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Is vacation destination a positional good?

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Abstract

The number of vacation flights is increasing, and since flying is a highly polluting mode of transport, it is important to better understand how people choose their vacation destination. This paper examines whether vacation destination is a positional good, as suggested by van Wee (2021). This means that their valuation of a destination depends on where their peers travel to.

This is investigated in a context-dependent choice experiment, in which respondents chose between vacation trips that varied in destination, travel cost, and travel time, given that their friends travelled to a higher, lower or equally valued destination.

The results show that for almost three-quarters of the respondents, positionality plays a role. More specifically, it was found that the importance of the vacation destination decreases when friends travel to a less attractive place and, conversely, increases when they travel to a more attractive one.

An important implication of this finding is that the welfare loss from policies aimed at curbing the growth of air travel may be smaller than currently assumed. After all, others are also affected by the same policies, meaning they too may no longer be able to visit the most attractive destinations, thereby diminishing the relative value of those destinations.

1 Introduction

Unlike many other sectors, emissions in the Dutch tourism and travel sector continue to rise, mainly due to the increasing number of flights. The total amount of flight kilometres travelled by Dutch tourists has roughly doubled between 2002 and 2019 (Eijgelaar et al., 2021). Furthermore, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) expects further growth and predicts that the number of flights will more than double between 2024 and 2050 (International Air Transport Association, 2025). Since flying is a highly polluting mode of transport, especially due to the long distances travelled, this is a worrying trend from a sustainability perspective. To reverse this trend, it is important to better understand how people choose their vacation destinations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were forced to spend their vacations at destinations closer to home. However, many said they didn't mind this because it applied to everyone, and others were doing the same. This suggests that others' vacation destinations influence how people value their own vacation destinations. Van Wee (2021), therefore, raised the question of whether a vacation destination is a positional good. Positional goods (Hirsch, 1977) are goods or services for which the utility to the individual is influenced by the consumption level of others, people with whom they compare themselves. Examples of positional goods include cars, clothing, luxury watches, and upscale houses, which all can convey status if the individual's good is considered "better" than that of others they compare themselves to. Whether holiday travel is a positional good is an important question when considering policy measures to curb the growth of air travel. If positionality plays a role, then people may not mind as much as is currently assumed if they can no longer travel as far on vacation due to such policies, if this also applies to others.

To investigate positionality, collecting data through a choice experiment is a suitable research method, as it allows for the creation of hypothetical choice situations for both individuals and their peers. Hoen and Geurs (2011), for example, asked Dutch respondents in a choice experiment to imagine living in a country where cars are, on average, smaller, such as in Italy, or larger, such as in the U.S., compared to the cars in the Netherlands. They found that in the scenario where cars are larger, people were willing to pay more to avoid driving a smaller car than others. This can be seen as evidence of positionality in car choices. In a similar study, Carlsson et al. (2007) investigated the positionality of several goods. They created choice sets involving car value, income, leisure time, and car safety. Although income and leisure time are not goods per se, the idea was that people might also compare themselves with others in how they value these. In that study, the alternatives were presented both in terms of individual value and population average. Because people may be reluctant to admit they compare themselves to others, in line with a suggestion of Johansson-Stenman et al. (2002), the study asked respondents not to choose for themselves, but for a distant family member, such as a (future) grandchild: which situation would make them happier? Although this seems like a reasonable methodological approach, it has not yet been studied whether people give different answers when choosing for a distant relative than for themselves.

The latter question will be examined further in this paper. The aim of this article is therefore twofold. First, to investigate whether vacation destination is a positional good. Second, to compare whether the choices individuals make for themselves differ from what they think (distant) family members would prefer. To examine this, a so-called context-dependent choice experiment is conducted. In this, respondents choose between different vacation destinations, given a certain context, namely, the vacation destination of their friends. By including an interaction effect in the utility function between others' given vacation destination and the individual's own vacation destination, it can be tested whether positionality plays a role. The choice data are analysed by estimating a multinomial logit (MNL) model and a Latent Class Choice Model (LCCM) to examine heterogeneity. The results presented in this paper are based on a small convenience sample. This paper should therefore be regarded as a first exploratory study on this topic, primarily to get the examination started.

In this paper, we will first describe the study design. Then we will present and interpret the results. Finally, we will draw some conclusions and discuss the implications of the findings.

2 An overview of literature

In discrete choice modelling, a standard assumption is that the utility of a good or service (from now on: 'good') depends on (a) the characteristics of that good, and (b) the characteristics of the decision maker (and sometimes also others, mainly household members). For example, the utility of a specific car type depends on the characteristics of that car type, and the characteristics of the owner and his or her household. In the case of a household with children, the space of the car (interior, luggage) is more important than for a household without children. Hirsch (1977) introduced the concept of positional goods: in addition to the characteristics of the good and the decision maker, the distribution of the same good over (segments) of the population matters. Status is a likely reason why this distribution matters. Returning to the example of car types, it is also relevant to consider which car type others have (family, friends, colleagues, ...). The cars that others have influence the utility of a specific car type for a person (see Verhoef and van Wee (2000) for a theoretical and mathematical underpinning in the case of car type choice, although they did not explicitly refer to positional goods, and see Hoen and Geurs (2011), for empirical research in the area of car type choice).

The idea that 'others' have an impact on people's decision making is not at all new, and recognised by, for example, the concept of conspicuous goods and status (Veblen, 1899), leading to more or more expensive consumption to impress others, symbolic-affective motives (Steg et al., 2001), and social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1989). The concept of conspicuous goods and the status a good can provide make clear that people are sometimes willing to spend more money on a good than they would if 'others' did not play a role. This is particularly important for choices like car type or, the focus of our paper, the choice of more expensive holidays, because choices that provide status can easily be way more expensive.

However, a systematic search in Scopus (15-9-2025) using the search string [(positional good OR positional goods) AND (travel OR mobility OR holiday OR tourism)] revealed 14 hits, out of which only one was on the topic of travel and positionality (van Wee, 2021). Via other channels, we came across some literature showing that 'others' influence holiday decisions. Litman (2011: 13), referring to Veblen (1899), Duffy (2002), and Ory and Mokhtarian (2005), argues that "demand for long-distance holiday trips results, in part, from the prestige associated with exotic destinations". This is at least an indication of the fact that vacation behaviour is influenced by (the perception of) what others think of one's vacation choice, although this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that this choice is subject to positionality in the sense that the distribution of vacation choices over (segments of) the population influences one's choice. Bronner and De Hoog (2018) studied vacation choice behaviour and found that identity demonstration influences vacation decisions. Identity demonstration is 'characterized by items such as having unique experiences, showing other people who you are, and visiting trendy locations' (Bronner & De Hoog, 2018, p.88). Again: strictly speaking, this does not prove that the utility of a vacation destination is influenced by the choices of others, but 'unique experience' can only emerge if only a few others have had the same experiences. Bimonte (2023) examined satisfaction among people with different types of holiday destinations. Inspired by the concept of positional goods, he explains differences in tourists' satisfaction levels across destination types by the importance of comparing oneself with others. Also, Oswald and Ernst (2020) conclude that social comparison influences flying behaviour.

To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to explicitly examine whether vacation choice behaviour is subject to positionality using discrete choice modelling, and to compare whether the choices individuals make for themselves differ from what they think (distant) family members would prefer.

3 Method

3.1 Design of the choice experiment

As stated in the introduction, this study uses a context-dependent choice experiment. The context describes the vacation destination choices of relevant others whom respondents compare themselves with. Given this context, the respondent is then asked in each choice set to choose between two different types of hypothetical vacation alternatives, described by the attributes: vacation destination, travel cost, and travel time.

Since preferences for vacation destinations vary, each respondent's personal preference is identified first. To keep the study manageable, the number of possible vacation destinations is limited to the following five options: Western Europe, Eastern Europe, South America, Oceania, and East Asia. Each respondent is asked to rank these five vacation destinations in order of attractiveness. In the dataset, the most attractive destination is assigned rank 5 and the least attractive rank 1, so that higher values correspond to more attractive destinations, which allows for a positive parameter estimate for destination attractiveness in the models.

Table 1 presents the attributes and their levels as varied in the experiment. The levels of the destination attribute correspond to the rank numbers. In the experiment alternatives, these rank numbers are replaced by the name of the destination that the specific respondent placed at that rank, which customises the alternatives for each respondent. For example, if a respondent finds East Asia the most attractive destination, then the level rank number 5 in the experimental design will be replaced with "East Asia" in the alternatives presented to that respondent. In this paper, we use the shortened term "destination" to refer specifically to the preference rank of a vacation destination, where a higher value indicates greater attractiveness.

Table 1. Attributes and Context and Their Levels

Varied variables	Levels		
Attributes			
Destination	1	3	5
Cost (€)	1000	1500	2000
Travel time (hours)	6	9	12
Context			
Destination of others	2	3	4

Based on a fractional orthogonal design, 9 choice sets were created, each describing two vacation alternatives that systematically vary across the attribute levels shown in Table 1. These were then combined with the context variable, that is, the vacation destination of others. In the explanation of the experimental task, initially the term 'others' is used, while a few sentences later a more specific term is used: "**average friends** (friends, colleagues, acquaintances)". In the paper, we will use the term "friends," although the questionnaire explained that this could also include colleagues or acquaintances. The destination of others could be 2, 3, or 4. This ultimately resulted in 18 combined context-vacation choice sets.

To investigate whether the choices respondents make for themselves differ from those they make for someone else, two different question framings were used. Figure 1 provides an example of a choice set with the framing in which respondents make choices for a family member. In the other version, the respondent is asked to choose for themselves. While the wording of the question differs slightly between the two variants, respondents in both cases are expected to choose the most attractive option, so the two question framings are treated as equivalent in this paper. Respondents are randomly assigned to one of the two question framing variants.

In this part of the questionnaire, you are asked to choose for a family member. The vacation destination of their friends (or colleagues, acquaintances) is provided. Your family member knows about these choices from the experiences their friends share at a party and/or on social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook).

Their friends are travelling to: East Asia.

Which vacation scenario would make your family member happier?

O East Asia; cost = €1500 and travel time = 12 hours

O South America; cost = €2000 and travel time = 9 hours

Figure 1. Example of a choice set with the question phrasing for the choice for a family

3.2 The sample

The data were collected in November 2020. Respondents were recruited online, primarily from the network of a student who conducted the data collection. A total of 205 people responded, resulting in 159 fully completed and usable responses. Of these 159 respondents, 79 made choices for themselves and 80 made choices for a family member.

Table 2 suggests that younger people, particularly those around age 30, are overrepresented in the sample, while older individuals, especially those aged 65 or older, are underrepresented. Furthermore, men and women, as well as various income groups, are roughly equally represented. Given the recruitment method, this sample should not be considered representative but rather a convenience sample.

Table 2. Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics (N=159)

Socio-demographic characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Male	50%
Female	47%
Other	3%
Age	
0-25	26%
26-35	50%
36-50	17%
51-65	6%
66+	1%
Yearly net household income (x 1000)	
0 to 20	17%
20 to 40	17%
40 to 60	27%
60 to 80	21%
80+	18%

3.3 The utility function

As previously explained, positionality refers to a situation in which others' destination choices influence the respondent's destination choice. The analysis focuses on the rank difference between the respondent's own destination (or that of their family member) and the destination of others. Since the respondent's own destination varies between rank values 1, 3, and 5, and others' destinations vary between 2, 3, and 4, this results in rank differences ranging from -3 to +3, where

a positive number indicates that the respondent's own destination is more attractive than that of the other.

The utility function includes main effects for destination (d), travel cost (c), and travel time (t), as well as an interaction (i) between destination and the rank difference. It is assumed that structural utility can be described using a linear additive model. The structural utility V_j of vacation alternative j can therefore be expressed with the following equation:

$$V_j = \beta_d * \text{destination} + \beta_c * \text{travel cost} + \beta_t * \text{travel time} + \beta_i * \text{rank difference} * \text{destination} \\ = (\beta_d + \beta_i * \text{rank difference}) * \text{destination} + \beta_c * \text{travel cost} + \beta_t * \text{travel time}$$

If the interaction effect (β_i) is statistically significant, it indicates that the contribution of the destination to utility (i.e., its evaluation) depends on the difference in the ranking of the individual's destination with the ranking of the destination of others. The destination coefficient is then dependent on the rank difference and takes the form $\beta_d + \beta_i * \text{rank difference}$. Since we expect that vacation destination becomes more important when others travel to more attractive destinations, resulting in lower values of rank difference, we expect the interaction effect to be negative. Thus, if the interaction effect is negative and statistically significant, we can conclude that the vacation destination is a positional good. The results of our study, presented later, will illustrate this.

3.4 Model estimation

As previously mentioned, both an MNL (Multinomial Logit) model and a Latent Class Choice Model (LCCM) are estimated. While the MNL model assumes no heterogeneity in preferences, the LCCM assumes that different segments or classes exist within the population, each with distinct preferences, but internally relatively homogeneous (Green & Hensher, 2003). The LCCM estimates a separate set of parameters for each segment. These segments are latent, meaning they cannot be directly observed but emerge during the estimation process.

Since the number of classes is not known in advance, a series of models with varying numbers of classes is typically estimated. To determine the optimal number of classes, model fit is compared across these models, usually using the minimum Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and minimum Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) (Gupta & Chintagunta, 1994; Kamakura & Russell, 1989). Additionally, the interpretability of the identified classes also plays a role in this determination.

4 Results

In this section, we will first discuss the observed rankings of the destinations. Then, we will discuss the MNL model results and interpret the estimated interaction effect in terms of positionality. Next, we will examine whether there is a difference between choosing for oneself or for a family member. Finally, we will compare latent classes as identified by the estimated LCCM.

4.1 Destination ranking

To give an impression of the attractiveness of the five selected destinations, Table 3 presents how often each destination was ranked in a particular position. For example, the first cell indicates that South America was considered the least attractive by only 12.6% of respondents, the lowest among the five destinations. Often, it is assumed that faraway exotic destinations are the most preferred vacation destinations. Of the five selected destinations in this study, one may argue that this would be Oceania. However, Oceania only ranks fourth in terms of attractiveness. The most popular destination is South America, which is also a faraway destination, but it is closely followed by Western Europe, which is the closest. The latter is not surprising, as most Dutch people still go on vacation somewhere in Western Europe. This can, of course, be due to various other factors that,

in addition to the perceived attractiveness of the location itself, play a role, such as perceived travel costs and time, and how those are valued. Keep in mind that this measure of attractiveness did not control for differences in travel cost and time (which are accounted for in the choice experiment, where these factors are specified). Furthermore, Western Europe has the largest standard deviation, indicating relatively high heterogeneity in preference for this destination. These results show that faraway and exotic-sounding destinations are not automatically considered more attractive by everyone. We also see substantial heterogeneity in preferences. It is perhaps redundant to emphasise that this study is about the perceived attractiveness of destinations according to each respondent, not the distance.

Table 3. Distribution of destination attractiveness rankings

Destination	Attractiveness ranking					mean	std.
	1	2	3	4	5		
South America	12.6%	16.4%	25.8%	20.8%	24.5%	3.28	1.34
Western Europe	20.1%	17.0%	13.8%	17.0%	32.1%	3.24	1.54
East Asia	13.2%	24.5%	20.8%	21.4%	20.1%	3.11	1.34
Oceania	20.1%	18.9%	21.4%	23.9%	15.7%	2.96	1.37
Eastern Europe	34.0%	23.3%	18.2%	17.0%	7.5%	2.41	1.31

(1=least attractive; 5=most attractive)

4.2 Positionality

The first two columns of Table 4 present the estimated parameters of the MNL model, separately estimated for respondents making choices for themselves and those making choices for a distant family member. For both models, travel cost and time have the expected negative parameters and are statistically significant. As expected, the destination parameter is positive, indicating that a higher-ranked destination is more attractive. That these parameters match expectations adds credibility to the results.

Table 4. MNL model results by choice context

Parameters	Own choice (N=79)		For family member (N=80)	
	β	Z ¹	β	Z
Destination rank (d)	0.874	12.10	0.213	3.54
Destination rank * rank order difference (i)	-0.075	-4.17	-0.019	-1.15
Travel costs (c)	-0.0025	-11.32	-0.0004	-2.46
Travel time (t)	-0.112	-5.89	-0.055	-4.82

¹ An absolute Z-value > 1.96 denotes a statistically significant parameter at the 95% confidence level

We focus here on the results of the model estimated from the 'own choices' (first results column in Table 4). The interaction effect between destination and the rank difference with friends' destinations is negative and statistically significant. This means that the valuation of location attractiveness in vacation decisions becomes more important when friends travel to more attractive destinations. Thus, we conclude that a vacation destination is a positional good.

To illustrate this effect, we calculate the resulting destination parameter for every rank order difference by substituting the estimated parameters in the earlier explained equation ($(\beta_d + \beta_i \cdot \text{rank difference}) \cdot \text{destination}$), resulting in **0.874 - 0.075 × rank difference**. For example, if individuals and their friends travel to the same ranked destination, the rank-order difference is 0, and consequently the destination parameter is 0.874. If individuals travel to a destination ranked one place higher than their friends', the destination parameter is lower: $0.874 - 0.075 \cdot 1 = 0.799$. The resulting destination parameters for each of the rank differences are presented in the second row of Table 5. These results indicate that the higher the rank of the destination of friends compared to an individual's destination rank, the more s/he also prefers a higher-ranked destination. At the aggregate level, this implies that if in a society, 'others' choose higher-ranked destinations, people are also inclined to choose higher-ranked destinations. The reverse also holds: if 'others' travel to

lower-ranked destinations, people are less inclined to travel to higher-ranked destinations. In other words, if all people were to travel to lower-ranked destinations, the utility loss is smaller due to the positionality effect.

The cells in Table 5 denote the utility contribution for each destination rank, depending on the rank difference relative to their friends' destinations. This is calculated by multiplying the destination parameter presented in the third row by the destination rank. Every row shows increasing utility contributions as rank differences decrease, i.e., when friends travel to increasingly attractive destinations.

Note that the grey cells in Table 5 present combinations that are outside the range of observed values. Hence, these predictions should be interpreted with caution, as they rely on extrapolation, which is generally less reliable. Nevertheless, assuming that these values are not too far off, the results suggest that there may be situations in which people derive a higher utility from a situation in which (a) they travel to a lower-ranked destination while their friends travel to an even lower-ranked destination, compared to a situation in which (b) they travel to a higher-ranked destination, while their friends travel to an even higher-ranked destination. For example, the utility contribution of destination rank 3 when the rank difference is -1 (so their friends travel to a lower-ranked destination) is 2.847, which is higher than the utility contribution of destination rank 4, when the rank difference is 3 (so their friends travel to a higher-ranked destination), which is 2.596. This illustrates that in some cases travellers may be happier with a less attractive destination when their friends travel to an even worse destination in the travellers' perception.

Table 5. Predicted utility contributions of destination rank depending on rank difference

	Rank difference*						
	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Destination parameter	1.099	1.024	0.949	0.874	0.799	0.724	0.649
Destination rank							
1	1.099	1.024	0.949	0.874	0.799	0.724	0.649
2	2.198	2.048	1.898	1.748	1.598	1.448	1.298
3	3.297	3.072	2.847	2.622	2.397	2.172	1.947
4	4.396	4.096	3.796	3.496	3.196	2.896	2.596
5	5.495	5.120	4.745	4.370	3.995	3.620	3.245

* The grey areas signify the combinations outside the range of observed values

4.3 Own choice vs. family member

The second aim of this paper was to determine whether people make different choices for themselves than for a family member. Strikingly, Table 4 shows that all parameters are lower when choosing for a family member. This suggests that this group made less consistent choices.

The interaction parameter, i.e., the positionality indicator, is not statistically significant for this group. This is contrary to expectations: we expected the positionality effect to be stronger when choosing for a family member, assuming people are less likely to admit to comparing themselves with others. Asking how a family member would feel was intended to sidestep this. However, the results show this is not the case, at least not for vacation destination choices.

4.4 Heterogeneity in positionality

To explore heterogeneity in choices, a Latent Class Choice Model (LCCM) was estimated. Given the large inconsistencies in the group that chose for family members, and the non-significant positionality effect in that group, this model was based only on the group that made choices for themselves (N = 79). Since the preferred class size should not fall far below 30 individuals, we compared only two- and three-class models. Although the three-class model had better BIC and AIC values, the third class mostly split off from the smallest class in the two-class model and showed little difference in parameter values. Thus, we chose the two-class model.

Table 6. The estimated latent class choice model (based on own choices)

Attributes	Class 1		Class 2		MNL (N=79)	
	β	Z	β	Z	β	Z
Destination rank (d)	1.903	8.36	-0.002	-0.01	0.874	12.10
Destination rank * rank order difference (i)	-0.178	-4.36	0.026	0.73	-0.075	-4.17
Travel costs (c)	-0.0040	-10.70	-0.0022	-4.02	-0.0025	-11.32
Travel time (t)	-0.172	-4.94	-0.130	-3.24	-0.112	-5.89
Class size	72%		28%		100%	

The results of this analysis (see Table 6) show that the interaction effect is not statistically significant in the second class, which suggests that people in this class are not sensitive to positionality. On the other hand, the positionality effect is much stronger in the first class, which includes most of the respondents. This analysis suggests that people differ in the extent to which they are sensitive to positionality. However, it should be stressed that these results are based on a small, non-representative sample, so the share of travellers who are sensitive to positionality in the population may be considerably higher or lower than the results reported here, which apply only to this sample.

Moreover, an attempt was made to estimate a membership model that would allow for explaining positionality sensitivity in terms of respondent characteristics. However, none of these characteristics were found to be statistically significant. So, the extent to which sensitivity to positionality is distributed in the population and which personal characteristics are related to this is still open to answering and is an interesting topic for future research.

Furthermore, although Class 2 parameters are generally lower than those of Class 1, both classes have expected negative coefficients for travel time and cost that are statistically significant. Dividing the time coefficient by the cost coefficient provides an estimate of the *Value of Travel Time Savings*. In Class 1, this is €43 per hour, and in Class 2, it is €59 per hour. These values do not differ much from the official value of time value for non-business air travel in the Netherlands, which is €53 per hour (Kouwenhoven et al., 2023). These findings lend credibility to our study's results.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This paper investigated whether vacation destination is a positional good by conducting a context-dependent choice experiment and estimating both a Multinomial Logit (MNL) model and a Latent Class Model. In the experiment, respondents made choices between two vacation trips that varied in destination, travel costs, and travel time, assuming their friends were travelling to a given destination (the context). Half of the respondents were asked to choose for themselves, and the other half to choose for a family member. To examine whether positionality was present, we estimated an interaction between the respondent's own destination and the difference from their friends' destinations.

The estimated interaction effect was statistically significant, which allows us to conclude that vacation choice is a positional good. The interaction effect is negative, meaning that the importance of the destination increases when friends travel to a more attractive destination and decreases when they travel to a less attractive one. Furthermore, contrary to expectations, the positionality effect was not stronger when choices were made for a family member compared to when individuals made choices for themselves.

That vacation destination is a positional good has an important implication for policy aimed at curbing or reducing the growth in air travel. Because the destination plays a smaller role when others also travel to less attractive destinations, the welfare loss of such policy measures is likely to be smaller than currently assumed. After all, others are affected by the same measures and therefore also cannot visit the most attractive destinations. This is an important insight for policymakers and politicians advocating for such policies, such as raising the price of airline tickets

by taxing kerosene, imposing higher taxes on CO₂ emissions and other pollutants, possibly progressively (higher taxes for those who fly more and farther), or by limiting flight rights.

An unexpected result in this study was that we found substantial differences between the self-choice group and the group that made choices for a distant family member, particularly that the positionality effect was not as strong as expected; it was smaller and not statistically significant. This raises questions about the validity of the latter group's choices in our study. Furthermore, it raises concerns about whether choosing for a family member is always a sound method. Maybe it is more difficult for some choices for people to admit that their choices are influenced by other people's decisions than for other choices. But it could be that the results are influenced by the fact that our framing of the question was less explicit in emphasising that the family member lives far away in the future, as done in Carlsson *et al.* (2007). Additionally, our study informed respondents only of the others' destination choices, whereas Carlsson *et al.* (2007) described all attributes of the alternatives. Further research into the optimal phrasing of these questions is therefore needed.

Like any study, this research has limitations that may warrant further investigation. First, the results are based on a relatively small convenience sample. Future research should aim for larger and more representative samples. Larger samples also allow for a more extensive examination of the heterogeneity in sensitivity to positionality, as well as which personal characteristics are related to it. In addition to the personal characteristics measured in this study, future research could include factors such as household composition, attitudes, travel habits, travel companions, and vacation preferences.

A second limitation is that we measured the ranking of destinations, which is an ordinal level of measurement, but treated it as an interval level and estimated linear effects. This was done for reasons of parsimony, as correctly representing ordinal predictors would require including many dummy variables. That would substantially increase the number of parameters to be estimated, which is undesirable given the limited sample size and the increased risk of finding unexpected, non-linear effects that we would be unable to interpret. Nevertheless, future research could consider alternative representations or measure destination attractiveness on an interval scale.

A third limitation is that we did not account for travel time and costs when ranking the five selected destinations. This implies that the observed destination attractiveness ranking may reflect not only the destination's pure attractiveness but also the effort required to get there, in terms of travel time and travel costs. Future research may avoid this by instructing respondents to ignore travel time and costs when expressing the destination's attractiveness, for example, by referring to travelling by portkey in the Harry Potter movies or by teleportation in the Star Trek movies ('Beam me up, Scotty').

Finally, we estimated only a linear effect of the rank difference relative to others, treating a better and a worse destination (from the respondent's perspective) as having symmetric effects. Prospect theory, however, suggests that losses and gains relative to a reference point are weighted differently. Future research could explore this.

We also emphasise that this study focused on destination attractiveness. As previously discussed, faraway destinations are not necessarily perceived as more attractive. The selected destinations also cannot automatically be scaled by distance. While most people likely consider destinations in Western Europe to be closer than those in Eastern Europe, the differences in perceived distance are less clear for Oceania, South America, and East Asia. If there is interest in directly linking destinations to distance, a more suitable selection might be: the Netherlands, central Germany/France, Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece), just outside Europe (Turkey, North Africa, Middle East), and "Farawaystan" (East Asia, North or Latin America, Africa, Oceania).

Lastly, we want to highlight a fundamental way vacation destinations differ from other positional goods. A likely mechanism underlying positionality is the idea that consuming a superior option signals a certain level of status. However, this status must be granted by others who share a similar

valuation of the good. This is where a vacation destination differs from other positional goods, such as homes, clothing, and cars. For example, while one may argue that there is some consensus that sleeker design, higher speed, more luxury, and higher price indicate higher status in cars, because of the substantial heterogeneity in vacation destination preferences, this consensus is weaker for vacation destinations. Many people expect that exotic, distant locations confer status, but our study shows that the most exotic destination (Oceania) ranked only fourth, while the least exotic (Western Europe) ranked second, not far behind the top-ranked destination. The destination ranking showed considerable heterogeneity in preferences, implying that someone travelling to their favourite spot in Western Europe won't necessarily gain status in the eyes of someone who favours South America. Although we acknowledge, as previously discussed, that our destination attractiveness measure does not strictly capture the location's attractiveness alone but is confounded by the valuation of travel time and travel cost, we believe that if we factor out this confound, we will still observe substantial heterogeneity in destination preferences. One may argue that a limitation of this study is that our measurement of positionality is based on respondents' individual preferences, which may differ from those of their peers, and, as a result, status is likely not (or to a lesser extent) granted. Thus, although we demonstrated that individuals' valuation of their vacation destination depends on where others are going, it remains uncertain whether people gain status by travelling to their most attractive destination. This is an interesting question to examine in further research.

Moreover, the favourite destinations weren't necessarily the farthest, which means this study offers only a limited explanation for the increasing number of long-haul flights. To better understand that trend, future research should focus on travellers who prefer long-distance vacations. This group is likely to have more homogeneous preferences, making it easier to study whether status is derived from distant vacation destinations.

Despite its limitations and the many areas left to explore regarding positionality in vacation destinations, we believe this study makes a valuable contribution to the literature. It is the first to demonstrate that a vacation destination is a positional good, an insight that also carries important implications for policies aimed at reducing air travel.

Data Access Statement

Data supporting this study are available from 4TU.ResearchData at <https://doi.org/10.4121/81910815-0b19-4304-872d-6c31255c8e61>.

Author and Contributor statement

Eric Molin: Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft; Jorge Quesada: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation; Steven Yoh: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing; Bert van Wee: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing

Use of AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGTP to translate the paper of an earlier Dutch version and to improve the readability of some sentences. After using this tool, the authors reviewed, edited, made the content their own, and validated the outcome as needed, and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Conflict of Interest (COI)

There is no conflict of interest.

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