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Senior Tourism in Global Perspective: A Systematic Review of Motivations, Preferences, and Constraints

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Abstract

The global demographic shift toward an aging population has driven the growth of senior tourism as a vital and expanding part of the tourism industry. This systematic review synthesizes empirical and theoretical studies published from 1980 to 2025, examining the main motivations, travel preferences, and challenges faced by senior tourists. Using the PRISMA protocol, 31 peer-reviewed studies were systematically identified and analyzed through thematic content analysis in NVivo software. The findings show that senior tourists are mainly motivated by intrinsic factors, such as relaxation, nostalgia, social engagement, and personal growth. At the same time, extrinsic motivators—like destination features and leisure activities—also play a role but are less explored. Preferences among senior travelers are quite diverse, influenced by age, health, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, and reflected in different choices regarding accommodation, travel timing, activities, and services needed. Key barriers to senior travel include physical and health limitations, financial constraints, psychological fears, and infrastructural issues, all of which affect participation and satisfaction. The literature indicates a regional focus on studies from Asia and Europe, with notable gaps in the Middle East and other underrepresented areas. Quantitative methods dominate, highlighting the need for more qualitative and mixed-method research to better understand the lived experiences and changing needs of senior tourists. This review provides an integrated thematic perspective that enhances understanding of senior tourism behavior and lays a foundation for creating more accessible and inclusive travel options that address the complex needs of aging populations.**

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Introduction

Animal tourism is a major engine of the visitor economy, drawing large audiences, shaping destination images, and generating substantial employment and income. It accounts for an estimated 20–40% of all tourism activity worldwide (Winter, 2020) and, through wildlife tourism alone, supports about 22 million jobs and contributes more than US\$120 billion to global GDP (Sustainable Travel, 2021). Against this scale and influence, concerns about animal welfare and responsible visitor conduct have intensified. In settings such as Iran—where Islamic teachings inform everyday ethics—religious values may play a pivotal role in shaping tourists’ awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward ethical animal tourism. To situate this inquiry within broader sectoral dynamics, it is worth noting that international tourist arrivals have expanded from 25 million in 1950 to 800 million by 2016 (Pei, 2020, p. 169), reaching 1.4 billion by 2024 (UNWTO, 2024).

In recent decades, global demographic trends have shown a significant rise in the aging population, typically defined as individuals aged 55 and older. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019), the worldwide population aged 60 and above is expected to surpass 2 billion by 2050, more than doubling the approximately 1 billion in 2020. This demographic shift mainly results from increased life expectancy, healthcare advances, and socioeconomic progress (WHO, 2021). Such changes have major implications across many sectors, especially in the tourism industry, which is increasingly affected by the growth of senior or “silver” tourism as a fast-expanding segment globally (Hsu et al., 2007; UNWTO, 2020).

Senior tourism generally refers to recreational travel activities undertaken by older adults aimed at improving quality of life, enhancing physical and mental health, and fostering social interaction and well-being (Otoo & Kim, 2020; Huang, 2022). This market segment contributes considerably to tourist arrivals and expenditure globally, underlining its economic importance and potential for sustainable tourism development (Carneiro et al., 2013; Patuelli & Nijkamp, 2016).

The travel behaviors and preferences of senior tourists differ significantly from those of younger groups due to physiological changes, varied socio-economic conditions, cultural backgrounds, and personal values (Kim, 2015; Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2021). Seniors usually pursue multiple motivations such as maintaining social bonds, participating in cultural activities, escaping daily routines, rekindling nostalgia, and enhancing health outcomes (Jang & Wu, 2006; Ward, 2014). These motivations shape tourists’ destination choices, activities, lodging options, and specialized services (Pomfret et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, seniors often face various travel obstacles, including but not limited to physical health issues, financial limitations, psychological barriers, and insufficient infrastructure and service

accessibility (Nielsen, 2014; Hung et al., 2016). The diversity within this group—covering differences in health, income, lifestyle, and culture—demands a nuanced understanding and customized service design (Otoo et al., 2020a; Kim & Kim, 2020).

Despite increasing research interest, extant studies frequently focus on isolated aspects of senior tourism, such as only motivations or preferences, with fewer adopting a holistic approach encompassing motivations, preferences, and constraints simultaneously (Hsu et al., 2007; Otoo & Kim, 2020). Moreover, geographic concentration of research remains limited, predominantly occurring in Europe, East Asia, and North America, while regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America are underrepresented (Kord et al., 2024). This spatial gap restricts a comprehensive, global understanding of senior tourism patterns and needs.

Methodologically, much of the literature depends on quantitative surveys with structured instruments, while there is a shortage of qualitative and mixed-methods studies that could explore the deeper psychosocial and experiential nuances of senior travel (Ward, 2014; Pomfret et al., 2023). Additionally, there is a conceptual gap in integrating these dimensions within a comprehensive theoretical framework to better inform practice and policy.

In response, this study conducts a systematic and comprehensive review of literature published between 1980 and 2025, synthesizing knowledge related to senior tourism motivations, travel preferences, and constraints. The goals include clarifying the current evidence base, identifying research gaps, and providing a foundation for future academic research.

This review explores the following key research questions:

1. What are the main motivations for travel among senior tourists worldwide?
2. How do travel preferences—such as destination choices, activities, accommodations, and services—differ within the senior population?
3. What are the main constraints faced by senior tourists, and how do these influence their travel behavior?
4. What conceptual and methodological trends in existing research need further exploration?

By systematically addressing these questions, the review advances scientific understanding and supports the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at improving tourism experiences for older adults. The findings are designed to inform scholars, practitioners, and policymakers in creating responsive, accessible, and sustainable tourism products and services that meet the diverse needs of senior travelers.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Senior Tourism and Understanding Motivations and Preferences

1. The Concept of Senior Tourism

Conceptually, the development of senior tourism is closely tied to global demographic trends and the notion of active aging. The World Health Organization (2021) emphasizes active aging as maintaining health, participation, and security to enhance quality of life as people age. Travel, in this context, is not only an economic activity but also a component of psychological well-being and social inclusion (Huang, 2022). Senior tourism thus represents both a social phenomenon—linked to older adults' pursuit of meaning, connection, and vitality—and a significant economic sector contributing to sustainable tourism growth (Carneiro et al., 2013).

The literature further situates senior tourism within broader theoretical frameworks of consumer behavior and gerontology. Jang and Wu (2006) noted that senior tourism intersects with life-course and role transition theories, which explain how retirement or empty-nest stages create opportunities for new leisure identities. Otoo and Kim (2020) later integrated this perspective with behavioral segmentation theory, highlighting that seniors' travel decisions are shaped by personal, cultural, and situational factors rather than chronological age alone. Recent works increasingly frame senior tourism as part of an inclusive and age-friendly tourism paradigm that values accessibility, universal design, and intergenerational participation (Pomfret et al., 2023; Abdelrazik et al., 2024).

Across this evolving literature (1980–2025), senior tourism has transformed from a narrowly defined market segment to a multidimensional social and cultural phenomenon emphasizing empowerment, autonomy, and lifelong learning. Scholars now recognize seniors as diverse travelers who contribute meaningfully to community development, cultural exchange, and social sustainability (Nielsen, 2014; Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2021).

2. Motivations for Senior Tourism

Motivation has been a central theme in tourism research since the introduction of the push–pull framework, where push factors refer to internal desires (e.g., relaxation, escape, or self-fulfillment) and pull factors denote external destination attributes (e.g., natural beauty, safety, or culture) (Cha et al., 1995). Applied to senior tourism, these dimensions have been interpreted through psychological, sociological, and developmental lenses.

In early studies, Cleaver et al. (1999) identified key psychological motivations among older travelers, including rest, nostalgia, and self-reward. Jang and Wu (2006) expanded these ideas by linking motivation to quality of life, showing that travel provides seniors with mental stimulation, social contact, and health benefits. Subsequent works (Nielsen, 2014; Carneiro et al., 2013) emphasized social

motivations such as meeting new people, maintaining family bonds, and participating in community-oriented activities.

From a theoretical standpoint, senior tourism motivations are frequently connected to self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are universal psychological needs (Hsu et al., 2007). Travel allows older adults to exercise autonomy and competence by exploring new environments and maintaining control over their time. Similarly, socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006, as cited in Ward, 2014) helps explain seniors' preference for emotionally meaningful activities and close relationships, making travel an avenue for enhancing emotional well-being and social connectedness.

Later meta-analyses, such as Patuelli and Nijkamp (2016) and Otoo and Kim (2020), reinforced that intrinsic motivations—relaxation, nostalgia, health, and self-enrichment—dominate across regions, while extrinsic pull factors (cultural attractions, natural beauty, and hospitality quality) determine destination choice. (Otoo et al., 2020b).

Recent studies (Huang, 2022; Pomfret et al., 2023) have reframed senior travel motivation within the broader discourse of well-being and positive aging. Here, travel is conceptualized as a restorative and identity-affirming experience, helping older adults sustain vitality, purpose, and social inclusion. Thus, motivation in senior tourism literature has evolved from describing economic consumption to articulating psychological growth, cultural belonging, and holistic health.

3. Preferences in Senior Tourism

Parallel to motivation, preference refers to the behavioral and situational expressions of seniors' choices—how, when, and with whom they travel, and which services they value. The literature conceptualizes preferences as dynamic constructs influenced by health status, mobility, financial capacity, and lifestyle orientation (Kim & Kim, 2020).

Seminal works (Alén et al., 2017) identified that seniors prioritize comfort, safety, and convenience, preferring barrier-free accommodations, direct transportation, and accessible environments. Building on this, Nielsen (2014) and Carneiro et al. (2013) introduced the idea of “social tourism,” in which governments or organizations facilitate travel for older adults to promote social inclusion. This stream of research framed preferences not merely as consumer choices but as reflections of social policy and equity.

Other studies emphasize the diversity of preferences among different senior subgroups. Otoo and Kim (2020) noted that younger, more active retirees often prefer independent or adventure travel, while older cohorts choose organized tours offering medical support and social companionship. Cultural background also shapes preferences: Asian seniors show a higher tendency toward collective travel and

group learning experiences, whereas Western seniors display stronger preferences for individualized or experiential tourism (Ryu et al., 2015; Wijaya et al., 2018).

From a conceptual standpoint, preferences in senior tourism intersect with service quality and accessibility theory. Abdelrazik et al. (2024) highlight that seniors evaluate tourism services through emotional comfort, familiarity, and trust rather than novelty or speed. Hence, affective satisfaction becomes a central dimension in understanding seniors' preferences.

Recent literature integrates these ideas into the broader framework of inclusive and sustainable tourism. Pomfret et al. (2023) and Zielińska-Szczepkowska (2021) argue that senior preferences increasingly align with ethical consumption and environmental consciousness. Seniors are more likely to choose destinations that are environmentally responsible, culturally authentic, and supportive of local communities.

Overall, scholarly discourse portrays senior tourism preferences as multifaceted and context-dependent, shaped by age, health, and social identity. They reflect not only functional requirements (accessibility and safety) but also symbolic values—belonging, learning, and contribution.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to comprehensively synthesize research on senior tourism, focusing specifically on motivations, preferences, and constraints as reported in empirical and review studies published over the period 1980–2025. The SLR approach was chosen to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility, complying with international standards such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009).

Review Design

The systematic review was created to minimize selection bias and ensure thorough coverage of relevant literature by following a predefined protocol. This included clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, multiple screening steps, and transparent documentation of the research process. Unlike narrative reviews, the SLR enables critical appraisal and thematic analysis, providing a strong basis for guiding future research and practice.

Literature Search Strategy

A thorough search was carried out across multiple bibliographic databases to ensure a comprehensive retrieval of relevant studies. The main search engine was Google Scholar, chosen for its multidisciplinary coverage and strong indexing of tourism research. To broaden the scope and cross-check results, additional searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect.

The search period spanned from January 1980 to March 2025, encompassing over four decades of published research that aligns with demographic and socio-economic changes affecting senior tourism worldwide.

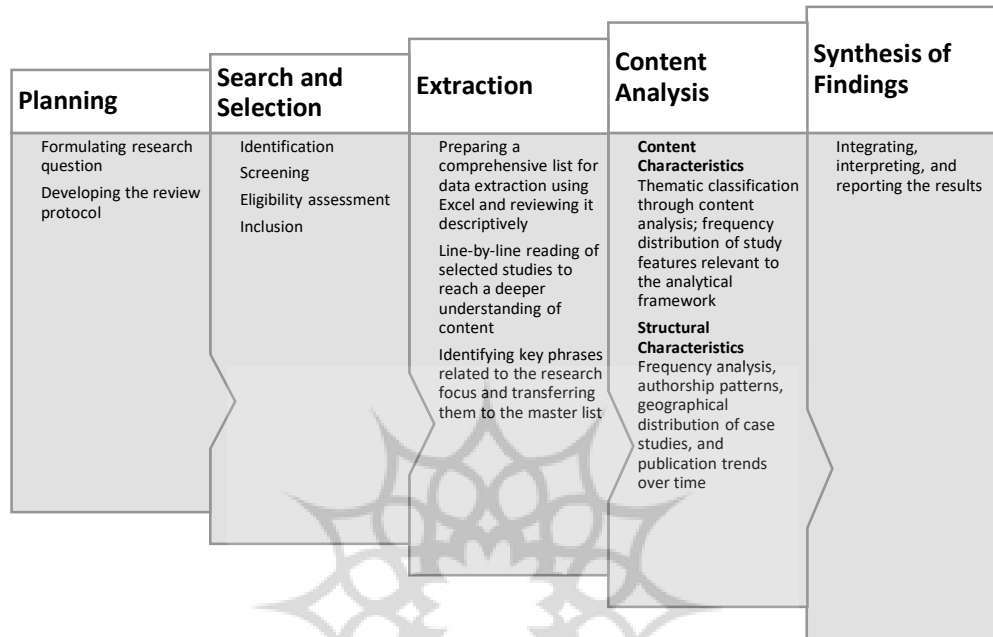


Figure 1. PRISMA-based systematic review process for the analysis of selected articles

Search Terms and Keywords

The search terms were developed iteratively in collaboration with domain experts and literature review specialists to balance sensitivity and specificity. Boolean operators were used to construct search strings that combine core concepts related to senior tourism.

The main search query was:

- (“senior tourism” OR “elderly tourism” OR “silver tourism” OR “aging tourism”) AND
- (“motivation*” OR “travel motivation*” OR “preference*” OR “travel preference*” OR “constraint*” OR “travel constraint*”)

Searches were limited to English-language publications to ensure quality and accessibility of full texts. No restrictions were imposed on geographic origin to capture the global range of studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and methodological quality, studies were evaluated using the following predetermined criteria:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles published from 1980 to 2025.
- Empirical studies or systematic reviews specifically focusing on senior tourists, typically defined as individuals aged 55 years or older.
- Investigations focusing on one or more core constructs: motivations, preferences, or constraints related to senior tourism behavior.
- Studies offering transparent methods and accessible full texts.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-peer-reviewed works, such as dissertations, book chapters, conference proceedings, gray literature, or unpublished manuscripts.
- Studies focusing on general populations without specific analysis of senior groups.
- Research unrelated to leisure or tourism travel, such as medical tourism not connected with leisure or migration studies.
- Articles that do not provide enough data or methodological detail for inclusion in the thematic synthesis.

Study Selection Procedure

The search initially found more than 200 records, which went through a multi-stage screening process:

- 1. Deduplication:** Identical records across databases were removed both automatically and manually.
- 2. Title and Abstract Screening:** Two independent reviewers assessed titles and abstracts based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Disagreements were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer to ensure consistency.
- 3. Full-text review:** Articles that passed the initial screening underwent a detailed full-text assessment to verify eligibility and extract relevant data.

Documentation: Screening decisions and reasons for exclusion were consistently recorded at each stage, ensuring a transparent audit trail following PRISMA guidelines.

This thorough process led to the final selection of 31 articles for in-depth content analysis.

Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction template was created and tested to gather all pertinent study characteristics and findings. The data collected included:

- Bibliographic details, including authors, publication year, and journal.
- Geographic focus, participant demographics, and sample characteristics.
- Research design and methodological approach (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods).

- Studied constructs include motivation, preference, and constraint.
- Key findings, limitations, and applied theoretical frameworks.

Two researchers meticulously examined all the studies individually, and in cases of disagreement, they engaged in discussions to reach an amicable resolution, ensuring that the information is as accurate and trustworthy as possible.

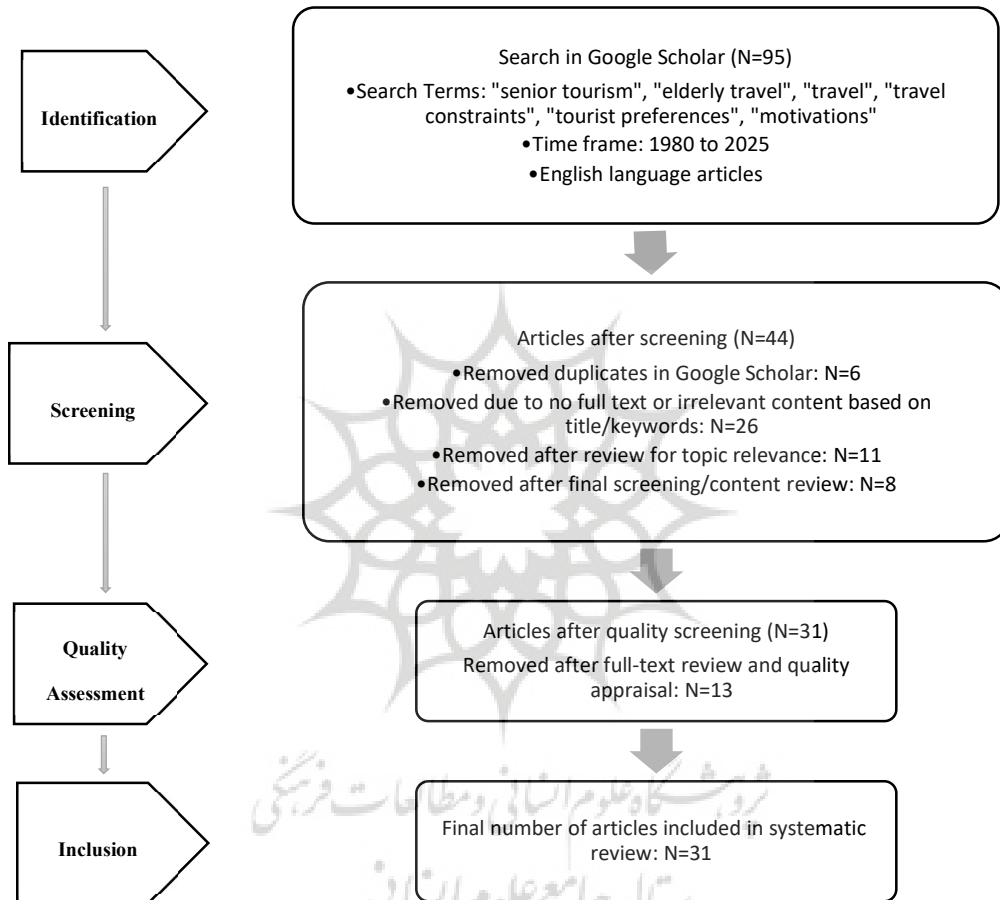


Figure 2. Systematic literature search and refinement process for international studies. Source: Research findings (2025)

Analytical Approach and Thematic Coding

Thematic content analysis was used as the main method for synthesizing study findings. The process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, carried out with NVivo 12 software for thorough qualitative coding.

Analysis steps included:

- Getting familiar with full texts through repeated readings and note-taking.
- Line-by-line coding of text segments directly related to motivations, preferences, or constraints.
- Development of initial codes and clusters that form sub-themes, with iterative refinement through cross-comparison and discussion.
- Developing a comprehensive codebook that outlines theme definitions and examples to ensure consistent coding.
- Reliability checks involved double-coding about 30% of data, with disagreements settled collaboratively.
- Grouping themes into broader categories that reflect the complex nature of senior tourism behavior.

Meanwhile, quantitative data (such as publication year distributions, methodological frequencies, and geographic coverage) were tabulated and visualized using Microsoft Excel.

Quality Assessment

To evaluate the methodological quality and relevance, included studies were assessed using a modified CASP checklist that concentrated on: clarity of objectives, suitability of methodology, transparency in analysis, and how well findings aligned with the goals. Studies with significant methodological flaws were identified for sensitivity analysis, but were not removed to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Because it relies solely on published secondary data, this research did not need formal ethical approval. However, strict adherence to academic integrity and citation standards was maintained.

Notable limitations of this review include its restriction to English-language peer-reviewed publications, which may exclude region-specific or emerging research in other languages or formats. Additionally, limited access to databases could have restricted the inclusion of certain studies. However, using multiple databases and rigorous screening protocols helps mitigate these limitations.

Findings

This section provides a comprehensive synthesis of findings from the thematic analysis of 31 peer-reviewed articles published between 1980 and 2025, focusing on the motivations, preferences, and constraints that influence senior tourism. The studies included in this systematic review cover various geographic regions, research designs, and senior population groups, collectively offering a broad understanding of the complex nature of senior tourism behavior. The findings are organized into contextual structural characteristics and detailed thematic analyses that align with the scope and rigor expected by Tourism Review.

1. Structural Features of the Reviewed Literature

• *Publication Trends*

An analysis of publication years reveals a growing academic interest in senior tourism over the past forty years, with a notable surge starting in 2014. Figure 1 displays a generally rising trend line despite some variability. The peak occurred in 2020, when six articles specifically examined senior tourist motivations, preferences, and constraints. This increase aligns with a heightened awareness of the senior population's importance in the tourism industry and a boost in scholarly research (Figure 3).

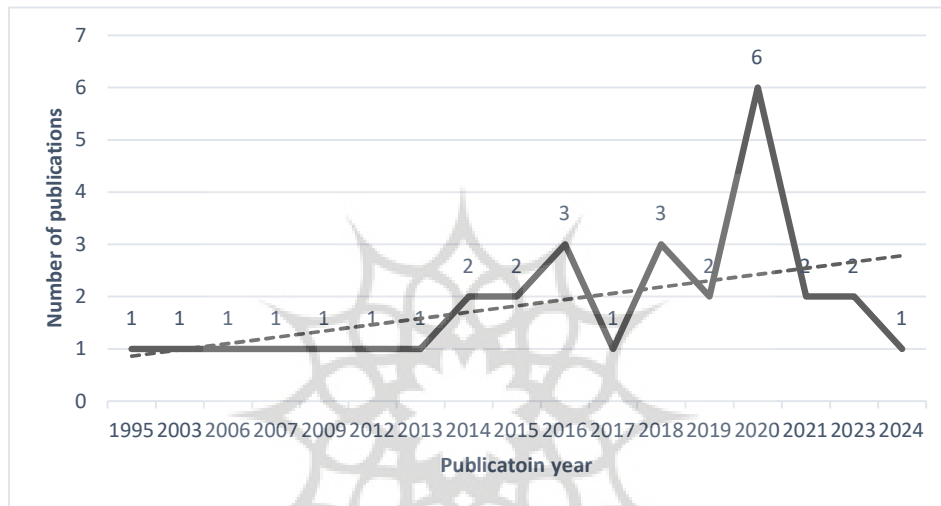


Figure 3. Temporal trend of published research on senior tourists' motivations and preferences

• *Geographic Distribution*

Geospatial analysis shows that most research outputs are concentrated in Asia and Europe (Figure 4). Asia leads with 19 studies, mostly from China, followed by Europe with 16, mainly from Portugal, Spain, and Poland. North America, Africa, and Oceania contribute fewer studies, while the Middle East, despite rapid demographic aging (e.g., Iran), remains significantly underrepresented. This imbalance highlights potential research priorities linked to population size and established senior market structures and indicates important knowledge gaps in culturally diverse and developing regions.

• *Leading Contributors*

Among prolific authors, Kim and Otoo from the University of Hong Kong stood out as key contributors, with 5 and 4 articles respectively in the review collection, especially focusing on hotel management, senior travel motivations, and behavioral typologies. Their combined work significantly influences the discussion on senior tourism and summarizes many of the findings here.

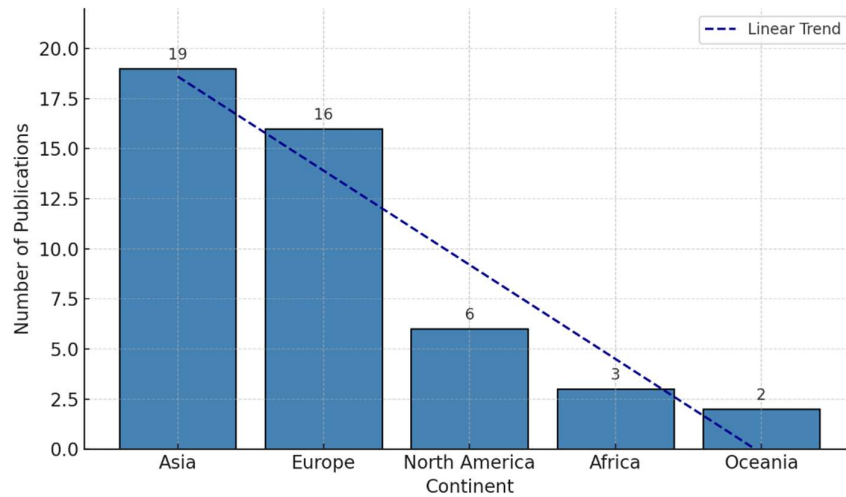


Figure 4. Distribution of Research Publications by Continent

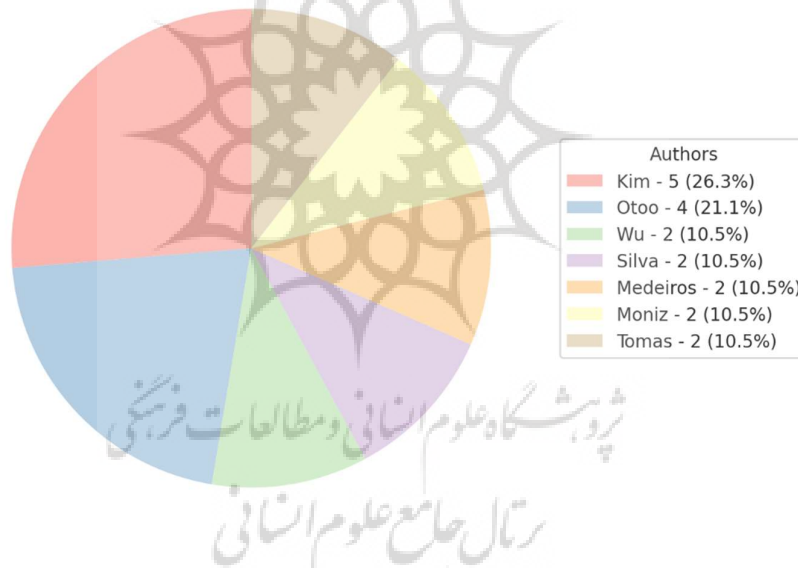


Figure 5. Leading Authors in Senior Tourism Research

2. Thematic Findings: Motivations, Preferences, and Constraints

In this study, the three overarching themes—motivation, preference, and constraint—were predetermined and formed the core framework guiding the selection and screening of relevant articles. Accordingly, included studies specifically addressed at least one of these main aspects of senior tourism behavior. Within these broad themes, we used thematic content analysis to inductively identify and develop more detailed subthemes and codes. This process allowed us to systematically synthesize subtle

patterns and variations across the literature, resulting in a hierarchical organization of 22 specific codes beneath the three main themes (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). The frequency and relationships of these subthemes and codes, along with their distribution across the reviewed studies, are further examined in section 4.2.4, offering a comprehensive view of the literature landscape.

▪ *Motivations*

Motivations for senior tourism were broadly divided into push (intrinsic) and pull (extrinsic) motivations, further categorized into psychological and social aspects (push) and attractions and activities (pull).

Push motivations include:

- Psychological: Driven by a desire for relaxation, stress relief, and escaping daily monotony. Seniors pursue travel for mental and physical renewal, nostalgia by visiting childhood or meaningful places, and personal growth as a way to reward themselves.
- Social: such as motivations for connecting with others through meeting friends, bonding with family, developing new relationships, and lifelong learning through cultural exposure.

Pull motivations are categorized into:

- Attractions: encompass historical, cultural, spiritual, adventurous, and natural sites that attract visitors; and
- Activities: Include using health and wellness services, taking part in recreational events like festivals, and engaging in specialized professional or leisure travel activities.

Findings show a research focus tilted towards push factors, with less but growing attention on destination pull qualities. This matches previous meta-analyses but highlights a need for more research to better link destination marketing with deep-seated senior needs.

▪ *Preferences*

Senior tourists' preferences include spatial-temporal choices, preferred activities, and service demands.

They fall into three main categories:

1. Place and Time Preferences:

Accommodation preferences vary widely, including luxury hotels, budget options, suites, homestays with relatives, and accessible resorts. Seasonal preferences tend toward spring and summer, and trip durations range from short (a few days) to longer stays (up to two weeks).

2. Activity Preferences:

Seniors show varied preferences for group versus solo travel. Activity options include historical tours, cultural activities, nostalgic visits, adventurous outings, and relaxing or nature-based trips. Health and age often influence the intensity and novelty of preferred activities.

Table 1. Categorization of Senior Tourism Travel Motivations

Main Category	Sub category	Motivational Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Publication IDs
Push Motivation	Psychological	Relaxation and Rest	20	64.5	2,3,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,14,16,18,20,21,22,24,26,27,28,31
		Personal Enrichment	10	32.2	2,6,8,9,12,13,20,25,28,30
		Nostalgia	8	25.8	2,3,8,9,13,19,20,28
	Social	Meeting Others	22	70.9	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,13,14,16,18,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,28,30
		Spending Time with Family	23	74.1	1,2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10,13,14,16,18,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,30
		Learning Motivation	17	54.8	1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10,16,18,20,21,22,23,27,28,30
Pull Motivation	Attractions	Historical, Cultural & Spiritual	17	54.8	2,3,5,8,9,10,11,12,14,16,19,20,21,22,26,27,31
		Adventure	9	29.0	1,5,6,7,13,14,18,21,22
		Peaceful Natural Environment	8	25.8	8,9,14,19,21,27,29,31
	Activities	Health & Wellness	9	29.0	3,4,11,12,13,20,23,24,25
		Entertainment & Enjoyment	14	45.1	3,4,8,10,11,13,14,19,20,22,25,28,29,30
		Professional/ Specialized	4	12.9	3,9,11,30

Table 2. Table X. Categorization of Senior Tourism Preferences

Main Category	Preference Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Publication IDs
Time & Place	Type of Accommodation	6	19.3	8,9,10,13,17,18
	Season	2	6.4	15,31
	Length of Stay	5	16.1	9,11,13,15,18
Activities	Group vs. Individual	3	9.6	12,13,18
	Nature of Travel	3	9.6	10,12,17
Received Services	Consumption Pattern	7	22.5	7,8,11,13,15,17,31
	Medical	2	6.4	11,17

3. *Service Preferences:*

Patterns develop in diet, shopping habits, transportation choices, and use of medical services. Safety, accessibility, and medical support significantly influence senior travelers' service expectations. Active younger seniors tend to favor new, independent travel experiences, while older or more physically limited seniors choose group travel that emphasizes comfort and safety.

▪ *Constraints*

Constraints were thematically grouped into three pillars:

1. *Physical and health-related constraints:*

Chronic illnesses, mobility issues, sensory impairments, and age-related health declines significantly limit travel options and destinations.

2. *Resource Scarcity Constraints:*

Financial limitations, lack of travel companions, digital illiteracy hindering online planning and booking, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with cultural environments emerged as significant obstacles.

3. *Psychological and Security Constraints:*

Fear of unfamiliar destinations, anxiety about health emergencies, stress related to travel arrangements, and lack of accessible infrastructure (e.g., unavailable ramps or elevators) discourage travel participation. The complex interaction of these constraints explains the multifaceted barriers senior tourists face and highlights the need for comprehensive support measures.

Table 3. Categorization of Senior Tourism Constraints

Constraint Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Study IDs
Physical Limitations	17	54.8	1,3,7,9,11,12,13,14,15,18,19,20,23,26,28,30,31
Resource Constraints	12	38.7	3,7,9,11,13,15,18,20,23,28,30,31
Physical & Psychological Insecurity	5	16.1	7,18,19,20,31

▪ *Integration and Thematic Coverage*

About 58% of studies combine multiple themes at once, often examining motivations alongside preferences and constraints (e.g., Otoo et al., 2020a). This combined method supports a comprehensive understanding of the changing interactions that influence senior tourism behavior.

Overall, the thematic framework combines 8 major categories and 22 detailed codes, providing a complete guide to the key factors influencing senior tourists' motivations, preferences, and limitations. This framework can inform future research and practical applications.

Table 4. Two-Dimensional Matrix of Thematic Dimensions in Senior Tourism Studies

Thematic Dimension	Motivations	Preferences	Constraints	Number of Articles	Percentage (%)	Study IDs
Motivations	✓	-	-	11	35.4	2,4,5,6,24,25,29,27,16,21,22
Preferences	-	✓	-	1	3.2	17
Constraints	-	-	✓	0	0.0	-
Motivations & Preferences	✓	✓	-	2	6.4	8,10
Motivations & Constraints	✓	-	✓	8	25.8	1,3,30,28,14,19,20,26
Preferences & Constraints	-	✓	✓	2	6.4	15
All Three Dimensions	✓	✓	✓	7	22.5	31,9,7,11,12,13,18
Total	-	-	-	31	100.0	-

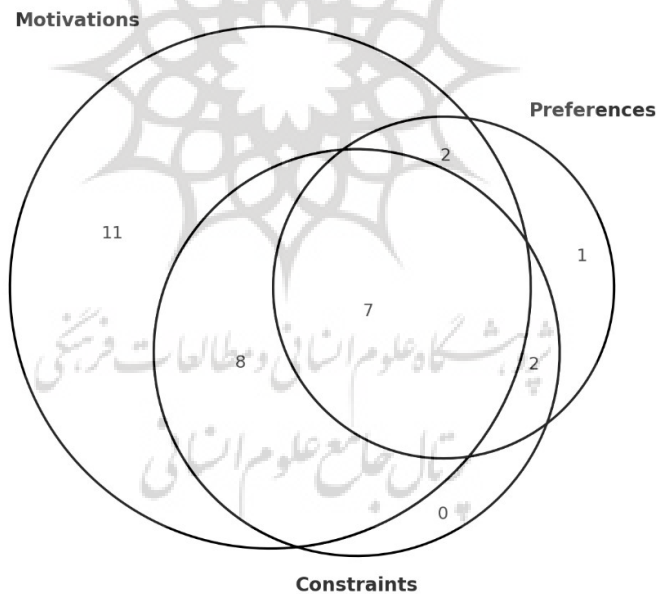


Figure 6. Venn Diagram of Senior Tourism Study Themes

3. Sociodemographic and Cultural Influences

Analyses reveal significant moderation effects of age, gender, marital status, education, health, income, and cultural background on senior tourist behaviors. Younger seniors (55–65 years) prefer active,

adventurous travel and use digital planning tools more, while older seniors focus on comfort, safety, family-oriented travel, and cultural experiences. Gender differences show women favor social travel more, while men prefer adventure. Cultural differences are seen in destination choices and motivation, with Western seniors emphasizing exploration and adventure more than Asian seniors, who prioritize family and tranquility. These demographic and cultural nuances highlight the need for customized and context-aware product development.

4. Methodological Patterns

Methodology analysis shows that most research is quantitative (over 60%), mainly surveys using standardized tools. Qualitative and mixed methods are rarely used, despite their usefulness in uncovering subjective experiences and deep motivations. Also, very few studies use comprehensive statistical models that combine all three thematic areas, highlighting an opportunity for future research.

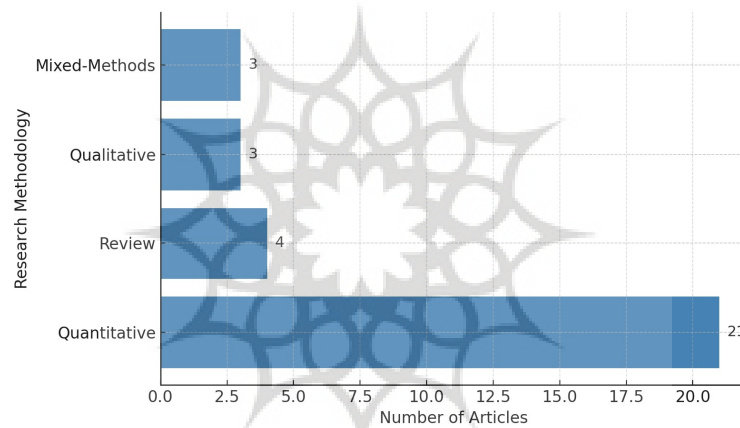


Figure 7. Distribution of Research Methodologies in Senior Tourism Studies

5. Summary

The thematic synthesis confirms the diverse and complex nature of senior tourism, influenced by intrinsic motivations, varied preferences, and intricate constraints. The imbalance in geographic research and the uniformity in methodologies highlight the need for more varied empirical studies and culturally specific research. Future studies should focus on multi-method approaches and integrated analyses to better support this expanding tourism market.

Discussion

This systematic review explored the main drivers, preferences, and constraints shaping senior tourism based on 31 peer-reviewed articles published between 1980 and 2025. The findings offer a detailed view of senior tourists as a diverse and constantly evolving group whose travel motivations, preferences, and

barriers are connected to age, health status, socio-cultural context, and structural factors. We critically examine these findings in relation to earlier research and discuss their broader theoretical and practical implications.

Motivations: The Prominence of Intrinsic Factors

Across the reviewed literature, intrinsic motivations—such as relaxation, nostalgia, social interaction, and personal growth—stand out as the main reasons seniors choose to travel. These findings support psychological theories of aging that highlight the need for self-fulfillment, well-being, and social connection in later life (Nielsen, 2014; Hsu, Cai et al., 2007). Many seniors travel to break the monotony of daily routines, reduce stress, boost their health, and restore or strengthen social bonds (Ward, 2014; Kim, 2015). Nostalgic motivations, such as revisiting childhood places or culturally meaningful destinations, also serve as a strong driver, highlighting the importance of memory and identity in seniors' tourism experiences (Pomfret et al., 2023). Social aspects, like family reunions and opportunities to form new friendships, further emphasize the multifaceted roles of social connections in improving quality of life during travel (Shavanddasht, 2018). While pull motivations—such as the appeal of specific attractions, cultural and natural heritage, and unique destination experiences—are acknowledged, they seem less emphasized in studied articles. This suggests a need for future research to better explore how destination features and services align with seniors' intrinsic needs.

Preferences: Diversity Shaped by Age, Health, and Lifestyle

Findings reveal that senior tourists have diverse and complex preferences, often influenced by cognitive age, health status, education, financial situation, and cultural background. Younger seniors (ages 55–65) tend to seek novelty, adventure, and more active involvement, showing interest in immersive travel, varied cuisines, and luxury lodging (Otoo et al., 2020b; Mohamed & Omar, 2016). In contrast, older seniors prefer comfort, safety, group travel, and less physically demanding activities (Nikitina, 2016; Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2021).

The analysis of accommodation preferences highlights the importance of accessibility, proximity to key amenities, and the desire for familiar environments—whether with family or consistent hotel standards (Abdelrazik et al., 2024). The strong tendency to travel in groups or with organized tours, especially among less mobile seniors, emphasizes both a need for security and the social enjoyment that comes from shared experiences (Alen, Losada et al., 2017).

Service-related preferences exhibit considerable diversity: although many seniors favor economical transportation and fundamental amenities, a subset anticipates high-quality service, contemporary transportation options, and autonomous planning possibilities (Ryu, Hyun et al., 2015). These

distinctions underscore that senior tourists should not be regarded as a homogeneous group; instead, customized services that address physical, psychological, and social needs are essential.

Constraints: Multifactorial Barriers to Participation

A key theme in the literature is the complex and interconnected constraints faced by senior travelers. Physical and health issues, like chronic conditions and limited mobility, are major barriers that affect choices about destinations, trip duration, and types of travel (Nielsen, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2020). Despite these obstacles, some seniors find ways to overcome them, often driven by psychological well-being or supported by family networks (Hsu et al., 2007). Besides physical limitations, resource constraints—such as limited income, lack of digital skills, and absence of travel companions—significantly restrict travel opportunities for many seniors. Those with higher income and education tend to access more travel options, while others rely more on external help (Otoo et al., 2020b). Psychological concerns and safety issues, like fears about safety, unfamiliar environments, and lacking accessible infrastructure, also discourage travel—especially when combined with limited information or services (Carneiro et al., 2013). The interaction of these constraints highlights the urgent need for strategies that improve accessibility, meet psychological and emotional needs, and develop supportive infrastructure specifically for seniors.

Socio-Demographic and Cultural Influences

A key contribution of this review is highlighting heterogeneity—by age, gender, marital status, educational level, income, health, and cultural context—in shaping tourism motivations, preferences, and barriers (Nielsen, 2014). Cultural background, in particular, influences motivational structures: Western seniors often value adventure and self-discovery, while Asian seniors emphasize family, tranquility, and social engagement (Patuelli & Nijkamp, 2016; Otoo & Kim, 2020).

Similarly, gender differences appear in participatory styles, with women showing greater interest in social, family-focused travel and men tending toward independence or adventure. These differences should prompt practitioners to create nuanced and context-aware tourism experiences.

Methodological Trends and Gaps

Methodologically, the reviewed literature is mainly made up of quantitative, cross-sectional studies—often using standardized survey tools (Ward, 2014; Pomfret et al., 2023). While this approach is useful for spotting broad patterns, it underrepresents the lived experiences, emotional processes, and deeper meaning-making of senior travelers. There is a strong need for more longitudinal, qualitative, and mixed-methods research to understand how motivations, preferences, and constraints change over the lifespan and across different contexts.

Notably, there are significant geographic gaps in the research, with the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America remaining mostly underrepresented despite their growing senior populations. Filling these gaps is crucial for developing a truly global understanding of senior tourism.

Practical Implications

The findings of this review offer important practical insights for policymakers and tourism professionals aiming to better serve the diverse needs of senior travelers. It is crucial that destinations and service providers move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and instead develop accessible, flexible, and personalized tourism products that meet the varied physical, social, and psychological needs of the elderly population. Investing in barrier-free infrastructure, senior-friendly transportation options, and health-focused support services can significantly reduce participation barriers that prevent older adults from engaging in tourism activities. Additionally, expanding offline information channels while helping seniors navigate digital platforms can improve their ability to access relevant travel information and services, encouraging broader and more inclusive participation. Social support mechanisms also play a key role; creating group travel opportunities, promoting intergenerational tourism, and implementing companionship programs can effectively reduce feelings of insecurity and loneliness, especially among those who travel alone. Overall, these strategies can help create a more inclusive, comfortable, and enjoyable tourism experience for seniors, ultimately supporting their well-being and social engagement.

Limitations

Limitations of this review include reliance on English-language, peer-reviewed studies, which might miss some regional perspectives. Additionally, the focus on quantitative research hinders our understanding of the subjective and contextual aspects of travel experiences among seniors. Nevertheless, the systematic approach, multiple databases, and strict screening procedures improve the reliability and completeness of the results.

Directions for Future Research

Future research in senior tourism should address several key gaps identified in the current literature to deepen and broaden our understanding of the field. First, using qualitative and mixed-method approaches will be essential to capturing the nuanced, subjective meanings seniors associate with travel, as well as their complex negotiations around various constraints. This methodological diversity can offer richer insights than those provided by mainly quantitative studies. Second, expanding empirical research to underexplored geographic regions will improve the cultural and socio-economic representation of the global senior population, recognizing the diversity in experiences and needs across different contexts. Third, longitudinal research designs are vital for assessing the changing motivations, preferences, and abilities as individuals age and go through life transitions, providing a temporal dimension that cross-

sectional studies cannot. Lastly, as technology increasingly influences travel experiences, future studies should explore seniors' use of digital tools, along with emerging factors like climate change awareness and innovative tourism options. Incorporating these aspects can lead to more inclusive, adaptable, and future-oriented strategies in senior tourism development.

Author Contributions

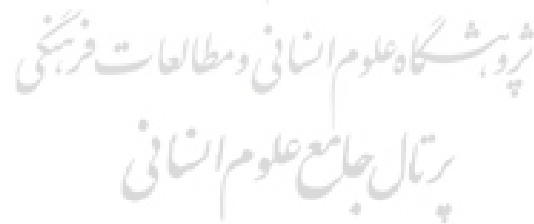
H. Bakhshi selected the topic and title of the article, analyzed and interpreted the data, and edited and prepared the article in its final form. S. Ebrahimian collected the data, conducted the literature review, wrote the article, and contributed to the preparation of the initial manuscript. M. Imanian provided suggestions for improving the structure of the article.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the publication of this work. Furthermore, ethical considerations, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy, have been fully adhered to by the authors.



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Appendix A. Thematic Mapping of Reviewed Articles: Motivation, Preference, and Constraint Dimensions

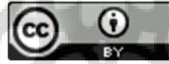
This appendix summarizes the extent to which each included article addresses the three main thematic categories identified in the review: motivation, preference, and constraint.

No.	Reference (APA)	Motivation	Preference	Constraint
1	Abdelrazik, M., Elbishieshy, N., et al. (2024)		✓	
2	Aggarwal et al. (2023)	✓		✓
3	Alén, E., Losada, N., & Domínguez, T. (2017)	✓	✓	
4	Bagus, I. G. & Utama, R. (2012)	✓	✓	
5	Carneiro, M. J., Eusébio, C., & Coelho, M. (2013)			✓
6	Cejudo, M. A. B. (2018)	✓	✓	
7	Cha, S., McCleary, K., et al. (1995)	✓		
8	Cleaver, M., et al. (1999)	✓	✓	
9	Esiyok, B., et al. (2018)		✓	
10	Filipe, S., et al. (2021)			✓
11	González, A. M., Rodríguez, M., et al. (2009)	✓	✓	✓
12	Hsu, C. H., Cai, L. A., et al. (2007)	✓		✓
13	Huang, Y. C. (2022)	✓		
14	Hung, K., Bai, X., et al. (2016)			✓
15	Jang, S. S., & Wu, C.-M. E. (2006)	✓	✓	
16	Kim, H. L. (2015)	✓		
17	Kim, M., & Kim, C. (2020)	✓		✓
18	Kord, A., et al. (2024)	✓	✓	
19	Medeiros, T., Silva, O., et al. (2019)	✓	✓	
20	MOHAMED, B., & OMAR, S. I. (2016)		✓	
21	Nielsen, K. (2014)	✓		✓
22	Nikitina, O. (2016)	✓		
23	Otoo, F. E. (2019)	✓	✓	
24	Otoo, F. E., & Kim, S. (2020) (Review)	✓	✓	✓

25	Otoo, F. E., Kim, S., et al. (2020) (Cluster)	✓	✓	✓
26	Otoo, F. E., Kim, S., et al. (2020) (Chinese segmentation)	✓	✓	✓
27	Patuelli, R., & Nijkamp, P. (2016) (Review)	✓		
28	Pomfret, G., Mellon, J., et al. (2023)	✓		
29	Ryu, E., Hyun, S. S., et al. (2015)	✓	✓	
30	Shavanddasht, M. (2018)	✓		
31	Silva, O., Medeiros, T., et al. (2020)	✓	✓	
32	Ward, A. (2014)	✓		
33	Wijaya, S., et al. (2018)	✓		
34	Wu, C.-M. E. (2003)	✓	✓	
35	Zielińska-Szczepkowska, J. (2021)		✓	

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