



## Travel frequency of seniors tourists



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- The variables that determine senior travel are not the ones that influence travel frequency.
- Women have significantly higher travel frequency than men.
- No significant relationship was found between the employment status of the individual and travel frequency.
- The health of seniors behaves more like a travel limiter than a travel inhibitor.

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### ABSTRACT

Current demand for tourism is characterized by more frequent, shorter trips throughout the year. Such trends may have adverse effects on the hospitality industry but benefit the travel industry. Most current literature assumes that the variables that determine travel participation are identical to those that influence travel frequency, though there is no evidence to support this assumption. Therefore, the current study seeks to identify variables that influence travel frequency among Spanish senior tourists, who represent a key target market for the tourism industry. The results specify that gender, self-perceived economic status, and self-perceived time available variables strongly determine Spanish seniors' travel frequency.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern tourism is largely characterized by more frequent but shorter trips, spread throughout the year (Alegre & Pou, 2003; Barros & Machado, 2010; Ferrer-Rosell, Martínez-García, & Coenders, 2014; Fleischer, Peleg, & Rivlin, 2011; Gokovali, Bahar, & Kozak, 2007; OECD, 2014; Salmasi, Celidoni, & Procidano, 2012), as encouraged by increased travel for work and the emergence of low cost airlines (Barros & Machado, 2010; Castillo-Manzano, López-Valpuesta, & González-Laxe, 2011). Martínez-García and Raya (2008) note that tourists tend to shorten the average length of their stay, which reduces spending per tourist, though the greater flow of visitors offsets this expenditure loss. Fleischer et al. (2011) also explain that the two great tourism industries, travel and hospitality, will be strongly affected by changes in travel habits, though in very distinct ways. That is, increased travel frequency should

benefit the travel industry, but an increase in the volume of travelers who stay for shorter periods likely will adversely affect the hospitality industry. Because the larger volume of travelers, making short trips, require more hours of work per customer at their destination, the hospitality industry also might confront increased operating costs.

Alegre, Mateo, and Pou (2009) and Mateo Erroz (2012) indicate that the number of trips in any given year has increased in recent decades in Europe, but not due to an increase in the percentage of people traveling. Rather they cite increased travel frequency and more intensive demand among existing customers. As Mateo Erroz (2012) explains, the evolution of tourism demand in developed countries thus will depend critically on their importance to the segment of the population that travels and the frequency with which they do so. For example, senior consumers—one of the most attractive market segments (Chen, Liu, & Chang, 2013; Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2015; Schröder & Widmann, 2007; Wang, Ma, Hsu, Jao, & Lin, 2013), who travel very frequently (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001; Oppermann, 1995; Schröder & Widmann, 2007; Zimmer, Brayley, & Searle, 1995)—may be of special interest to the travel industry. Recent research

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also has exhibited growing interest in the mobility patterns of this group of consumers, reflecting the worldwide demographic aging trends (Moniruzzaman, Páez, Habib, & Morency, 2013). Despite the importance of senior travelers for the tourism industry though, few studies analyze factors that might influence the intensity or frequency of their travel. Instead, many studies assume that the influences on decision to travel are the same as those that determine travel frequency (Alegre et al., 2009; Mateo Erroz, 2012). However, they are not the same by definition,<sup>1</sup> nor are they required to have the same effects.

According to a recent OECD (2014) report, demographic changes constitute key external factors that will shape tourist demand over the medium and long terms. Senior tourism is likely to become a growing niche (OECD, 2014), especially because by 2050, the population aged 60 years and older will take more than 2 billion international trips, far more than the 593 million they took in 1999 (Patterson, 2006). Various authors, including Chen and Shoemaker (2014), Chu and Chu (2013), Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, and Wanhill (2007), Glover and Prideaux (2009), Kim and Jang (2015), Mahadevan (2014), and Ryan (1995), emphasize the influence of the aging baby boom generation, which exhibits more leisurely and recreational travel lifestyle choices than any other generation has, along with substantial purchasing power (Dann, 2007; Kazemina, Del Chiappa, & Jafari, 2015; Kuo & Lu, 2013; Van Den Berg, Arentze, & Timmermans, 2011). Although the global population is aging in general, different nations reveal varying intensities of this trend. For example, Spain soon will be one of the oldest countries in Europe; by 2050, one out of every two citizens will be at least 50 years of age (United Nations, 2013). Furthermore, in 2012, 62.1% of Spanish households that contained members between 51 and 65 years of age made trips. The people between 55 and 64 years of age were the ones who traveled the most (IET, 2012). Thus, Spanish seniors represent a segment of great interest to the travel industry.

This study in turn seeks to identify the variables that influence the travel frequency demonstrated by Spanish seniors, distinct from the variables that determine their travel participation. It is thus an empirical contribution to travel research focused on senior tourists. Relatively few studies address these issues, and those that do focus mainly on identifying variables that determine senior participation in travel (Blazey, 1992; Chen & Wu, 2009; Faranda & Schmidt, 1999; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Huh, 2006; Jang & Ham, 2009; Nyaupane, McCabe, & Andereck, 2008; Pettersson & Schmöcker, 2010; Romsa & Blenman, 1989; Sakai, Brown, & Mak, 2000; Wang, 2005; Wu, 2003; Zimmer et al., 1995). The current study extends that focus by investigating the variables that affect their travel frequency.

## 2. Travel participation

Crawford, Jackson, and Goodbey (1991) propose that three barriers prevent people from engaging in leisure activities or travel: structural barriers related to the lack of necessary resources to participate in leisure activities, such as money, time, opportunities, or family life cycles; intrapersonal barriers, reflecting the psychological state of the individual or personal situation, such as stress, depression, anxiety, beliefs, attitudes of family and friends, and perceptions of own abilities; and interpersonal barriers that result from interactions with the intrapersonal dimension, including barriers related to the difficulty of finding companions (Crawford et al., 1991). The three types of barriers follow a hierarchical

structure, according to their impact on people's leisure behavior, from nearest (intrapersonal) to farthest (structural), so the first and foremost barriers must be overcome before the farthest ones can be addressed (Crawford et al., 1991).

As an early and influential contributor to senior leisure research, McGuire (1984) identified specific barriers to leisure for seniors: external resources (lack of information, too much planning, lack of money, lack of proper attire, lack of means of transport); time factors (need to work, disruption of normal routine, excessive burdens); lack of approval from family and friends; lack of skills (know-how, company); and physical well-being (lack of energy, health reasons, weather, excessive age, dependence). In turn, more recent studies have linked senior travel participation to several socio-demographic variables (age, gender, household and employment status) and self-perceived factors (health, economic status, time available), as detailed next.

### 2.1. Socio-demographic variables

#### 2.1.1. Age

Lohmann and Danielsson (2001), Oppermann (1995), Schröder and Widmann (2007), and Zimmer et al. (1995) indicate that travel participation increases as a person ages but then begins to wane in the last stage of the life cycle, mainly for health reasons. Chen and Wu (2009) and Nyaupane et al. (2008) find a greater tendency to travel after 60 years, though Zimmer et al. (1995) suggest this tendency begins to decline after the age of 65 years. Pettersson and Schmöcker (2010), Wang (2005), and Wu (2003) argue that as a person ages, the tendency to travel decreases, but Jang and Ham (2009) find that the tendency to travel increases up to 74 years of age and only declines thereafter. Therefore, a nonlinear relationship likely exists between age and travel likelihood (see also Alegre et al., 2009; Nicolau & Más, 2005). If these effects apply similarly to travel frequency, the resulting hypotheses state:

**H1.** Age relates positively to travel frequency.

**H2.** Age<sup>2</sup> relates negatively to travel frequency.

#### 2.1.2. Gender

Sakai et al. (2000) claim that the tendency to travel, particularly in adulthood, varies by gender: Men tend to travel more after 45 years of age, whereas women do so after 55 years. Meng and Uysal (2008) and Sakai et al. (2000) attribute these trends to family expenses, which greatly determine participation in leisure and tourism by women, especially younger women, who are the most affected by such interpersonal barriers. However, Pettersson and Schmöcker (2010) indicate that travel participation is greater among female seniors. Therefore, the current study predicts broadly:

**H3.** Gender determines travel frequency.

#### 2.1.3. Employment status

The senior population has long been considered a relevant market segment, because of its purchasing power and leisure time, following retirement (Chen & Wu, 2009; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Nyaupane et al., 2008). However, several authors also note seniors' lack of money and time as potential impediments to travel. Faranda and Schmidt (1999) argue that though retirees have more time off, retirement does not determine their tendency to travel, and Blazey (1992) and Romsa and Blenman (1989) also suggest that travel trends remain nearly constant before and after retirement. Chen and Wu (2009) indicate that seniors are more likely to travel, but Nicolau and Más (2005) take a different perspective and argue that people still active in the labor market have a higher propensity to travel, because they have greater purchasing power. Therefore,

<sup>1</sup> In particular, the decision to travel is a binary, yes or no variable. Travel frequency instead refers to the number of trips made, which can have a positive effect on travel demand. This variable can take any value, beginning with 1.

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