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Investigating the motivation of baby boomers for adventure tourism

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Abstract

Adventure tourism has become the centre of interest for baby boomers in today's world. The baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964 are now starting to participate in new activities such as hiking, diving, surfing, mountain climbing and riding in different destinations worldwide. The baby boomers' needs and interests are changing as they have become healthier and wealthier than in previous years. The aim of this study was to assess the motivations of baby boomers to participate in adventure tourism. A survey was conducted to better understand the adventurers' motivational behaviour. The push and pull factors which influence baby boomers in their choice were examined. A quantitative study was conducted through the use of a questionnaire and the target population was both locals and tourists. Findings show that the most important push factors identified were fun and enjoyment, relieve from stress and tension, escapism, relaxation, change and novelty while the pull factors were the attractiveness of the physical environment and better health. The findings also suggest that more research on the motivation of baby boomers should be undertaken as this will assist business operators and destination marketers to better meet the needs and expectations of this niche segment.

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1. Introduction

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Adventure tourism is one of the major niche segments in the tourism industry (Williams & Soutar, 2009) with an estimated annual growth of over 15 percent (Burak, 1998; Cater, 2005; Travel Industry Association, 2005; Buckley, 2007). According to Beedie and Hudson (2003), it is estimated that by 2040 over half the population in the developed world will be over 50, enjoying good health with a more informed global perspective. In Mauritius, this worldwide trend is also evident and there has been the development of increasing adventure tourism activities such as mountain trail running, kite surfing and skydiving in recent years. However, despite the growing popularity of adventure tourism worldwide and locally, little research investigation has been attempted on this topic (Walle, 1997; Weber, 2001; Fluker & Turner, 2000; Sung, 2004). Moreover, little knowledge on the baby boomers segment have attributed to a great complexity for business entities in developing, delivering, and packaging product offerings in today's marketplace. Following this line of reasoning, it is suggested that research in adventure tourism should start from understanding the motivations and behaviour of individuals.

Adventure travel has recently become a center of attention for the older people most precisely the baby boomers (Patterson & Pan, 2007). This rise and sudden popularity is partially due to a progression in the commercialization of outdoor recreation (Buckley, 2000, 2007; Travel Industry Association, 2005). Baby boomers can be defined as a cohort of individuals born between the years 1946 and 1964 (Gillon, 2004). They are now aged between 50 and 68 years and according to Xola (2006), people aged between 41 to 60 years old represent the greatest participating age category in adventure travel at a rate of 42.2 percent per annum. The Baby Boomers Summit held in 2009 labelled this generation as 'The Recession Boosters' as they have the ability to recover from the economic crisis (Baby Boomers Travelling, 2014). Moreover most of them are healthy, have more disposable income, are better educated and have more leisure time and reduced family obligations (Higgs & Quirk, 2007; Tate *et al.*, 2006). Business operators are becoming increasingly aware of the economic potential of the baby boomers' (Paxson, 2009) segment and recognise that these travelers will account for a larger share of the tourism industry (Huang & Tsai, 2003; Patterson, 2012). Therefore, due to global aging patterns and its economic potentials, tourism practitioners are required to further understand the needs and motivations of this segment. Since there are few studies on the topic, to compensate this gap, the aim of this study is to assess what motivate baby boomers to engage in adventure tourism and to examine the push and pull factors that influence them in their choice of adventure tourism.

2. Adventure Tourism

Adventure is all about action (Kane & Tucker, 2004). Adventure tourism is also known for its six major dimensions namely activity, experience, environment, motivation, risk and performance (Sung *et al.*, 1997). Adventure tourism consists of air, sea and land-based activities (Hall, 1992; Fennel, 1999; Page *et al.*, 2005; Gajda, 2008). Adventure tourism is also categorised into two basic types which is hard and soft adventure (Hill, 1995; Millington & Locke, 2001; Ewert & Jamieson, 2003; Miller, 2003; Patterson & Pan, 2007). Soft adventure can be defined as adventure activities that require low level of risk, low physical effort and obligation. These activities are usually undertaken by novice adventurers or people who want passive activity levels, accompanied with experienced guides (Schott, 2007). Goodnow (2005) describes soft adventure journeys as travel to new and exotic locations with low force activities. On the other hand, hard adventure has been defined as activities requiring high level of risk, extreme commitment and superior and sometimes specialized skills (Hill, 1995). Risk and competence are two major aspects involve in hard adventure activities. Those engage in hard adventure are generally in quest of challenge, adrenaline rush and risk (Rubin, 1989; Mallett, 1992; Williams & Soutar, 2009).

2.1 Push and Pull Factors

Tourism motives in the tourism literature is often categorized into the terms push and pull forces (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Andreu, Bigne & Cooper, 2000; Kozak, 2002; Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003; Crouch *et al.*, 2004, Woodside & Martin, 2008). Pull factors are known as extrinsic motivations (Robinson *et al.*, 2011), where individuals are 'pulled' or enticed by other factors to engage in something while the decision has already been made (Lam & Hsu, 2006). In the context of adventure tourism, the destination is one element of pull factors that plays a vital role in the motivation of individuals (Ewert, 1985; Millington *et al.*, 2001). The pull factors also include marketing elements such as the marketing mix (Kotler *et al.*, 2008) with emphasis on the promotional

aspects (Goossens, 2000) such as brochures, travel books and the internet where individuals are persuaded or stimulated to engage in a particular activity.

Push factors can be defined as intangible factors that push a tourist away from his/her home (Andreu, *et al.*, 2000). There are several push factors such as escape from daily routine, examination and evaluation of self-development and progress, building new friendship and social relationship (Pomfret, 2006; Bonera, 2008). Patterson (2006) points out that some recreationists are really seeking bigger change, diversity, challenge to escape the monotony of everyday routine. On the other hand, Muller & O’Cass (2001) put forward the notion of ‘subjective age’ as foremost motive for baby boomers embark on adventure travel. This cohort of tourists has the desire and nostalgia to feel younger and their trip preferences are frequently similar to that of younger people (Patterson, 2006). Baby boomers are mostly pushed in adventure tourism for fun (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). This segment are in quest of latest and exciting adventure experiences, want to test their physical abilities and continue to be more active (Smerek, 2010). Studies have demonstrated that older tourists perceived adventure tourism as tempting and want to adventure themselves to gain personal satisfaction (Gibson & Singleton, 2011). They want to enjoy their holidays with a range of exciting and new physically challenging activities and meet new people to build up relationships (Camden & Mccoll-Kennedy, 1991; Kludge, 2005).

3. Research Methodology

As the study’s interest is on baby boomers and adventure tourism, convenience sampling was used to collect data amongst this niche segment on several adventure sites. The survey was carried out with 384 baby boomers over a period of two months from September to October on adventure and leisure sites on the island of Mauritius such as Valley de Ferney, Domaine la grave, Haras du Morne, Domaine de Chazal, kite surfing spots and several public beaches. This study adopted a quantitative research approach and developed a self-administered questionnaire with a sample of 385 individuals across the island. A structured questionnaire was designed to gain information regarding the motivation of baby boomers to participate in adventure tourism activities. The questionnaire was in both English and French language since the respondents were from different backgrounds. The questionnaire was adapted from past studies (Meisel & Cottrel, 2004; Ottevanger, 2007; Jönsson & Devonish, 2008).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of Respondents

A total of 251 questionnaires were completed for data analysis, which represented a response rate of 65%. The higher responses were from baby boomers aged between 48 and 52 years old (39.4%), followed by those aged between 53 and 57 years old (30.7%). The majority of respondents were married (67.3%) whilst 15.1% were single. Many of the respondents stated that their household size was two (46.6%) and most had one or more children. In addition, most of the respondents came from France (32.7%) and 29.7% were from Mauritius.

4.2 Preferred Activity Type

Respondents were asked to select from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) regarding the type of activities they most preferred (Table 1). The results showed that the participants most preferred activities which contained low level of risk since it had a highest mean of 3.74, followed by easy activities requiring few technical skills (3.67) and activities with low physical effort (3.42). It is clearly noted that baby boomers least preferred activities with high levels of risk (2.34).

Table 1. Preferred Activity Type

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Activities with low level of risk	3.2%	13.1%	18.3%	37.1%	28.3%	3.74

Easy activities with least technical skills	2.8%	15.5%	19.1%	36.7%	25.9%	3.67
Activities with low physical effort	4%	17.1%	28.3%	34.3%	16.3%	3.42
Activities with high level of risk	25.5%	36.7%	18.7%	16.3%	2.8%	2.34
Challenging activities	10.0%	16.7%	31.9%	23.1%	18.3%	3.23
Activities with high physical effort	16.7%	34.3%	21.1%	16.3%	11.6%	2.72

4.3 Hard and Soft activities

A list of activities was proposed to the respondents where they were asked to choose amongst the activities they were more likely to participate in and activities that they had undertaken in Mauritius. Moreover, they were asked to categorize these activities under hard and soft types based on degree of challenge, risk and effort (Table 2). The list of activities is shown in Table 4. Some examples of soft activities selected by the respondents were namely horse-riding, glass bottom, catamaran trip, bird and dolphin watching, canoeing and pedal boat, walking, cycling, swimming and camping while those who chose hard activities specified participation in activities like scuba diving, water skiing, kite surfing, wind surfing, dolphin diving and parasailing. Moreover, most of the respondents stated that they were more likely to participate in soft adventure activities (53.4%) or a combination of both (32.3%) rather than hard adventure activities alone (14.3%).

Table 2. Categorisation of adventure tourism activities

Soft Activities	Hard activities
Horse-riding	Scuba diving
Camping	Undersea walk
Cycling	Snorkeling
Safari	Water skiing
Quad biking	Dolphin diving
Hiking	Shark diving
Canoeing	Mountaineering
Pedal boat	Trekking
Bird watching	Mountain biking
Dolphin watching	Kite surfing
Catamaran trip	Parasailing
Swimming	Wind surfing
Walking	Paragliding

4.4 Push Factors

Table 3 shows the motivation of the participants across 11 push factors. The aim of these statements was to identify the push factors for baby boomers to engage in adventure tourism. Baby boomers participated in adventure tourism primarily for fun and relaxation (4.32), to relieve from tension and stress (4.31), escape from daily routine (4.27) and to relax and refresh (4.25). A mean of 3.96, 3.93 and 3.95 respectively clearly indicated that most of the respondents agreed that indulging in adventure is a way to experience change, try something new and seek out new sensation. 35.1% and 31.9% of the respondents correspondingly had a neutral view in engaging in adventure to feel younger or relive experiences from youth. Likewise, 39% and 33.5% respectively disagreed with the motive for risk seeking and social achievement. For the respondents the desire to feel younger, relive experiences from their youth or the need for risk seeking and social achievement is not most important when engaging in adventure tourism.

Table 3. Push factors

4.5 Pull Factors

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Experience Change	1.6%	5.2%	15.1%	51.8%	26.3%	3.96
Try something new	0%	6.4%	17.5%	52.6%	23.5%	3.93
For fun and enjoyment	0%	0.4%	6%	55%	38.6%	4.32
To relieve from stress and tension	0%	0.4%	8.8%	50.2%	40.6%	4.31
To escape from daily routine	0%	2%	8%	51%	39%	4.27
To relax and refresh	0%	0%	12%	51%	37.1%	4.25
To seek out new sensation	1.2%	7.2%	17.5%	43.8%	30.3%	3.95
A desire to feel younger	4.4%	22.3%	35.1%	24.7%	13.5%	3.21
Relive experiences from youth	4%	29.9%	31.9%	23.9%	10.4%	3.07
A need for risk-seeking	13.5%	39%	28.7%	13.9%	4.8%	2.57
Achieve something that no one was expecting an older person to do	6.4%	33.5%	30.7%	21.5%	8%	2.91

The pull factors are external motivational factors such as better health, higher income, more free time and the attractiveness of the physical environment, advertising campaign, promotion packages and word of mouth. Table 4 shows that the highest mean for the pull factor was 4.16 where 49.4% respondents agreed that they were motivated by the attractiveness of the physical environment followed by better health (3.87). As stated in the literature, in today's world baby boomers are healthier and this lead to many to engage in various adventurous activities. As compared to other pull factors such as higher income and more free time. It is stated in literature that baby boomers were now motivated because of higher income and more free time. Nevertheless, most of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with these statements since they represented mean scores of 3.05 and 3.32 respectively. Although important, higher income, more free time and advertising were not the most important as pull factors for the baby boomers. 33.5% agreed that promotion packages acted as a pull factor and 29.5% agreed that word of mouth was important.

Table 4. Pull factors

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Better health	0.4%	8.4%	19.5%	47.4%	24.3%	3.87
Higher income	6%	21.1%	49.4%	16.7%	6.8%	3.05
More free time	2.8%	12%	48.2%	24.3%	12.7%	3.32
Attractiveness of the physical environment	36.3%	0.4%	5.2%	8.8%	49.4%	4.16
Advertising campaign	6.4%	25.5%	31.5%	29.5%	7.2%	3.06
Promotion packages	4.0%	25.1%	21.5%	33.5%	12.4%	3.25
It was recommended by someone	4.4%	25.5%	28.7%	29.5%	12%	3.19

4.6 Discussion and Conclusion

The results demonstrate that the principal motive for baby boomers to indulge in adventure tourism was for fun and enjoyment confirming the theory of Beedie & Hudson (2003). Several studies (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003; Patterson, 2006) stated that baby boomers engaged in adventure to seek change, escapism and novelty. Likewise, the current study supported these findings. The main push factors identified were fun and relaxation, relieve from tension and stress, escape from daily routine, relax and refresh, as a way to experience change, try something new and seek new sensation. Muller & O'Cass (2001) together with Patterson (2006) argued that one of the foremost push motives for baby boomers to participate in adventure tourism was due to nostalgia and to feel younger. Likewise, Kane & Tucker (2004) posited that adventure is like a game for adults to relive their childhood and enjoy this freedom to play like a child again. However, the findings of the current study do not

support these theories. The study also contradicts the statements of Muller & Cleaver (2000), Ewert & Jamieson (2003) and Weir (2004) related to adventure as a need for risk seeking as in the current study it was found that most of the respondents engaged in low risk activities.

The findings also revealed that the most important pull factors to participate in adventure tourism were the physical environment, better health, more free time and promotion packages. The study confirms the theory of Pomfret (2006) who stated that the physical environment is what attracted most adventure travelers. Physical environment is an important pull factor for adventure tourism as many participants came particularly because of the benefits of physical environment. Mauritius is known to be an exotic destination, popular for its three 'S' - sea, sun and sand. Most of the respondents came from France and were pulled to the destination for its water-based activities like snorkeling, scuba diving, swimming, dolphin diving and its good climate. In addition, the findings confirm those of Clarke & Stankey (1979), Swarbrooke *et al.*, (2003), Patterson (2006) who indicated that recreationists were attracted to participate in adventure tourism to have better health. Goossens (2000) stated that marketing was a basic stimuli to take part in adventure but in the current study advertising did not highly motivate baby boomers to engage in adventure tourism.

Many of the respondents stated that their household size is two and that their children have left home. This confirms the theory of Chon & Singh (1995) who declared that parents are now enjoying their life, going for adventure now that their children had grown up and the latter made their own life. Most of the baby boomers were still working, had not yet retired and wanted to do something for them, seek a new change, escape from the stress and tension of work and be far from their children (Leitner & Leitner, 1996; McGuire *et al.*, 2004). Gibson & Yiannakis (2002) pointed out that those aged between 47 to 50 years old were motivated to participate in activities due to economic benefit, that is, more disposable income. In the current study, even though most of the respondents stated to be middle class, they did not confirm that higher income was a prime motive to engage in adventure tourism. Gibson & Yiannakis (2002) also stated that baby boomers aged between 50 and 55 years and those over 65 were more involved in soft activities where less physical effort was required in a safe and secured environment. This statement is confirmed in the current research since 58.4% of the respondents aged between 53 and 57 years old and 57.4% aged between 58 and 62 and those above 63 asserted a preference for soft adventure activities rather than hard ones.

As observed from results gathered, most of the baby boomers were not much influenced from by advertising. It seems that the baby boomer generation is generally forgotten by the marketers. Adventure it is not reserved for young people alone. Baby boomers are healthier in today's world and want to engage in adventure mostly through soft activities. It is suggested that businesses do not neglect the baby boomers' segment in developing, delivering, and packaging product offerings. Finally, little studies have been conducted on adventure tourism and baby boomers. Subsequently, more research on the motivation of baby boomers should be extended in the future. This will help marketers to have a better understanding of the different motives of baby boomers so as to better meet the needs and expectations of this growing segment.

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