

**Baby boomers and future seniors: How to get them on motorcoaches?**

by

Kam Hung, Ph.D. Student (Corresponding author)  
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences  
Texas A&M University  
2261 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-2261  
[kamh@neo.tamu.edu](mailto:kamh@neo.tamu.edu)

and

James F. Petrick, Ph.D. - Associate Professor  
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences  
Texas A&M University  
[jpetrick@tamu.edu](mailto:jpetrick@tamu.edu)

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Baby boomers are defined as people who were born between 1946 and 1964 (Schewe & Balazs, 1992). In today's market, the 76 million U.S. baby boomers are recognized as more influential than their younger counterparts due to their substantial number and discretionary income (Dychtwald & Gable, 1990; Carrigan & Szmigin, 1999; Moschis, Lee & Mathur, 1997). Combined with other aged populations, those 65 and older in the United States constituted 35.9 million (12 %) of the total population in July 2003 (He, Sengupta, Velkoff, & DeBarros, 2005). The older population is anticipated to continue to increase with the most rapid growth predicted to occur after 2010, when the baby-boom population reaches age 65 (Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001). The largest increase in this population is expected to occur between 2011 and 2030, and the population in 2030 is projected to be twice as large as it was in 2000 (He, Sengupta, Velkoff, & DeBarros, 2005).

Much research has emphasized the significance and importance of baby boomers in today's market. For instance, Leventhal (1997) suggested that the entry of baby boomers to the market has become one of the "greatest marketing movements that we have ever seen in this country." (p.276). Much evidence can be found to support this statement:

1. Those aged 65 and over have outnumbered teenagers in the U.S. (Dychtwald, 1997).
2. They control over 50% of assets and discretionary income in the U.S. (Long, 1998; Sawchuck, 1995).
3. They are the major consumer of luxury products including vacations (Sawchuck, 1995).

These facts indicate that the marketers should consider if youth-oriented marketing strategies are still appropriate for today's market given the rapid increase of the size and spending power of baby boomers. To target the senior market more effectively, the first thing to do is to know this market better. Implementing marketing strategies based on marketers' perceptions or stereotypes

toward the elderly without research support can be costly if these strategies are inappropriate to the market. Therefore, some of the characteristics of baby boomers such as their lifestyle, self concepts, and their potential influence in the marketplace are first addressed, and the applications of this information on the motorcoach will be suggested later.

## Understanding the senior market

### *Stereotypes*

Often perceptions towards the elderly are determined in face-to-face interaction (Hazan, 2000) based on predetermined stereotypes associated with older people. When there is a lack of information, stereotypes are often used to interpret the behavior of the elderly. Leventhal (1997) suggested that none of the stereotypes (older people could not adapt to change; most older people lived below the poverty line; most older people are lonely; one of ten older people lives in a long-term care institution) found in a survey reported by the *New York Times* in 1995 were true. More negative and positive stereotypes about aging can be found in Table 1. When implementing a marketing strategy such as promoting a product to the senior market, it would be a mistake if the marketers advertised products based on false perceptions toward the elderly. Today's seniors are more active and dependent than past generations (Dychtwald, 1997). Recognizing the changes of their lifestyle and incorporating this new understanding into marketers' decision-making is more likely to successfully reach this target market.

TABLE 1  
*Negative Stereotypes and Positive Stereotypes of Aging*

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**NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES**

1. Most older persons are sick or disabled.
2. Most older persons have no sexual activity or desire.
3. Older persons are ugly.
4. Mental abilities start to decline after middle age.
5. Most old persons are “senile.”
6. Old workers are not as effective as younger ones.
7. The majority of older persons are socially isolated and lonely.
8. Most older persons live in poverty.
9. Older persons feel miserable (cranky, depressed).

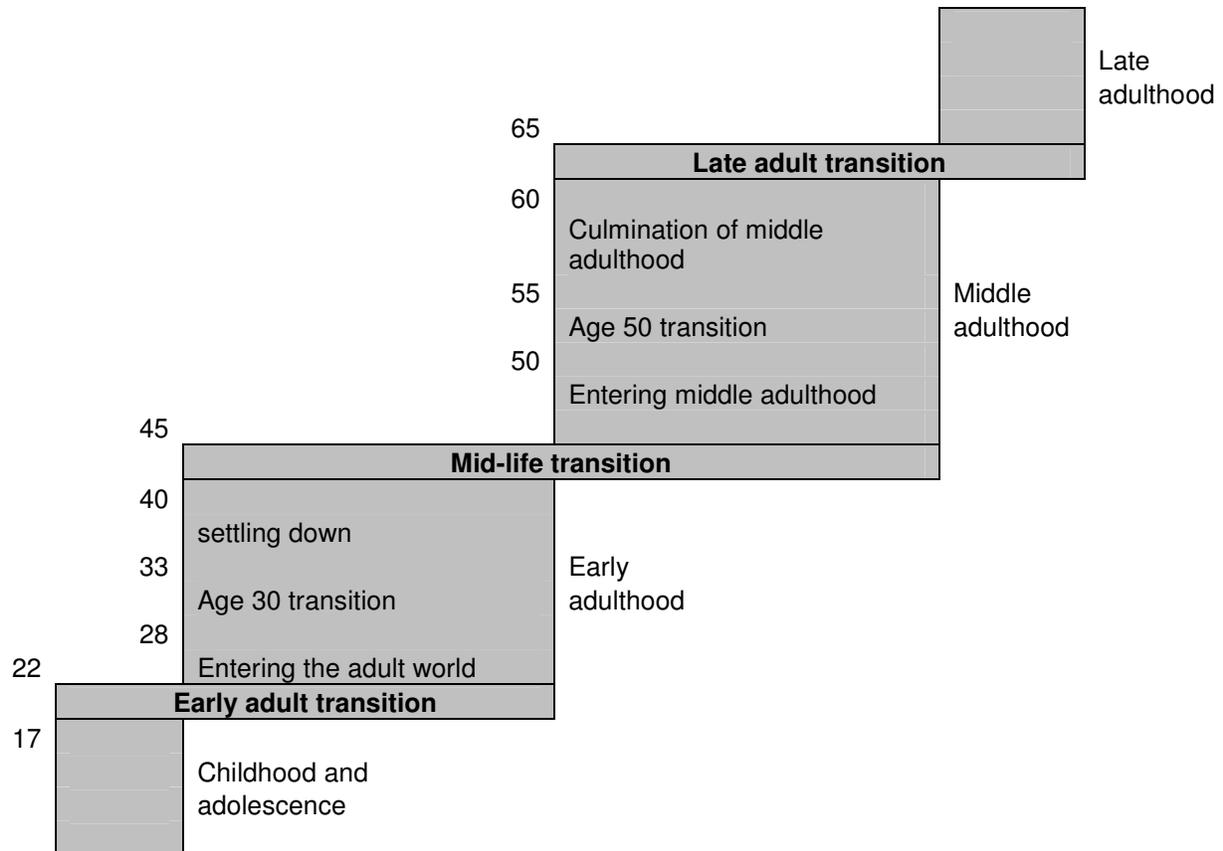
**POSITIVE STEREOTYPES**

1. Older persons are kind and warm.
  2. Most older persons have great wisdom.
  3. Older persons are more dependable.
  4. Older persons are well off financially.
  5. Older persons are a powerful political force.
  6. Older persons are free to do whatever they want.
  7. It is possible to slow down the aging process.
  8. Old age is full of peace and serenity.
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Source: McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick (2004).

*Change of Lifestyle*

In the past research, the chronological model, which uses calendar years as a measure of age, is the most frequently used perspective to interpret the aging process (Teague & MacNeil, 1992). An example was given by Levinson et al. (1978) (Figure 1). This identifies four stages of the life cycle: childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. Each stage occurs at a specified chronological age.



Source: Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978).

Figure 1. Developmental Periods in the Life Cycle

This model suggests that there is a linear lifestyle which indicates a designated order of education, work and leisure as a person gets older. Particular roles are assigned to each age based on social expectations. For instance, people are expected to get married and have children in their 20s, have a successful career in their 30s, and be retired from work or be grandparents at age 65. However, this traditional aging perspective has changed in today's era. More flexibility is allowed in today's consumers' lifestyles. In this new lifestyle philosophy, "education, work and leisure are found to be interspersed throughout the lifespan in no particular order" (Dychtwald, 1997, p.272). This means that older adults often cycle in and out of education and work, and treat learning as an ongoing, lifelong process (Dychtwald & Gable, 1990). They may not like to settle

with the traditional role of retirement. Rather, many of them prefer to continue to work either fulltime or part-time after passing retirement age (Dychtwald & Gable, 1990). In addition to work, past research has also indicated that education has been found to be one of the goals in later life (Dychtwald & Gable, 1990). Therefore, today's elderly live in a very active life, and their chronological age is an insufficient indicator for predicating their behavior. Elderly consumers have been termed "ageless market" (Leventhal, 1997). Thus, more effective indicators need to be included in research to more effectively market to this population. Indicators which have been suggested include: their value orientations, life-styles, life satisfaction, and cognitive age (Schiffman & Sherman, 1991).

Schiffman and Sherman (1991) also found differences between new-age and traditional elderly (Table 2). Dychtwald and Gable (1990) suggested that different life experiences might have contributed to different lifestyles among the elderly. For instance, their value orientations and spending preferences are different because the parents of baby boomers worked during the Depression while baby boomers lived in a more prosperous post-war period. The baby boomers are highly educated, analytical on information received from mass media, more used to using credit cards to make purchases, and have high "interest in spending on products and services that enhance their enjoyment of life" (Dychtwald & Gable, 1990, p.72). Research also indicates that mature markets respond to marketing efforts more effectively when these efforts reflect their personal values including autonomy, connectedness, altruism, personal growth, and revitalization (Leventhal, 1997). As a person gets older, tangibles becomes less important than other values such as experiences, personal growth, and helping others (Bone, 1991). These suggest that the advertisements directed toward seniors need to convey the benefits which reflect the baby boomers lifestyles and values rather than merely selling the physical products.

TABLE 2  
*Comparison of New-Age and Traditional Elderly*

New-Age Elderly	Traditional/Stereotypical Elderly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceive themselves to be different in outlook than other people their age</li> <li>• Age is seen as a state of mind</li> <li>• See themselves as younger than their chronological age</li> <li>• Feel younger, think younger, and do younger</li> <li>• Have a genuinely youthful outlook</li> <li>• Feel there is considerable adventure to living</li> <li>• Feel more in control of their own lives</li> <li>• Greater self-confidence when it comes to making consumer decisions</li> <li>• Less concern that they will make a mistake when buying something</li> <li>• Especially knowledgeable and alert consumers</li> <li>• "Selectively innovative"</li> <li>• Seek new experiences and personal challenges</li> <li>• Less interested in accumulating possessions</li> <li>• Higher measured life satisfaction</li> <li>• Less likely to want to live their lives over differently</li> <li>• Perceive themselves to be healthier than more people their age</li> <li>• Feel financially more secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceive all older people to be about the same in outlook</li> <li>• Age is more of a physical state</li> <li>• See themselves at or near their chronological age</li> <li>• Tend to feel, think, and do things they feel match their chronological age</li> <li>• Feel that one should act one's age</li> <li>• Feel life should be dependable and routine</li> <li>• Normal sense of being in control of their own lives</li> <li>• Normal range of self-confidence when it comes to making consumer decisions</li> <li>• Some concern that they will make a mistake when buying something</li> <li>• Low to average consumer capabilities</li> <li>• They are not innovative</li> <li>• Seek stability and a secure routine</li> <li>• Normal range interest in accumulating possessions</li> <li>• Lower measured life satisfaction</li> <li>• Have some regrets</li> <li>• Perceive themselves to be of normal health for their age</li> <li>• Somewhat concerned about financial security</li> </ul>

Source: Schiffman & Sherman (1991).

*Cognitive age*

Cognitive age, which is also named perceived age, refers to the age that people perceive themselves to be regardless their real age (Muller & O’Cass, 2001). The central argument in this

concept is that aging is a state of mind (Schiffman & Sherman, 1991). Chronological age has been a widely used criterion to explain aging in the past research, and it has been used as one of the main criterion to segment the market (Bone, 1991). However, this segmentation strategy has been found to be ineffective for those who do not act according to chronological age (Bone, 1991). The underlying reason for the insufficient power of chronological age to predict people's behaviors is that aging is a multidimensional phenomenon with variant biological, psychological, and social development issues (Moschis, Lee & Mathur, 1997). Different personalities, life experiences, and feelings toward life can lead to different perceived ages. As a result, some may perceive themselves to be younger than their real ages while others may feel older. In general, most older adults feel younger than their real ages. The older a person gets, the larger the gap between their cognitive age becomes. In general, baby boomers feel about 15 years younger than their chronological age (Leventhal, 1997; Muller & O'Cass, 2001).

Cognitive aging is a multidimensional concept. This can be displayed in Barak and Schiffman (1981)'s four multidimensional construct for measuring cognitive age. They measured subjects' feel-age, look-age, do-age, and interest-age among older adults, and found that people feel, look, act, and have interests younger than their real ages. This suggests that the concept of cognitive age may have some implications in determining marketing strategies when targeting baby boomers. Studies (e.g., Muller & O'Cass, 2001; Tongren, 1988) have suggested that implementing marketing strategies solely based on chronological age is unlikely to bring success to a business since people may not act according to their real age. The perceived age of consumers should be considered instead since it is more predictive of their consumption behaviors including in the domains of leisure, recreation, and tourism.

## *Conclusion*

The previous discussions suggests that seniors today are different than they have been in the past including their: lifestyles, values, and perceived ages. Marketers need to understand how these changes affect their needs on tourism services, and take this information into consideration when implementing a marketing strategy. The following paragraphs further examine how age influences tourism businesses, and to provides some suggestions on how the motorcoach industry can reach and target this market more effectively.

## Aging and Travel

The study of aging in a tourism context is a recent phenomenon (Hsu, 2001). However, increasing attention has been paid to this market due to increases in the aged population, improved health, more time flexibility after retirement, increasing disposable income, and the elderly's substantial interest in travel (Faranda and Schmidt, 1999; Marvel, 1999; Lieux, Weaver, and McCleary, 1994). Past research in this field falls into two categories: studies using a lifespan approach embracing all age groups including the elderly and studies focusing only on older age cohorts. The former category often compares senior and non-senior travelers on various aspects such as travel motivations, travel demands, travel amenities preference, travel purposes, socioeconomic factors, travel mode, distance of travel, etc. (e.g., Reece, 2004; Javalgi, Thomas, and Rao, 1992; Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo, and Howey, 1992). The general consensus from these studies is that senior travelers are different from younger travelers on a wide range of items. The other category of studies focuses only on older age cohorts. These studies often further divide the aged population into different subgroups, and investigates variations of travel behaviors across these groups (e.g., Bai, Smith, Cai, and O'Leary, 1999; Huang and Tsai, 2003; Horneman,

Carter, Wei, and Ruys, 2002). Studies in both categories of research suggest heterogeneity of travel characterizes not only between groups (i.e., senior and non-senior), but also within groups (i.e., subgroups in the senior population) (e.g., Shoemaker, 1989; Hsu, 2001; Prideaux, Wei, and Ruys, 2001).

Studies have pointed out that seniors today have active and independent lifestyles (Dychtwald, 1997). They look for opportunities for personal growth (Leventhal, 1997), and they participate in personal meaningful activities such as receiving further education, volunteering, and continuously working (Schewe & Balazs, 1992). Schiffman & Sherman (1991) suggested that older consumers like to buy experience-rich products or services. Travel, along with other cultural events, is particularly appealing to this market. Patterson (2006, p.3) summarized other opportunities for travel in later life from previous studies:

“...there is little doubt that older people are increasingly placing travel as a higher priority in their retirement years, mainly because they are feeling healthier, wealthier, better educated, more independent and have an abundance of leisure time and a lessening of social and family obligations compared with younger people (Martin and Preston, 1994; Zimmer et al., 1995).”

These opportunities, along with their own interest in travel, have resulted in seniors being major consumers of tourism services. In the United States, seniors have contributed to about 80% of luxury travel, 70% of coach tours, 65% of ocean cruises, 32% of hotel overnights and 28% of foreign travel (Smith & Jenner, 1997). The increase of interest in travel among seniors is a global phenomenon. In 1999, over 593 million international travelers were recorded to be aged 60 and over (Patterson, 2006). It is predicted that more than 2 billion trips will be made by seniors by

2050 (World Tourism Organization, 2001). The dominance of seniors in today and future travel markets may shift the dominant form of travel. Educational or cultural holidays, which provide personal enriched experiences, are predicted to increase as a result (World Tourism Organization, 2001).

### Aging and motorcoach industry

The statistics above indicate that the elderly have, and will continue to have a substantial impact on tourism business including motorcoach tours. Although independent travel is more popular than group tours in the United States, the increased number of seniors and their interest in travel can facilitate growth of the motorcoach tour business. Past research has indicated that motorcoach tours were one of the fastest growing travel business segments (Robinson, 1994; Illum and Schaefer, 1995). In the United States, about 50% to 70% of motorcoach tour patrons were seniors (Chacko and Nebel, 1993; Marshall, 1997). These numbers suggest that baby boomers have more interest in traveling with groups than other age groups. Therefore, baby boomers are more likely to be a lucrative market for motorcoach tours. Although there has been little research on investigating seniors' motorcoach behaviors, researchers have recently started to pay attention to this area of study. These studies can be categorized into two streams; those focused on tour operators (e.g., Schaefer, Illum, & Margavio, 1995; chacko & Nebel, 1993); and those focused on customers (e.g., e.g., Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001; Hsu & Lee, 2002). Since the main purpose of this paper is to identify ways to effectively target baby boomers, more attention will be paid to the second category of study. These studies provide some insight into the seniors' motorcoach market, and the results of these studies, along with other information of seniors presented in the previous sections, will be used to provide some suggestions to the motorcoach

industry on how to serve this market more effectively. The following paragraphs first summarize the findings from these studies.

Hsu (2001) explored the dimensionality of seniors’ motorcoach tour choice attributes, and found that senior motorcoach travelers choose to travel with a particular motorcoach tour based on certain attributes of the tour. Six dimensions were identified in the research: social activities; operator services and referrals; flexible schedule; health and safety; promotional materials; and tour operator’s reputation. She found that reputation and health and safety concerns were the most influential factors for choosing a motorcoach tour. The measurement items of each attribute are listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
Senior motorcoach travelers’ choice attributes

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<p><b>Social Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evening entertainment</li> <li>Group activities</li> <li>Similar age of other participants</li> <li>Recreational activities</li> <li>Social contact opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>Operator Services and Referrals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior discounts</li> <li>1-800 telephone number</li> <li>Availability of travel insurance</li> <li>Name recognition</li> <li>Travel and agent recommendation</li> <li>Friends/relative recommendation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Flexible Schedule</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of freetime</li> <li>Time to relax</li> <li>Schedule/itinerary flexibility</li> </ul> <p><b>Health and Safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safety precautions</li> <li>Personal safety</li> <li>Emergency procedures</li> <li>Empathy for health problems</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotional Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attractiveness of promotional materials</li> <li>Comprehensiveness of promotional materials</li> </ul> <p><b>Reputation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliability</li> <li>Reputation</li> </ul>
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*Source: Hsu (2001)*

Using the same set of motorcoach tour choice attributes, Hsu and Lee (2002) identified three distinct segments within the senior motorcoach traveler market. The segments are named dependents, sociables, and independents, and these three segments were found to be significantly different on thirteen tour selection attributes, age, retirement status, education, and income. Table

4 depicts the characteristics of each group and marketing strategies the authors recommended to the tour operators accordingly.

TABLE 4  
Senior motorcoach market segments

<i>Market segments</i>	<i>Marketing strategies</i>
<p>Dependent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seniors rated all 13 attributes as extremely important.</li> <li>On the top of the list, other than safety and health, included 1-800 telephone, name recognition, and friends and travel agent recommendation.</li> <li>They tended to be older retired individuals without a college degree and had lower income.</li> </ul>	<p>Dependent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tour operators may work with and provide incentives to travel agents to recommend particular packages.</li> <li>Establish a reliable and credible reputation among consumers and travel agents to maximize the positive word of mouth. Referrals from previous customers could be encouraged as well, with incentives provided if necessary.</li> <li>Tour operators need to make sure that every detail of the tour packages is well thought out, and this information should be communicated to potential travelers via attractive and comprehensive promotional materials to minimize their concerns.</li> <li>Empathy for health problems and safety precautions could be emphasized in all communication materials.</li> </ul>
<p>Sociables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They rated evening entertainment and group activities as very important, in addition to safety and health concerns.</li> <li>They also rated attractiveness and comprehensiveness of promotional materials as more important than travel agent and friends/relatives recommendations.</li> <li>This group was composed of younger seniors with higher income compared to the other two market segments.</li> </ul>	<p>Sociables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotional materials should be professionally designed to indicate all the social activities planned for the trip.</li> <li>Various advertising media could be used to disseminate information about the operators as well as upcoming tours.</li> <li>More physically active social programs could be included in the itinerary.</li> <li>The package tour price can be higher for this group since they have higher incomes than other two market segments.</li> </ul>
<p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They rated only 1-800 telephone number and name recognition as important.</li> <li>This group had a higher education, were younger, and had moderate income.</li> </ul>	<p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a toll-free telephone number and had a recognizable name.</li> <li>Information could be provided about the destination and local culture in a welcome kit for the participants to read at their leisure.</li> <li>Packages could include limited group activities to allow free time for independent exploration.</li> </ul>

Source: Hsu and Lee (2002)

In her later study on the mature motorcoach travelers' satisfaction, Tsu (2003) found that some of the factors listed in Table 3 not only influence senior travelers' choice of motorcoach tour, but also correlate to their satisfaction with the tour. Flexible schedule, tour guide, and price

and value were found to be the three best indicators of mature travelers' satisfaction of tour packages. The measurement items for each dimension are shown in Table 5. The study suggested that travelers' overall satisfaction is determined not only by their satisfaction with the tour provider, but also their satisfaction with tour packages.

TABLE 5  
Senior motorcoach travelers' satisfaction

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<p><b>Flexible Schedule</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time to relax</li> <li>Comfortable tour pace</li> <li>Schedule/itinerary flex.</li> <li>Availability of free time</li> <li>Stops at interesting place</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tour Guide</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interesting tour guide</li> <li>Professionalism of guide</li> </ul> <p><b>Price and Value</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value for the money</li> <li>Price of tour package</li> </ul>
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*Source: Tsu (2003).*

Baloglu and Shoemaker (2001) also investigated Pennsylvania senior travelers' motorcoach use and their important considerations when choosing a motorcoach tour. However, the study examined the topic from a perspective different from Hsu (2001) and Hsu and Lee (2002). Instead of using tour attributes as the indicators of seniors' choice of a motorcoach tour, the authors investigated if travelers' demographic, psychological, and psychographic characteristics can explain their behaviors. It was found that these three dimensions significantly predicted senior travelers' decisions related to taking motorcoach tours. This suggests that senior motorcoach travelers' decisions are a complex phenomenon involving not only the consideration of tour attributes or pull motivations, but also decision-makers' personal attributes or push motivations. This implies that the changes among the seniors in terms of their ways of thinking, lifestyles and values, and perceived age may influence their decision-makings and travel behaviors. Thus, it is important to design tour packages with satisfying travelers' psychological

needs in mind. The study also identified the following characteristics of senior motorcoach customers:

- They are price sensitive.
- They prefer their trips to be filled with activities.
- They use travel as a way to build friendships.
- They prefer to take shorter trips (2 or 3 days) rather than long ones (7 to 8 days).
- They are less likely to want to return to the same place.
- They are concerned about the tour company's reputation.
- They are more likely to have low incomes.

In conclusion, past studies have investigated how seniors choose a motorcoach tour, and the factors influencing their satisfaction from joining the tour. The segmentation study (Hsu, & Lee, 2002) suggested that seniors are not a homogenous market. Rather, they are different from each other in terms of choice attributes. This coincides with previous studies in which heterogeneity of seniors was found (e.g., Bai, Smith, Cai, and O'Leary, 1999; Huang and Tsai, 2003; Horneman, Carter, Wei, and Ruys, 2002). Therefore, treating seniors as only one market and using a single marketing strategy to reach all seniors is unlikely to be effective.

#### Marketing implications: How to get seniors on the motorcoaches?

The marketing mix (also called the four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion), which has long been used in marketing for designing and implementing effective marketing strategies, seems to be a useful framework for which suggestions to the motorcoach industry can be outlined. Selected elements of the additional four Ps (publicity, packaging, programming, and

partnership) proposed by Morrison (1989) were also added to the discussion in order to broaden the spectrum of analysis.

### *Product*

In this study, product refers to motorcoach service. Since seniors are more likely to respond to the marketing efforts which reflect their lifestyles and perceived self-images, motorcoach tours which are designed with stereotypes in mind are unlikely to succeed. Today's elderly are active in later life, physically healthy and more independent, enjoy continuous learning, and perceive themselves to be younger than their real age. They are willing to spend money on leisure activities which provide them meaningful life experiences, enhance their personal growth, and realize revitalization. Therefore, activities which require mild to moderate physical strength can be considerably incorporated into the design of motorcoach tours. The tours should be enriched with learning experiences such as visiting heritage sites and attending cultural events. Independence and sense of control should be allowed by letting the group members explore the destination by themselves or design their own itineraries. The importance of a flexible schedule with available free time and relaxation time has also been found to be an important determinant when a senior motorcoach traveler chooses a service provider (Hsu, 2001). Since seniors prefer a certain degree of autonomy, customization is essential to motorcoach tours targeting baby boomers.

Motorcoach tours have been considered as a low cost means of travel. The elderly have been viewed as a group with low income and low affordability for high-end travel (Baloglu and Shoemaker, 2001). However, given the increasing affluence among the elderly, many seniors can afford luxurious vacations. Thus, motorcoach tour operators should consider targeting wealthy baby boomers (Baloglu and Shoemaker, 2001; Chacko & Nebel, 1993). Tours specifically

designed for more affluent customers should be accompanied with high quality of services such as accommodating them in high-class hotels or dining in good restaurants.

Since many people work even after reaching retirement age, recruiting older adults in various positions such as tour guides in motorcoach companies can demonstrate the commitment and sympathy of the motorcoach industry to the senior market. Since the older employees are experiencing aging themselves, they are more likely to be attuned to the needs of the senior market.

There is evidence that the senior market is not homogenous (e.g., Day, Davis, dove, & French, 1988; Daychtwald, 1997; Visvabharathy & Rink, 1984). Dychtwald (1997) found that older adults become more rather than less diverse as they grow older. As a result, market segmentation has been recommended to divide the seniors into different segments in which each segment has homogenous needs and characteristics. This is suggested to be an effective strategy because the motorcoach business is more likely to serve a chosen target market more effectively with limited resources. Since segmenting seniors based on chronological age is unlikely to be successful (Bone, 1991), other segmentation criterion such as their lifestyles, cognitive ages, and psychological factors should be considered.

### *Place*

Place refers to the ease of distribution of services. Thus, it is concerned with how customers can reach the service providers if they decide to make a purchase. The buying process should be made as easy as possible since frustration with the transaction may terminate their buying intentions. Motorcoach tour operators should state their contact information clearly on their promotional materials so that elderly will know how to reach the service providers when they decide to make a purchase or ask any questions. Since research has suggested that the

elderly prefer to reach service providers with 1-800 telephone number (Hsu, 2001), it is important to offer 1-800 telephone line, and communicate it to the target market or print it in a visible size on all the printed promotional materials. Since today's elderly have higher educations, offering access to a website where additional information can be found or online reservation might facilitate the buying process.

### *Promotion*

Since today's seniors are knowledgeable, alert, and well educated (Schiffman & Sherman), they have an increased demand for facts of products. Training should be provided to frontline employees on the details of services so that they are better prepared to communicate details to their customers. Although senior customers prefer to know the facts about products and services, they do not prefer advertisements to start with details (Leventhal, 1997). Promotions should be directed to attract senior travelers' attention and interest first, followed by more comprehensive information about the services.

Since there is an indication of reluctance of marketers to respond to senior customers' needs due to the youthful profile of those who work in advertising (Carrigan & Szmigin, 1999), including seniors on promotional teams or seeking input from seniors may increase the effectiveness of promotional campaigns.

Most older adults perceive themselves to be younger than their real age. They also do not like to be treated as being old by marketers and advertisers (Carrigan & Szmigin, 1999). Therefore, including youthful-looking seniors as the characters in advertisements and demonstrating active living through travel with motorcoach tours are more likely to reflect the lifestyles of today's seniors and stimulate their interest in travel. Also, promotional messages

should be designed to promote an uplifting spirit rather than mentioning aging or illness related to this group.

Tour operators' reputation has been suggested as one of the most important elements for mature customers to consider when choosing a service provider (Hsu, 2001). Tour operators should strive to establish a good reputation by offering quality services to the senior market. Their reputation and name recognition can be enhanced through not only various promotional campaigns, but also community service involvements. Since word of mouth is important to older consumers, incentives can be offered to those who refer their friends or relatives to partake in motorcoach tours.

### *Programming*

Programming refers to the integration of activities to enhance the travel experience. Social activities which provide opportunities for networking and building friendships can be built into motorcoach tours. Research suggested that the elderly seek social support and friendship in their leisure activities (Driver, 1990; Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001). They also prefer their trips to be filled with activities (Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001). Therefore, activities such as evening entertainment, group activities, recreational activities, and social contact opportunities can be programmed into motorcoach tours to enhance seniors' trip satisfaction.

### *Partnership*

Mutual beneficial relationships can be established between motorcoach tours and other businesses. Only selling motorcoach tours without connecting to other services is unlikely to succeed. Partnerships with airlines, hotels, and attractions could allow more flexibility and diversity of tours. Chacko and Nebel (1993) suggested that motorcoach/air and motorcoach/ship tours can increase the competitiveness of motorcoaches since seniors who grew up with jet travel

may not prefer motorcoaches as their only transportation tool. In addition, since seniors do not like to return to the same place which they previously visited (Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001), seeking new partnerships with different entities such as hotels and attractions in new destinations is important to retain older patrons.

### *Conclusion*

The increased number of aged citizens has placed a significant demand on travel and motorcoach services. Unlike previous generations, seniors today are active, thriving, independent, and are more willing to explore their personal growth opportunities and experience different culture. The changes of lifestyles and perceived images among the elderly imply that marketers need to constantly revise their marketing strategies accordingly in order to reflect the best interest of customers. Utilizing the marketing mix, this section outlined some suggestions for the motorcoach industry in regards to ways to target the senior market.

### A Case Study

The Bus Owners Association of Québec (APAQ) was chosen as a case study to demonstrate how market changes have influenced the group tour business in Québec and how the industry has responded to these changes. The data was collected from various sources including information obtained from the association's website, market research conducted by APAQ, and a phone interview with Marilyn Désy, who is a person in the organization responsible for coordinating, developing, and promoting different programs associated with group travel.

Formed by approximately 60 bus owners in the spring of 1926, the original goal of APAQ was to act as an integrated force to defend the rights of bus owners. Today, APAQ has about 600 members and has evolved into a major player in today's motorcoach industry in Québec. Since the 1980s, APAQ has been involved in tourism and has helped its members

develop group tours as a response to increasing demands from the tourism market. In 1988 APAQ formed Bienvenue Québec, which is a three-day trade show of tourism products with participation from both suppliers and buyers.

Due to its initial success, this event has been conducted annually to generate business opportunities for tourism suppliers, especially group tour operators in Québec, through meeting with Québec, Canadian, and American buyers. About 300 group tour organizers and 200 North American travel agencies and tour operators attend the event each year to familiar themselves with the tourism opportunities offered in Québec. Other than the trade show, Bienvenue Québec also plays an advisory role in group tourism business mainly focusing on the region of Québec by conducting marketing research, offering training, networking and promotional activities, and providing strategic suggestions to its members.

The establishment of Bienvenue Québec represents a revolutionary change in group tour business in Québec which is now geared toward maximizing business opportunities and responding to the needs of travel market. Being the only tourism trade show in Québec, Bienvenue Québec has become a leading advocate in renovating tourism products, presenting new tourism business practices, and providing a meeting platform where sellers and buyers of tourism products can interact. The trade show's theme has evolved and is carefully chosen to best represent the needs of the market. For instance, to respond to the increasing travelers' interest in cultural resources, Bienvenue Québec designated "Québec—Quite a Cultural Experience" as the theme of the tradeshow in 2002, 2003 and 2004, and put culture on the centre of all tourism activities of Bienvenue Québec. This innovative idea has won the association a national award for tourism excellence.

Observing a decline in group tour business in recent years, Bienvenue Québec's current tourism activities are directed to increase the number of group tour travelers. The tradeshow's theme has been changed accordingly to "Group Experience: Privilege" since 2005. The dedication of Bienvenue Québec to improving group tour business is accompanied by marketing research being conducted to: identify changes in travelers' preferences, provide strategic directions to tour companies, and initiate promotional activities to showcase innovative group tourism products.

According to marketing research conducted by APAQ, 28% of the population have made use of motorcoaches and anticipate to continuously use them in the future; 40% of the public in Québec did not use motorcoach service in the past five years and do not intend to do so in the future; and 32% of the population have not used motorcoaches but showed an interest in doing so in the future. This study suggested there is market potential for the development of group tours in Québec, but efforts should be invested in renovating traditional group tour services in order to make them more appealing to the market. The group tour market has experienced changes over the last five years. The traditional group tour formula in which a large number of travelers are packed in a bus and follow the exact itinerary with limited flexibility might not be applicable in today's marketplace.

According to Marilyn Désy, baby boomers were frequent group travelers in the past, but they are losing their interests now in joining group tours. Today's seniors are more individualistic, prefer more freedom on their journeys, do not like to travel with large groups, and perceive themselves to be younger than their real ages and hence do not like to be treated as being old. These trends suggest that a tour which delighted baby boomers in the past may be seen as inappropriate to today's travelers in the same age bracket. To effectively reformulate group

tour products, tour operators should understand what baby boomers want, provide them innovative and exclusive services, and enhance the quality of services throughout the whole journey.

The current motorcoach clientele are either those who are very young such as students or very old, and are usually lacking economic power. Tour operators in Québec are interested in attracting baby boomers age 45-65 years old since this market is perceived to be affluent and live an active lifestyle. To win over this market as well as other prospected customers, APAQ has suggested five keys to success for tour service providers: 1) providing unique trips or excursions; 2) uniqueness can only be experienced through joining group tours and is out of reach of free independent travelers; 3) offering guided tours to places with restricted access such as back stages of theatres; 4) providing educational opportunities and helping travelers gain in-depth knowledge of tourism sites visited; and 5) allowing more freedom in group tours.

Bienvenue Québec designed the “Group Experience: Privilege” program in recognition of the need to attract baby boomers as well as other group tour clientele. The essence of the privilege program are to treat group travelers as preferred and privileged customers, offer them unique products to which the public has limited access, provide high quality service, reduce group tour size, and reward tour participants with unforgettable experiences. This program has stimulated 115 privilege activities developed by over 80 tour operators with a wide range of interests including events, festivals, shows and cinema; garden; soft adventure, outdoor, ecotourism and cruises; industrial sites, learning and team building spirit activities; culinary tourism and agricultural tourism; history, museums, culture and religion; and shopping. These activities are privileged because they are unique, exceptional, and reserved for group travelers only.

The suppliers were invited to the Bienvenue Québec trade show and were given the opportunities to present their new services on stage to their potential buyers from Québec, Canada, and the United States. The privilege program has proved to be a success. According to market research conducted by APAQ, the overall stated intention of interest of the public in going on a group tour has increased dramatically (from 28% to over 40%) after implementing the privilege program.

Other than providing unique group tour services, the APAQ is also currently building a website to provide information on all privilege touring opportunities and other information related to group travel. Since Québécois traditionally do not like to purchase group tours through travel agents, an alternative way to facilitate their purchasing process is through online service. However, there is currently no website available in Québec to present customers all group travel information. Therefore, APAQ is working with tourism and transportation offices in creating the first online clearinghouse for group tours in which potential clients can find various activities matched with their interest, and be able to make reservations online or search for related travel information. It is expected with all these innovative and promotional efforts, there will be an increase of interest among Québécois in traveling with group tours.

This case study suggested that getting baby boomers on motorcoaches is not an easy task; it requires tour operators to think outside the box when designing tour services and tailor their services to match the need of the market. Baby boomers are now more experienced travelers than past generations, and have more travel alternatives to choose from. Taking this market for granted is no longer applicable; rather, continuously improving existing services and making them more appealing to the market is more likely to win customers.

## Conclusions

Today's baby boomers are "young" not only in their physical conditions, but also in their psychological state. To get them on motorcoaches, tourism providers need to understand and attune to their needs. The constant change of the market also means that tour providers need to monitor the changes, adjust tour services to match target market's lifestyle, and stand out from the numerous other travel alternatives by providing unique group tourism products.

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