

## Visions in Leisure and Business

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Volume 11 | Number 2

Article 6

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1992

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#### Recommended Citation

Kerstetter, Deborah L. (1992) "The College-educated Older Adult Traveler: A Travel-specific Psychographic Profile," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 11 : No. 2 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol11/iss2/6>

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**THE COLLEGE-EDUCATED OLDER ADULT TRAVELER:  
A TRAVEL-SPECIFIC PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The potential number of individuals in older age groups who may have the capacity to enjoy travel as a leisure pursuit is staggering. Yet, little is known about a sub-group of this population, college-educated individuals 55 to 64 years of age (older adults), specifically with respect to their attitudes, interests and opinions towards pleasure travel. In addition, little attention has been devoted to international travel which is of interest to 28% of the 55 and older market. Thus, this investigation identified whether college-educated older adults who travel internationally differ from those who do not with respect to their attitudes, interests and opinions towards pleasure travel. A random sample of individuals 55 to 64 years of age was taken from the alumni list of a large northeastern university. The results indicated that college-educated older adults who travel internationally were more inclined to agree that travel for pleasure is "intrinsically" appealing.

**INTRODUCTION**

"An agequake is coming that will shake America as much as the youth culture of the

1960s did. Not only are there more older people, but they are different" (8). By 2010, the 50 and older age group will number 96.5 million, representing 34.2% of the population (13). These statistics clearly indicate that the potential number of individuals in older age groups who may have the capacity to enjoy travel as a leisure pursuit is staggering. Not only do many have the time and inclination to travel, they also have the money. According to Norvell (16), four in ten people, fifty-five years of age and older took a vacation away from home of five nights or longer in the past three years. And, when they traveled, they tended to outspend the typical American by \$100. While individuals 55 years of age and older may be a lucrative market for the tourism industry, little is known about a sub-group of this population, college-educated individuals 55 to 64 years of age (older adults), specifically with respect to their attitudes, interests and opinions towards pleasure travel.

The median education level of individuals 65 years of age and older increased three years between 1970 and 1986. In the near future, education levels of the older population are expected to approach those of the entire adult population according to MacNeil (14). This finding is significant in

light of recent research which suggests, "the breadth in leisure repertoire, interest in travel, self-improvement, attachment to the world and current events and greater attention to physical pursuits may be positive effects associated with higher levels of education in older adults" (21).

Given that older adults do have and are expected to have higher levels of education and as a result an enhanced interest in travel, it is critical that researchers begin to understand their attitudes, interests and opinions towards travel. Markowitz (15) recognized the importance of researching travel-specific motivations and attitudes. He stated, "...If we [want to market] travel and not just simply [provide it], what [consumers] feel and how [their] attitudes change is crucial to an understanding of the marketplace" (p. 47). His pragmatic approach referred to as "life style" or "psychographic" research has been supported by Woodside and Pitts (25) who suggest that it is more important in helping travel marketers to understand travel behavior than traditional demographic information.

Researchers have used a variety of approaches including Activities, Interests and Opinions (AIO), VALS and VALS2 (Values and Life Style Systems), and independent scales to generate psychographic profiles of their respondents. Calantone and Johar (3), Davis, Allen and Cosenza (6), and Gladwell (9) have effectively used AIO approaches. In 1984, Pennsylvania's Bureau of Travel Development (20) measured the effectiveness of its "You've Got A Friend In Pennsylvania" tourism campaign through the use of the VALS questionnaire. During the same year, the Hong Kong Tourist Association also conducted a psychographic analysis of its tourists.

More often than not, however, examples of independent psychographic research instruments are found within the realm of tourism research. Schul and Crompton (18) conducted an exploratory study to determine the ability of travel-specific psychographic statements and socio-demographic variables to: (a) predict and explain travel related search behavior and (b) to determine the differences 'between travelers' external search behaviors. Bonn (2), Crask (4), and Plog (17) used independent psychographic instruments in their study of vacationers. The 1989 Travel and Leisure Study (in Crozier, 1989) was also an attempt to illuminate the behavioral, emotional, and attitudinal dimensions of travel and to link them to travel behavior.

Few studies have used psychographic instruments with adults 55 years of age and older. Towle and Martin, Jr. (22) attempted to explain diversity within the 65 and older market by creating demographic and behavioral dimensions. The National Association for Senior Living Industries sponsored "Lifestyles and Values of Older Adults"--a study conducted by SRI International (in Gollub & Javitz, 1989). Six distinct segments emerged from the study. Others have studied sub-groups within the 55 and older market. For example, Anderson and Langmeyer (1) conducted a study that specifically analyzed the activities and opinions of travelers under and over the age of 50. They found differences between the two groups with respect to level of involvement and interest in leisure activities, including travel. Hawes (11), on the other hand, studied the travel-related life style profiles of older women. His findings indicated that substantial market segments existed of women who were predisposed to non-domestic travel and of women who were interested in quiet, tranquil and restful destinations.

While psychographic instruments have been used to profile tourists in a variety of settings, including tourism, few studies have been conducted with college-educated older adults. In addition, little attention has been devoted to international pleasure travel which, according to MacLaurin (13), is of interest to 28% of the 55 and older market. Thus, this investigation identified whether college-educated older adults who travel internationally differ from those who do not with respect to their attitudes, interests and opinions towards pleasure travel.

## METHODOLOGY

A systematic sample with a random start ( $n=1,100$ ) was selected from a membership list of the alumni association of a large northeastern university. The membership list used for this study only included individuals who had graduated between 1945 and 1954 ( $n=8,500$ ). A self-administered questionnaire, a post-card reminder, and one follow-up questionnaire and post-card were used to collect the data, resulting in a response rate of 54.9%.

Only individuals between the ages of 55 and 64 and who had traveled for pleasure or enjoyment during the year previous to the study were included in the analyses. The total usable sample was 415. (See Table 1 for a profile of the respondents.)

A questionnaire was designed to solicit information about the overall travel behavior of college-educated older adults. More specifically, a review of the literature resulted in 32 statements that were used to assess the travel-specific attitudes, interests and opinions of the sample. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." In addition,

the sample was asked to provide sociodemographic and trip type (e.g., domestic vs. international) information.

In an attempt to affirm the notion that distinct psychographic dimensions exist for college educated older adults, an exploratory factor analysis was employed on the 32 travel-specific psychographic statements. The use of exploratory rather than confirmatory factor analysis was deemed appropriate due to the absence of prior empirical results which would have suggested specific hypotheses for this population. A spearman rank-order inter-item correlation matrix and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic were calculated to determine whether a factor analysis for these variables was appropriate. The KMO statistic was .69.

After the viability of the factor analysis procedure was determined, a principal axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation was completed. The reliability of the factors was determined using Cronbach's coefficient alpha and the split-half method. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) determined whether older adults who traveled internationally differed from those who did not on each of the psychographic factors identified.

## RESULTS

Four factors were identified, however, only three of the four resulted in alphas greater than .60. Thus, the fourth factor, which on its own explained four percent of the variance, was eliminated. The three resulting factors were identified as "Economy," "Exploration," and "Independence" (see Table 2). Luxury was not found to be important in Factor 1, "Economy." The second factor, "Exploration," included statements that described the importance of learning about

oneself and life through travel. And, "Independence," the third factor, included statements that suggested travel in a non-regimented style was of importance to the respondents. The cumulative variance explained by the three factors was 23 percent. There was one significant difference between those who traveled internationally and those who did not. Individuals who traveled internationally were more likely to express higher levels of agreement with the statements that comprised Factor 2, "Exploration."

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that college-educated older adults have different attitudes, interests and opinions towards pleasure travel. Like the older adult population in general, they are not as homogeneous as many suggest (7, 16).

College-educated older adults who travel internationally were found to be in greater agreement with the notion that travel is "intrinsically" appealing. They were, based on the mean scores on the statements that comprised Factor 2, to be more interested in learning about themselves and others through travel. Kung (12) has documented that this focus on "exploration" of self and the world at large is new in America. He believes that Americans are shifting from travel for fun and relaxation to health, cultural aspects, self-indulgence, and seeking unique experiences. Perhaps his argument is tied to Wolfe's (24) stage of life hypothesis which suggests that consumer behavior is influenced by stage of life and the experiences and maturity that people bring with them into each of the stages. Older adults, Wolfe argues, are either in or approaching the "Being Experience Stage," a stage in which individuals crave

meaningful experiences; want new, challenging and exciting experiences; and are generally not interested in materialistic or ostentatious goods or experiences. "Mature travelers are more interested in enriching their lives with 'experience' than hands-off entertainment" (7). If this type of individual--the "new" older adult--continues to occupy a growing percentage of the market, it would behoove marketers to begin to understand their attitudes, interests and opinions towards pleasure travel.

Although the results of this study indicate that differences exist with respect to the psychographic profiles of college-educated older adults who travel internationally versus those who do not, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The older adults sampled in this study may have a cultural or geographic bias. Shaw (19) and Veal (23) have found that response to questionnaires may to some degree reflect the cultural environment in which respondents were raised. In the case of this sample, all do not live in the northeast region of the United States, but did attend school and probably were raised in the same geographic region.

With respect to marketing international travel to college-educated older adults, promotional campaigns that focus on the experiential nature of the travel product would be most effective. Targeting older adults' need for a more educational travel experience (e.g., self-exploration or enhanced knowledge of other cultures and people) would also be advisable. According to Forbes (7), to be successful servicing the older adult market, companies in the travel industry will have to develop a customer-centered orientation; they will have to "develop the unique, customizable products that today's [older adult] travelers are seeking and buying."

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TABLE 1

## SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Socio-demographic Characteristic	<i>n</i> <sup>b</sup>	Percent of Total	Socio-demographic Characteristic	<i>n</i>	Percent of Total
<b>Age<sup>a</sup> (n=415)</b>			<b>Income (n=404)</b>		
55	31	7.5	under \$10000	3	.7
56	43	10.4	\$10000-19999	12	3.0
57	40	9.6	\$20000-29999	40	9.9
58	43	10.4	\$30000-39999	67	16.6
59	32	7.7	\$0000-49999	67	16.6
60	41	9.9	\$50000-59999	53	13.1
61	41	9.9	\$60000-69999	44	10.9
62	52	12.5	\$70000 and above	118	29.2
63	35	8.4			
64	57	13.7			
<b>Gender (n=412)</b>			<b>Occupational status (n=413)</b>		
Male	250	60.7	Currently working		
Female	162	39.3	Yes	299	72.4
			No	114	27.6
			Position		
			Professional	203	68.4
			Technical	36	12.1
			Precision craft	3	1.0
			Volunteer	32	10.8
			Other	23	7.7
<b>Health (n=414)</b>					
Poor	5	1.2			
Below average	30	7.2			
Average	117	28.3			
Good	146	35.3			
Excellent	116	28.0			
<b>Highest level of education completed (n=404)</b>					
Advanced degree					
Yes	148	36.6			
No	256	63.4			
Level of advanced degree					
Masters	108	72.0			
Doctorate	42	28.0			

<sup>a</sup>Reported in years

<sup>b</sup>The total number of respondents may vary because some individuals did not answer all the questions.



TABLE 2  
 ROTATED FACTOR LOADINGS: PSYCHOGRAPHIC STATEMENTS

Variable	Psychographic Statements	Item Means <sup>a</sup>	Factor Loading			
			Factor 1 (Economy)	Factor 2 (Exploration)	Factor 3 (Independence)	Factor 4
Best	It is important that I stay at the best places when on vacation	2.45	.78			
Luxury	The best vacations are spent in luxury accommodations	2.29	.77			
Long	I'd rather take a longer vacation trip with fewer luxuries than a shorter more extravagant one	3.50	-.56			
Culture	I am very interested in the cultures of other areas	3.96		.80		
Life	Traveling is a good way to learn about life	4.11		.54		
Locals	I like to mix with the local people and experience the local customs	3.73		.53		
Learn	I like to visit places where I've been able to learn things that help me in education or business	3.10		.47		

Variable	Psychographic Statements	Item Means <sup>a</sup>	Factor Loading			
			Factor 1 (Economy)	Factor 2 (Exploration)	Factor 3 (Independence)	Factor 4
Guide	When I travel, I prefer to be on a guided tour	2.52			-.78	
Arrange	When I go on a trip I prefer to arrange my own sightseeing schedule and accommodations	3.63			.73	
Same	I prefer to visit places where the people speak the same language	3.37				.64
Their	People should see their country first before visiting foreign countries	3.22				.45
	Alpha		.77	.66	.73	.45
	Eigenvalue		3.12	2.49	1.61	1.29
	Variance explained		9.7%	7.8%	5.0%	4.0%
	Cumulative variance explained		9.7%	17.5%	22.6%	26.6%

<sup>a</sup>Means ranged from "1" to "5" with "1" signifying "strongly disagree" and "5" representing "strongly agree".

TABLE 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILES  
AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

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Factor	Traveled Internationally	Did Not Travel Internationally	F-Value	Prob.
Economy	2.80	2.72	1.94	.17
Exploration	3.91	3.64	17.42	.00
Independence	3.10	3.08	.19	.66

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