

International Conference on Strategic Innovative Marketing, IC-SIM 2014, September 1-4, 2014,
Madrid, Spain

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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Peer-review under responsibility of I-DAS- Institute for the Dissemination of Arts and Science.

Keywords: adventure tourism; motivation; push; pull factors

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

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