

Senior leisure travelers in Hong Kong: Examination of their motivation and destination choice

Abstract

The growing potential market of senior travelers has become increasingly important to the tourism industry in Hong Kong due to its substantial size and potential to growth. The primary objectives of this study were to examine what factors are important in explaining travel motivation of senior travelers in Hong Kong, their preferences on the travel destination choice as well as their travel constraints. Using factor analysis, this study identified 'novelty seeking' and 'enjoyment-seeking' as the most important motivations while 'environment and safety' and 'transportation and financial' were the most crucial factors for seniors to choose the destination. Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that different age groups of senior travelers had difference in motivation, preference in destination choice and travel constraints. While, destination choice and travel barriers were different between gender and marital status, among seniors' health status and their income sources. Seniors from different educational level had different motivation to travel and their preferences to the destination.

Keywords: Destination choice, Hong Kong, Motivation, Senior travellers, Tourism, Travel constraint

Introduction

Seniors are becoming a significantly large prospective market segment of the hotel and tourism industry (Huang & Tsai, 2003, p. 561). Most researchers realized the increasingly importance of the growing senior market leading to the senior tourism in the future trend. Various researches have been focused on understanding the factors influencing older adults' perception (Chen & Gassner, 2012), and the senior's travel motivation in different nationalities, for example, Taiwanese seniors (Jang *et al.*, 2009; Jang & Wu, 2006), the seniors in Beijing and Shanghai (Hsu *et al.*, 2007), Japanese seniors (Sangpikul, 2008), Swiss seniors (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009), and French seniors (Prayag, 2012). However, lack of research on the senior leisure travelers' motivation and behavior particularly focuses on Hong Kong market.

In an attempt to attract the senior travelers, the research of understanding their travel behavior and preference is recommended (Horneman *et al.*, 2002; Jang *et al.*, 2009) so it is worthwhile studying the Hong Kong seniors' travel motivation and behavior. The research about identifying the attributes of seniors' travel motivation and their destination choices would give an insight to the destination marketers and the travel agency in Hong Kong in an attempt to improve and customize their tourism products and services to tap into the emerging senior market segment. According to Census and Statistics Department in mid-2014, the number of people aged over 55 has reached 2.1 million, which accounts for 29.4% of the total population in Hong Kong.

In regards to the significance of the senior market in Hong Kong, this study aims (1) to identify underlying factors of Hong Kong senior leisure travellers' behavioral pattern embracing their travel motivation and their preference on travel destination choice (2) to examine the relationship between the attributes of travel motivation and their travel destination choice in terms of socio-demographic factors of senior travelers in Hong Kong.

Literature Review

Senior travelers

Some studies have been done to prove that senior market is not homogenous group because they have different characteristics (Javalgi *et al.*, 1992; Shoemaker, 1989), in particular, in their motives, preferences and spending (Long, 1998; Sellick, 2004). They tend to travel often with further distances, stay longer in the destination because of their better mental and physical health of the seniors (You & Leary, 2000), relatively high level of wealth, higher travel propensity, higher discretionary income, less debt, more free time than any other age group (Horneman *et al.*, 2002; Javalgi *et al.*, 1992; Shoemaker, 1989; You & Leary, 2000) and even travel more often particularly for those well-educated seniors (Zimmer *et al.*, 1995) whereas some of the seniors travelers with aging problem, education, and mobility problem tend to avoid from travelling (Zimmer *et al.*, 1995).

Traveler motivation and destination choice

Push and pull factors developed Dann (1977, 1981) became the most acceptable theory to explain travel motivation (Hsu, *et al.*, 2007; Jang & Cai, 2002; Jang *et al.*, 2009). Push factors are regarded as sociopsychological needs that drive people to travel, and pull factors as ones that attract people to destination. Most of the researches focus on the senior tourists' motivation (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009; Horneman *et al.*; Hsu *et al.*, 2007; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Jang *et al.*, 2009; Jang & Wu, 2006; Prayag, 2012; Sangpikul, 2008; Sellick, 2004; Shoemaker, 2000). Anderson & Langmeyer (1982) revealed that those over-50 travelers with more time to travel and still relatively healthy tend to take pleasure trip for rest and relaxation or to visit relatives, and prefer to visit historical sites.

Shoemaker (1989) revealed that the important criteria for choosing a pleasure destination were "beautiful scenery" and "price of accommodation". Different generation has their own preference in choosing destination when they travel because different generation has different values and travel experiences that lead to a different travel destination choice (You & Leary, 2000). Zimmer *et al.* (1995) stated that factors that influenced seniors in their decision on destination selection were time, money, distance, income, education, rural residency, willingness to spend money on recreation and health status.

Methodology

Of 350 distributed self-administered questionnaires, a total of 203 samples of Hong Kong senior citizens and permanent residences were collected. After eliminating invalid or incomplete responses, 190 questionnaires were retained and used for further data analysis. They were seniors with age of 55 years and above, who had traveled outside Hong Kong within 3 years from the date of the survey. Questionnaires were distributed to church communities, authors' relatives and friends over a five-week period in February - April 2015 in Hong Kong. A pilot test was conducted to 5 senior travelers to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire, some modification to the wording was made before the questionnaires were distributed. The travel motivation and criteria in choosing destinations of senior travelers was analyzed using factor analysis. Non-parametric Mann Whitney and Kruskal Wallis tests were adopted to examine whether there were significant differences between groups of travel motivation and destination choices according to the senior travelers' socio-demographic attributes.

Results

Sample characteristics

The demographic profile of senior travelers is presented in Table 1. A descriptive analysis of the respondents showed 52.1% female and 47.9% male respectively while the dominant age group of the senior travelers was 55-60 years (43.7%). In term of educational level, 41.6% of the seniors had achieved junior to senior high school level, while 64% had vocational and university degree. The majority of the respondents were married with 77.9% with 38.9% of the respondents had excellent health, 33.7% in good health. Most of the respondents (48.9%) were retired while 31.6% were still working. The income source of the respondents was mainly from their own saving (43.2%) and children's financial support (21.1%).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	91	47.9
Female	99	52.1
Age (years)		
55-60	83	43.7
61-65	57	30.0
66+	50	26.3
Education		
Elementary school	47	24.7
Junior to senior high school	79	41.6
Vocational/university degree	64	33.7
Marital status		
Married	148	77.9
Widow/divorced/unmarried	42	22.1
Health		
Excellent	74	38.9
Good	64	33.7
Fair/poor	52	27.4
Employment		
Work full-time	60	31.6
Retired	93	48.9
Others	37	19.5
Income Source		
Pension	36	18.9
Own savings	82	43.2
Children's financial support	40	21.1
Others	32	16.8
Preferred travel duration		
3 days or less	31	16.3
4-7 days	108	56.8
More than 7 days	51	26.8

Travel motivation

Table 2 shows that 11 motivation items yielded four factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Five motivation items, which are 'attend cultural events', 'do same things people there' visiting places my family came from', 'meet new people and socialize', and 'spend time with family, relative, and friends' were eliminated due to its unreliability for further analysis.

These four factors are named: Novelty seeking (F1), Enjoyment-seeking (F2), Ego-enhancement (F3), and Relaxation (F4), as presented in table 2. The mean of travel motivation items indicate that the three most important motives for senior Hong Kong travelers are ‘see things not seen in Hong Kong’, ‘take a break and relax’, and ‘enjoy life’. Among the four factors, with the average mean of 3.98, the most obvious push factor for Hong Kong seniors to travel is novelty seeking, which result is consistent with the previous studies of Taiwanese senior travelers (Jang & Wu, 2006) and Chinese seniors (Chen & Gassner, 2012) but contrast to the studies in Taiwan (Huang & Tsai, 2003).

Table 2. Travel Motivation (Push Factors) of Hong Kong Seniors

Items	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cronbach α	Mean
Factor 1: Novelty-seeking		2.65	32.45	0.83	3.98
Different culture & way of life	0.86				3.89
Local people live	0.83				3.94
Go someplace interesting	0.78				3.96
See things not seen in Hong Kong	0.71				4.12
Factor 2: Enjoyment-seeking		1.91	16.70	0.66	3.70
Fine dining & nice food	0.86				3.28
Comfortable accommodation	0.76				3.84
Enjoy life	0.56				3.99
Factor 3: Ego-enhancement		1.87	13.20	0.93	3.67
Like to talk things seen	0.94				3.69
Like to talk places visited	0.93				3.64
Factor 4: Relaxation		1.58	10.55	0.65	3.74
Take a break & relax	0.84				4.02
Just to slow down	0.85				3.45
Total variance explained			72.90		

Note : KMO = 0.716

It can be seen in Table 3 that there are no significant differences of travelling motives between male and female seniors, married travelers and unmarried/divorce/widow travelers, health status, among different employment status (work full-time, retired, and others) as well as income sources. However, there are significant differences among age groups, educational level, and preferred travel duration on motivation to travel. Compared to other age cohorts, the motivation of the seniors aged 55-60 is most likely driven by their interest to visit interesting places, an opportunity to see things that cannot be seen in Hong Kong and how other local people live, as well as their intention to enjoy life. For seniors with vocational/university degree, their significant motivations for travelling are their interest in visiting interesting places and experience difference others' culture, which were also appealing to those seniors who generally prefer 4-7 days to travel.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney Test Results for Travel Motivation

Travel Motivation Characteristics	Female vs Male		Married vs Unmarried/Divorce/Widow	
	U statistic	Sig.	U statistic	Sig.
like to talk places visited	3871	0.052	2780	0.227
like to talk things seen	4190.5	0.340	2972	0.619
fine dining and nice food	4071	0.233	2621.5	0.107
comfortable accommodation	4189.5	0.358	2568	0.058
go someplace interesting	4113	0.252	2918	0.503
different culture and ways of life	4357.5	0.672	3085.5	0.938
local people live	4379.5	0.699	3023	0.751
see things not seen in Hong Kong	4132	0.242	2944	0.535
enjoy life	4114	0.238	2894	0.437
just to slow down	3997	0.153	2938	0.564
take a break and relax	4292	0.511	2707	0.136

Table 4a. Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Travel Motivation

Push factors	Age		Education		Health	
	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.
like to talk places visited	3.171	0.205	3.775	0.151	3.587	0.166
like to talk things seen	2.028	0.363	7.779	0.020*	1.082	0.582
fine dining and nice food	4.059	0.131	0.799	0.671	0.502	0.778
comfortable accommodation	3.673	0.159	1.891	0.388	3.221	0.200
go someplace interesting	8.716	0.013*	16.202	0.000**	3.805	0.149
different culture and ways of life	4.473	0.107	23.324	0.000**	5.528	0.063
local people live	9.116	0.010*	10.383	0.006**	2.962	0.227
see things not seen in Hong Kong	10.838	0.004**	3.191	0.203	1.702	0.427
enjoy life	9.026	0.011*	3.270	0.195	4.698	0.095
just to slow down	0.643	0.725	1.673	0.433	0.973	0.615
take a break and relax	4.291	0.117	8.452	0.015*	0.858	0.651

Note: ** and * represent 1% and 5% significant levels respectively

Table 4b. Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Travel Motivation

Push factors	Employment		Income source		Travel duration	
	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.
like to talk places visited	0.311	0.856	5.829	0.120	7.069	0.029**
like to talk things seen	0.119	0.942	2.813	0.421	5.429	0.066
fine dining and nice food	2.387	0.303	4.991	0.172	2.322	0.313
comfortable accommodation	3.784	0.151	5.410	0.144	5.014	0.081
go someplace interesting	0.307	0.857	3.565	0.312	25.099	0.000**
different culture and ways of life	1.640	0.440	1.835	0.607	25.819	0.000**
local people live	2.653	0.265	6.866	0.076	15.948	0.000**
see things not seen in Hong Kong	0.590	0.744	3.492	0.322	4.041	0.133
enjoy life	0.341	0.843	4.590	0.204	2.373	0.305
just to slow down	5.625	0.060	1.057	0.788	0.131	0.937
take a break and relax	2.788	0.248	1.144	0.767	4.663	0.097

Note: ** and * represent 1% and 5% significant levels respectively

Destination choice

Owing to reliability and low loading factor, two factors eliminated from the analysis were ‘availability of entertainment activities’ and ‘availability of shopping facilities’. Table 5 shows that similar factorial analytical was applied for the 12 items of destination selection and resulted in the extraction of three factors, which accounted for 63.12% of the explained variance and were named to be ‘Environment & Safety’ (F1), ‘Transportation & Financial’ (F2), and ‘Destination Attraction’ (F3). Of the three factors, environment and safety became the most important factor when choosing a destination.

Table 5. Destination Choice (Pull Factors) of Hong Kong Seniors

Items	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cronbach α	Mean
Factor 1: Environment & safety		3.23	36.62	0.84	4.28
Hygiene/cleanliness	0.88				4.54
Air & water quality	0.82				4.37
Safety/security	0.78				4.64
Medical facilities	0.72				3.87
Nice weather	0.64				3.97
Factor 2: Transportation & financial		2.41	14.81	0.73	3.51
Exchange rate	0.76				3.32
Travel distance	0.74				3.17
Transportation convenience	0.73				3.77
Overall cost	0.65				3.78
Factor 3: Destination Attraction		1.94	11.69	0.69	3.67
Cultural attraction	0.85				3.65
Beautiful scenery	0.71				4.17
Special event & festival	0.66				3.20
Total variance explained			63.12		

Note : KMO = 0.817

Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference between female and male respondents in 8 attributes, two of which are related to financial attributes that are exchange rate and overall cost, in addition to geography-related attributes that are beautiful scenery, travel distance, and transportation convenience. The analysis results show that there is a statistically significant difference in the environmental attributes which are air and water quality, and nice weather between female and male, plus married and unmarried/divorce/widow groups, both of whom yielded insignificant difference in safety / security attribute though. It implies that safety / security, which is an important concern in both gender of the senior travellers in their destination choice from our result, that is also consistent with the previous studies (Huang & Tsai, 2003; Jang & Wu, 2006).

Travel distance was the only significant concern for seniors who claimed to be in fair/poor health condition when they are choosing the travel destination. Seniors with the income source from their children's financial support tend to be concern more about travel distance, convenience of the transportation, and medical facilities when travelling abroad. For seniors who preferred to travel for 7 days or more, hygiene/cleanliness, medical facilities, beautiful scenery, and cultural attraction were the priorities in choosing the destination compared to seniors who only prefer a shorter period of travel.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney Test Results for Destination Choice Attributes

Destination Choice Attributes	Female vs Male		Married vs Unmarried/Divorce/Widow	
	U statistic	Sig.	U statistic	Sig.
safety/security	4448.5	0.851	2682	0.086
hygiene/cleanliness	3952	0.092	2126	0.000**
air and water quality	3539	0.005**	2427.5	0.016*
nice weather	3394	0.002**	2315.5	0.007**
exchange rate	3140	0.000**	2880.5	0.453
overall cost	3567	0.008**	2909	0.501
travel distance	3638.5	0.018*	2712.5	0.193
transportation convenience	3605	0.011*	2708	0.176
special event and festival	4093.5	0.256	2952	0.605
medical facilities	3847	0.066	2319.5	0.008**
beautiful scenery	3647	0.014*	2718	0.180
cultural attraction	4210.5	0.414	3107.5	0.999

Note: ** and * represent 1% and 5% significant levels respectively

Table 7a. Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Destination Choice Attributes

Pull factors	Age		Education		Health	
	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.
safety/security	4.788	0.091	5.032	0.081	1.147	0.564
hygiene/cleanliness	2.053	0.358	3.193	0.203	0.486	0.784
air and water quality	2.305	0.316	3.493	0.174	1.192	0.551
nice weather	8.733	0.013*	2.314	0.314	1.940	0.379
exchange rate	0.218	0.897	6.087	0.048*	1.167	0.558
overall cost	2.611	0.271	1.728	0.421	1.078	0.583
travel distance	4.399	0.111	9.975	0.007**	11.907	0.003**
transportation convenience	1.059	0.589	1.624	0.444	4.298	0.117
special event and festival	2.917	0.233	0.410	0.98	2.247	0.325
medical facilities	5.837	0.054	9.034	0.011*	0.970	0.616
beautiful scenery	11.067	0.004**	8.837	0.012*	3.481	0.175
cultural attraction	13.087	0.001**	12.154	0.002**	4.391	0.111

Note: ** and * represent 1% and 5% significant levels respectively

Table 7b. Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Destination Choice Attributes

Pull factors	Employment		Income source		Travel duration	
	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.	Chi-Square	Sig.
safety/security	4.284	0.117	2.676	0.444	5.910	0.052
hygiene/cleanliness	5.205	0.074	0.435	0.933	7.526	0.023*
air and water quality	4.627	0.099	4.144	0.246	5.312	0.07
nice weather	5.177	0.075	4.944	0.176	4.079	0.13
exchange rate	4.649	0.098	3.596	0.308	4.054	0.132
overall cost	2.624	0.269	0.299	0.96	0.779	0.677
travel distance	1.760	0.415	11.759	0.008**	11.986	0.002**
transportation convenience	1.418	0.492	8.096	0.044*	2.712	0.258
special event and festival	0.080	0.961	2.838	0.417	4.713	0.095
medical facilities	4.496	0.106	8.808	0.032*	14.756	0.001**
beautiful scenery	2.928	0.231	4.121	0.249	12.888	0.002**
cultural attraction	0.130	0.937	6.183	0.103	7.901	0.019*

Note: ** and * represent 1% and 5% significant levels respectively

Discussion

In Hong Kong with keen competition among the travel agents in Hong Kong and growing potential market of the senior travelers, who have sufficient time and discretionary income for traveling, it is very crucial to understand the characteristics of consumer behavior, which is useful to know the current travel behavior of tourists but also forecast their future behavior (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003) because the information can be used to identify the targeted senior travelers, their travel motivation, their intention to do during travel, and their preference of destination choice (Chen & Gassner, 2012). In an attempt to appeal those senior groups,

tourism service providers and local tourism organizations can further design and customize products and services to meet or even exceed the expectation of the senior by understanding the push and pull factors (Prayag, 2012).

Considering 'novelty seeking' and 'enjoyment-seeking' factors, which are main push factors of their travel motivation, the travel agents may launch cultural tour encompassing product attributes to experience authentic cuisine, cultural activities and sight-seeing in the traditional places by stressing on exploring new and novel things. In an attempt to tap into the senior market in Hong Kong, the travel agents should try to promote some destinations of the tour with the messages about higher level of hygiene, safety, security, air and water quality with advanced development of medical facilities provided and convenient transportation by considering 'environment and safety' as the important pull factors and 'environmental and health constraints' of their destination choice.

The study indicated significant differences in the motivation to travel among educational level, and preferred travel duration but no significant differences of travelling motives in gender, marital status, health status, employment status, income sources and particularly age. The study shows travel motivation, preference in destination choice and travel constraints can be different among different age groups. It also implied that travelling abroad has been becoming the popular and common activities among the Hong Kong senior travellers regardless of the gender and marital status. As of their destination choice, there is a significant difference between female and male respondents in 8 attributes, two of which are related to financial attributes that are exchange rate and overall cost, with higher mean in female respondents, which implied that female seniors tend to keep an eye on budget planning during travelling. The unmarried/divorce/widow seniors have greater concern about health consideration and fear of no travelling companion as the travel barriers.

Various research showed that the seniors are, nowadays, healthier, willing to travel frequently and longer than before (Chen & Gassner, 2012; Jang & Wu, 2006). The findings give insights into the travel industry and have implications for marketing strategies on product development especially introducing a cultural-related tour package or itineraries to the younger seniors aged 55-66 who prefer to travel to new and interesting places with authentic local culture. The travel agents can stress on the environmental factors involving good standard of hygiene of dining and accommodation, safe travel destination, and good medical facilities provided in the promotional message of their travel products to the seniors. The limited sample size might affect the validity of generalization to represent Hong Kong senior travellers when the respondents' interpretation of the questions in Chinese version, subject to the author's translation approach, may have some biases in the findings. Future studies could be conducted further by examining Hong Kong seniors' behaviours on travelling to certain country such as to mainland China.

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