

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MATURE TRAVELERS ON THE BASIS OF INTERNET USE

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ABSTRACT

Travel and tourism marketers face a highly competitive environment brought on by the changing demographics of the U.S. population, the most significant change being the growth in size of the mature segment of the population. In terms of market size, there are currently 73 million people age 50 and older, comprising nearly one-fourth of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). That number is expected to rise to 96 million by 2010, representing one-third of the population (Rasmusson 2000).

A swelling population is not the only enticement that this age group offers. It is important to note that many mature consumers have deep pockets and a strong desire to spend. In fact, they control more than three-quarters of the wealth and one-half of the discretionary income in the nation. It is also estimated that they lay claim to three-fourths of the country's financial assets and boast more than \$1 trillion in annual buying power. When all is said and done, this age group accounts for 40 percent of the total consumer demand in the United States (Swartz, 1999). However, even though recognizing the significance of the mature market in terms of their market size and economic potential, little research has been conducted to identify and understand the mature travelers who use the Internet.

The main purpose of this study is to profile mature travelers on the basis of Internet use. More specifically, the intention is to examine the demographic and socio-

economic characteristics of mature travelers who use the Internet compared to those who do not use the Internet. In addition, the purpose of the present study is to examine whether or not differences exist between Internet users and Internet non-users among mature travelers with respect to travel behavior. Attention is paid to investigate types of trip selected, the preferred activities participated in during the travel, length of stay, travel-related expenditures, type of lodging, type of transportation, number in the travel party, and type of travel party in explaining the differences between Internet users and Internet non-users of the mature market.

Data were collected by utilizing a mailed questionnaire. 433 responses (23.44 percent of the total target population) were coded and used for data analysis. Data were analyzed by employing three types of data analysis: chi-square tests of independence; t-tests; and multiple discriminant analysis.

The findings in the present study suggest that there are numerous differences in demographics, socio-economic characteristics, and travel characteristics between Internet users and Internet non-users among mature travelers. As a whole, for example, the results revealed that mature travelers who use the Internet were more likely to be younger, have higher annual household incomes, and have higher levels of education than mature travelers who do not use the Internet. Also, the results indicated that mature travelers who are still working are more likely to use the Internet than those who are not working. By understanding and utilizing information gathered from Internet users and Internet non-users demographics, socio-economic characteristics, and travel characteristics, tourism planners and marketers can develop appropriate and effective marketing strategies that appeal to mature travelers.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved wife, Eunsoo Park. Without her inspiration and encouragement, this thesis would not been possible. I also dedicate this thesis to my parents, Moonchan Cho and Choonja Choi. They gave me unconditional love, encouragement, and support. I also dedicate this thesis to my father-in-law, Wanhee Park and mother-in-law, Myungja Lee. They gave me encouragement and love which has influenced the successful completion of this study.

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