

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM: A STUDY WITH SENIOR TOURISTS

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Resume: This study investigates several similarities and differences in travel behavior patterns between mature and younger consumers in the Brazilian marketplace. More precisely, this paper attempts to understand the relationships between age and patterns of travel behavior. The travel dimensions that were explored are: motivation to travel, motivation to travel with package tours, activities engaged during the trips, travel related life styles, types of pleasure trips taken and source of information used to plan the trips. Results suggest that the older and younger travelers present some similarities and differences in their travel related behaviors. The dimensions differentiating the two groups were travel related lifestyles, motivation to travel and activities performed during the trip. The other dimensions revealed similar behavioral patterns.

Key words: Mature Consumers; Senior Tourists; Tourism.

Twenty years of senior travel research have yielded considerable understanding on travel behavior. The majority of the research in the area has contrasted the similarities and differences between senior and non-senior travel-related behaviors (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Javalgi, Thomas & Rao, 1992; Mcguire, Uysal & McDonald, 1988; Romsa & Blenman, 1989). Previous studies have focused on different aspects of the phenomenon. Javalgi, Thomas & Rao (1992) examined the types of pleasure trips taken and other travel related characteristic of senior and non-senior. Zimmer (1995) analyzed the differences between older adults who travel and those who do not, and destination choices. Blazey (1987) compared constrains to travel

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among older people. Hawes (1988) explored the travel related lifestyles of older women whereas Capella & Greco (1987) and Mcguire, Uysal & Mcdonald (1988) investigated the information sources utilized by the older consumers when planning their trips. Blazey (1992) studied the relationship between pre and postretirement status and older adult travel activities. Romsa & Blenman (1989) focused on the activities that mature travelers engage during the trips. Shoemaker (1989), Lieux (1994) and Anderson & Langmeyer (1982) examined motivations to travel, while Quiroga (1990) and Thomson & Pearce (1980) considered the motivation to travel on package tours.

Despite the substantial set of knowledge aggregated about the senior travel and tourism literature, the majority of the empirical studies have been conducted primarily in the USA. Very little effort has been made to understand the phenomenon in other countries, with the exception of the work of Romsa & Blenman (1989); Quiroga (1990) and Thomson & Pearce (1980).

The present study investigates several similarities and differences in travel behaviors patterns between mature and younger consumers in the Brazilian marketplace in order to extend the core findings in the area to international context. More precisely, the study attempts to understand the relationship between age and patterns of travel behavior. Specifically, the dimensions compared in this research are: their motivation to travel; motivation to travel with package tours; the activities engaged during the trips; travel related life styles, types of pleasure trips taken and source of information used to plan the trips.

Hypotheses

Motivation to Travel

Previous research shows that motivations for pleasure trips that were found to be important to the seniors were *to get rest and relaxation* (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982, Romsa & Blenma, 1989, Shoemaker, 1989, Lieux, 1994), *to be able to experience new things, to visit new places, to spend time with immediate family, to escape the everyday routine, to visit museums and historical sights* (Shoemaker, 1989; Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982) and *to visit friends and relatives* (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982 and Romsa & Blenma, 1989). Moreover, the studies that compared seniors with non-seniors found that *visit friends and relatives* (Romsa & Blenma, 1989) and *visit historical sights* (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982) were more important to the senior

group than to the non-senior group. Therefore, we hypothesize: H1: Motivation to travel will vary between mature and young groups.

Motivation to Travel with Package Tours

In an investigation about package tours in Europe, Quiroga's (1990) results indicate that there is a significant relationship between age and reasons to participate in package tours. Motivation related to *personal safety* emerge as an essential reason for people over 65 and the last important for those under 26 for whom the fundamental benefit is *making friends*. The other motives given by the mature travelers were "*getting the most of the journey*" and "*not having to worry about planning and organization of the trip*". The results of Thomson & Pearce (1980) investigation, where 80% of the sample were travelers over 45 years old, revealed that travelers opt to go in package tours because they consider 1) it is the *way to get most out of the trip*, 2) that *one doesn't have to worry with the organization of the trip* 3) *they can meet and travel with other people*. Therefore, we hypothesize: H2: Motivation to travel with package trip will vary between mature and young groups.

Travel Related Activities Engaged During the Trip

Blazey (1992) scrutinized travel related activities in which pre-retirement and postretirement individuals (who were 50 and older) were likely to engage during the trip. According to the results of the study, people who were still working tend to participate in the following activities: *to shop, go to a beach, to swim and to ride a bicycle*. On the other hand, the activities that the postretirement travelers tend to engage were *to go in a package tour*. Romsa and Blenman (1989) compared travel related activities among four groups: 30 to 39 years old, 40 to 49, 60 to 69 and 70 and older (the group with age between 50 and 59 was not investigated). The results indicated that both senior and non-senior travelers participate in activities such as *to go to a special place to have dinner, read magazines and news papers, to walk, to hike, to shop and tour*. However, younger people are inclined to engage more in activities as *swimming, to perform physical activities, to play with children, to have sunbath and to take pictures*. The older travelers are predisposed to take part in activities related with *religion* and to *talk*. Therefore, we hypothesize: H3: Travel related activities engaged during the trip will vary between mature and young groups.

Travel Related Life Styles

The lifestyle profiles of elderly travelers were investigated by Hawes (1988) and Anderson & Langmeyer (1982). Travel related lifestyle is defined as the activities, interests and opinions related with traveling. Hawes' (1988) findings revealed that the majority of the women reported were interested in *resting and relaxing* in their vacations, feel that “*travel-now-pay-later vacation*” is wrong, that *when it comes to their recreation, time is more important than money*; and they *like to experience the uncertainty of not knowing what they will encounter from day to day*. Anderson & Langmeyer (1982) have identified that the majority of the 50 year old over and travelers tended to do what other members of the party wanted to do most of the time than younger travelers and that they tended to engage less in sport activities and felt less active than younger travelers. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H₄: Travel related life styles will vary between mature and young groups.

Types of Pleasure Trips Taken

Javalgi, Thomas & Rao (1992) and McGuire, Uysal & McDonald (1988) compared the types of pleasure trips taken by senior and non-senior travelers. The findings revealed that senior travelers tend to take part more than younger travelers in trips *to visit friends, touring vacation and cruise*. In addition, the older group participate less in comparison with the younger travelers in *outdoor vacation, trips to theme park or special event, city trip* (Javalgi, Thomas & Rao, 1992 and McGuire, Uysal & McDonald, 1988), *close to home leisure trip* and *resort vacation* (Javalgi, Thomas & Rao, 1992). Therefore, we hypothesize: H₅: Types of travel trips taken will vary between mature and young groups.

Source of Information

Research focusing on the sources of travel information showed that the most important sources of information that seniors use in order to plan their trips were *family, past experience* (Capella & Greco, 1987), *friends* (McGuire, Uysal and McDonald, 1988; Capella & Greco, 1987), *travel agencies* and *press media* (McGuire, Uysal e McDonald, 1988). However, research showed also that a large number of mature travelers do not use any type of source of information to plan their trip (McGuire, Uysal and McDonald, 1988).

Blazey (1992) examined the source of information that 50 years old pre-retired and retired travelers employ when planning their trips. His findings indicated that the source of information most popular among the 50 and older travelers were (in the following order): *maps, word of mouth communication, pamphlets/brochures, travel agent, American Automobile Association (AAA), travel guidebook, State Tourism Office, magazine articles and newspaper advertisement*. As the related studies about this source of information did not compare senior and non-senior behavior, no hypothesis about relationship between age and source of information was established.

Research Design

This study was undertaken in Sao Paulo city, Brazil. The data was obtained by personal interviews with structured questionnaires and were conducted in the subjects' homes. The sampling frame was composed by 273 elements selected by a snowball technique and separated in two groups: the 25-54 and 55 years of age and older. The age of 25 was applied in order to exclude the students who have a very specific travel behavioral pattern. In addition, the age of 55 was chosen as a cut-off point between mature and younger travelers since it has been used by many previous studies on mature consumer and senior travel behaviors (see Moschis, Mathur & Smith, 1993; Lazer, 1986; Javalgi, Thomas & Rao, 1992; Shoemaker, 1989). Following, Javalgi, Thomas & Rao (1992), in order to be included in the sample the respondent must have taken at least one pleasure trip during the three years preceding the study.

All the conceptual definitions, questions items and scales measures were derived from the travel and tourism literature. Trip types were defined based on Javalgi, Thomas & Rao (1992); travel related lifestyles were based on Hawes (1988) and Anderson and Langmeyer (1982); motivation to travel, based on Shoemaker (1984); sources of information to travel, based on Capella and Greco (1987), activities engaged during the trips, based on the work of Romsa & Blenman (1989) and on Blazey (1992) and motivation to travel on package tours was based on the investigation of Quiroga (1990). The data was examined using descriptive statistics analysis and qui-square (X^2).

The hypotheses also were derived from previous research. The following chart presents the hypotheses of the study:

HYPOTHESES
H1: Motivation to travel will vary between mature and young groups
H2: Motivation to travel with package trip will vary between mature and young groups
H3: Travel related activities engaged during the trip will vary between mature and young groups.
H4: Travel related life styles will vary between mature and young groups
H5: Types of travel trips taken will vary between mature and young groups.

Results

Demographics of the segments:

Among the younger travelers almost 55% of the respondents were between 25 and 40 years old; 32.5% were between 41 and 50 and only 12.6% were between 51 and 54 years old. In the senior group 19% of the informants were 55 to 60 years old, 53.3% belonged to the 61 to 70 age group and 27.9% were 70 years of age and over. In the senior group older women are over-represented. They comprise 75.4% of this group. In both groups there was a predominance of married people. However, among the younger group there was a large number of single people and among the senior group the widow status comprised 32% of the sample.

As one would expect, there is a significant association between level of education and age. The younger group tends to have more formal education than the senior travelers. Roughly, slightly more than half of the younger group (51.3%) completed their undergraduate studies and almost 23% had some graduate studies. Among the seniors travelers these figures drop to 36.1% and 5.7%, respectively. The majority of the respondents of this survey belonged to the social class A (upper class) or B (middle class). Among the non-seniors, 48.34% comprised the class A and 37.75% the social class B. Among the seniors these figures were 37.7% and 44.26%.

Motivation to Travel

Results reveal that Brazilian seniors travel for the following reasons: “to meet people and socialize” (60%), “to escape the everyday routine” (82%), “to rest and relaxation” (83%), “to visit museums and historical sights” (66%), “to visit new places and to experience new things” (89%).

The X^2 test shows that motivation measures were statistically different for the two groups, that is, to escape the every day routine and to engage in physical activities. Thus the two groups differ in these two dimensions. Therefore, to this sample motivation to travel varies between mature and younger groups.

Motivation to Travel with Package Tours

The main reasons to travel with package tours given by the oldest group were “personal safety” (92%), “lack of worry with the organization of the trip” (86%), “travel with other people” (71%), and “to make friends” (65%). Surprisingly, the three main important reasons for the senior travelers were the same for the younger group, that is, “personal safety” (81%), “lack of worry” (79%) and “travel with other people” (56%). In Quiroga’s (1990) study personal safety was a reason featuring the oldest group and making friends was, on the other hand, the major reason characterizing the youngest group. In this research, both reasons were important to either age group. Hence, in our study the two groups state to travel for the same reasons and this fact is ratified by the X^2 that revealed that there is no relationship between age and motivation to travel with package tours.

Activities during the trips

The most popular activities among older travelers are *sightseeing* (98.4%), *to go out to have dinner* (89%), *to shop* (88%), *to see the movement of the town* (87%), *walk* (86%), *to visit historical sights* (84%), *to visit museums* (82%) and *to visit cathedrals and churches* (81%). Therefore, in this investigation activities engaged during the trip varied between mature and younger groups. However, the major differences between the two groups were featured by the following activities: *to swim*, *to go to a nightclub*, *to go to the beach*, *to see the movement of the town*, *to attend the theater* and *to visit cathedrals and churches*. Such findings appear to be consistent with Romsa & Blenman (1989) results. In addition, the X^2 test attests that there is a statistically significant relationship between age and activities performed during the trip (the estimated X^2 was 52,61, which is a higher value in comparison to the table X^2 for 21 degrees of freedom and 5% of level of significant).

Travel Related Lifestyle Profiles:

The agreement of the senior and non senior group varied to the following four AIO statements – “*When it comes to my recreation, time is a more important factor than money*”, “*I like to spend my vacation in or near a big city*”, “*On a vacation, I tend to engage in sport activities*”, “*On a vacation, I use to do what other members of my party want to do most of the time*”. The measures of association between these four statements were statistically significant (all four estimated X^2 - were higher than table X^2 that is 3,84). Thus, these AIO statements differentiate the two age groups of travelers interviewed. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents from both age groups consider that “*travel-now-pay-later*” vacation is not wrong and both affirm that in their “*vacation they just want to rest and relax*”. Therefore, in this investigation *travel related lifestyles profiles* varied between mature and younger groups.

Types of Pleasure Trips Taken

Overall, there is an indication of the existence of a linear relationship between the age grouping and the types of trips taken. In comparison to the younger group, older travelers are more likely to have taken trips to *visit friends and relatives* and *package tours*. In Addition, they are less likely to have taken trip types as *outdoor vacation, trips to theme park or special event, city trip, close to home leisure trip* and *resort vacation*. However, the X^2 test revealed that there was no significant difference for comparisons of proportions between the two groups. Therefore, in this investigation types of pleasure trips taken don't vary between mature and younger groups.

Source of information used to plan the trip

The large majority of the respondents, both the older or the younger travelers, reported using a source of information when planning their trips. In addition, few differences were found between types of source of information applied by the two groups. Both groups reported using *travel agencies, past experience, friends, family, travel magazines* and *newspapers*. Actually, this fact explains why the X^2 test revealed that there is no significant relationship between age and usage of information or type of source of information.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

As indicated earlier, there is a preponderance of empirical studies administered in the U.S. The present study, however, was conducted in the Brazilian marketplace. This investigation was undertaken to understand the relationship between age and travel behavior. Specifically, the research aimed to examine the differences and similarities in travel behavior patterns between two groups of age, 25 - 55 year old group and the 55 and older group concerning some selected dimensions.

Overall, the hypothesis that guided this research was that the behavior of senior travelers in leisure trips is different from the behavior of younger travelers. As indicated earlier, senior and non-senior behavior were compared on different aspects. The results show that the older and younger travelers present some similarities and differences in their travel related behaviors. More precisely, the dimensions differentiating the two groups were *travel related lifestyles, motivation to travel and activities performed during the trip*. The other dimensions revealed similar behavioral patterns.

In this manner, the results of this investigation confirm partially previous research and contribute to provide more empirical research to the studies of mature consumer behavior in tourism.

Our findings have important implications for marketers. For example, when addressing mature consumer marketing managers should conduct Market research in order to determine their differences and similarities before launching marketing stimulus to target this segment.

The most apparent limitation of this paper is that it can be classified as an extension of existing studies and does not contribute with new ideas to the literature. However, the over accentuation on creativity tend to obscure the importance of replication studies to scientific progress in establishing findings. In fact, according to HUNTER (2001), "*scientific progress requires a database of facts and facts can only be determined by extending the findings of existing studies*" (p.2).

However, as with all research, the limitations of this study suggest possibilities for future investigative attempts. For instance, the sampling applied in the study was a snowball technique. A sampling frame representative of the universe and based on a random selection would improve the research design of the study. Future research should also conduct cross-cultural comparison studies related to constraint to travel and retirement status. Another

interesting stream of research would be the exploration of the linkage between travel related activities and disengagement Theory of Aging and Activity Theory of aging.

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