

Article

Gender and Culture Differences in Consumers' Travel Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: COVID-19, as a rampant health crisis, lies at the basis of fluctuating perceptions affecting decreased demand among travelers. Recent studies have witnessed a growth of interest in the interactions between tourists' behaviors and other factors with the potential to moderate such behavior during travel. However, it remains to be discussed whether the influence of demographic aspects, especially cultural and gender differences, on tourism behaviors will be more prominent during COVID-19. The current empirical research aims to integrate demographic variables, including gender and culture, with tourists' behavior in terms of their choice of companions, travel destinations, and mode of transportation. According to the research findings, people in other countries have greater desire to travel than Chinese tourists who, in any case, prefer to travel with friends. Tourists from other countries are more willing to travel by plane and by car. Males show a more positive attitude than females to these means of transportation. Moreover, the interactive effect of gender and nationality reveals that female travelers from mainland China put the train or bus top on their agenda. These theoretical findings have the potential to provide actionable insights into how policymakers and service providers can make adjustments to bring back tourism stifled by COVID-19.

Keywords: consumer travel behavior; gender differences; cultural differences; Chinese consumers; COVID-19



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1. Introduction

The past three years have witnessed how the rampant COVID-19 pandemic has undermined livelihoods, education, healthcare, and many other aspects of people's welfare [1–3]. Tourism, as a pillar industry in economic development, naturally became one of the most affected sectors since the first COVID-19 outbreak [4–7]. Estimates from the UNWTO suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduction of approximately 1.1 billion in international tourists and has put 100–120 million jobs at risk [8,9]. There is no doubt that such a widespread economic and social crisis must be related to the fluctuation of perceptions and decreased demand among travelers, who have moderated their travel activity as reflected in the decision-making process regarding destinations [10]. In this scenario, tracking changes in tourist behavior and considering any related underlying factors has the potential to assist tourism service providers and policy makers in their task of bringing tourism back to life by meeting travelers' demands.

In recent years, several studies seem to show a growing interest in the interactions between tourist behavior and any factors that can moderate any aspect of various forms of behavior during travel [11]. Specifically, culture potentially or directly affects the thinking of individual tourism consumers, which further shapes consumer travel behavior and tourism consumption patterns [12]. Studies have found that culture influences not only destination choice before travel, but also travel consumption behavior during and after travel [13]. For instance, it can determine travel information search behavior [14] and influence travel motivation [15], choice of destination [16], driving behavior [17], and purchase

decisions [18]. Therefore, culture, as one of the demographic variables, is considered an influential factor in the choice of destination, travel style, and purchase decisions, among other travel facets [19]. However, more studies are needed on the influence of cultural differences on tourist behavior. The nature of these differences is expected to be more evident when seen against the background of a widespread pandemic. Concerning the role of culture in tourist behavior, previous publications just attempted to use culture to provide a possible theoretical explanation, but few studies have examined its effect through empirical research, much less in such a distinct period.

Furthermore, gender, as another critical demographic component, shapes and is shaped by the interaction of political, economic, environmental, and cultural factors in the society where tourism takes place [20]. If we failed to include the gender perspective in the analysis of tourism activities, our exploration of tourism experiences would be incomplete and unconvincing. In previous studies, researchers' attention to gender differences in the tourism industry has been focused on equal pay, the promotion of the tourist destination, workforce divisions, etc. [21–23]. However, extensive research on gender differentiation in tourist behaviors has been conducted on tourists' perceptions and performance in limited areas, such as in Poland, Arabia, and the European Union [11,24,25]. By contrast, our empirical research on gender difference addresses the different effects of gender on tourist behavior among travelers from different countries and cultural backgrounds in the context of COVID-19.

Nevertheless, tourist behavior does appear to invite comprehensive research by integrating gendered and cultural interpretation. Xu et al. [26] compared the differences between China and the United Kingdom regarding travel behavior and attitudes. They reported on the cultural difference that was also found to be present in both the male and female groups. However, Wang and Walker [27] claimed that the culture and gender interaction is not significant. In conclusion, there is not enough work on the effects of gender and culture interactions on travel behaviors among tourists, let alone during COVID-19.

Building on a review of previous studies, the present empirical research integrates demographic variables including gender and culture with tourists' behaviors during the pandemic to extend existing findings that generally reveal the effect of individual demographic variables. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 outbreak, the question of gender differences among tourists around the world affecting travel behavior, especially in the choice of transport, destinations, and companions, has drawn the attention of researchers from various fields [28]. Therefore, we undertook to compare the gender differences of tourists with different cultural backgrounds in terms of transportation mode and choice of companions and travel destinations, and to provide more persuasive explanations about such behavioral differences from social, economic, and psychological perspectives based on our empirical results.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Effects of Cultural Difference on Different Tourism Behaviors*

Tourist behavior is extensively influenced by culture. Culture directly or potentially influences how tourists think, further shaping their travel behavior [12]. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the cultural context embedded behind tourists so as to promote adequate tourism development [29].

Previous studies have shown that information-seeking behavior is culturally influenced [14,30]. Several researchers have addressed differences in information-seeking behaviors among German, British, and French travelers. It was found that German travelers prefer to obtain travel information via the Internet, whereas French and British people prefer to obtain it from travel companies. The researchers suggest that such preferences for information resources are related to the cultural background of different countries [31]. Based on Hofstede's cross-cultural research framework (2001), some scholars have found that the reasons for differences in information-seeking behavior can be attributed to cultural uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance is defined as "the degree to which people

perceive the threat of uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid it" (Hofstede, 1980). A number of studies have found that individuals from a high-uncertainty-avoidance culture spend more time searching for travel information online [32,33]. People from Belgium, for example, take longer to gather travel information and complete travel plans than those from the United States. This is due to the fact that Belgium is a country with a higher-uncertainty-avoidance culture, where people prefer to travel free from unexpected situations. Therefore, this country tries to work on eliminating travel-related uncertainty by doing more research before a trip. The United States, on the other hand, is a country with low uncertainty avoidance and therefore has a higher acceptance of unexpected situations [34].

Several cross-cultural studies have shown that travelers from different cultural backgrounds are characterized by likewise different travel motivations [16,35–37]. An interesting study [38] focused on exploring kinds of motivational factors that exerted significant impacts on travel to Korea in terms of information sources used, pre-trip planning, and length of stay. The research results confirmed that motivational differences based on national culture can be regarded as a leading factor impacting tourists' behaviors. Additionally, several studies have been conducted on subjects from different nationalities, confirming that travel motivation is indeed influenced by culture. For example, Japanese tourists showed great interest in the prestige and family reunion motivation compared to British and American tourists [39], as Japanese tourists tended to express more collectivist traits while American tourists preferred individualistic traits. British tourists showed a greater preference for the "pleasure seeking" motivation than German tourists; Chinese (mainland) tourists had a higher interest in leisure facilities and games [40]. Taiwanese and Westerners demonstrated stronger motivations for seeking knowledge and entertainment, and Hong Kongers were more motivated by local cultural resources as well as gambling and recreational activities [40].

Kim et al. [41] and Ayeh et al. [14] proposed that the differences in communicating travel information could be explained by the culture of individualism versus a collectivist culture. Individuals from the culture of collectivism were more inclined to share information via the Internet, while people from the culture of individualism were more likely to simply get travel information [14,42,43]. This finding is also supported by the evidence that Chinese people from the culture of collectivism have a higher level of contribution and participation in social networks [44]. This may be due to the fact that, for people from collectivist cultures, sharing travel information on social media can lead to interaction and feedback from others, helping them gain a sense of group identity [45], an essential psychological need in social life [46]. Furthermore, there were also differences between travel bloggers from the cultures of collectivism and individualism. Travel bloggers from the former culture were more focused on the feelings of their fans and, therefore, were willing to share their experiences in order to help others [47]. On the other hand, travel bloggers from the latter culture were inclined to write about their own travel experiences but provide suggestions to others, which seemed to be another travel difference caused by culture [48].

When it comes to the influence of culture on tourist behavior, another aspect that cannot be ignored is the choice of destination. Jackson [36] and Ng et al. [37,49] found that tourists from the culture of collectivism were more likely to choose destinations with a different culture, since they were not only unafraid of it, but were even willing to establish a harmonious relationship with an unfamiliar group. In contrast, tourists from individualistic societies tended to pick destinations that were culturally similar [13]. In another study examining the travel behavior of British and Chinese high school students, destination choice was also found to be closely related to the culture. It noted that British students focused their preferences on personal pleasure, socializing with friends, and shopping. Chinese students, on the other hand, preferred to visit scenic spots and historical sites because of the importance the Chinese give to honoring cultural conventions [26]. In addition, a recent study showed that there was a negative correlation between tourist demand and both cultural and travel distance, whereas the popularity of the destination

gave rise to a positive correlation. The negative effect of cultural distance on tourist demand is more severe for less popular routes, while the effect decreases when the popularity of the route increases [50].

In addition to the tourist behaviors reviewed above, others, such as the choice of transportation [26], consumption habits [51], participation in tour groups [40,52,53], and attitudes toward tour providers, also reveal cultural differences. For example, in the aspect of travel modes, researchers found that it is due to geographical differences that British tourists prefer airplanes, while Chinese tourists tend to travel by train [26]. In Britain, an island country, traveling by air is more convenient, whereas China, as a large and densely populated country, provides faster and cheaper services for rail travel. With respect to consumption habits, it was discovered that consumers from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tended to carefully evaluate the benefits when making purchases [51]; on the other hand, consumers from low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures were less cautious.

2.2. The Effects of Gender Difference on Different Kinds of Tourist Behavior

Tourist behavior has been an important topic for researchers, marketers, and operators of tourism destinations, as tourist activities are becoming a stronger engine for the development of the local, national, and global economy. As more and more female travelers are interested in outbound tourism [54], it seems essential that tourism professionals and researchers consider the potential effect of gender on tourism decision-making processes. After reviewing previous studies, we found that several tourism studies have investigated gender differences from different perspectives, such as social roles [55], residents' support for tourism [56], and destination attributes and motives [57]. Males tend to be more independent than females and more motivated by their need for self-fulfillment. Kim and Richardson [58] also pointed that gender plays a critical moderating role during decision-making processes about foreign travel. Accordingly, marketing messages should be delivered to women and men according to their respective tourist intentions. Images in brochures will be attractive if they create a fantasy-driven atmosphere, while advertising with a positive attitude seems to be more persuasive to men.

Gender differences in travel behaviors between men and women are reflected in various aspects of tourist activities [11]. Some tourism behavior, such as the purchase-decision process, appear to be influenced by gender [59–61]. In previous studies, gender differences in hotel room reservations made by tourists were analyzed based on environmental, economic, and social dimensions [61]. The empirical analysis revealed that tourists, regardless of gender, paid more attention to the environment. However, better performance in social aspects during travel was more appreciated by women, and economic factors were more decisive for men when they wanted to make a hotel reservation. Therefore, what tourists appreciate most about a hotel differs according to gender. At the same time, although women tend to carefully consider the services and products before purchasing them, their subsequent desires are greater than those of male buyers [61]. Men are more willing to make decisions directly aimed at their goal.

Regarding the selection of travel information sources, research on tourism behavior has identified information sources and search methods used by travelers as crucial activities in the choice of destinations [62]. Previous literature has demonstrated that there are different preferences in searching for travel information based on gender differences [63,64]. Yasin et al. [64] concluded that male visitors prefer to choose destinations through external information sources, such as Facebook, blogs, television, magazines, and newspapers. However, female tourists are more inclined to internal sources of information, such as previous travel experience and suggestions from friends or family. Gender discrepancies in the selection of travel information sources have also been explained by Jones et al. [65], who claimed that men tend to be more self-confident, optimistic, and reasonable than women when facing online events and challenges. Additionally, younger women rely more on online travel information as a primary source, such as hotel websites, while older women tend to use traditional media, such as magazines and television.

Regarding the purpose of the trip, female tourists prefer to travel for relaxation and recreation, while men tend to determine travel destinations on the basis of discovery and adventure [64]. In addition, men usually choose to travel for business or work, while women tend to go shopping or accompany other people, including to take care of administrative matters related to the home and to accompany children traveling to school [66,67]. Furthermore, differences in travel purposes between genders seem to exert a significant influence on the characteristics of female tourism, which tends to show simpler business travel patterns, but more complex patterns when travel is for other reasons. However, there is limited literature on whether gender differences in tourism purposes may contribute to differences in tourism behaviors, such as choice of tourism modes (for example, whether tourists with various purposes have the potential to choose different travel companions, such as friends, tour groups, or family members).

When it comes to differences in travel behaviors based on gender, another aspect that it is necessary to consider is the mode of transport. Studies have demonstrated gender differences in this regard. Specifically, women rely more on sustainable travel than men, preferring to travel on foot or by public transport [68–70]. At the same time, male tourists tend to use private cars, bicycles, and motorcycles [28,67]. Moreover, the literature reveals a higher probability of women being passengers rather than drivers than men when women do use a car [71]. These findings suggest that gender differences in travel behaviors, especially in transportation choice, have been attracting the attention of researchers from various fields, and further discussion is considered essential.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has stifled the tourism industry, an indispensable part of the global economy, regardless of changes in social behavior, leisure, mobility, and consumption patterns [4,72]. Existing studies show cultural differences in the choice of destination [13], the sharing of travel information [49], and other behaviors, such as transportation mode [26] and consumption [51]. When natural or man-made crises draw the attention of most travelers to their own safety, the perceived risk that travel intention and behavior could change tends to be reinforced. Sensitivity to environmental safety will allow post-crisis travelers to choose closer places as a destination. Furthermore, as shown in previous research, tourists' risk perceptions of travel destinations vary between gender groups [73]. Specifically, women are more likely to be safety-conscious and open to natural, sanitized, and socially distanced spaces when determining their destinations.

Therefore, more empirical research is needed to discuss whether the impact of gender or culture on tourist behavior was sharper during the generalized pandemic. In addition, the interactive effect of demographic factors between gender and culture should inform a higher agenda, which has the potential to moderate the decision-making processes of tourists and provide reasonable explanations about the effect of gender differences on the choice of destinations. Given the importance of gender differentiation among tourists with different cultural backgrounds, and the lack of sufficient research on this topic, we propose the following research questions:

- (1) Are the different cultural backgrounds of tourists closely related to their choices of travel mode, destination, and partner selection in the context of the pandemic?
- (2) Is the gender of a tourist closely related to their choice of means of travel, destination, and partner selection in the context of the pandemic?
- (3) Is there a significant interaction effect between gender and nationality on the behavior of tourists in the context of the pandemic?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Instrument and Method

This study first used a qualitative approach to determine the content of the questionnaire. The researcher interviewed experts, scholars, graduate students, and undergraduate students in the field. The topic was "travel perceptions and travel behaviors during the pandemic". Based on interviews and a review of the relevant literature, the main content of this survey was broadly determined, to examine people's travel perceptions and behaviors

during the pandemic within multiple dimensions, such as health, destinations, and modes of travel. Then, a questionnaire was initially prepared based on the main research content obtained from the interviews and with reference to relevant research results. After the questionnaire was designed, it was revised based on the suggestions of the experts and the feedback of the subjects. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: personal information for the subjects and the travel perceptions and behaviors survey. The questionnaire was configured with 10 single-choice questions presented on a 5-point Richter scale: 5 = very likely (very important); 4 = more likely (more important); 3 = somewhat likely (neutral); 2 = less likely (less important); 1 = not likely (unimportant). Finally, the researcher performed relevant statistical analysis of the collected questionnaires to report and analyze the findings.

3.2. Data Collection

The survey was published between March and May 2020 on Sojump, a leading provider of online data collection services in China. The survey is available in two versions, Chinese and English. The two versions have the same content; only the language is different. Subjects were surveyed on a voluntary basis. A total of 924 responses were collected. Of these, 924 were from mainland China, including Shanxi (N = 303), Hebei (N = 116), Hubei (N = 114), Beijing (N = 74), and Henan (N = 44), while 149 were from other countries, such as Greece (N = 22), Spain (N = 16), India (N = 9), Great Britain (N = 9), and the USA (N = 6). According to their diverse cultural backgrounds, the respondents were classified into domestic and foreign groups. These female and male respondents are engaged in different occupations, which could reflect the universality of the sample.

4. Result

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Main Constructs

This section begins with descriptive and multivariate statistics on the resulting data, followed by an ANOVA to explore the effects of different cultures and genders on travel behavior. The study used the analysis software R (Version 4.2.1) to complete all statistical analyses, and Table 1 reports the items in the questionnaire and their mean scores. A total of 10 items were included in this study and these 10 items were divided into 3 dimensions. The first dimension consists of Item 1, Item 2, and Item 3, which describe the choice of travel destination, with the lowest mean score of 2.2 for travel abroad and the highest mean score of 3.25 for urban and rural travel. Items 4, 5, and 6 mainly depict the choice of travel companions, where the lowest mean score of less than 2 was obtained for the item of traveling with a group, and the highest score was obtained for the item of traveling with family or alone, which shows that more people in the groups involved in this study tend to choose to travel with their families. Items 7–10 mainly describe the modes of transportation. As seen from the results, trains and airplanes are common modes, and the mean values of the two modes are roughly the same, 2.68 and 2.85 respectively. In contrast, fewer people choose to cruise, and the cruise item score is only 1.77.

Table 1. Items extracted from the questionnaire.

Items	Means
1. How likely are you to travel outside of your city, town, or village, but within your state, within the next year?	3.25
2. How likely are you to travel out of state for domestic travel within the next year?	3.12
3. How likely are you to travel to another country outside of your country within the next year?	2.20
4. If you travel, how likely are you to travel on an organized group tour within the next year?	1.98
5. If you travel, how likely are you to travel with a small group of friends within the next year?	2.85
6. If you travel, how likely are you to travel only with family or by yourself within the next year?	3.17
7. If you travel, how likely are you to travel primarily by car within the next year?	2.54
8. If you travel, how likely are you to travel primarily by bus or train within the next year?	2.68
9. If you travel, how likely are you to travel primarily by plane within the next year?	2.84
10. If you travel, how likely are you to travel primarily on a cruise ship in the next year?	1.77

4.2. Multivariable Analysis/Hypotheses Testing

As shown in Figure 1, a 2×2 (Two-way) ANOVA was performed for the score of each item. The independent variable Gender contains two levels: male and female. Furthermore, within the variable of country, there was mainland China and other countries. In the ANOVA, main and interaction effects were obtained through the `aov_ez()` function in the `afex` package to obtain main effects and interaction effects and the `emmeans()` function in the `emmeans` package to obtain simple effects.

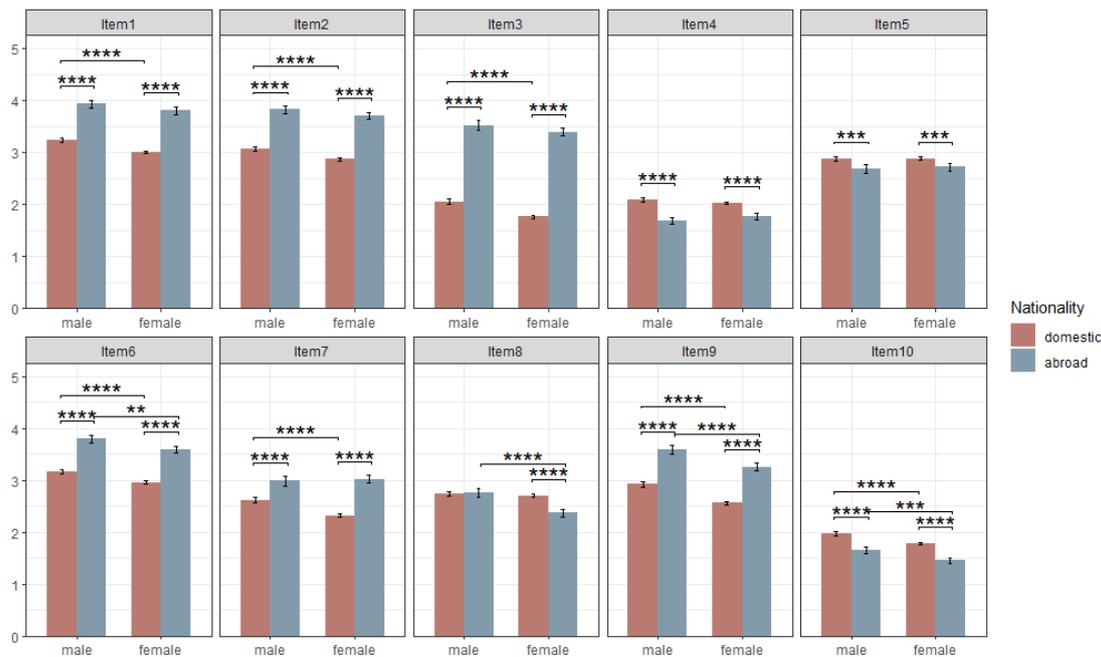


Figure 1. Total score for Chinese vs. respondents from other countries. In Figure 1, ** represents $p < 0.01$, *** represents $p < 0.001$, **** represents $p < 0.0001$.

The results show that the main effect of nationality is significant ($p < 0.05$) for each item except Item 8 ($p = 0.66$). The score was higher for mainland than for the foreign respondents for Item 4 (2.05 and 1.74 for mainland and foreign respondents, respectively), Item 5 (2.88 and 2.70 for mainland and foreign respondents, respectively), and Item 10 (1.84 and 1.54 for mainland and foreign respondents, respectively), whereas for the other four conditions, the score was lower for mainland than for foreign respondents ($p < 0.01$).

Additionally, the main effects of gender were significant for Item 1 [$F(1, 1191) = 4.543$, $p = 0.033$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.004$], item 3 [$F(1, 1191) = 5.805$, $p = 0.016$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.005$], Item 6 [$F(1, 1191) = 5.718$, $p = 0.017$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.005$], Item 8 [$F(1, 1191) = 6.225$, $p = 0.013$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.005$], Item 9 [$F(1, 1191) = 15.240$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.013$], and Item 10 [$F(1, 1191) = 6.966$, $p = 0.008$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.006$] but not for other four conditions ($p > 0.05$).

Interestingly, we only found significant two-way interaction [$p < 0.05$] for Item 8 [$F(1, 1191) = 6.225$, $p = 0.013$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.005$], but not for other items ($p > 0.05$). Further pairwise comparisons were made for this item. The score was higher for males (2.759) than for females (2.369) in the foreign group ($p = 0.009$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.006$), while there was no significant difference between genders in the domestic condition ($p = 0.681$). For the female group, the score was higher for the domestic (2.703) than for the foreign condition (2.369, $p = 0.002$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.008$), but such an effect was not found in the male group ($p = 0.867$).

5. Discussion

5.1. People in Other Countries Have a Greater Desire to Travel Than People in Mainland of China

In the context of the pandemic, people abroad have a greater desire to travel than people in mainland China, whether for urban, domestic, or foreign trips. Items 1, 2, and

3 of the questionnaire investigated the possibility of urban, domestic, and foreign travel in the second year, respectively. The results showed significant cultural effects for these three items, and the mean scores of the mainland Chinese subjects were lower than those of the foreign subjects. One reason for this result may be that, as pandemic disease and mortality rates and negative media coverage increase travel uncertainty [74], the Chinese, a group with a high-uncertainty-avoidance culture, have a reduced desire to travel due to fear of accidents.

These results are consistent with previous studies according to which prevalence can affect the image of the country, further decreasing the willingness of tourists to travel to certain destinations. Previous studies have shown that such a willingness is positively influenced by more positive attitudes toward trust, crisis management, and health care systems in countries with lower rates of illness and death, while travel intentions are negatively influenced when destination countries have higher disease and mortality rates [6]. As the first country to report being affected by it, in the early stages of the pandemic, China had relatively high infection and mortality rates. This situation could have decreased the willingness of tourists to travel.

This result also validates previous findings that people from high-uncertainty-avoidance countries are more sensitive to perceived risk and more risk-averse. Ghauri and Usunier [75] suggested that high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are risk-averse because people tend to feel anxious in risky situations, whereas, in low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures, uncertainty is relatively tolerated. Previous research has shown that people from high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures, such as the Chinese, Venezuelans, and Belgians, are more careful when they travel; for example, they gather more information [34], choose safer travel destinations [13,26], and are cautious when shopping [29]. China is also a high-uncertainty-avoidance country, and, therefore, in the context of the pandemic, the Chinese will be more conservative and cautious in travel activity.

5.2. People in Mainland China Prefer to Travel with Friends over People in Other Countries

The results show that Chinese people prefer to travel with a group of tourists and friends, while foreigners favor travelling with their families or on their own. For Question 4, "If you travel, how likely are you to travel on an organized group tour next year?", the mean score of mainland respondents was 2.05, while the mean score of foreign respondents was 1.74, which shows a difference between the two. For Question 5, "If you travel next year, how likely are you to travel with friends?", the mean score for mainland respondents was 2.88, while the mean score for foreign respondents was 2.70, indicating a non-significant difference. Although the difference between the two is not significant, in general, we can assume that Chinese tourists still prefer to travel with friends.

The reason why Chinese people prefer to travel with friends is most likely that China is a country with a collectivist culture. Firstly, it has been shown that China is a country where collectivism is more respected and valued because Chinese tourists have lower individualization scores [26]. Second, a collectivist culture focuses on strong relationships between groups, the dedication of the individual to the team [26,76], and the needs of the group [77,78]. Woodside et al. [79] also recognized that consumers from a collectivist culture preferred to travel in groups to satisfy their desire to interact with others from whom they could derive a sense of social identity and security. Thirdly, consumers from a collectivist culture are more receptive to touring with a group since they tend to submit to others [80] and therefore are more tolerant of poor service.

By comparison, people from individualist cultures place more emphasis on their own needs and the freedom to pursue self-development [26,76]. For example, most British participants admitted that they preferred to travel alone to have the freedom to do what they wanted, although they were not always able to travel alone due to family responsibilities [13]. Besides, British participants did not spend much time with their families on a regular basis, so they found it acceptable to travel with them. The Chinese, on the other hand, spent more time with their families in daily life and, as a consequence, did not have

a strong desire to travel with them. Additionally, the study suggests that choice of travel partners is not significantly influenced by the pandemic, but is more related to nationality and culture, suggesting that the pandemic was not an influential factor in the selection of a travel partner.

5.3. Both Foreigners and Nationals Tend to Travel by Train, but Foreigners Prefer to Travel by Plane and Car

In the mode-of-travel survey, foreign tourists scored higher than domestic ones on Questions 7 and 9; that is, foreign tourists are more likely to drive private cars and travel by plane than domestic tourists. This may be related to the culture of individualism or collectivism, but also to the culture of risk avoidance, on the one hand, and the influence of geographical culture on the other.

The characteristics of self-driving tours are more attractive to people from countries with individualistic cultures. Self-driving tours are those in which tourists drive their own personal cars or rent cars to complete their travel activities [81]. Unlike other types of tourism, self-driving tours have their own unique characteristics: for example, free choice of destination [82] and lack of time constraints. Furthermore, self-driving tourists can bring much of their own equipment and necessities, giving them the opportunity to fully enjoy camping, exploring, photography, and picnicking [82–84]. These unique attributes of self-driving tours are more attractive to tourists from countries with individualistic cultures that focus on personal experience [85]. In contrast, Chinese tourists, who are relatively conservative and more risk-averse, have a lower preference for self-driving tours.

The survey results also show that foreign tourists have a greater preference for air travel than mainland tourists, which is assumed to be due to geographical factors. In terms of geography, when foreign countries are vast and sparsely populated, people sometimes have no choice but to travel by airplane because of its efficiency. In comparison, although China is a large country, it has a relatively concentrated distribution of cities and population, and a more developed infrastructure of highways; as a result, in many cases, airplanes are not the only option.

5.4. Female Tourists Show Less Desire to Travel Regardless of Whether It Is Domestic or International Travel

The main effects of gender were significant for Items 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, and 10, indicating that gender, as a demographic variable, significantly moderates the travel behavior of female and male tourists in terms of destination, companions, and mode of transportation. To be more specific, the first three items reveal the main effect of gender on a traveler's choice of destination, with Item 1 and Item 3 reflecting the fact that female tourists have significantly lower scores than males concerning tourism destinations in terms of domestic or international travel. As for Items 8, 9, and 10, related to the mode of transportation, our research has also observed significant effects, which will be discussed in the next section.

Regarding tourist destinations, our present empirical research shows that female tourists have lower scores than males concerning tourist destinations in terms of domestic or international travel. This gender difference in the perception of risks could explain the lower desire to travel of female tourists. As evidenced in the literature [86], women seem to be more responsible and be more involved in the “ethics of care” than men [87] because, culturally, they take for granted the need to care for the elderly, their children, and even all family members. Therefore, women may be more reluctant to travel for fear of transmitting disease to their loved ones. Another possibility is that women tend to perceive a higher risk of infectious diseases [88,89], which may push them to avoid problematic destinations, thus adding to their feelings of self-efficacy [73,90]. In particular, travel plans to large, crowded cities can also be affected by the higher uneasiness that this type of travel creates.

As reflected in Items 1 to 3, we can also find that tourists show more interest in domestic and local travel than in foreign travel, regardless of gender. As illustrated in the figure, closer destinations may be considered less risky by many potential tourists in the face of the insecure and uncertain global environment, especially as their consumption

capacity may also be influenced by the economic risks arising from the pandemic [91]. As discussed above, the decision-making process for determining a travel destination varies among travelers with different income levels [92]. Furthermore, pandemic prevention and control restrictions may result in cancellation of long-distance international travel, creating more inconvenience for outbound travelers. Thus, the image of the tourist destination can be connected with tourists' perceptions, further adjusting their destination choices [25]. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, male and female tourists are more likely to visit destinations with good medical and health conditions. Therefore, if a destination enjoys a better reputation for pandemic control, it will be able to attract more visitors [93].

5.5. The Choice of Transportation for Travel Significantly Varies between Gender Groups

The choice of transportation mode varies significantly between gender groups, as revealed by male tourists' higher scores for all modes, including bus or train, plane, and cruise. This phenomenon can be attributed to greater perception of the risk and the frequent avoidance of trips by female tourists during menstruation. Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty [94] reported that natural or man-made crises allow travelers to be more sensitive about their safety by reinforcing perceived risk, which changes travel intention and behavior. Furthermore, as shown in previous research, tourists' risk perceptions of travel destinations vary greatly across gender groups [73]. Women are more likely to be concerned about safety and take steps to avoid being sick. In general, travelers with higher risk awareness may be willing to act in this way. As a consequence, female travelers will have a more cautious attitude regarding their choice of transport, which is closely associated with their own safety when travelling.

5.6. The Interactive Association of Nationality and Gender on Tourists' Behaviors

In the present study, the interaction of nationality and gender is reflected in Item 8. The findings indicated that, for the female group, the cohort from mainland China (2.703) was more likely to travel by bus and train during the pandemic (2.369, $p = 0.002$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.008$) than those from other countries (2.369, $p = 0.002$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.008$). There may be some possible reasons for the gender difference in the choice of public transportation [95–97]. An important one is that, psychologically, female tourists from mainland China have a lower perception of risk of infection due to the vigorous health procedures requested by their government. Chinese vaccination policies are stricter compared to other countries [98,99], leading Chinese tourists to rely on compliance with pandemic prevention regulations at destinations. However, travelers from other countries place more emphasis on their own safety, due to weaker intentions to vaccinate, and relatively lax prevention policy in the context of COVID-19. Therefore, we can speculate that tourists from other countries do not choose less private and flexible public transport over private transport [100].

Another possible explanation for the greater tendency of women than men to choose public transport in domestic travel can be attributed to income. As a determinant of socioeconomic status, income is paramount [101,102]. People with higher incomes tend to choose to use motorized vehicles, while people with lower incomes are more likely to use public transport [103]. In relative terms, women generally earn less money than men, and even for exactly the same job, a woman's salary is usually lower than a man's salary. This unequal economic status has also been evidenced by a report conducted by the European Commission, which claimed that men earn on average 17.5 more than women. These findings may shed light on the gender differences in travel in tourism, with women preferring public transportation such as train and bus.

It is believed that the lower income of women compared to men can be attributed to women's disproportionate commitment to family and household responsibilities. It is often argued that the reduced career advancement of women is related to different male and female priorities. Schulze and Gergoric [104] reported that many women choose unpaid housework or, when paid, only part-time work to reconcile caregiving and professional duties. Furthermore, although the employment rate of women has increased significantly,

they continue to be more likely to be in charge of domestic activities, and a vulnerable group in occupational segregation [105,106]. Some women tend to find work close to their homes to facilitate their participation in household responsibilities [107]. People employed in wealthy companies are more likely to use a car for transportation than other people with worse jobs and than the unemployed [108]. Therefore, weaker economic power and greater attention to family are two other reasons why female travelers prefer public transportation and use cars less as a means of transportation.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Major Findings

This empirical research committed to comparing behavioral differences by integrating tourist demographic variables, including culture and gender, with regard to the choice of travel partners, destinations, and mode of transportation. We found that, in the context of the pandemic, foreigners have a greater desire to travel than mainland Chinese people, whether for city, national or foreign travel. Additionally, Chinese people prefer to travel with a tour group and friends, while foreigners favor traveling with their families or alone. Moreover, both foreigners and nationals tend to travel by train, but foreign tourists have a higher preference for air travel than mainland tourists, which is assumed to be due to several factors. Tourists also show more interest in domestic and local travel than foreign travel, regardless of gender. From a gender perspective, the choice of transport varies significantly between gender groups. The interactive association of nationality and gender in tourist behavior is also significant. Specifically, for the female group, tourists from mainland China were more likely to travel by bus and train during the pandemic than those from other countries.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

Tourism, as the main engine of economic development, has been notably stifled by the rampant pandemic, which has affected various social and economic fields [3]. Such a widespread social crisis must be related to fluctuations of perceptions and decreased demand among travelers, thus moderating their travel behavior. In recent years, several studies have appeared that show a growth of interest in the interactions between various aspects of tourist behavior and other factors that have the potential to moderate such behavior during trips. Specifically, studies have found that culture influences not only the choice of destination choice before travel, but also consumption behavior during and after travel [13], while ignoring the gender perspective, which results in an incomplete investigation of tourist behavior. It remains to be discussed whether the influence of cultural and gender differences on tourist behavior will be more prominent in the context of a widespread pandemic. Our research has extended existing findings by quantitatively examining their effect rather than only providing a possible theoretical explanation. In addition, extensive research on the effect of gender on the perceptions and performance of tourists has been conducted in a limited area. Our empirical research on gender differences has cast further light on the effect of gender on tourist behavior among travelers from different countries and cultural backgrounds in the context of COVID-19. In conclusion, there is not enough work on the effect of gender and culture on travel behavior among tourists, let alone in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the present paper adequately responds to the invitation to carry out comprehensive research on tourist behavior by integrating cultural and gender variables. The resulting analysis is useful to help tourism service providers and policy makers to revive tourism by addressing the real demands of travelers.

6.3. Practical Implications

Understanding the behavioral differences of tourists from various countries has several managerial implications. First, our findings reveal the most significant concerns of global tourists regarding the risks of COVID-19, further compelling tourism managers to promote

safety practices that improve tourists' perceptions of their chosen destinations. In addition, female tourists appear to feel more responsible for their families, which is why they show higher risk perceptions toward destinations. Therefore, tourism service providers should try to adopt creative initiatives by developing products suitable for the needs of all family members, especially when families have children. Furthermore, the pandemic has resulted in lower incomes for people, which has boosted the popularity of domestic tourism. We recommend that managers investigate whether the quality of a tourist service is compatible with its price and with the expectations of travelers and whether more aggressive price discount policies would help to activate the price-sensitive tourist segment.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study has examined the impact of nationality, culture, and gender on tourist behavior in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it has made up for the shortcomings of previous studies, it still has some limitations. First, this study has only divided the research object into two categories, people from mainland China and other countries, without considering individual countries. In this regard, the research results only address general possibilities and not specific targets. Second, in the survey of the gender variable, occupation, age, and other demographic factors were not taken into account. Future research could interactively study multiple factors that influence tourism consumption behavior to uncover interactive effects between the factors. In addition, the research topics can be made more specific to obtain more precise and specific results, which can be used to provide likewise precise and specific recommendations and initiatives for the recovery and development of tourism.

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