Chapter XIV

Changing Technological Trends in the Travel Behaviour of Older Tourists

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Abstract

This chapter examines the growth in usage of information technology and the Internet by older adults. We are becoming an ageing society with seniors and baby boomers now responsible for a larger share of all holiday spending. The Internet provides a perfect vehicle for the travel industry however, many seniors are still fearful about using the Internet, and perceived problems still exist with credit card security, quality control and privacy issues. In the future, Internet travel bookings are likely to increase with the growth in baby boomers who generally prefer to use the Internet. This will further encourage the use of discount fares however it will place increased pressure on the future role of the travel agent. Furthermore the authors hope that through an understanding of the technological needs of older adults, it will inform tourism providers about the best ways to attract older people to use Internet sites for all aspects of their travel needs.

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Introduction

We are becoming an ageing society. The United Nations has recognised the fact that the older generation are growing rapidly, and has estimated that over two billion people will be aged 60 years and over by the year 2050, and this will account for 22% (or one out of five) of the world’s population compared to 10% in 2000. These demographic shifts will be seen across all continents (United Nations, 2000).

For example, McNeil (1991) stated that, “… as amazing as it seems, over one-third of all Americans were born between 1946 and 1964” (p. 22). Australia’s ageing population also is increasing, from around 12% in 1999 to between 24% and 26% by 2051, or one in four people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999).

On a global scale, the world is becoming increasingly aware of the significant impact that older adults (and in particular, baby boomers) will have on the tourism industry in the decades ahead (Goeldner, 1992). The direct consequence of this ageing pattern is that in the future, seniors will be responsible for a larger share of all holiday spending. For example, in 1999 over 593 million international travellers were aged 60 years and over. This accounted for around a third of all holiday spending by this segment. By 2050 this figure is projected to be greater than 2 billion trips (World Tourism Organisation, 2001).

As a result of this change in the demographic profile, the tourism and leisure industry is increasingly targeting the 65 years and over market because older adults generally are regarded as having greater amounts of free time and discretionary income to spend on travel, and as a result have become a significant growth market (Javalgi, Thomas, & Rao, 1992). This is because many baby boomers perceive themselves to be younger in age and in outlook, more in control of their lives, and increasingly more self-reliant. Baby boomers typically feel a decade younger (average of 10.2 years) than what their actual age is, and as a result often prefer to spend their holiday activities with younger people (Cleaver & Muller, 2002). They often seek out new and different leisure experiences that are often challenging and soft adventure activities, as well as being skillful and knowledgeable consumers that are generally satisfied with their lives (Patterson, 2002).

Today, the Internet has provided a perfect vehicle for the travel industry, as online travel Web sites have allowed consumers to have increased power over their travel planning, as well as providing them with a quick, easy and cheaper way of booking holiday travel. Traditionally, older consumers have been slower to embrace new technologies such as computers and the Internet in comparison to younger people. Many seniors are still fearful of using the Internet, and a widespread belief exists that information and communication technologies (ICT) are only for the young. This attitude is slowly changing as more baby boomers are approaching the retirement age.
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