

**SENIOR TOURISM: AN ANALYSIS OF HOLIDAY PURCHASE DECISIONS AND  
MAJOR BEHAVIOURAL CONSTRAINTS**

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**Abstract**

The volume of senior tourism has increased rapidly in last three decades and attracted researchers' interest in its patterns and behavioral dimensions not only in developed but also in third world countries. Over the time, requirements to define it, investigate its dimensions in context of motivations, constraints and decisions making processes were felt globally. Present paper is modest effort to discuss all these issues in details by making analysis of existing literature.

**Keywords:** Senior, tourist, behavior, purchasing, decisions, constraints

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**Introduction**

The proportion of older people in world population is increasing continuously and forecasted to reach up-to one fourth of total population by 2030 (Harper and Leeson, 2008). This aging phenomenon has made shift of economy from good production to service production in developed countries like Australia, Japan, North America and countries of Western Europe (Schettkat and Yocarini, 2006). The seniors have showed bright promises for tourism and world tourism organization (2000) indicated that its relevance in words of “an opportunity for growth for the twenty-first century”. Importance of senior tourism is because of -1) seniors’ population is bound to rise in future; 2) they have disposable money and time and; 3) they take more holidays and stay longer at destinations (Lavery, 1999; World Tourism Organization, 2000). This market has already attracted considerable studies like Blazey, (1992); Javalgi *et al.*, (1992); Shoemaker, (1989). Findings of these studies indicate that growth in seniors’ population is because of improved health facilities early retirement, active life style, higher life expectancies and increased prosperity. Studies have also investigated the behavior of this segment in detail. Studies like expenditure patterns (Hong *et al.*, 1999; Jang and Ham, 2009), travel motivations (Norman *et al.*, 2001), safety concerns (Lindqvist and Björk, 2000), travel constraints (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2008), accommodation preferences (Ananth *et al.*, 1992; Lieux *et al.*, 1994; Sund and Boksberger, 2007), holiday patterns (Javalgi *et al.*, 1992; Romsa and Blenman, 1989), changes over time in seniors’ behavior (Möller *et al.*, 2007; Shoemaker, 2000; You and O’Leary, 2000) and market segmentation (Boksberger and Laesser, 2009; Cleaver, 2004; Hsu and Lee, 2002; Shoemaker, 1989) are working as base for marketing strategies of destinations.

The lack of universally accepted definition has created controversy (Faranda and Schmidt, 1999; Patterson, 2006) and cut-off age of senior tourist is still not commonly accepted. Aging affects in heterogeneous manner, makes cut-off subjective and makes shift to cognitive age concept popular among researchers (Patterson, 2006.). This paper with objective to investigate definition of seniors’ tourism, their purchasing behavior, segmentation and constraints reviews literature extensively.

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**Purchase decision-making process**

Elderly travelers have become attraction of tourism industry at global level and the segment cannot be overlooked ((Jang and Wu 2006; Lehto, O’Leary and Lee 2001; Capella and Greco 1987). Supernaw (1985) stated that, after retirement, number one thing, which people want to pursue, is “travel” in case of USA. In USA, seniors travel frequently, stay longer at destination and require more services from travel trade (Rosenfeld, 1986). Generally, these people have already made their investments in term of time and finance in their families and now enjoy freedom, as their children are dependent (Zimmer, Brayley and Searle 1995).

In purchase decisions, the influence of children, wife and husband vary according to the stages of family life cycle. Purchase decisions are bound to travel through three phases namely problem recognition, information collections and purchase realization (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Nelson 1979; Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Howard and Madrigal 1990). In tourism industry, purchase decisions also follow the same route. In study conducted by Sharp and Mot, (1956), it was found that majority of marketing mix elements (Jenkins, 1978) were present in tourism products. This study also revealed that decisions related to length of stay, timing of holiday and expenditures are influenced by husband while wife have more influence on decisions related to mode of transport, activities, undertaking during holidays, choice of destination and holiday purchase decisions (Darley and Lim, 1986). Majority of studies deals with the role played by husband and wife in decision making (Litvin, Xu and Kang 2004; Gray 1999; Ritchie and Filiatrault 1980 Kersteter and Pennington; Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Nichols and Snepenger 1988) while other studies (Ritchie and Filiatrault 1980; Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Cosenza and Davis 1981; Howard and Madrigal 1990; Nichols and Snepenger 1988; Fodness 1992) have investigated the role of children in vacation decision making process related to decision making processes.

Greater personal flexibility of seniors allows them longer time stay at destination (Romsa and Blenman, 1989). This segment tends to purchase packaged trips and to take travel agents help in both accommodation and transport arrangements (Javalgi, Thomas and Rao (1992)). Literature has provided a number of highly relevant studies (Shoemaker 2000; Lieux, Reece 2004; Weaver and McCleary 1994; Horneman et al. 2002 motivation (Guinn 1980), uses of travel information (Capella and Greco 1987), constraints to travel (Blazey 1987 and Fleischer

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and Pizam 2002). Milman (1998) concluded that senior tourists rely mainly on travel agency, tour operator and destination brochure. These elderly tourists travel in-group, takes holiday package and try to visit several destinations were some of the findings of study conducted by Sheldon and Mak's (1987). Some studies (Belch, Belch and Ceresino 1985; Jenkins 1978, 1979; Szybillo and Sosanie 1977) have tried to answer questions like -where to go, where to stay, and how much money to spend, how much time spend.

### **Behavioral assessment of senior tourists**

This section of paper deals with identification of behavior of senior tourists for segmentation. Empirical studies of field indicate three basic element i.e. temporal dimension, traveling constraints and criteria of segmentation.

#### **a) Analysis of temporal dimension**

Longitudinal studies for investigation of changing behavioral dimension are very scarce in tourism discipline. Shoemaker, (1989) studied it by collecting data from same group of respondents after 10 years in Pennsylvania. In the studies conducted for examination of seniors' behavior, major contribution is from the study of Shoemaker (2000). Zimmermann (1982) described this concept with help of life cycle, period and cohort dimensions which Oppermann (1995, in following words also described

*“Period effects refer to annual changes and/or specific events that influence tourism behavior (e.g. Gulf War). Life cycle adverts to variations of the behavior over the life-span of an individual, most often associated with changes in family structure. Cohort effects relate to behavior patterns that are influenced by some unique aspect of that cohort, such as its size or historic background (e.g. baby boom generation).”*

Cohort analysis, which is generational in nature, attempts to investigate dimensions of relationship between behavioral patterns of tourist for past and present. Studies indicate that preferences and patterns related to vacation changes with passage of time. Generational comparisons in seniors' behavior changes in travel propensity (Lohmann and Danielsson, 2001),

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activity participation (You and O’Leary, 2000) , travel preferences (Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter, 2001), the life cycle and across cohorts (Lohmann and Danielsson, 2001; Oppermann, 1995, travel preferences (Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter, 2001) and online travel purchase behavior (Beldona *et al.*, 2009) is available in literature. But more empirical researches in order to examine behavioral changes from more additional time intervals are a need of field (Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter, 2001) in contemporary times.

#### **b) Constraints of travelling**

Constraints answer the question “why seniors do not travel and what are the factors which prevents them from traveling. Theory of family life cycle suggests that more disposable time, fewer work and family responsibilities and more purchasing power are some of factors, which favor senior travelings while health problem can limit their traveling. Blazey (1987), Fleischer and Pizam (2002), Nyaupane *et al.* (2008) and Zimmer *et al.* (1995) have addressed this issue empirically by considering the relationship between socio-economic characters and demographic profiles like age, gender education, level of income and status of health. Some constrains like advanced age (Blazey, 1987; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2008; Zimmer *et al.*, 1995), health or mobility problems (Blazey, 1987; Fleischer and Pizam, 2002; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2008; Zimmer *et al.*, 1995) constraints of income (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002 ) and not having a travel companion (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2008 ) have been used to make differentiation between main stream tourist and senior tourist.

#### **c) Segmentation**

Senior tourists are dynamic in travel habits and their heterogeneity can be assessed by their travel preferences, expected benefits and lifestyle. Age wise segmentation i.e.50 years or more than it (You and O’Leary, 1999) and 55 years or more than it (Boksberger and Laesser, 2009; Shoemaker, 1989) does not provide true picture for segmentation, because “their reasons and/or motivations for pleasure travel” (Shoemaker, 1989) plays more important role and relevance in purchase decisions. Motivation and activity preference of senior tourists can be observed by considering three categories, which includes family travelers, active resters and the older set. The statement like “their needs and lifestyles, which are in turn influenced by life-

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changing events and circumstances they experience” (Moschis, 1996) highlighted the need of changing experiences and life events inclusion of ‘Gerontographics’. Segmentation approach advocated by Moschis, (1996) discussed four consumer segments i.e. *Healthy Hermits, Ailing Outgoers, Frail Recluses* and *Healthy Indulgers for*. Extensive literature search reveals that following three broad criteria can be used to segment the senior tourists.

- 1) Psychographics – Supportive studies are Horneman *et al.*, (2002; Lehto *et al.*, (2001)
- 2) Motivations- Empirically examined by Boksberger and Laesser, (2009); Cleaver, (2004); Lieux *et al.*, (1994) Shoemaker, 1989, 2000);
- 3) Gerontographic- advocated by Moschis and U’nal, (2008).

Variation in want and demand of seniors because of their preferences, motivations and life style requires separate marketing strategies for desired level success (Lieux *et al.*, 1994; Patterson, 2006).

### Conclusion

Senior tourist being vulnerable and heterogeneous should not be focused only on their advanced ages, mobility problems and social dependency. The variation in their preferences, motivations and behavior should also be taken care of while segmenting. The analysis of constraints needs to address in more detailed manner. The generational analysis based on empirical data can provide extra advantage for marketers. This paper tried to attain its objectives by providing a synthesis of senior tourists’ a detailed overview on behavioral dimension and purchasing decision process.

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