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COMPARISON OF PERCEIVED TRAVEL CONSTRAINTS TO TRAVEL BEHAVIOR
CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLEGE-EDUCATED MATURE ADULTS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Given that by the year 2,000 the number of mature adults (55-69 years of age) will increase by 23% (Josephson, 1989), the number of individuals having the capacity to travel for pleasure is staggering. According to Rosenfeld (1986), mature adults "travel more frequently, go longer distances [and] stay away longer...than any other segment of the population" (p. 38).

Although mature adults travel, few studies have been conducted on their perceived constraints to pleasure travel. Research conducted by Blazey (1986), Richardson (1986), and Sheldon and Mak (1987), found availability of time, absence of information or travel companion, and lack of money to be examples of constraints to travel. However, not one of the three research efforts specifically focused on mature adults. In addition, they did not sample college-educated mature adults—a population more likely to travel for pleasure than those with lower levels of education (Josephson, 1989). Furthermore, Frechtling (1987) argues that analyzing the mature adult market as a whole is problematic because there is no common "mature adult market." The travel-related needs of persons 55- to 69-years old differ and may be observed when subgroups (i.e., 55-59, 60-64, 65-69) are compared (Foster, 1988).

Thus, in an attempt to enhance leisure service providers' understanding of travel-related needs of subgroups of college-educated individuals 55-to 69-years old, the relationship of perceived pleasure travel constraints and travel behavior characteristics was investigated.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

Data were collected from alumni of a large northeastern university. A systematic sample with a random start of 1,100 names and addresses was selected from the university's alumni association membership list. A self-administered questionnaire, a post-card reminder, and one follow-up questionnaire and post-card were used to collect data. Of the 1,100 questionnaires distributed, 604 were completed and returned, resulting in a 54.9% response rate. Individuals meeting the following criteria were included in the analyses: (a) they had traveled for pleasure and enjoyment in 1988 and (b) they were 55-69 years of age. Of the 604 respondents, 533, (88%) met the two criteria.

INSTRUMENTATION

A mail questionnaire was designed to solicit information about the pleasure travel behavior of mature adults. "Pleasure travel" was defined as a trip lasting two or more days and taken primarily for the purpose of pleasure or enjoyment.

A review of the literature resulted in identification of over 30 statements representing travel constraints. Iso-Ahola and Minnell (1985) have argued that constraints can be categorized into three dimensions: (a) social personal (e.g., a perceived lack of ability or competence), (b) social-cultural (e.g., social obligations, familial constraints, occupation-social norms, and (c) physical. According to Goodale and Witt (1989), Iso-Ahola and Mannell's model is particularly appropriate to constraints that are felt during or following engagement in activity. It distinguishes between participation and other concepts such as enjoyment or satisfaction that results from participation. Therefore, the 30 travel constraints were either placed into one of these three categories or rejected. In an attempt to deal succinctly with the issue of constraints and to avoid item redundancy (Kass & Tinsley, 1979), four items per dimension were chosen a priority for inclusion into the instrument, resulting in a total of twelve statements that characterized perceived constraints to pleasure travel. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the constraint statements on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." A 13th choice was open-ended which allowed respondents to indicate other items they perceived as constraints to pleasure travel. The sample was also asked to respond to sociodemographic (e.g., age) and pleasure travel behavior (e.g., domestic and international travel behavior) questions.

RESULTS

More than 75% of the sample fell between the ages of 55-64 and 35% had pursued an education beyond the bachelors degree. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents maintained some type of work relationship and a similar number were male. The majority were in average or above average health and reported incomes in excess of \$40,000 per year. Additionally, 97% had traveled domestically and 32% had traveled internationally in 1988.

When asked about constraints or considerations they may have encountered in thinking about or actually traveling, the overall sample offered an interesting profile. More than two-thirds "strongly disagreed" with the statements, "I have a disability that makes traveling difficult," "My health prevents me from traveling," and "I'm afraid to travel." The statements they most strongly agreed with included; "I have someone close who likes to travel with me," "My family and friends approve of me going on trips," and "I have the energy to travel."

Analysis of variance procedures determined if statistically significant differences existed between perceived constraints to travel and pleasure travel behavior. A Duncan Multiple Range test (a .05 probability level) was used to determine whether means were significantly different. Significant differences were found for 5 of the 12 statements, they included: "I have enough money to travel," "I'm too busy to travel," "I have a disability which makes traveling difficult," "I have the energy to travel," and "My health prevents me from traveling."

DOMESTIC TRAVEL

Individuals who traveled domestically differed with respect to the constraint statements. The youngest group who traveled domestically, 55-59 year olds, were more likely than the two older groups to agree that they were constrained by time and money whereas 65-69 year olds, the oldest group, agreed most strongly that poor health would impact upon their travel behavior. Due to the fact that 97% of the sample traveled domestically, it is not feasible to discuss the relationship between those who did not travel domestically and constraint statements.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Individuals in the 55-59 year old age group who traveled internationally were more likely than 60-64 year olds to feel that they were too busy to travel. A different pattern of response was found for those who did not travel internationally. The oldest group, 65-69 year olds, were most likely to feel that they had the money and time to travel but were also most likely to agree that a disability, lack of energy, or

poor health would prevent them from traveling.

DISCUSSION

This sample was very homogeneous, reflecting higher incomes, better health, and higher level of education than a representative sample of mature adults. However, according to Josephson (1989) and Menchin (1989), the population under study was representative of mature adults who are likely to travel for pleasure or pursue other luxury recreation services.

The sample, regardless of age group, was inclined to disagree to some extent that they had difficulty getting information about traveling or that a disability/health prevented them from traveling. The majority agreed that they had money to travel. These findings are different from those reported by Blazey (1987), Francken and van Raij (1981), and Searle and Jackson (1985), who identified lack of awareness, time, and money as well as concern about health as primary constraints to leisure or travel involvement. This finding suggests that college-educated mature adults are unique and as a segment of the larger mature adult population, may perceive of travel and its associated barriers differently.

While differences existed among age groups with respect to perceived pleasure travel constraints, 65-69 year olds, the oldest group, were most comfortable with their ability to travel. This finding challenges the myth that individuals in this age group are too old, sedentary, or conservative to enjoy experiences that younger people supposedly thrive on (Menchin, 1989). Not surprisingly, individuals aged 55-59, 83% of whom are currently working, perceived that they had less time and money to travel than the two older groups.

It is interesting to note that individuals who traveled internationally responded differently than did those who did not travel. This finding suggests that marketers who segment the college-educated mature adult population on the basis of perceived constraints and/or travel behavior characteristics, may be able to more successfully target their message(s) and services to this lucrative segment of the travel market.

This exploratory study has documented that college-educated mature adults must not be considered a homogeneous market; subgroups have different perceptions of constraints to pleasure travel. Given this study's findings on the relationship between perceived pleasure travel constraints and travel behavior characteristics, professionals must not assume (a) that individuals aged 55 and older are homogeneous or (b) they will perceive of pleasure travel or associated barriers in the same way. Different types of services and advertising copy should be developed to accommodate the needs of college-educated mature adults who are not bound by constraints such as money, time, health, or ability. In addition, leisure service providers should heed the types of variables college-educated mature adults perceive to be constraining. Although they continue to travel both domestically and internationally, their

perceptions of barriers may influence how and when they travel for pleasure.