

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY:

HOW NEED FOR COGNITIVE CLOSURE SHAPES CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN SOLO AND GROUP TRAVEL

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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how travel type (solo vs. group) influences cultural competence development. While solo tourism is rapidly growing, empirical research remains limited, often focusing on group dynamics or gender constraints. By examining Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC) as a moderator, this research compares these travel contexts to reveal how individual psychological traits shape cultural learning. It contributes a nuanced, comparative framework to understand the unique developmental outcomes of autonomous travel.

OBJECTIVE

- To compare cultural competence levels between solo and group travelers in short-term tourism contexts.
- To examine solo travel's unique impact on intercultural learning and "small culture formation," addressing the gap in current tourism literature.
- To determine the moderating role of Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC) in the relationship between travel type and cultural outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a cross-sectional survey and moderated regression to compare solo and group travel. By analyzing travel preference versus actual behavior alongside validated NFC and cultural competence scales, the study identifies how psychological traits moderate intercultural learning outcomes.

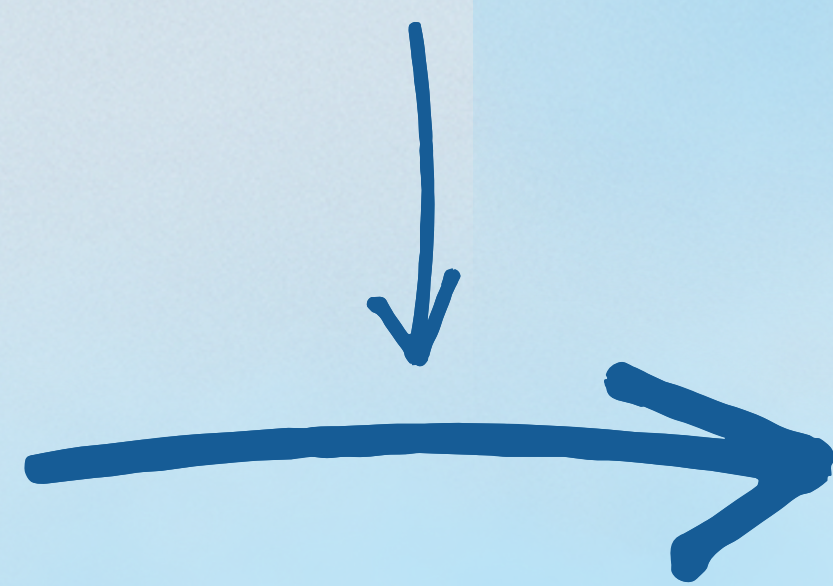
HYPOTHESIS

- H1 (Main Effect): Solo travelers will report higher levels of cultural competence than group travelers due to increased independent cultural engagement.
- H2 (Moderation Effect): Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC) will moderate the relationship between travel type and cultural competence, such that the performance gap between solo and group travelers is wider among those with low (vs. high) NFC.

NEED FOR COGNITIVE CLOSURE



TRAVEL TYPE



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

RESULTS

1. Solo Travel Predicts Higher Cultural Competence

- Solo travelers consistently outscore group travelers in Overall, Motivational, and Behavioral CQ.
- Travel preference was a particularly robust predictor of Motivational CQ, accounting for 21% of the total variance
- Solo preference explains a substantial portion of the variance in cultural drive

2. Preference Matters More than Behavior

- Travel preference is a broader predictor of competence than actual behavior.
- The travel preference for solo travel significantly predicted Metacognitive CQ and Intercultural Sensitivity, suggesting that the desire for independence is the primary driver of adaptability.

3. Insignificant Moderation Effect

- The relationship between travel type and cultural competence is not influenced by an individual's Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC).
- All interaction terms were non-significant for both behavior and preference models.

CQ Dimension	Group Traveler (Behavior)	Group Traveler (Preference)
Overall CQ	$B = -0.41^{**}$	$B = -0.48^{***}$
Motivational CQ	$B = -0.79^{***}$	$B = -0.78^{***}$
Behavioral CQ	$B = -0.41^{*}$	$B = -0.52^{***}$

Note: Negative B coefficients indicate lower scores for group travelers compared to the solo travel reference group.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

1. Autonomy Over Guidance

- Solo travel lacks a "safety net," forcing travelers to take initiative and adapt in real-time.
- Guided tours provide a "mediated" experience that reduces the need for behavioral flexibility.

2. Mindset Over Knowledge

- Travel type shapes how travelers react to culture (drive/behavior) rather than increasing factual knowledge.
- Stated preference is a stronger predictor than actual behavior, as it reflects a person's core orientation toward exploration.

3. NFC cannot moderate the relationship in short-term travel

- Brief leisure trips are likely too short for personality traits like NFC to hinder the learning process.
- Solo and group travelers share similar NFC levels, proving independent travel benefits both structure-seekers and ambiguity-lovers in short-term travel.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that solo travel enhances cultural competence more effectively than group travel, specifically in motivational and behavioral domains. By prioritizing autonomy and active engagement, solo travelers develop greater drive and adaptability, whereas cognitive knowledge remains limited by the brevity of short-term trips. Notably, the Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC) did not moderate these results, suggesting that the benefits of independent travel are universal and stable across different personality types. Ultimately, the findings emphasize that mindset and interaction are more vital for intercultural growth than dispositional traits or passive exposure.

Related literature

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