cultures (Abbasian, 2019; Terziyska, 2021). However, for Asian solo travellers, their cultural values, such as religion and traditional myths, may constrain their ability to travel solo (Hosseini et al., 2021).

Solo travellers who seek to immerse themselves in different cultures and broaden their global knowledge tend to develop greater open mindedness. Cultural myopia can manifest in several ways. Firstly, in mixed-gender accommodations, solo travellers may feel nervous when faced with unfamiliar situations that differ from their cultural norms. Secondly, the absence of

judgemental scrutiny allows these travellers to step outside their religious limitations, which grants them the freedom to pursue their preferences and dress comfortably without fear of societal judgement. Thirdly, within conservative communities, pivotal moments can encourage solo travellers to discover a newfound sense of self, which enables them to confront challenges and risks with greater awareness.

The challenges faced by female solo travellers in their journeys often include the fear of going to certain public places (e.g. pubs, nightclubs, city areas and cinemas) due to the risk of violence or sexual harassment (Wilson & Little, 2008), the fear of being misjudged (Teo & Leong, 2006; Muzaini, 2006) and being constrained by their religious beliefs (Asbollah et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2018; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2019; Fung, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2021; An Nguyen & Hsu, 2024). These findings not only explain the situations but also describe how travellers react to such situations and identify those factors that make them feel changes within themselves. These travellers generally observe changes in how they represent themselves after their solo travel. They feel self-empowered and present themselves to others not based on what others think of them but based on their own conscience and standards. They begin to realise that living to the expectations of society all the time is not necessary.

For *hostility towards tourists*, the researcher identified three key factors that negatively affect tourism, namely, terrorist attacks, unwelcoming behaviour from locals and risk of stalking, which have also been highlighted in previous studies (Kliot & Mansfeld, 1997; Drakos & Kutan, 2003; Arana & Leon, 2008; Bassil et al., 2019; Song et al., 2019). When travellers encounter these situations alone, they often learn to trust themselves and feel empowered to handle their circumstances independently. The participants reported that their experiences with stalking and other unexpected, dangerous situations taught them valuable lessons in self-protection, presence of mind and the importance of being prepared. Despite showing

commendable bravery, these participants also recognised the need to take adequate safety precautions when travelling to isolated or potentially dangerous destinations.

For *fraudulent activities* and *lack of travel packages*, the participants often described fraudulent activities using the terms 'cheating', 'deception', 'dishonesty', 'fake', 'fraud' and 'scams' (Xu et al., 2021). Previous studies have explored these activities across various contexts, including the sale of counterfeit products (Wu et al., 2014; McKercher & Lui, 2014; Huang & Pearce, 2019), unethical business practices and scams in tour services (March, 2008; Keating, 2009; Min & Juan, 2011; Wang, 2019), harassment (McElroy et al., 2007), fake reviews (Ahmad & Sun, 2018; Ahktar, 2019) and false promotions (Hersh, 2014). Whilst similar situations have been highlighted in the current study, ignorance of others, unwelcoming approach and high cost were identified as more specific situations to explain how much solo travellers were scammed by others during their travel. Some participants fell victim to these scams at the initial stage of their travels. However, they eventually learnt to act smart after accumulating enough experience. Nevertheless, they cautioned that solo travellers should be vigilant because scams may happen in various forms.

For *social harmony*, the researcher discovered that receiving unexpected kindness from strangers can either positively or negatively affect solo travellers' travel experiences and self-representation. The positively perceived kindness motivates these travellers to continue travelling alone, whilst the negatively perceived kindness discourages them from going further. Female solo travellers often cited kindness from strangers as a motivation (Seow & Brown, 2020; Hamid et al., 2021).

Although temporary, kindness from strangers may act as a core motive (Filep et al., 2017) for one to realise his/her envisioned society (Putnam, 2000; Glover & Fliep, 2015) and enhance his/her own wellbeing (Lyubomirsky et al., 2004). Those travellers who received

kindness from strangers during their travels develop trust in another person, a sense of risk, authenticity of experience and experience of wellbeing (Fliep et al., 2017).

The participants also discovered new aspects of themselves due to situations they created themselves, including their careless behaviour, emotional connections, self-handicapping and participation in voluntary activities during travel.

In sum, the researcher identified several situations and unexpected circumstances that prompted solo travellers to discover a new version of themselves. Navigating these unfamiliar situations and solving problems independently empowered these travellers. Upon returning to their accommodations, these travellers reflected on their actions, the events that occurred and their reactions. In this context, solo travellers observed authenticity in narrating their experiences and their responses.

The authenticity of travellers is often shaped by their experiences at a specific destination (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). This authenticity can act as a triggering point, motivator or source of value (Yeoman et al., 2007), hence explaining why some travellers seek out authentic experiences and often undergo personal transformations. When travellers step outside their comfort zones and encounter unfamiliar environments (Tiberghien, 2020) and adventurous situations (Noy, 2004), they become psychologically disconnected from their usual surroundings, social circles and routines, and this disconnection enables them to pursue authentic experiences (Tiberghien, 2020) that lead to psychological changes as reflected in their behaviour (Wang et al., 2021; Tiberghien, 2020). This process ultimately aligns with the expectations of solo travellers who often seek out learning opportunities, participate in volunteer activities and engage in self-reflection. These experiences provide them with deep meaning, lasting impressions and unforgettable memories (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

The experience of being alone also allows solo travellers to reflect on their movements and confront authentic experiences. The time spent alone provides an opportunity for self-

dialogue and self-evaluation, which enables these travellers to understand their true selves and how they react in various situations. This introspection helps them recognise the changes they undergo when facing unfamiliar or challenging circumstances. This finding addresses the question of how solo travellers become aware of their personal growth as they assess their values, beliefs and feelings during these moments of self-reflection (Teoh et al., 2021). This process can only take place in a peaceful environment, which is often afforded by solo travel. These findings altogether explain that the challenges faced by travellers during their solo travel significantly contribute to changes in their self-representation.

Although the actions and reactions of travellers occur within a fraction of a second or over the course of a few hours, they often reflect on the changes in their self-representation upon overcoming critical situations during their journeys. The extent to which they perceive these unfamiliar situations as pivotal events in their lives largely depends on their personalities (*whether they are introverts or extroverts*), their cultural backgrounds and various demographic factors, such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications and employment status. Their years of experience travelling alone may also play a significant role.

The purpose behind their travels significantly impacts these travellers' experiences of critical events and the subsequent changes in their self-representation. Before embarking on their journeys, many travellers deal with work pressure, a monotonous lifestyle, relationship issues and a desire for personal breakthroughs. They often seek personal growth, skill development, self-improvement and a fulfilment of social needs, all of which motivate their solo travel in the long term.

Solo travellers generally do not expect to fall for fraudulent activities in well-known tourist destinations. This contradiction arises from their pre-trip perceptions, which are shaped by input from their acquaintances and the information they read on social media platforms, including travel blogs. If travellers set high expectations based on the positive information they

gather from others but then encounter negative experiences at their destination, then they may demonstrate a significant shift in their pre-assumptions. Conversely, if travellers receive negative information but have a positive experience upon arrival, then they will face a critical situation that alters their initial perceptions of the destination.

The researcher utilised several supportive theories, including trial and error theory, social cognitive learning theory and bystander effect to support its findings on the critical events and self-changes experienced by solo travellers. According to trial and error theory, an individual who solves his/her problems or achieves his/her goals generally learns from his/her previous attempts and mistakes (Liu, 2024). For solo travellers, the challenges they create for themselves, such as careless behaviour and self-handicapping, stem from their own mistakes. The learning gained from these experiences helps these travellers plan their future travels better and avoid their past mistakes.

Meanwhile, social cognitive learning theory emphasises that learning from past mistakes is reflected in one's actions (Bandura, 2009). Solo travellers learn from their environment, the actions of others and their own experiences. When engaging in emotional connections, such as participating in spiritual activities, these travellers experience changes in their self-representation, where their emotional connection with travel significantly contributes to their journey of self-discovery (Hamid et al., 2021). When critical events arise due to the actions of others, solo travellers empower themselves to address these challenges independently. Learning from such incidents teaches these travellers to trust themselves and act bravely, which ultimately boosts their confidence. This situation can be understood in the context of the bystander effect, where an individual may not receive support from others during a difficult time. As a result, they learn to be courageous and overcome their situation on their own (Bazinet & Van Vliet, 2020).

RO4: To conceptualise solo travellers' self-representation in the context of liminality to understand how solo travel brings changes to their self-representation

This research objective aims to explain how solo travelling for a set period of time provides individuals with a valuable opportunity to spend their quality time alone and gain a deeper understanding of themselves. The experience of being alone can significantly transform one's behaviour as can be seen in his/her self-representation. The researcher utilised rites of passage or the concept of liminality to underscore the importance of time alone.

The concept of liminality has been explored in the context of tourism, particularly regarding liminal tourism experiences in various settings, such as hotels (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006), vacations (Weichselbaumer, 2012), cruises (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005), resorts (Shields, 1991) and campgrounds (Foley & Hayllar, 2007; Ryan & Kinder, 1996). Previous studies reveal that tourists often engage in uninhibited behaviour when spending time in these liminal spaces. Liminality has also been examined in the context of sex tourism.

However, in the solo tourism context, how liminal experiences can lead to self-transformation remains unknown. Specifically, how does this transformation change a solo traveller's self-representation? This research objective thus aims to clarify how self-transformation occurs amongst solo travellers and how such experience influences their self-representation. Within the context of solo tourism, liminality can be divided into three stages, namely, separation, transition and re-incorporation (Gennep, 1960). In the separation stage, solo travellers should have a strong reason to travel. The transition stage exerts a critical influence on how solo travellers perceive their new selves when facing critical situations during their travels. Unexpected circumstances prompt these travellers to decide how to respond and overcome such challenges and encourage them to empower themselves and confront these challenges independently. In the re-incorporation stage, these travellers come to realise how their self-representation has changed. These changes become more apparent when they are

alone as they reflect on their experiences and recognise how much they have changed before and after their journeys.

As these travellers return to their homes, they revisit their memories with the aid of travel photos and videos, travel diaries, souvenirs and social media posts. The participants mentioned that the critical situations they faced during their travels remained a permanent part of their lives. Given that the experiences gained during travel are meaningful and emotionally connected to solo travellers, they desire to integrate these new changes into their behaviour. Some solo travellers even adopted new behaviours during their travel, such as smoking, drinking, using drugs, changing the way they dress and participating in adventurous activities. However, upon returning to their routine lives, they faced difficulties in integrating such changes into their habitual behaviour.

5.2 Implications

Solo tourism has unique characteristics and benefits for travellers. For instance, solo travel allows travellers to make changes in how they represent themselves and provides them with some time to self-reflect on their identities and true selves. Travelling alone does not simply mean being physically alone but rather involves journeying with one's own expectations, thoughts, problems, goals and dreams. Spending time alone presents an opportunity to find one's strength, empower oneself and affirm one's identity regardless of gender, nationality or culture. As noted by the participants, '*Solo travel brings happiness; it not only provides joy but also fosters self-discovery and builds self-confidence*'.

The researcher believes that this study significantly contributes to the understanding of solo tourism, particularly in terms of self-representation amongst solo travellers, both theoretically and practically. This section presents the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings.

5.2.1. Theoretical Implications

Following a systematic analysis of the findings, the researcher has outlined the following contributions of this study:

- The concept of self-representation has been explained in depth from the perspective of solo travellers.
- The critical factors that influence changes in solo travellers' self-representation have been clarified.
- This study utilises the concept of liminality to examine solo travel as a transitional period and to elucidate how self-transformation occurs during this time and how solo travellers adapt their self-representation in response to these changes.
- Different types of solo travellers have been identified based on their travel behaviours.
- Travelling alone has been highlighted as a contributor to the self-development of solo travellers.

- **The concept of self-representation has been explained in depth from the perspective of solo travellers**

Only a few studies have emphasised the connectivity between solo travellers and their self-representation even though such relationship has been mentioned in several theories (e.g. theory of mind and self, Gottman's dramaturgical approach of self-presentation–impression management, social identity theory, theory of perception and theory of personality), concepts (e.g. self-concept, self-consciousness, self-identity, self-image, self-appraisal and self-monitoring) and self-related scales (e.g. self-presentation tactics scale and efficacious self-presentation scale). The researcher adopted the approach of Thagard and Wood (2015) to investigate self-related aspects, including representation, effecting and change. They explained

self-representation mainly as oneself to oneself (self-concept) and oneself to others (self-presentation). The researcher adopts these perspectives to explain self-representation in the context of solo tourism.

The theory of self posits that individuals generally believe in themselves. This theory encompasses several aspects, such as self-concept, self-awareness, self-image, self-esteem and self-efficacy, and emphasises that an individual's sense of self can vary across circumstances. Therefore, the researcher argues that solo travellers significantly differ from typical travellers. Although existing concepts and theories offer various perspectives on self and self-construction, a universally accepted definition or explanation for the concept and process of self-representation remains lacking. Therefore, this study aims to provide new insights into how solo travellers represent themselves. Gottman's dramaturgical approach to impression management sheds light on self-representation by suggesting that individuals tend to present themselves positively to attract others. However, this case does not always hold true, especially for solo travellers whose self-representation can change significantly based on the situations they encounter during their travels.

Individuals who travel alone empower themselves to learn independently. As a result, solo travel has been recognised as a significant driver of behavioural changes. Self-representation refers to how individuals communicate their identity and is closely linked to their behaviour (Larsen & Todd, 2009). In this case, the study of self-representation is related to understanding the behavioural changes amongst consumers. From a consumer behaviour perspective, self-representation serves as a tool for understanding the shifts in human lifestyles and addressing the needs and wants of consumers (Dixit, 2022). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, how self-representation acts as a tool for behavioural change or how such concept reflects an individual's self-representation remains unknown. Additionally, whilst previous studies on solo tourism have primarily focused on the motivations, challenges

and risks associated with this form of travel, the current research expands this focus by emphasising the behavioural changes observed amongst solo travellers and exploring how these changes manifest in their lives.

Thus far, self-representation has been discussed as a communication tool for individuals to impress others (Twomey, Conal & O'Reilly, 2017; Oren Gil et al., 2015). Women in particular express themselves through distance (*visual presentation*), behaviour (*offer, submission, seduction and affiliation*) and (un)dress (*dressing and clothing*) (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015) and used to hidden their sexual identity (Duguay, 2019). In the present research context, self-representation is defined as how solo travellers represent themselves before their solo travel, what kind of changes they have observed during their travel, how their solo travel experience has changed their behaviour and how are these behavioural changes reflected in their self-representation.

Solo travellers are known to be able to make themselves happy, demonstrate open mindedness and self-development, show confidence in expressing themselves, explore their true selves through their travel experiences and have their own mechanisms for controlling their emotions in public. To understand how these travellers represent themselves based on their travel experiences, the researcher has identified four key situations that reflect changes in these travellers' self-representation *(oneself to oneself),* including (i) *realising changes (self-authenticity), which includes discovering a new version of oneself (uncovering hidden skills and gaining a fresh and clear focus), self-awareness (recognising the power of the self, self-interest and genuine feelings), self-realisation (admitting to changes and choosing a career) and self-motivation (praising oneself)*; (ii) *reflecting on changes* (*self-reflection*), *which includes sense of curiosity (self-interaction on one's self perspective) and self-control (surviving in an extremely bad situation, controlling feelings and emotions and controlling fear and anxiety)*; (iii) *experiences connected with emotions* (*existential transformation*), *which*

include self-assertion (being confident in self-expression and communicating clearly in public), power of independence (being independent and relying less on others), self-love (better self-understanding, finding happiness within oneself and finding meaning in one's life) and self-management (achieving a work–life balance and effective time management); and (iv) *learning during travels* (*transformative learning*), *which includes self-development (learning new skills and knowledge) and being open minded (learning to respect multiple cultural values and listen to others' opinions)*.

Another significant aspect of self-representation involves how individuals present themselves to others. Solo travellers often prioritise their safety when interacting with strangers in unfamiliar destinations rather than trying to impress others or hiding their true identities. Therefore, the changes that these travellers experience are reflected in their self-presentation (*oneself to others*) in the following ways: (i) *realising changes (self-authenticity), which includes spontaneity (interacting with strangers, trying new things whilst travelling and stepping out of self-handicapping);* (ii) *reflecting on changes (self-reflection), which includes a sense of curiosity (self-reflection from one's own perspective)*; (iii) *experiences connected with emotions (existential transformation), which include being more self-conscious (pretending to be similar to others, being more appealing by reducing self-handicapping and increasing self-esteem)*; and (iv) *learning during travels (transformative learning), which includes a sense of responsibility (being responsible for one's own actions and learning to be socially responsible).*

Individuals' self-representation can change, especially for solo travellers, depending on their experiences, personality, cultural background, past travel experiences and other social and demographic variables. The researcher thus explains self-representation in the context of solo tourism and solo travellers.

- **The critical factors that influence changes in solo travellers' self-representation have been clarified**

Previous studies have largely ignored the critical situations faced by travellers who are genuinely interested in wildlife and nature-based tourism. The common trigger points include connection with nature (*visiting wildlife and scenic attractions*), self-reflection (*achieved through solitude, calmness and heightened awareness*), spontaneity and novelty, aesthetic experiences (*intense art and music*) and self-development (*physical activities, overcoming personal limitations and pursuing scientific discoveries*) (Curtin, 2005; Farber & Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2009; Ulusoy, 2016; Kiirillova et al., 2017). Nevertheless, how solo travellers perceive these situations as critical factors in their transformative travels and how each of these situations triggers changes in their self-representation remain unclear.

To fill this gap, the researcher examines these critical situations, how they trigger changes amongst solo travellers and how such changes are reflected in these travellers' self-representation. Figure 5.1 illustrates how a situation becomes 'critical' and how solo travellers realise changes in their self-representation.

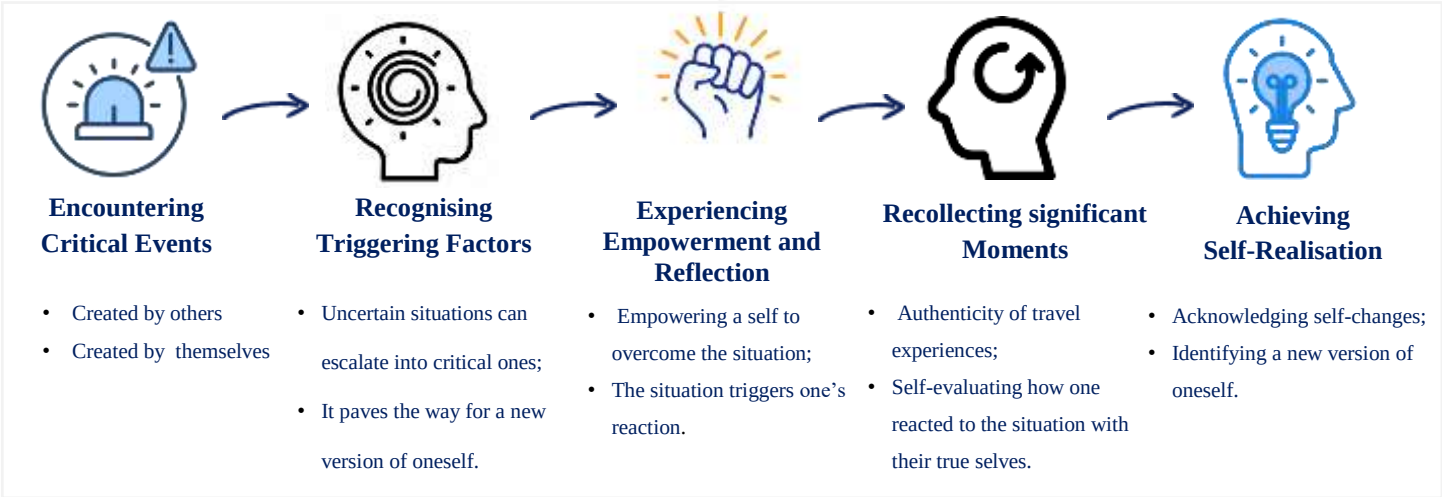


Figure 5.1 Critical Events and Changes in the Self-Representation of Solo Travellers

(Source: Researcher's Compilation)

The researcher has identified several *critical events* encountered by solo travellers and categorised them into two groups, namely, those created by others and those created by travellers themselves. The former events include cultural myopia, which refers to an individual's inability to fully understand and appreciate other cultures due to the dominance of his/her own cultural influences. Other issues, such as local arrogance, violence (*terrorist attacks, unwelcoming behaviour from locals and risk of stalking*), fraudulent activities (*inflated charges, scams related to room reservations and fake reviews*), lack of solo travel packages and social harmony (*where solo travellers often discover inner beauty in themselves and others*), are also included in this category.

Meanwhile, the situations created by solo travellers include careless behaviour (*poor travel plans and losing personal belongings*), emotional connections (*forming a bond with their travel choices or undergoing personal transformations due to significant experiences related to spirituality, relaxation or valuable life lessons*), self-handicapping *(overcoming their own limitations*) and volunteering (*participating in unfamiliar activities to explore their identities*), which provide new insights into the context of solo tourism. This exploration helps clarify how travellers behave and how deeply they connect with their travels.

The researcher notes that 'the transformation process only occurs when individuals experience travel challenges or moments that trigger a shift in perspectives or behaviour' (Teoh et al., 2021, p. 368). The critical events faced by solo travellers during their trips serve as pivotal moments that can inspire personal change and alter their self-representation.

When solo travellers encounter unfamiliar or challenging situations, *they react within a fraction of a second or over the course of a few hours, and after overcoming these challenges, they begin to reflect on the changes in their self-representation*. The extent to which solo travellers perceive these unfamiliar situations as pivotal events in their lives largely depends on their personalities (*whether they are introverts or extroverts*), their cultural backgrounds

and various demographic factors, such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications and employment status. Their years of experience travelling alone may also play a significant role.

The researcher then explains why solo travellers view certain experiences as critical. Instead of specifically identifying critical events, the researcher draws upon extant theoretical perspectives, which suggest that when travellers encounter unexpected situations (e.g. cultural shocks), the resulting challenges generate various stimuli that differ in intensity throughout their experience (Brown, 2019; Walter, 2016). These challenges may lead to a 'peak episode', which is described as a significant moment that profoundly impacts the traveller and creates feelings of transcendence and connectedness (Pung et al., 2020, p. 8). These peak episodes encourage travellers to reassess their life direction, observations and adaptability to change and provide them with valuable learning opportunities (Pung et al., 2020).

In the context of transformative studies, peak episodes are also referred to as emotional connections or self-directed experiences that contribute to existential transformation. The lessons learnt by travellers from their environment are outward oriented and are considered part of their transformative learning (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023). In the current study, regardless of the critical events that trigger transformation amongst travellers, the focus remains on how these travellers represent themselves before and after their solo travels. These experiences heighten their sense of difference (Pung et al., 2020; Crouch & Desforges, 2003).

Solo travellers also experience *a sense of empowerment and self-reflection* when faced with critical situations. Given that they are travelling alone, they do not seek or expect support from others. During these moments, they learn to rely on themselves to navigate challenges, which allows them to realise their own strengths and discover a new version of themselves. This experience can be understood in the context of the bystander effect, where individuals

may not receive assistance from others during difficult times. As a result, they learn to show courage and overcome these challenges independently (Bazinet & Van Vliet, 2020).

How solo travel connects critical events to changes in travellers' self-representation also warrants further consideration. Previous studies show that solo travel provides individuals with some time to assess their values, experiences and behaviours, which helps them acknowledge changes in themselves (Teoh et al., 2021). When encountering various situations, travellers may not fully understand how their reactions differ from their usual self-representation. However, self-evaluation becomes possible after these events, especially when these travellers find themselves alone. During these solitary moments, self-introspection (Kirillova et al., 2017) helps these travellers calm down and reflect on their experiences. By recalling their thoughts and reactions to the situations they faced, these travellers can evaluate their true selves against their perceived self-representation.

Travellers' authenticity in their travel experiences can act as a triggering point, motivator or source of value (Yeoman et al., 2007), which may explain why travellers seek out authentic experiences and often undergo personal transformations. When travellers step outside their comfort zones and encounter unfamiliar environments (Tiberghien, 2020) and adventurous situations (Noy, 2004), they become psychologically disconnected from their usual surroundings, social circles and routines, and this disconnection enables them to pursue authentic experiences (Tiberghien, 2020) that leads to psychological changes as reflected in their behaviour (Wang et al., 2021; Tiberghien, 2020).

At the end of the *self-realisation* process, travellers start comparing how they represented themselves before and after their journeys, and this comparison reveals the changes in their self-representation. These travellers begin to understand how critical situations, whether unexpected or unfamiliar, can transform into challenges. They end up feeling more self-empowered as they learn to navigate these circumstances independently. Their experiences

and emotional connections during these moments allow them to identify a new version of themselves.

Previous studies on transformation have not yet established the specific stages during travel when travellers experience a transformation. These travellers evidently engage in transformative learning during their travels, which helps them realise that they have acquired new insights. Upon returning to their homes, these travellers tend to recall the peak episodes of emotional connection that signify their existential transformation (An Nguyen & Hsu, 2023).

Regardless of the stages or types of transformation, travellers always reflect on their experiences when they encounter critical events during their travels. Individuals generally interpret their transformative experiences through memory (Parr, 2005; Pung et al., 2020). When travelling alone, they engage in self-introspection, where they compare their actual self-representation with their past actions. At this moment of self-realisation, they acknowledge the changes in themselves by recalling how they represented themselves whilst overcoming the challenges they faced during their travels. These travellers also empower themselves to embrace these challenges. Therefore, through these critical events, these travellers gain valuable insights and start to see the world and its people from a new perspective. Apart from understanding diverse behaviours and lifestyles, overcoming these experiences independently can teach these travellers about their own strengths.

The researcher used Tasci and Godovykh's (2020) comprehensive model of stimuli, which is associated with self-changes and transformation. Previous studies suggest that travellers' cognitive and affective stimulation leads to a shift in their self-perception, which results in behavioural changes. Amongst the collected self-definitions, the stimuli were grouped based on their in-depth meanings. For instance, one element of cognition is defined as '*an individualised process which can lead to a critical awareness of the self, leading to a new self-definition*' (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018, p. 567). Given that no previous study has examined

the cognitive stimuli in the context of solo tourism, the solo travellers' incredible stories let them function independently and realise the power of self-empowerment. These travellers also have the power to groom their personality and self-development and realise changes in their behaviour.

The most frequently identified cognitive stimulations in this study include self-belief (*one's affirmation of own worth and recognition of achievements*), self-empowerment (*identifying one's capabilities and challenging oneself*) and accepting differences (*being open minded, connecting with new people, learning about their cultures and interacting without pre-judgement*). Affective stimulation emerged as another stimulus that can intensify the emotions of travellers and inspire a profound emotional affinity for their choices of travel experiences. This affective stimulation, which stems from intense travel experiences, engenders robust emotional connections with travellers (Caru & Cova, 2003; Lindberg & Ostergaard, 2015; Tasci & Godovykh, 2021). These travellers learn to connect with themselves when their experiences allow them to enhance their personal wellbeing, curate unique travel experiences and apply their newfound perspectives to their lives.

Cognitive and affective stimuli led the participants to discover themselves and witness transformative relationships. As a result, the changes that these participants discovered within themselves, including shifts in their intrinsic dispositions, their self-perspectives and their attitudes towards others, effectively dispelled their misconceptions about other cultures and their personal development, embracing the discernment of skills through their travels. In sum, solo travel can inspire changes amongst individuals and strongly motivate changes in their behaviour. However, in line with previous studies, the researcher finds that whether one needs to adjust his/her behaviour entirely depends on his/her preferences (Tasci & Godovykh, 2021).

As an outcome of facing challenging situations, solo travellers develop 'self-efficacy beliefs' or their beliefs in their own ability to handle difficulties independently. Previous

studies show that self-efficacy beliefs serve as expressions of positive emotions when individuals are facing difficulties (Bandura et al., 2003; Caprara et al., 2022) and that such positive emotional experience can enhance their satisfaction and personal wellbeing (Gerbino et al., 2016; Caprara et al., 2022). Self-efficacy beliefs may also be considered a motivational construct that influences an individual's achievements, choices and efforts (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). According to cognitive learning theories, self-efficacy beliefs are developed through behaviour and various social and environmental factors (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

Overcoming challenging situations during solo travel can evoke positive emotions and build trust in one's capabilities, which allow solo travellers to discover a new version of themselves and foster behavioural change. Ultimately, this experience can strongly motivate these travellers to continue travelling alone and influence their future travel preferences. By contrast, group travel often provides support from fellow travellers, thus eliminating opportunities for travellers to navigate through difficult situations independently. Therefore, from the perspective of solo travellers, solo travel offers a unique experience.

- ***This study utilises the concept of liminality to examine solo travel as a transitional period and to elucidate how self-transformation occurs during this time and how solo travellers adapt their self-representation in response to these changes***

The liminality concept has been used in multi-disciplinary (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2020), highlighting the liminality, where "it is an experience, one that is characterised by powerful, emotionally charged feelings and it is this experiential dimension of liminality that has received considerable attention in consumer research" (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2020, p. 867-868). The basic theory explains three stages of identity change. Gennep (1960) proposed that identity transformation happens in three stages: separation, transition and re-

incorporation. The current study used the liminality concept to highlight the 'liminal time', where solo travellers' solitary travels offer them quality time to think of themselves, care about themselves and build trust in themselves so that they can handle any situation by themselves.

Most importantly, being alone lets them realise the changes that have happened to them. After realising their self-changes, solo travellers begin to incorporate these changes into their identities. The current study has explained how solo travel influences the lives of solo travellers, particularly in terms of their self-representation. Figure 5.2 below illustrates the stages of separation from the perspective of solo travellers.

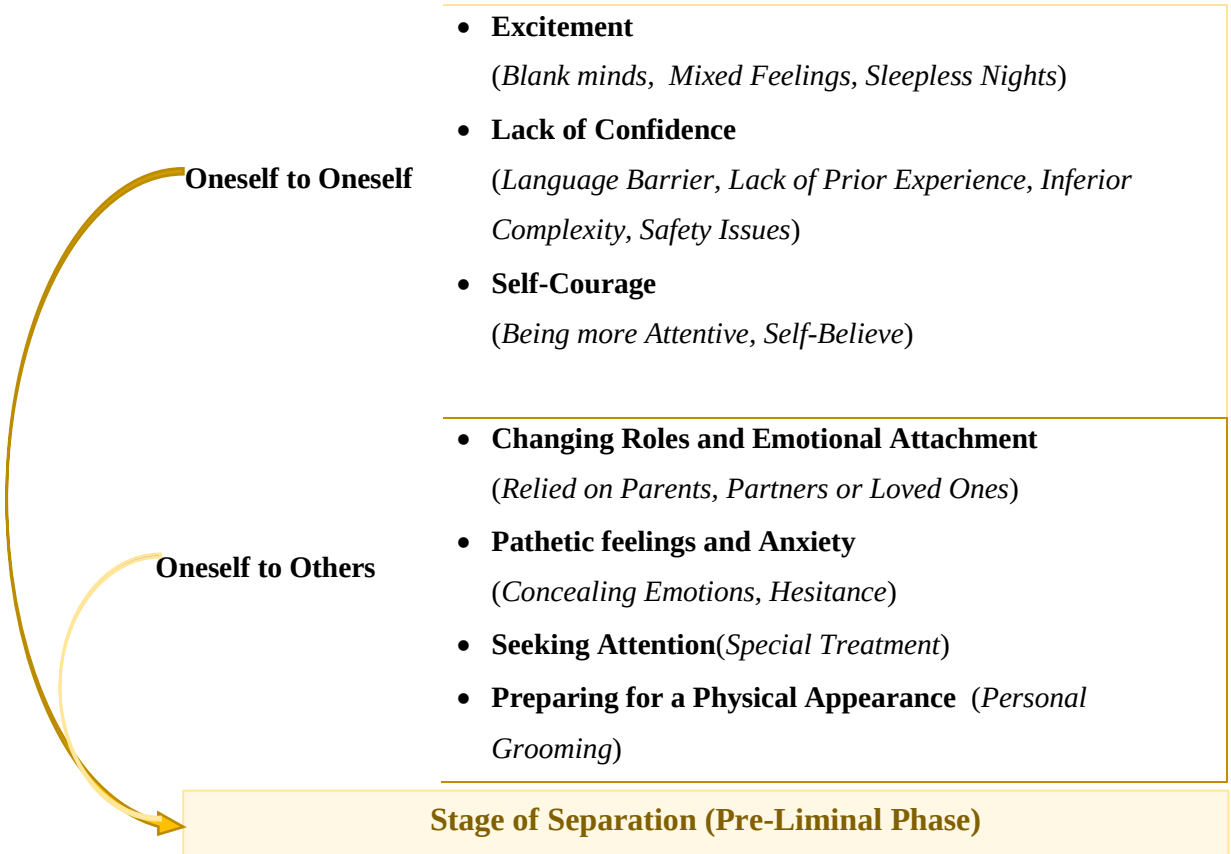


Figure 5.2 Stage of Separation (Pre-Liminal Phase) and Self-Representation

(Source: Researcher's Compilation)

According to Figure 5.2, *the separation stage* involves individuals detaching from their familiar backgrounds. For solo travellers, this means stepping away from their routine lives and comfort zones. This stage emphasises the strong reasons and motivations behind why solo travellers choose to distance themselves from their comfortable and familiar environments. The findings revealed not only the reasons and motivations for solo travel but also how solo travellers represented themselves before embarking on their solitary travels. In summary, these insights provide a meaningful explanation for why solo travellers prefer to travel alone, aligning with the concept of self-representation.

During *the transition stage,* individuals find themselves in an intermediate state where they contemplate various possible identities for their future selves (Hensel et al., 2014). A solo traveller, when travelling alone, encounters both certain and uncertain events. In response to these experiences, each solo traveller tries to manage the situations independently, identifying their hidden skills and gaining insights into their selves. This realisation allows them to compare who they were before they began their solo travels with who they are afterwards, enabling them to witness the changes that have occurred within them. In the context of solo tourism, after experiencing the authenticity of travel experiences, solo travellers reflect on specific moments and connect those experiences to changes in their self-representation. According to the study's respondents, all these processes involve a transition or self-realisation of the changes that took place during their travels, referred to as the transition period.

Based on the respondents' views, the researcher has identified a five-step transition process: (i) encountering critical events, (ii) recognising triggering factors, (iii) experiencing empowerment and reflection, (iv) recollecting significant moments and (v) achieving self-realisation. The following figure 5.3 explains the solo travellers' transition by including all the steps.

Stage of Transition (Liminal Phase) and Self-Representation

Self-Representation of Solo Travellers

Encountering Critical Events	Recognising Triggering Factors	Experiencing Empowerment and Reflection	Recollecting Significant Moments	Achieving Self-Realisation
• **Cultural Myopia** (a mixed-gender accommodation; the absence of judgemental scrutiny; the conservative communities)	Gender; Unfamiliar Culture; Personality; Culture and Religious Values; Social norms	• **Oneself to oneself:** self-courage; self-transcendence; self-protection; self-empowerment; self-care • **Oneself to others:** positive impression; self-image; sense of liberation; act bravely.	**Sense of Authenticity:** • *Oneself to oneself:* discovering a new version of oneself (uncovering hidden skills and gaining a fresh and clear focus), self-awareness (recognising the power of the self, self-interest, and genuine feelings), self-realisation (admitting to changes and choosing a career), and self-motivation (praising oneself) • *Oneself to others:* spontaneity (interacting with strangers, trying new things while travelling, and stepping out of self-handicapping) **Reflecting on Self-Discovery:** • *Oneself to oneself:* a self of curiosity (self-interaction on one's self-perspective) and self-control (survive in an extremely worst situation, control feelings and emotions, and control the level of fear and anxiety) • *Oneself to others:* a sense of curiosity (self-reflection from one's own perspective) **Connecting Reactions to Emotions:** • *Oneself to oneself:* self-assertion (being confident in self-expression and communicating clearly in public), the power of independence (being independent and relying less on others), self-love (better self-understanding, finding happiness within oneself, and finding meaning in one's life), self-management (achieving a work-life balance and effective time management) • *Oneself to others:* being more self-conscious (pretending to be like others, and being a more appealing character by reducing self-handicapping, and increasing self-esteem) **Connecting Reactions to Learnings:** • *Oneself to oneself:* self-development (learnt new skills and learnt new knowledge); being open-minded (learnt to respect multiple cultural values and learnt to listen to others' opinions) • *Oneself to others:* a sense of responsibility (being responsible for one's own actions and learning to be socially responsible)	**Cognitive Stimulation:** • A choice of independence; • Self-empowerment; • Finding new people and new learning **Affective Stimulation:** • Personal wellbeing; • Life-long experience; • Loneliness **Self-Changes:** • Self-discovery; • Changes in a self; • Self-development **Self-Efficacy** • Believing in one's own capabilities
• **Hostility towards Tourists** (terrorist attacks; the unwelcoming behaviour; the risk of stalking)	Age; Unfamiliar situation; Personality; Gender	• **Oneself to oneself:** self-motivation; self-control; self-empowerment; meaning of life; self-doubt; self-embarrassment; self-empowerment; self-protection • **Oneself to others:** spontaneous; concealing true emotions; self-image		
• **Fraudulent Activities** (high price; scams in room reservations)	Personal Traits; Location of Scam; Self-Disappointment; Unfamiliar situation; Personality; Language barrier; Harming one's integrity and self-morals	• **Oneself to oneself:** innocent self; self-doubt; self-determination; self-empowerment • **Oneself to others:** people- pleasing personality; voice-out; self-expression		
• **Lack of Travel Packages** (collective packages)	Ignorance of Others; Unwelcoming approach; High cost; Less travel experience; Personality;	• **Oneself to oneself:** self-disappointment; • **Oneself to others:** do not express the actual emotions;		
• **Social Harmony** (unexpected kindness from locals- positive/negative)	Contradiction between own thoughts; Less travel experience; Unexpected approach from an unexpected group of people; Cultural values	• **Oneself to oneself:** rigid to speak with others; self-doubt; uncomfortable and unsafe feelings; • **Oneself to others:** safety consciousness; narrator on social media; courtesy		
• **Careless Behaviour** (poor travel itinerary; loss of personal belongings)	Over-Confident; Unfamiliar Destination; Careless behaviour; Self-frustration; Destination image; Budgeted travel	• **Oneself to oneself:** self-projection; self-trust; self-blame; self-courage • **Oneself to others:** do not express the actual emotions; safety concern; self-image		
• **Emotional Connection** (spiritual connectivity; relaxation and meaning of life)	Self-changes; Self-fulfilment; Stress; Relationship issues; Self-handicap	• **Oneself to oneself**: self-realisation; self-concentration; self-reluctance; self-empowerment; self-trust • **Oneself to others:** self-consciousness; self-integrity; spontaneous; self-image		

(Source: Researcher's Compilation)

Figure 5.3 Stage of Transition (Liminal Phase) and Self-Representation

The transition period plays a significant role in the self-transformation of solo travellers. During this period, these travellers encounter unfamiliar events that prompt them to respond to new situations. Being alone empowers them to handle and overcome these challenges independently. After navigating these critical moments, these travellers take time to reflect on and interpret their experiences, and this process of self-realisation allows them to see a different version of themselves, deeply connect themselves to their emotions and reflect on the lessons they had learnt from their experiences, which can significantly impact their lives.

The re-incorporation stage occurs when an individual has established a new version of himself/herself. According to the liminality concept, this stage involves solo travellers incorporating the changes they had encountered during their travels into their self-representation. The accumulated experiences of the participants clearly reflect how they had responded to these changes. They reflected on their actions and recognised that their self-realisation was distinct from their actual self-representations. This process of self-realisation transforms into action during the reintegration stage or the post-liminal phase.

According to Peirce's theory of experience, transformative experiences are reflected in the consciousness of travellers and how effectively they integrate the new changes they have discovered into their lives. The extent to which these behavioural changes become habitual is influenced by their practice of these new behaviours (House & Kloesel, 1992). However, upon returning home, travellers often revert to their habitual behaviours, and their adherence to new practices typically ceases once they leave their travel destinations (Moscardo, 2009). Nevertheless, if the changes in these travellers' attitudes are significant enough, then these changes may transform their long-term behaviours beyond their tourism experience (Pung et al., 2020, p. 9). These behavioural changes may include environmentally friendly practices (Wolf et al., 2023), socially responsible actions (Grabowski et al., 2019) and self-changes that

influence interpersonal relationships and career-related decisions in the long term (Brown, 2009; Lean, 2012).

At the end of the transformation stage, each traveller decides what is good and bad, which leads to variations in their personal beliefs (Pung et al., 2020). However, how they adapt to these behavioural changes in the long term still requires further study. To address this gap, the researcher specifically focused on the experiences of solo travellers, who tend to have strong reasons for their journeys because their encounters often leave a lasting impression. These experiences also provide them with meaningful lessons that they remember long after their travels.

Solo travellers experience significant and changes in their mindset after facing uncertain situations, and such experiences may linger in their minds for a long period. Although their reactions to these situations may differ from their actual behaviour, the extent to which they embrace and reflect the changes in their self-representation ultimately depends on their individual choices.

Based on the above findings, the researcher classified the extent to which individuals incorporate changes into their self-representation as follows: (i) revisiting travel experience (*happy moments and feelings of pressure upon returning home*); (ii) temporary self-changes (depending *on travellers' willingness to adopt new habits during their experiences*); and (iii) long-term behavioural changes (*maintaining desirable changes whilst avoiding undesirable ones*). Figure 5.4 explains the reintegration of solo travellers by including all of these steps.

Stage of Re-Incorporation (Post-Liminal Phase and Self-Representation)

Revisiting Travel Experiences

↓

Temporary Self-Changes

↓

Long-term Behavioural Changes

- **Recall travel moments** (happy, sad, challenging, boring; maintain a travel diary, revisit clicked photos and recorded videos);
- **Feelings of pressure** (arise when returning to the routines of life and monotonous work).
- **Management of transient habits** (controlling leisure activities)

Situations created by others	**Hold on Desirable Behavioural Changes**	**Avoid Undesirable Behavioural Changes**
Cultural myopia • A mixed-gender accommodation • The absence of judgemental scrutiny • The conservative communities	• Maintaining self-confidence • Exhibiting courage • Nurturing a robust sense of self-esteem • The thought of being independent • Self-prevention: to avoid unnecessary trouble from locals.	• Abstaining from preconceived judgements • It is not necessary to live as society expects. • Do not select risky destinations and accommodation
Hostility towards Tourists • Terrorist attacks • The unwelcoming behaviour • The risk of stalking	• Emphasises the value of life • Believe in self • Develop self-confidence • Presence of mind	• Try not to be an extreme introvert • No need to embarrass yourself if you have not done anything wrong • Do not select risky destinations
Fraudulent Activities • High price • Scams in room reservations	• Say no to others • To properly prepare for travel • Voice out at the needful situation	• Self-ignorance • Do not always trust unknown people • Impulsive purchasing behaviour
Lack of Travel Packages • Collective packages	• Thinking from others' perspective • Cherish each moment in life • Controlling emotions	• Self-ignorance • Do not keep expectations while travelling • Pre-judgement
Social Harmony • Unexpected kindness from locals (positive/negative)	• Matured behaviour • Self-courage • Develop self-confidence • Cherish each moment in life. • Self-care • Learnt to say no	• Come out from a comfort zone • Do not trust everyone • Travelling inbound • Do not reveal
Situations created by themselves	**Hold on Desirable Behavioural Changes**	**Avoid Undesirable Behavioural Changes**
Careless Behaviour • Poor travel itinerary • Loss of personal belongings	• self-awareness • Self-focus • Self-realisation • Self-care • Acknowledging own mistakes • Being vigilant • Self-empowerment • Socially responsible	• Self- delusion • Do not depend on others • Being careless
Emotional Connection • Spiritual connectivity • Relaxation • Meaning of life	• Self-control • Socially responsible • Evolving grooming style • Come out from a comfort zone • cherish each moment in life	• Being non-vegetarian • Do not depend on others • Reduce inferior complexity

(Source: Researcher's Compilation)

Figure 5.4 Stage of Re-Incorporation (Post-Liminal Phase and Self-Representation

- **Different types of solo travellers have been identified based on their travel behaviours**

Previous studies have identified various types of solo travellers, including default and choice-based solo travellers (Leith, 2020; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). These travellers may seek solitude, social interaction, reduction of the stigma associated with being alone or a digital connection to others (Leith, 2020). These travellers may also be classified as highly individualistic, less individualistic, outward oriented or inward oriented (Mehmetoglu, 2003; Cohen, 2004; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2014). However, the researcher classified these solo travellers based on their travel behaviours, specifically focusing on how they represent themselves during their solitary travels.

Based on existing knowledge, the researcher identified two main types of solo travellers, namely, highly and lowly individualistic solo travellers. *Highly individualistic solo travellers* prefer spending time alone and are not interested in interacting with locals or strangers that they meet during their travels. Meanwhile, *lowly individualistic solo travellers* enjoy interacting with locals and strangers and are interested in meeting and communicating with new people they meet during their travels. The latter can be further divided into three subgroups, namely, *those who only interact with local people, those who only interact with non-local people and those who interact with local and non-local people*, based on how these travellers behave during their solitary travels.

Some solo travellers prefer interacting only with locals to ensure their safety, to gather more information about their destination, to gain navigation support and to learn about the local culture, food, language, religion and rituals. By contrast, some solo travellers do not enjoy interacting with locals for safety reasons. In either case, solo travellers may feel that they could expose themselves to risks, such as fraud and threats to their safety, if the locals find out that they are all by themselves. Meanwhile, those solo travellers who enjoy interacting with locals and non-locals tend to seek activity partners and join parties. They may even travel with

strangers when joining games or participating in activities, such as hiking, cycling and underwater activities.

In relation to the personality traits identified by Quinton (2015), the participants in this study exhibited a variety of personality traits, including (i) openness to experience (*the participants showed a keen interest in experiencing new things, whether from the people they met or the places they visited*); (ii) conscientiousness (*most of the participants prioritised their safety as reflected in their choice of destinations, the activities they engaged in and their interactions with strangers. Those participants who faced safety challenges, such as fraudulent activities, local hostility or violence, often developed a stronger sense of self as a result*); (iii) agreeableness (*those participants who scored high in agreeableness were generally easy going and friendly and tend to connect with others, whilst those participants who scored low tend to enjoy their own company*); (iv) neuroticism (*those participants with less experience and poorly planned itineraries faced challenges, which led them to become more conscientious about their future travel plans. Their experiences contributed to a greater awareness of what they should do next time*); and (v) extroversion (*the participants were categorised into introverts and extroverts, with the former enjoying their own company, whilst the latter maintaining their usual energetic demeanour).*

Individual experiences during solo travel could lead to significant behavioural changes, with many travellers reporting that they had discovered a new version of themselves whilst spending time alone at their destinations. However, most introverts demonstrated traits associated with openness to experience that contradicted their natural tendencies, where they often stepped out of their comfort zones to engage with others. Similarly, some extroverts spent their entire journey in solitude, thus demonstrating an introverted behaviour. These shifts in personality depend on travellers' individual preferences and expectations before their journey. The experiences and unexpected situations faced by travellers can also enhance their sense of

self and help them identify new aspects of their personality. Figure 5.5 illustrates the different types of solo travellers identified in this research.

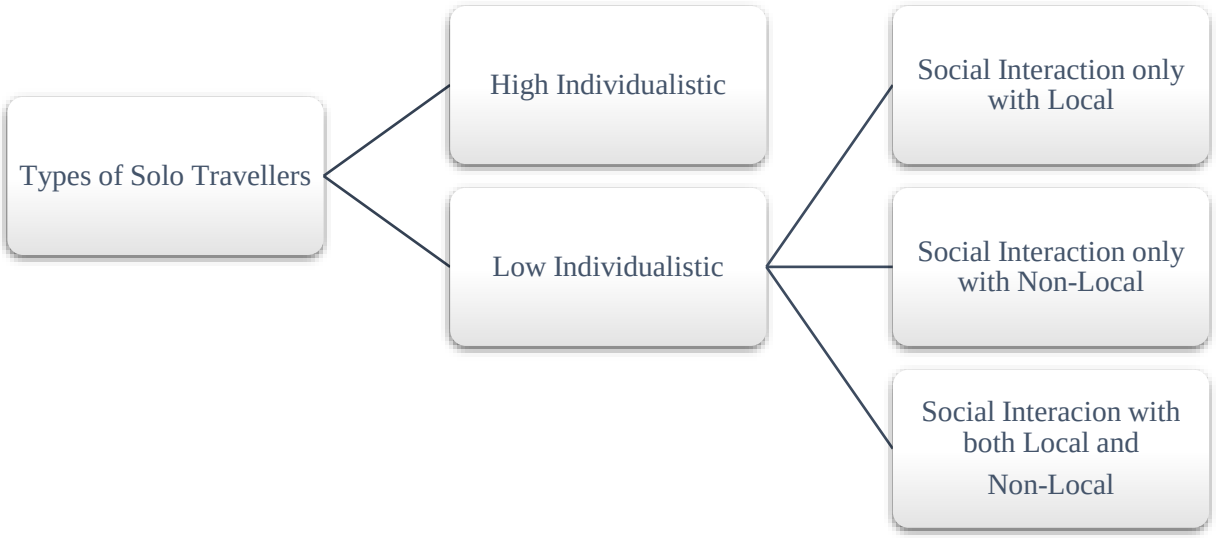


Figure 5.5 Types of Solo Travellers

(Source: Author's compilation based on the information collected from the study's respondents)

- ***Travelling alone has been highlighted as a contributor to the self-development of solo travellers***

The analysis on 'adventure seekers' (*those who travelled alone one to three times*) highlighted their curiosity about travel and their enjoyment of the underlying motivations. To fit into society, some of these adventure seekers also exhibited the behaviour of 'attention seekers' to differentiate themselves as cool or to put on a brave face in front of their friends and family. Driven by their curiosity, these travellers were eager to learn about solo travel and especially appreciated the independence and adventurous experiences afforded by this form of travel.

These travellers' curiosity about travel led them to challenge and empower themselves to handle situations alone, thus allowing them step out of their comfort zones. As a result, many of these travellers reported that travelling alone taught them how to trust in themselves and find the courage to pursue their dreams.

Meanwhile, a shift from curiosity to passion was observed amongst 'variety seekers' (*those who travelled solo four to six times*), who described solo travel as a fascinating experience. They specifically appreciated how solo travel granted them independence and freedom from compromising or adjusting plans. They actively sought out diverse experiences, such as visiting new places, meeting new people and learning different things. Solo travel provides them a tool for achieving personal growth, fostering positive energy and building their self-confidence.

The long-term experiential learning of 'self-discoverers' (*those who travelled solo seven to nine times*) helped them become more self-aware and achieve personal growth. They engaged in deep reflection to understand themselves better, and they used their solitary time to build their identity and empower themselves to meet their needs. Empowering oneself is considered a valuable opportunity for an individual to learn about his/her self-sufficiency.

Meanwhile, 'matured learners' and 'survivors' (*those who travelled solo 10 or more times*) demonstrated courage and self-awareness similar to self-discoverers, but they approached new experiences with an energetic and enthusiastic attitude grounded in maturity. These travellers believed that being open minded and warm hearted helped them foster relationships with new people and enhanced their learning experiences. Instead of simply being attracted to a destination, these travellers would align their personal needs with their choice of destination and seek a deeper understanding of themselves.

The process of self-discovery evolves alongside the transformation of solo travellers. During the initial stage of their travel, these travellers would embark on their travels out of

curiosity about the unique features of solo travel. However, as they acknowledge the changes within themselves over time, these travellers become motivated to stick with solo travel to realise a transformative travel experience. The reflections from their invaluable travel experiences strengthen the self-belief of these travellers, which would allow them to gain a deeper understanding of themselves (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Consequently, the time they spend travelling alone provides meaningful moments that inspire self-development.

5.2.2 Managerial Implications

This study aims to explain whether solo travel leads to changes in how solo travellers represent themselves. Whilst travelling alone, solo travellers experience significant changes in their sense of self. The unexpected and challenging situations they encounter during their journey empower them to learn about navigating difficult circumstances independently. These travel experiences play a vital role in their self-transformation. In sum, the way these travellers present themselves before and after their solo travels has changed for the better.

The pivotal moments behind the self-transformation of solo travellers encompass positive and negative experiences. On the positive side, solo travellers often gain insights into different cultures, forge emotional connections through spiritual activities, appreciate solitude and find meaning in their overall experiences, all of which contribute to their wellbeing. Conversely, negative experiences may include encounters with hostility towards tourists, (e.g. terrorist attacks), unwelcome behaviours from locals, stalking and scams, which may lead these travellers to doubt their decision to travel alone.

Practitioners can enhance their tourism promotion strategies by emphasising the transformative experiences that solo travellers can gain from their travels in the following ways:

- by highlighting essential events that can foster emotional attachments amongst solo travellers. These events often serve as positive milestones in solo travellers' lives that facilitate changes in their self-representation; and
- by addressing and mitigating the dangerous situations that solo travellers may encounter during their travels.

By focusing on these managerial implications, industry professionals can ensure that potential solo travellers are given safe travel options, hence encouraging them to pursue their passions and providing them with enriching and transformative travel experiences.

- **Highlight essential events that foster emotional attachments**

The participants had ample time during their solo travels to gain a better understanding of themselves. They experienced an emotional connection with their travels, which they considered a pivotal moment in their lives that changed their self-perceptions. Their travels served as a *relaxing retreat*, particularly for those who sought to spend quality time in nature. In this context, all the participants actively sought out a quiet and pleasant environment that would help them calm down and connect with the natural world. Some participants found relaxation through spiritual activities, such as meditation, yoga and visits to spiritual sites, whilst others found fulfilment by engaging in activities they were passionate about, including hiking, cycling, diving and exploring theme parks, museums and art galleries.

These insights present an excellent opportunity for tourism practitioners to promote the aforementioned activities through social media, travel blogs and travel agencies. These practitioners should also disseminate relevant information to solo travellers who are specifically searching for these experiences. Hoteliers can enhance awareness by disseminating detailed flyers or maps that guide solo travellers to local attractions. Most of the time, travellers

are only aware of well-known destinations that are mentioned on social media or travel blogs, but locals often know many out-of-grid destinations. To encourage solo travellers and contribute to their transformation, destination marketers should effectively promote these local destinations.

The participants generally agreed that despite their naturally introverted personalities, they ventured outside their comfort zones during their solo travels and enjoyed discovering a newer version of themselves through their interactions with locals. They experienced significant internal changes as they embraced different aspects of their character, and they felt that solo travelling accelerated their self-transformation and encouraged them to embark on more adventures as they connected with strangers and learnt about their cultures. Tourism practitioners may enhance the transformative travel experiences of these travellers by collaborating with community social workers and local residents who are managing homestays. For instance, they may organise events that showcase community traditions, rituals, food, language and characteristics. This approach offers numerous opportunities for solo travellers to reinforce their self-transformations during their travels and allows them to learn more about other cultures.

Given that these activities are related to community-based tourism, tourism practitioners may collaborate with community marketers who are working in this field. This collaboration can effectively attract more travellers and enrich their transformative experiences.

- **Mitigate the risks associated with dangerous situations**

Solo tourism is an emerging segment of the current travel market. Whilst travellers are generally motivated by the experience of travelling itself, many still face anxieties and disappointment during their travels. This issue tends to significantly impact those individuals

who often travel alone. However, those travellers who have travelled solo more than 10 times seem to be less affected by these feelings. By contrast, solo travellers in the early stage may find these emotions to be a more serious concern, which could lead them to choose other types of travel instead. Unfortunately, the disappointments experienced by these travellers during their travels can negatively influence their preferences for future destinations. Nevertheless, solo tourism should be recognised as a niche market, and losing even one true traveller can be a loss for such market.

Therefore, stakeholders must address the challenges and inconveniences being faced by solo travellers to meet their expectations. Based on the travel experiences shared by the participants, the following suggestions are provided for hotel and hospitality industry stakeholders, including hoteliers, destination managers, travel agencies and relevant government authorities:

Prioritising the safety of solo travellers by addressing various forms of local violence against tourists, such as stalking, harassment, colour discrimination and scams, will generate a safer destination. In general, individuals interested in travelling alone, as well as those already identified as solo travellers, often prioritise their safety, which significantly influences their choices of destination, accommodation and itinerary. As such, local violence can negatively affect travellers' decisions to visit certain destinations, such as Barcelona. Despite government efforts to control crime and protect tourists through laws and regulations, instances of local violence, including harassment, colour discrimination stalking and scams, still persist.

Firstly, harassment is a major concern, particularly for female travellers, who often adjust their dress and behaviour to mitigate risks. During the interviews, many female participants noted the importance of being mindful of their clothing choices. For example, one participant stated, *'...I usually wear simple dresses to avoid attracting strangers' attention…'* (P4), whilst another participant mentioned, *'...I am more concerned about my safety and dress*

like locals to prevent unnecessary trouble from the locals…' (P31). In contrast to male solo travellers, females tend to have more concerns about avoiding potential troubles from locals in the destinations they visit.

Although solo travel offers many advantages, some individuals, especially women, often hesitate to travel alone due to negative reactions from locals regarding their dress and behaviour. Dressing is a fundamental right, and everyone should be free to wear what they choose. As long as an individual's choice does not infringe on the values of others, it should not be an issue. In cases where certain attire may be deemed inappropriate for specific locations, such as religious institutions, authorities often provide shawls or alternative cover-up garments, hence leading to a win–win situation where no one's feelings are hurt.

However, misconceptions related to dress codes are particularly prevalent among travellers in South Asian countries and those with strong religious and cultural traditions. When female travellers wear short dresses or outfits that expose their cleavage, they may be labelled as promiscuous or even called sex workers. Dress does not determine a person's character or identity, yet people tend to make quick judgements based on appearances. The primary reasons for such misconduct include cultural differences, language barriers and lack of laws and policies aimed at protecting solo travellers. However, not all locals pose a threat to solo female travellers; many kind-hearted individuals still strive to protect women from these threats, thus positively contributing to the image of their destination.

Secondly, colour discrimination in any form violates human rights and contradicts the principle that all individuals should be treated equally and fairly. However, in reality, despite the technical advancements witnessed across the globe in recent years, society continues to categorise people with fair or white skin as the dominant class and view those with dark or brown skin as subservient or inferior. Additionally, Asians frequently face discrimination from

locals during their travels. This mistreatment can leave solo travellers particularly vulnerable as they may lack the support of a group in an unfamiliar environment.

Colour discrimination can make individuals feel abandoned and isolated in their travel destinations when locals treat them unequally. When travelling with people who are native to the destination, a solo traveller's skin colour may attract stares and judgment from others. In some destinations, individuals with white skin may even refuse to sit close to those with dark or brown skin on public transportation. This behaviour leaves many people with minority skin tones feeling humiliated and vulnerable. Moreover, contemporary society often holds a judgemental view of dark- or brown-skinned individuals, equating them with criminality.

Thirdly, scams can occur at either famous or lesser-known destinations. Social media and travel blogs often promote these locations to attract a large audience. Given that their ultimate goal is to generate profit, the information presented in these blogs may be either true or false, and these blogs are known to exaggerate the positive aspects of a destination. As a result, solo travellers who fall for these promotions may find themselves deceived upon arriving as they start encountering problems, such as stalkers, pickpockets and unclean environments.

The famous phenomenon known as 'Paris syndrome' refers to the experience of Japanese tourists who sought therapy after their expectations of visiting Paris were not met (Seifner, 2017). Many participants reported similar feelings of disappointment when their travel destinations failed to meet their expectations, leading them to feel that their visits were unworthy. In sum, local violence is one of the greatest threats to the solo tourism industry. Addressing this challenge is not easy for industry stakeholders, but government authorities, travel agents and travel counsellors can work together to raise awareness within their society and bridge the gap between tourists and locals.

For instance, to eliminate colour discrimination, government authorities need to take collective action via strictly regulated laws and legislations to ensure individuals' fundamental right to be free from discrimination. Anti-discrimination parades and programmes can be conducted with the help of celebrities and trustworthy influencers. Modern digital platforms may also encourage social advocacy in eliminating colour discrimination. Travel agencies should emphasise the role of travel counsellors in providing customer services. These counsellors guide travellers before their travel by recommending a proper travel itinerary after understanding the personality of each traveller. At the same time, when travellers feel disappointed after their travel, these counsellors can still direct them with a proper guide.

Budget friendly stays can solve the problems related to high-priced packages. Although budget-friendly accommodations are available at destinations, it still seems unfair for solo travellers to face higher prices for single occupancy, which may discourage them from travelling alone. The following suggestions are offered to hotels to ensure a cost-friendly stay for solo travellers:

- *Collaboration with renters*: The hotel industry can collaborate with renters who willingly rent out their space for singles. In this collaboration, the hotel industry administrates everything, including customer contact, whilst renters act as service providers (outsourcing).
- *Introducing capsules or domes*: Leasing a unit or units and converting them into capsules or domes can overcome the high costs faced by solo travellers.
- *Convertible single rooms*: Family suites typically consist of individual rooms with separate entrances and a common entry point. These individual rooms may be sold as single rooms when supplies are lacking. By analysing past and recent occupancy data, hoteliers can determine whether family suites are always fully booked or are left vacant

more often, and they can identify the special preferences of their guests, such as floor level, type of suite and number of suites available. They may also identify vacant periods based on these data and create a schedule to utilise these vacant suites as single rooms during their lean seasons. The rates will be decided upon after finalising this schedule to ensure they are reasonable enough for solo travellers whilst remaining profitable for the industry. However, converting suites into single rooms may not always be feasible throughout the year. Therefore, periodic updates about the availability of these rooms should be communicated to specific groups, such as solo travellers. The option for convertible rooms should also be made available upon request when demand is sufficient.

- *Accommodation provision through a forum or club of solo travellers*: To resolve the issue, form a group for solo travellers, or if a group is there, make it active.

5.3 Limitations and Future Studies

The following limitations of this study should be considered:

- Given that this study is purely qualitative, a mixed-method approach is recommended for future studies to provide deeper insights into solo travellers and their behavioural changes.
- This study highlights changes in solo travellers' self-representation by analysing the critical events they encountered during their travels. However, a more in-depth approach that examines the experiences of different age groups over time should be adopted in future studies to further understand how solo travellers' behaviour changes based on their number of solo travels and their age groups.
- The solo travellers in this research are limited to those individuals who have travelled alone at least once. However, solo travellers have varying purposes and interests (e.g.

adventures, historical sites, nature or wildlife experiences). By narrowing down solo travellers based on their primary interests, stakeholders can understand better about the different types of travellers. Additionally, exploring the characteristics of solo travellers from stigmatised groups (e.g. the LGBTQ+ community) or those with health issues could reveal unique aspects of solo travel and contribute further knowledge on solo tourism.

- The study explored the critical events faced by solo travellers. However, it does not compare the experiences of travellers from different nationalities. From an overall perspective, while cultural values were highlighted as a crucial factor influencing solo travellers' self-representation, the study did not examine how travellers from different nationalities adapt to these changes. Future studies should address this gap by incorporating demographic factors for a more in-depth analysis.
- As the tourism industry increasingly focuses on Artificial Intelligence (AI), it is essential to consider its significant role for solo travellers. If solo travellers interact with AI-driven services, how can these technologies enhance their transformative travel experiences? This raises intriguing questions about how AI might influence solo travellers' self-representation, paving the way for future studies in this area.
- In the current study, the changes in self-representation among solo travellers have offered valuable insights into the proposed conceptualisation based on the concept of liminality. Building on this idea, conducting quantitative research with a larger sample size would enhance understanding of solo travellers and allow for a deeper exploration of their behavioural changes.

In conclusion, future research should address these limitations to enhance our understanding of solo tourism and solo travellers' behavioural changes.

5.4 Researcher's Reflection

As a typical member of the Tamil community in northern Sri Lanka, I lived a simple childhood surrounded by a single culture, religious belief and language. My experiences of the outside world were mainly limited to my neighbours, relatives and friends. Most of our family travels were within the district, and we only visited the capital during educational trips organised by my school. I was very content with this experience and believed that it represented the real me and the life I wanted to lead—until I was exposed to the broader world.

Receiving higher education and starting my career encouraged me to travel by myself outside of my town and country. I had the opportunity to meet or connect with people from multiple languages, cultures or ethnicities, experience different environments and food and deal with various situations, which allowed me to break out of my shell and fly with colourful feathers. I felt reborn with new eyes that allowed me to see the world differently, sharp ears to hear my surroundings clearly and positive or innovative thoughts to handle any situation. This new version of myself helped me narrow down the 'unknown' of my Johari window. I found my true self through those solo travels. Although they were far from ideal, these journeys inspired my interest in this form of tourism. I strongly believe that solo travel is a 'goldmine' where you can find the most valuable things as you dig deeper. My interests and beliefs have driven me to choose this area of study. Any plan without an outcome will never be implemented. I identified the gaps and scope of solo tourism research by reviewing the relevant literature and by referring to my solo travel experiences. Furthermore, the current lifestyle promotes solo tourism and is expected to make it a trend. Given the qualitative nature of this research, an unbiased response from the participants is needed. I never influenced these participants and allowed them to freely share their stories. I started out with a blank page, but at the end of the data collection, I had a compilation of wonderful tales from my participants.

My findings not only reflect the meaningful travel experiences of 40 solo travellers but also offer theoretical and managerial contributions to the context of solo tourism.

5.5 Conclusion

Human cognition is inherently diverse and individual aspirations differ significantly, thereby paving the way for new market segments within the tourism industry. By aligning travel objectives with the varied interests of travellers, distinct forms of tourism can be identified. Among these, solo tourism has emerged as a notable trend, as evidenced by analyses from leading online travel guides, websites and blogs.

The purposes of travelling would be general to all types of travellers, except if travellers look for specific and unique intentions for the travel. The solo travellers will be counted as travellers with specific purposes. The existing studies under the context of solo tourism only covered the reasons, motivations and constraints related to solo travel. From them, most scholars highlighted that the transformative experience would be the main reason behind the selection of solo travelling. However, there is a limited understanding of how such a transformative experience can be formed via solo travel. The study attempts to address the following research questions: How do solo travellers define themselves? Does solo travel bring changes in solo travellers' self-representation? What critical moments may trigger solo travellers to make changes in their self-representation? Situating solo travel in the context of liminality, the study mainly aims to explore the mechanism of the changes solo travel brings to a solo traveller's self-representation.

The interviews were taken place in China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Thailand from July 2023 to August, 2024. The experience-based snowballing and sampling criterion strategies were used to select the sample. Interviews were conducted both in-person and online, depending on the convenience of the selected participants. Since the study adopted

phenomenology, in accordance with Englander (2012), the sampling unit and the unit of analysis are experiences instead of the number of participants. The sample size was limited to 40 due to data saturation and used a pluralism analysis technique, including Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis (DPA), the Hermeneutic Cycle (HC), and Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyse the data. The researcher has comprehensively addressed all pertinent information across Five Chapters: *Chapter One*: Introduction, *Chapter Two*: Literature Review, *Chapter Three*: Methodology, *Chapter Four*: Findings and *Chapter Five*: Discussion, Implications and Conclusion.

The current study has established an understanding of how solo travellers represent themselves during their travel and explained that travelling alone leads to meaningful positive transformations in a traveller's life, particularly in regard to self-transformation. The research discovered that during the transitional phase when travellers venture outside of their comfort zones and face significant challenges on their solo travels, they commonly develop a newfound sense of self. Nonetheless, the degree to which these changes are internalised by solo travellers is contingent on their unique inclinations. The following figure, 5.6, summarises the contents included in this chapter.

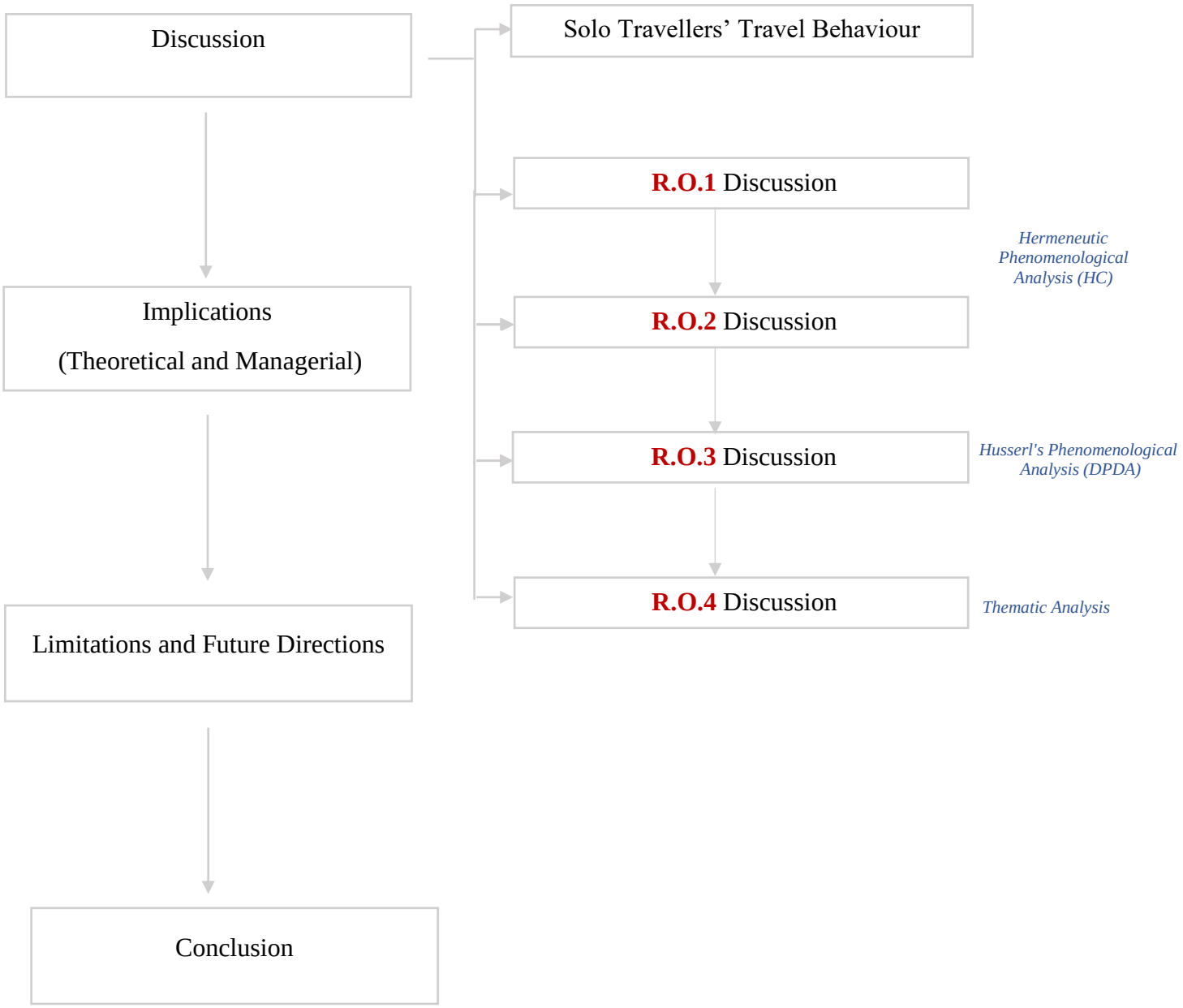


Figure 5.6 Summary of Chapter Five

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APPENDIX-A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

	Questions	Remarks
Qualifying Questions	Have you travelled alone before?	**(If yes, interviewer can continue the interview; if not no)**
	Have you chosen solo travel by default or choice?	**(If it is a choice option, interviewer can continue the interview; if not no)**
Background Information	What is a small introduction about you?	**Socio & Demographic Information.**
Travel Experience	How many times have you made solo travel?	**One-time traveller/ Multi-time traveller**
	Frequency of making own solo travel arrangement?	**Multi-time traveller**
	What was your age/position when you made your solo travel?	
	What are countries/ destinations did you visit alone?	
	Do you have any particular reasons for choosing your travel destinations?	
	What was the length of your travel?	**Minimum/ Maximum Days**
Accommodation	Where did you stay during your solo travel?	
	Did that make you feel or have any different experiences of being alone in a place?	
	Did anyone being supported your decision to travel alone?	
	How did you manage all the travel experiences?	
	Have you experienced bad things/ risks during your solo travel?	
General Questions	Do you like to travel alone throughout your travel, or will you join other groups or strangers whom you will meet at your destination?	
	Have you ever cancelled the solo travel plan? If so, why?	
	Which part of the destinations do you think of going alone in future and why?	
	How did you pass through all the stages of solo travel?	
	Which travel stage was difficult? And why?	

Research Question One	Have you chosen solo travel destinations based your nature characteristics or just selected?	**Interested in Adventurers activities, Nature based activities, Spiritual and Shopping**
	How did you connect yourself with solo travel?	**Self**
	How could you define a 'solo traveller' based on your experience?	**Self-Defining**
Research Question Two	Solo travel can be daunting –how confident were you when deciding to travel alone?	**First/Multi-time traveller**
	What is the difference between your first solo travel and after multiple solo travels? And which motivates you to do various solo travels?	**Multi-time traveller**
	Before being a solo traveller, what thoughts you had on a solo traveller? After your solo travel, was your thought changed or the same as before travel? How did you express it?	
	Since you're travelling alone how could you balancing your loneliness?	
	During your solo travel, did find yourself? Did you discover your hidden skills?	
	What kind of activities were you involved in during your solo travel?	
	How did those activities relate to your life before travelling, and how would they affect your travel?	
Research Question Three	Has any situation caused you to feel embracement, happiness, loneliness, anger, or low feelings during solo travel?	
	What those critical moments may trigger you to identify their new selves during their solo travel?	
	Did you make an attempt to move with strangers or people you met throughout your solo travel?	
	Did you adjust your natural character or your native behaviour in terms of avoiding some unwanted situation throughout your solo travel?	
	Throughout a solo travel, based on your experience how do you justify yourself?	
	Why do you want to disassociate yourself from others?	**Liminal Phase-I Separation Pre-Stage**
	What kind of changes would you expect from a solo travel?	
	How do you identify yourself in the liminal time between the decision to travel alone and to begin solo travel?	
	What was the real motives or the reasons behind your solo travel?	
Research Question Four	How did you prepare yourself when you decided to travel alone?	**Liminal Phase-II Transition Middle Stage**
	How long did it take you to confirm your final decision to travel alone?	
	How did you express yourself between first thought about solo travel and finally booking the flight ticket?	
	How did you execute your travel plan?	
	Did you over-excite before travelling alone? If so, how did you do that? How did you express it to your family & friends?	

Did your environment support or stimulate your thought process of being travel alone?	
How long did it take you to confirm your final decision to travel alone?	
How did you execute your travel plan?	
Did you over-excite before travelling alone? If so, how did you do that? How did you express it to your family & friends?	
Did you ever feel that when you walk alone in a destination and new places, you want to engage in the events (night party), but the cultural values or the family background may resist you from adopting?	
If I ask about solo travel, is there anything that you don't want to recall and simultaneously wish to remember?	**Liminal Phase-III Re-Incorporation**
Do you mind others' perceptions and thoughts on your behaviour?	
Did you feel anything during the solo travel would challenge your unhidden talents?	
How did you feel about the changes that happened in yourself after solo travel?	
How is your life after solo travel? Any significant changes happened in your life?	
Did you accept the changes and change yourself? Or did you use any mechanism or have a level of restriction over the critical events triggers to change?	

(Source: Developed for the study purpose)

APPENDIX-B: PARTICIPANT'S SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION DATA COLLECTION

Gender :

Male ☐

Female ☐

Age :

18-29 Years Old ☐ 40-49 years Old ☐ 60 Years or Older ☐

30-39 Years Old ☐ 50-59 Years Old ☐

Education :

Some College or School Level ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐

Master's Degree ☐ Doctorate Degree or Above ☐

Marital Status:

Single/ Living Alone ☐

Married/ Living with Partner ☐

Travel Organiser:

Myself ☐

Travel Agent ☐

Family, Friends, or Others ☐

Countries you visited alone: ☐

☐

The Maximum Length of Stay:

Less than 5 Days ☐ 5 Days ☐

5-6 Days ☐ 6- 7 Days ☐

7-8 Days ☐ More than 8 Days ☐

(If so, please mention the number of days) ☐

-Thank you-