

# **Motivation for family vacations with young children: anecdotes from the Internet**

## **ABSTRACT**

Family travel receives growing attention from both the travel industry and academia, but they ignore a vital segment of the family holiday: nuclear families that travel with young children. This study investigated the motivations that drive this market segment to take vacations as a starting point to understand the travel behavior of family tourists, especially those with young and dependent children. By employing netnography, this study collected and analyzed 97 travel diaries from five travel blogs and one travel forum in 2015. Five motivation themes emerged, namely they are spending quality time with children, creating pleasant memories, learning and development, compensation for children, and self-compensation. Both theoretical and practical implications are discussed and future research is suggested.

## **KEYWORDS**

Family vacation; young children; motivation; travel blog

## **Introduction**

In modern society, parents are under great pressure to extract maximum value from an increasingly limited resource by structuring quality family time. Tourism, which is associated with the notion of family togetherness or bonding, has become a means of enjoying ideal and happy family time. Providing children with experiences beyond their everyday lives is now viewed as part of good parenting (Carr, 2011). Holidays are argued to provide sound learning experiences for children. Learning through fun and entertainment is as effective as in-class learning. Moreover, the holiday experiences gained in childhood create enduring memories that play an important part in the construction of self (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992).

The tourism industry has increasingly recognized the value of children, and the nuclear family has been identified as playing an important role in the success of the tourism market (Carr, 2011; Shaw, Havitz, & Delemere, 2008). According to a recent travel survey conducted by TripAdvisor (2014), nine out of ten respondents forecast at least one journey in the coming year with their families, half of which are nuclear. Marketing studies have elucidated how important dependent

children are in determining families' general consumption behaviors, particularly in the travel decision process (Poria, Atzaba-Poria, & Barrett, 2005; Schanzel, Schänzel, Yeoman, & Backer, 2012). Products have also been designed to target this younger market directly or indirectly by tourism operators (Poria & Timothy, 2014). Although the nuclear family is seen as the basic unit of consumption (Bonvalet & Lelievre, 2016) including tourism consumption, this market has surprisingly not received the same level of attention from academia. Therefore, the study reported in this article is designed to fill the gap by exploring the vacation behavior of nuclear families with young dependent children. Specifically, the study examines the motivations that drive this market segment to take vacations. As previous studies have suggested that motivation is the starting point of any effort to gain knowledge of consumer behavior (Li & Cai, 2012; Mook, 1996), the understanding of travel motivation is expected to provide insights into the existing body of knowledge on family vacation behavior.

### **Family vacation with children**

Family holiday is defined as “a purposive time spent together as a family group (which may include extended family) doing activities different from normal routines that are fun but that may involve compromise and conflict at times” (Schanzel, Yeoman, & Backer, 2012, p. 3). Given the vulnerability and innocence of children, most of their tourism-related time during family holiday is spent with their families, which represent a notable market for the tourism industry (Carr, 2011; Schanzel et al., 2012). As early as 2007, Yesawich (2007) predicted that family (with children) tourism would continue to grow at the fastest rate in all forms of leisure travel). As a result of the increasing leisure time and disposable income available to families, an annual holiday for families is becoming a necessity rather than a luxury (Beioley, 2004; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007).

A family vacation is perceived to be a remarkable promoter of family bonding and well-being (Lehto, Choi, Lin, & MacDermid, 2009). In addition to the desire for relaxation and escape from the pressure of daily living, parents expect holiday experiences to provide a time for family reconnection (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). Despite their increasing workload, parents are eager to spend more quality time with their children in traveling activities, which seem to be the best for creating positive memories (Shaw et al., 2008). On the basis of the suggestion that holiday experiences may facilitate children's development, most adults have

identified family tourism as a contributor to the education of their children (Poria et al., 2005; Turley, 2001). Moreover, in countries where a “nuclear family” is the most common type, children’s existence is the key determinant in the family tourism market as parents are eager to make their children happy (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Consequently, children play an active role in family holiday experiences regarding where to go and what to do.

Though children have no buying power in the current market, a number of studies have highlighted their influence on their parents with regard to family travel experiences (Carr, 2011; Lehto et al., 2009; Shoham & Dalakas, 2005; Thornton, Shaw, & Williams, 1997). Extant studies addressing children’s role in family tourism primarily focus on their influence on the family decision-making process (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Shaw et al., 2008; Shoham & Dalakas, 2005; Thornton et al., 1997) and on the effects on holiday activities and behavior (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Schanzel et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2008).

Children’s power in changing the spending habits with regard to family holidays has been recognized as a result of an increasing number of family vacation trips in recent years. In addition, the sociological changes in families are identified as another important stimulus (Carr, 2011; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). Connell (2005) found that parents are leaving more chances and space to their children in terms of family decision making in contemporary society. This so-called “liberal parental style” is further explained by Carr (2011), who claims that children are offered more money and freedom in consuming processes because of their parents’ guilt due to frequent absences in their children’s daily life. Consequently, children are more willing to express their desires and participate in the decision-making process (Gram, 2007).

In a study on the group decision-making process, Decrop (2005) noted that parents would take their children into consideration when choosing vacation activities. Moreover, parents are negatively influenced if the destination fails to satisfy their children (Johns & Gyimothy, 2002; Thornton et al., 1997). Tagg and Seaton (1995) found that the involvement of children in the decision-making process could improve the family’s holiday satisfaction by studying travelers from four European countries.

The children’s role in family decisions is believed to change along with their increasing ages. Darley and Lim (1986) found that the extent to which parents would consider their children’s views is largely dependent on the children’s ages. They argue that the level of children’s

influence on the family holiday differs in various types of activities. This notion was supported by Carr (2011) who states that children usually determine if the family visits child-oriented attractions such as zoos, theme parks, and museums, and that adolescents with a stronger sense of self can generate more influence than younger children in the family decision-making process. Overall, children's influence is limited in the ultimate decisions (Beatty & Talpade, 1994; Gram, 2007; Thornton et al., 1997). However, children nowadays have a more observable influence on family holidays than ever before.

Seaton and Tagg (1995) and Thornton et al. (1997) also agreed that the level of children's influence differs according to their age. Thornton et al. (1997) noted that younger children could generate influence on family vacation behaviors to a great extent merely through their existence due to caring requirements and inflexible time-tabling needs. By contrast, older children are able to negotiate with their parents using strategies and techniques. A number of studies from various perspectives have revealed that children have emerging powers of bargaining and persuasion when negotiating with adults (Marquis, 2004; Rust, 1993). They use a range of tools, including "bargaining, badgering, and bemoaning their deprivation, compared with other children" to influence their parents in the purchasing decision process (Middleton, Ashworth, & Walker, 1994). Some parents complain about the sacrifice they have made to provide their children with holiday experiences (Johns & Gyimothy, 2002). Traveling with children is sometimes more like taking parental responsibility, which constrains parents in determining their traveling affairs. Children's influence does not cease when the family has decided where to go on holiday. Nevertheless, children's experience on holidays has been the subject of relatively insufficient research (Carr, 2011; Cullingford, 1995; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Small, 2008). Studies have shown that children have a significant influence on the behavior of family vacations (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008; Thornton et al., 1997). Young tourists have identified holidays as a chance to participate in physical activities and to have fun rather than to relax or escape from everyday life obligations (Schanzel et al., 2012), which may lead to intra-family conflicts according to Carr (2011). Therefore, parents will have to change their traveling modes and activities after having a child. Unplanned holidays with last-minute arrangements are no longer taken in the early years after the children's birth. Extensive activities, such as camping, island hopping, or bungee jumping, have been substituted by playing on the beach, camping on a farm, and staying at fully serviced hotels (Blichfeldt, 2007).

A study conducted by Thornton et al. (1997) identified a number of differences between families with and without children in vacation experiences based on a space–time budget diary survey. Families with children spend more time using swimming pools and taking part in beach activities, whereas groups consisting solely of adults visit pubs, clubs, and bars more frequently.

Contributing to the understanding of family travel with children, existing studies have mainly focused on families with older children who are logically consistent and able to express their own opinions. However, only a few studies have examined the travel behavior of families with young children. Young children can still influence family vacation experiences simply through their presence, regardless of their limited cognitive capability and language skills.

Based on the above discussion, the current study examines the travel behavior of families with young children. More particularly, this study is interested in how the presence of young children influences parents' travel motivation. Motivation is considered as the cause of human behavior (Li & Cai, 2012). The study of tourist motivations has seen a fair amount of action since the 1960s, and substantial progress has been achieved since then. Several theories or models have been developed to guide the empirical study of travel motivation, such as the push–pull model (Dann, 1981), allocentric–psychocentric theory (Plog, 1974), escape-seeking theory (Ross & Iso-Aloha, 1991), and the travel career pattern (Pearce & Lee, 2005).

As an important topic in tourism literature, the reasons why people travel have been examined by scholars from different disciplinary areas, including psychology, sociology, economy, and anthropology. A wide variety of topics have been covered from the dimensionality of motivation (see for example Crompton, 1979b) to the relationships between motivation and other behavioral constructs (see for example Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010), from the travel motivation of a particular source market (see for example Hsu & Lam, 2003) to the cross-cultural analysis of tourism motivation (see for example Li, Zhang, Xiao, & Chen, 2015), from tourism motivation of specific demographic groups (see for example Li, Wen, & Leung, 2011) to the motivation of a certain type of special interest tourism (see for example Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu, & Guo, 2016). Motivation is also used as a tool for market segmentation (see for example Li, Huang, & Cai, 2009). Family togetherness and kinship has always been identified as an important motivational factor by existing studies (see for example Hsu & Lam, 2003; Li & Cai, 2012) which demonstrates the synergy between travel and family, as well as the significance of family, which

forms the consumer base of many destinations (Obrador, 2023). However, few studies made the effort to detect the underlying reasons for families to vacation, especially the families with independent children, except for enhancing kinship.

In the current study, Piaget's theory of cognition development is adopted to define young children as children in the cognition development stages of the sensory motor period and preoperational phase (2–4 years of age). Children of this age group cannot manipulate and transform information in a logical way. Therefore, their influence on their parents' travel decisions is more subtle.

## **Methodology**

Given the exploratory nature of the research objective, which is to examine the vacation motivation of nuclear families with young dependent children, a qualitative research method is used in the current study to conduct a in-depth analysis based on a rich source of information with parents as the information generator. The research objectives are achieved through netnography using a covert approach. Netnography, which was formulated by Kozinets (1998), takes advantage of the changing virtual landscape of tourism (Munar, Gyimóthy, & Cai, 2013) and the rapidly growing participation in such communities by people from a wide range of social and cultural positionalities (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). The ever-expanding selection of user-generated content sites, through which tourists are able to openly reflect about their holidays or seek travel information, offers an unprecedented opportunity to better understand tourists' experiences. Netnography enables researchers to source a broad geographical spread of participants and a representative sample due to the “decentralization and democratization of tourism information” (Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014, p. 180) among the social networks.

As illustrated by Kozinets (2002), the first step of netnographic research is to identify qualified online communities that are appropriate to the research focus and research question. The online communities of interest should be relevant, active, substantial, data-rich, and interactive. Thus, Mafengwo ([www.mafengwo.cn](http://www.mafengwo.cn)) and five personal travel blogs were identified as the sources of information. Data were collected from November 2014 to February 2015.

Mafengwo is one of the largest travel communities in China where users generate content from their travel experiences. This free travel site has become the number one travel user-generated content (UGC) site in China in terms of the number of registered users (Analysys, 2014). With 10 million reviews covering 60,000 destinations around the world, Mafengwo helps users to gather

travel information, share travel experiences, and give helpful comments on various attractions, hotels, restaurants, entertainments, shopping venues, and traffic modes (Mafengwo, 2014). Each travel notes published on the site can be read an average of 12 000 times. The key words *qinziyou* and *ertonglvyou* (meaning “traveling with children” and “children tourism” respectively) were used to search for the travel blogs. Only those posted after 2010 were selected. A purposive sampling method was then employed in accordance with the research objectives to eliminate blogs with fewer narratives and too many pictures. This process resulted in 50 posts (with discussions) contributed by 39 members.

The five personal travel blogs were selected by firstly searching the keywords *traveling/vacation with kids/children/baby*, and *blog* on google.com. The first 20 entries returned in each search were reviewed. For the purpose of the research, blogs maintained by parents with children over 4 years old were screened out. As a result, five personal travel blogs were selected as they had been listed as the Best Family Travel Blogs by Red Tricycle (redtri.com) and Top 25 Travel Blogs by Parents voted on Circle of Moms (www.circleofmoms.com). The profile of the five blogs is shown in Table 1. A total of 47 posts (with discussions) posted after 2010 were identified from the five blogs. Member checks are not applicable in covert netnographic research as community members have no awareness of the ongoing study (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2012).

Table 1. Profile of the personal travel blogs selected.

Blog	Number of diaries	Creating year	Author	Country	Job	Family profile	Travel route
Traveling with children	12	January 2011	Maria Haskins	Canada (born in Sweden)	Freelance writer and translator	Son was born in 2003 and daughter in 2007	Between Vancouver, Canada, and Sweden at least once a year
Hither and thither	9	January 2009	Ashley Muir Bruhn	Northern California	Used to be a book editor and is currently a freelance writer, blogger, and stay-at-home parent	Husband: Aron is a urologist Son: Hudson born in July 2011 Daughter: Skyler born in February 2014	Around the world
Around world with Luca and ... Eli	8	March 2010	Linda de Paor	Dublin, Ireland	Solicitor	Husband: Phil is a librarian Sons: Luca born in 2008 and Eli born in 2012	Cycling around the world from Ireland in July of 2010
Baby loves to travel	9	June 2010	Lisa Wielgosz	United Arab Emirates	Stay at home mum	Husband: Canadian Daughter: born in 2009 Son: born in 2011	Asia Pacific, Europe, Indian Ocean, Middle East, North

Walking on travels	9	2011	Keryn Means	Washington, D.C., United States	A production manager in a book publishing company	Husband: Mike Sons: Dek born in 2009 and Ty born in 2012	America and Dubai Asia, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the United States
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The document was analyzed using the inductive method suggested by Glaser and Strauss (2011). An open coding procedure was conducted with line-by-line reading to identify the salient categories of information supported by the text. The constant comparative approach was used to saturate the categories. Three rounds of open coding were conducted to make sure that no drift occurred in the definition of codes or a shift in the meaning of the codes during the process of coding to ensure reliability (Gibbs, 2007). Axial coding was then conducted after the text was reduced to a small set of categories. During axial coding, the underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties were discovered to formulate a smaller set of higher-level concepts. Lastly, selective coding was utilized when more abstract thematic patterns were identified, and the hierarchy was finalized.

Operationally, the texts were read and decoded in the original language. The Chinese texts were later translated into English for the citation of quotes in the manuscript writing. Data analysis was independently conducted by the first and the third authors. This process was not designed to guarantee that two analysts would achieve the same results because of the inductive nature of the study. It was designed to enable vagueness and flexibility that aid the creative generation of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). The results of coding were then compared, and consensus was achieved. The second and fourth authors, who acted as peer debriefs, read through the final product to enhance the accuracy of the account (Cresswell, 2007). We believe that the constant comparison, multiple rounds of decoding, detailed description of the findings, and peer debriefing ensure the validity of the results. However, caution is advised regarding the potential bias in the interpretation resulting from the insiders' view. The analysis was facilitated by NVivo 10.

### **Motivation of vacation with young children**

A total of 97 blogs contributed by 46 authors were collected from the online community. The contributors' profile is shown in Table 2. In the Table, only five out of the 46 contributors are fathers. Among the five personal travel blogs, two are maintained by couples, and the other three are maintained by mothers only. Mothers evidently make more effort than fathers to write about



and share their families' travel experiences through the Web.

The children studied in this paper are aged from two months to four years. The number of children between the ages of 3 and 4 years was the largest. According to the children's profile, more boys than girls travel with their parents in our study. More than one-third of the children are frequent travelers. This observation is consistent with the statement of Clark (2001) that children nowadays are well-traveled and more sophisticated than young travelers in the past. In addition, parents seem to become more inspired to travel with their young children. A Chinese mother expressed her great pride in her little son who was a frequent traveler:

*Our son has been to many places using various modes of transportation, such as plane, train, public bus, and private car. His excellent adaptability to unfamiliar environments and unconventional diets has given me the courage to bring him to three different places in eight days for a long independent journey. (Scarletlwp from Mafengwo)*

With regard to travel companions, most of the vacations were taken by nuclear families, especially the international bloggers. The greatest difference between Chinese and international travelers in terms of their travel companions appears in the numbers of trips they make with their extended family. Specifically, the grandmother is the confirmed family member to travel with the nuclear family for Chinese bloggers. The reason behind this situation is that families want to create a memorable experience for their aged parents who rarely go on holiday. Conversely, they value the important role their parents play in looking after their young children. Even in Disneyland, one mother felt “quite free and at ease” in having her mother keeping an eye on her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter while the mother played adventure games with her husband. Another interesting finding is that mothers were never absent from the journeys involved in this research.

Five motivation themes emerged from the coding process. They are *spending quality time with children, creating family memories, learning and development, self-compensation, and compensation for the children.*

Table 2. Profile of bloggers

	Blogs	Bloggers	Mothers	Fathers	Children's gender		Children's traveling age	
					Girls	Boys	Youngest	Oldest
Chinese	50	39	36	3	17	22	13 months	4 years
International	47	7	5	2	2	5	2 months	4 years

### *Spending quality time with children*

Taking younger children on travels seems not to be a wise decision according to conventional concepts. In our study, parents were criticized and questioned by their relatives and friends before the holidays began. Nevertheless, they managed to create a pleasurable holiday for their children and themselves. When asked about the reason for creating the travel blog, one mother who had taken her two little boys to five different countries explained the following:

*Traveling with a child is impossible. At least that's what everyone told me – a "travel junkie" – three years ago when I was pregnant with my son Dek. As a full-time mother and full-time production manager, I would never have the time or energy, they said, to keep up with these trips. I tried day and night to make it work. But in a way, these naysayers were right. Not that traveling with my son was too complicated to attempt, but it was time for a change. My full-time job had to go. It interfered with my travel time and, more importantly, with the way I wanted to raise my son. I had to move on. (Walking on Travel)*

Although the desire to escape from the pressure of work and everyday life has been identified as the central holiday motivation of parents (Crompton, 1979a; Shaw et al., 2008), some scholars have illustrated that parents value the opportunity to be with their children during family vacations (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). A couple began to travel around the world with their 2-year-old son in 2010. They would update their blogs during their journeys. The mother had the following to say on her blog when talking about the meaning of a vacation for her family:

*He (the son) has grown up SO much since we got the boat to France in July. It has been a true privilege for Phil (the husband) and me to have been with him 24/7 during this special time in his life between baby and boy, and to witness his development first hand. (Around world with Luca and . . . Eli)*

The mother's description shows that parents are glad to spend more time with their children. However, a number of issues have been reported to lead to the decline in the amount of time parents spend with their children (Carr, 2011). As discussed above, a family holiday has been identified by parents as a chance to spend "quality time" with their children, as it is beneficial for family interaction and family bonding (Lehto et al., 2009). According to a mother from Canada,

*It's a great family bonding time – when we're on a hike we walk and talk together about anything and every- thing that comes to mind (I always find it easier to talk while walking,*

*for some reason). We look at slugs, mushrooms, moss, rocks, trees, and tracks in the mud together. We help each other overcome obstacles like streams, muddy patches, and steep hills. It all adds up to some great together-time. (Traveling with children)*

According to the suggestion of a father who was usually busy at work and had no time to play with his little daughter, family travel is considered a good way to build a closer relationship between parents and their children. Another blogger also admitted that traveling with a younger child is difficult, but the blogger enjoyed the pleasant time the family had with the baby.

### *Creating pleasant memories*

The parents in this study indicated that family holidays are not always perfect. Nevertheless, the children's experiences and happiness are what parents value the most in family vacations. For example, although the scenery in Sanya, China, was not able to meet the mother's expectation, her son's excitement during the trip affected and improved her satisfaction. Some parents were clear about the fact that their children were too young to remember things. However, they insisted that the holiday would create special memories for the little ones. A mother responded to the controversy by stating that the meaning of travel for young children is to enjoy different views, interact with new people, and see the world through their own eyes. Inspired by this mother, another user in the community left a comment to support her:

*I strongly agree with the writer in terms of taking young children to travel. Although they are not allowed to play some of the games, they can be happy with their parents. Besides, they have opportunities to experience the world instead of being restricted at home. I will continue to travel with my child no matter where we go. By the way, we will have a family vacation to Europe this September with our son, of course. (Comments on Mafengwo)*

Moreover, some parents argued that young children do remember their holiday experiences. A mother exemplified this when talking about her son's feedback after a family trip to Hangzhou, China:

*My parents often blamed me for taking my little son to travel far. They didn't think my son would remember what happened on the trips, and neither did many other people. However, the truth is my son remembered his trips. When looking at the photos we took during the holiday, my son would tell me where it was. I would ask him whether it had been fun in Hangzhou, and guess what he said? He told me, "There is water in Hangzhou!" (Ivan from*

*Mafengwo)*

Another mother who had had a family vacation in Singapore mentioned that whenever her baby girl would hear “Singapore” on the television, she would immediately go to her mother to tell her that she had been there before. The mother posted the following on her blog: “Kids know more than you can imagine about tourism.” Carr (2011) indicated that children below the age of two might not be able to consciously express their ideas about traveling, but after this time, children’s cognitive abilities are sufficiently developed to be able to think logically. A father of a 2-year-old girl indicated that traveling with younger children creates pleasant memories not only for the little children but also for the adults:

*I recommend to Chinese parents to spend more time with their children on holidays. The inability of children to remember the trips should not be considered as the reason for not traveling with them. I think we, as parents, get more benefits than our children from the holiday experiences. When we get older, the photos will prove that our decisions were right to create so many travel experiences with our kids. My wife and I have insisted on traveling with my daughter not for what she can remember, but for being able to recall these times in the future. (Chris from Mafengwo)*

### *Learning and developing*

The parents in our study attached great importance to the educational function of travel activities as previously discussed in the literature review. Some trips are undertaken to stimulate children’s interests and talents. For example, a mother who went on a hiking trip with her little boys explained her intention:

*It gives kids a connection to nature – I personally believe that an interest in, and personal connection to, nature can help encourage kids to be more environmentally aware and responsible. I also believe it can help spawn an interest in science (biology, zoology, and so on). It also gives kids knowledge of local places where you can go to get exercise, to relax, or just spend some time in the natural world. All those things can serve them well whatever their age I figure. (Traveling with children)*

Moreover, some mothers held the view that traveling at a younger age enables their children to “understand the world better” and to “build a strong foundation for being open to and accepting of the wonderful differences that exist in the world.” Another mother from the

United States (US) agreed with the notion that traveling at a very young age would “form a strong foundation for accepting and respecting cultures that are different to our own” even though they would not be able to preserve the memories.

The parents in our study were impressed by their children’s development during family trips. This development seems to be an additional benefit of tourism. When discussing the meaning of a particular trip with her boy, a mother described the time her son saw a swimming pool for the first time:

*My son went through a phase where water became an interesting toy. I wanted to make full use of the swimming pool in the hotel, therefore, we tried to stimulate the little boy’s interest in water. He was scared in the beginning. Then my brothers and I took turns taking him to the deep end, and gradually, my son gained courage to swim by himself. He had a lot of fun! And I feel so proud of his progress! That was the most exciting thing for me on this trip. (Baby loves to travel)*

Some parents consciously attempted to train their children for the holidays. For example, a writer shared her experience in cultivating the independence of children as she had traveled with two young boys. When conflicts occurred between the two brothers, the blogger simply pretended to be helpless and allowed them to deal with the disagreement themselves. She expressed her happiness in seeing her children’s growth during the trips:

*Although problems and arguments happened every day during the trip, the two brothers respectively aged 3 years and 5 years grew up step by step. Our sincere wish is for our children to grow up happy, and it is also the major driving force for traveling with them.” (Vivi from Mafengwo)*

Similarly, another Canadian mother who had previously traveled with her two young children was surprised and proud when she found that they behaved much better than expected during a long-distance flight from Vancouver to Sweden:

*“At ages four and eight they really impressed me this past summer with their patience and ability to cope with 20 hours of flight time, spread out over three flights. We made it all the way to Sweden from Vancouver without any serious mishaps and only a brief exhaustion-related tantrum for each kid. It is definitely a proud-parent moment to watch them get ready*

*for a security checkpoint, wait patiently at check-in, and help me with the suitcases at the luggage carousel. (Traveling with children)*

Family trips provide a great opportunity for parents to explore the infinite potential of their children. Parents sometimes realize that young children during holidays become smarter, stronger, healthier, and more independent than they are at home. Perhaps this is the reason why most parents encouraged their readers to take a vacation with their young children at the end of their posts.

### *Self-compensation*

Some of the family vacations were stimulated by regretful childhood memories of the parents. Thus, the parents considered vacations as a compensation for themselves. For example, a mother who would like to provide her child with positive holiday experiences explained her motivation to deal with her regret in her own childhood:

*When I was young, I would always dream of holding my parents' hands while we were on a family vacation. This dream did not come true until I gave birth to my baby. I have decided to travel with him once a year to compensate for my own childhood. I want my baby to grow up without regrets. (Fairy from Mafengwo)*

This view was supported by Shaw et al. (2008), who noted that parents' travel-related memories in childhood have certain influences on their intentions to provide positive holiday experiences for the next generation. In addition, Carr (2011) pointed out that in Shaw et al.'s (2008) study, respondents with nostalgic emotions were more likely to impose their own ideas on their children in terms of family travel activities.

### *Compensation for children*

Holiday experiences created by parents do not always involve their younger children. In our study, the parents expressed their regret about not taking their children with them on their last trip. This previous exclusion is the main reason why they would finally organize a vacation with their children. Similarly, a mother broke her promise to her 2-year-old son to take him to the beach. Thus, she was motivated to arrange another trip:

*We should have taken this trip with our son last summer, but we didn't make it for some*

*reason. I know my son was quite disappointed. Last autumn, my husband and I went to Cambodia without our child, and it made me feel regretful. Therefore, this year we have decided to go to Sanya just to travel with our son. (Xingyun from Mafengwo)*

Another writer felt bad about her little daughter who would often talk about the trip the mother had made last year. In addition, some parents regarded traveling with children as a duty and claimed that “they would never go on holiday without their children”. Many parents tended to define family holiday as a “parental responsibility” as they would spend insufficient time with their children and develop a sense of parental guilt (Decrop, 2005; Shaw et al., 2008).

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the motivation of families vacationing with young children. The analysis of parents’ travel blogs identified five dimensions of motivation. Apart from *spending quality time with children, creating pleasant memories, and learning and development*, which were suggested by previous motivation studies, two unique motivation factors (*self-compensation* and *compensation for children*) emerged from the coding process. Some of the parents expressed their intention to take family vacations with their young children as a way of compensating for their feelings of regret as a result of their childhood or for their feelings of guilt with regard to their children.

This study reveals that many parents enjoy going on a holiday with their children, although it is not an easy task. Parents feel regret when they travel without their young children. Parents believe that traveling as a family contributes positively to family bonding and interaction. They are often questioned about the meaning of tourism for younger children who barely remember what happened on the trips. In response to this, most adults present the view that the family’s experience is the most important part of a satisfactory trip. They argue that traveling helps young children to build a solid foundation for accepting the wonderful differences that exist in the world. In addition, they also consider holidays with their young children as pleasant memories that they can recall in the future.

Parents engage in a great deal of preparation before setting off for their destination. However, the adults find that their worries are usually redundant as their children behave much better than expected during family holidays. Most of the children in our study show good adaptive

abilities, both mentally and physically. More importantly, children can experience a holistic development through this process, such as becoming more independent by learning how to swim. This experience in turn inspires parents to travel with them more frequently.

This study has both theoretical and practical merits. Epistemologically, the current study contributes to the understanding of family tourism. Specifically, the study sheds light on the vacation motivation of a nuclear family with young children. Given the important positive benefits attributed to vacations in the medical and business literature (see for example Richard, 1999), surprisingly very little research on tourism has focused on this market. Nonetheless, the value of conducting research into families goes beyond the commercial incentive. A non-economic analysis can offer a broader social understanding (Small, 2008), as tourism studies have to a large extent concentrated on the spectacular and exotic form of tourism while excluding the more mundane and trivial types, such as family vacations.

Contemporary tourism studies are largely based on the assumption that individuals have the freedom to choose their preferred destinations and make rational decisions. Previous research has been conceptualized on the basis of an individual's willingness to learn by being exposed to other cultures and social realities. These paradigmatic assumptions are usually not valid in relation to the travel experience of families with young children. For example, for some, especially mothers with young children, a vacation is but an extension of daily life rather than novelty seeking. This view can be exemplified by the motivation factors identified in the current study. In addition to learning and developing, most parents are found to take vacations with their young children for creating pleasant memories, spending quality time with their children, and making up for lost family time with their children. Understanding parents' motivation for going on a family vacation provides tourism promoters with a great opportunity to develop an appropriate family-/ child-friendly image. This image further enhances tourism development in the area. As the results indicate, Chinese travelers are more likely to travel as part of an extended family, and this condition requires the destinations to fulfill each family member's desires and needs. The study findings are also useful for destinations/resorts to explore programs and activities catering to families with younger children. In order to attract the family market, it is suggested that tourism practitioners aim to understand more about family members preferences and desires, particularly the younger ones', since parents have attached more importance to entertaining



their children, and at the same time, relieving themselves of the daily care aspect involved in holidays. Thus, facilities and activities tailor-made for both the adults and young children are necessary. In addition, as parents enjoy the quality time with their children, immersive activities which can involve both children and parents together are suggested.

This study is not without limitations. Netnographic research, a relatively new method applied in tourism studies, has certain shortcomings. First, the authenticity of data generated from the public Web remains unverified (Mkono, 2012) as users may conceal information or even lie in the case of some claims. Second, the researcher, who acts as a passive observer in this study, is unable to change the bloggers' content. This lack of control entails more difficulties in obtaining the most relevant data. Third, as all of the data in this study have been generated from online users' texts, the richness of the data is limited without face-to-face interactions. Finally, as the five motivational themes were purely constructed from travel diaries of bloggers, which is a specific type of traveler, any interpretation of the findings from this study must be made in the context of the characteristics of the study participants. Therefore, future studies on children's holiday experiences should employ mixed methods. For example, interviews with parents who frequently travel with their younger children can be conducted to complement the netnographic approach.

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