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## **ARTICLES**

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## SENIOR TOURISM AS AN EMERGENT MARKET SEGMENT

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This study focus on senior tourism, a segment that has not been significant in this sector up until this moment, in spite of having potentialities and generating new opportunities for the tourist industry because of the ageing population and the changes happened in our society the last years.

Tourism represents a huge part of economy in every country and nowadays is not only an activity approachable for the upper class. This sector has undergone important changes according to the contemporary society and new segments have emerged as the accessible, LGTB (lesbians, gays, transsexuals and bisexuals) or senior tourism, among others.

One of the most common tendencies is the ageing population in an important number of nations, included Spain. Above all the group of the population formed by people of more than 55 years old has experienced a notary growth in occidental societies. As consequence of the decreasing of mortality rates in these countries, the proportion of senior tourist will grow in a spectacular way in the next few years. This factor will have an effect on the national tourism offer. Nowadays the extended life is living in a more satisfactory way, with better mental and physical health conditions. Furthermore, their point of view, way of living, behaviour, tastes and interests are different than before. They are a group with a young and open spirit and an ideal economic level. Seniors are willing to enjoy the opportunities that tourist industry can give them. Spain has been pioneer in conceiving senior tourism as an independent reality different the other divisions of tourism, and even it was a model for other countries due to have programs as IMSERSO (The Elderly Institute and Social Services), that try to improve life quality of old people organising trips and making tourist activities. At the same time the creation and support of job employment is favour in the low season.

As this is almost an unknown tourist sector, the existing literature is not very rich. There is a lack of consensus in defining seniors by the authors and this implies an important handicap. This lack of agreement let see the concept fragility and his repercussion from a theory sight, that is to say, the absence of a conceptual structure for researching on senior behaviour. And, on the other hand, from an applied point of view, in other words, the lack of the necessary tools to identify senior consumer. For some authors the beginning of the senior period is at 50, others think that it is at 55 and there are who think that is at 60 years

old or more. This segment is really heterogeneous, dynamic and it strongly depends on the personal characteristics and the social environment of each person. Authors are trying to do a deeper literature revision in this field.

Motivations are another important topic in tourism. They are the reasons that explain our behaviour, they are essential to understand the process of deciding to travel and they are fundamental to evaluate the tourist experience satisfaction. In the choice of the tourist activity can influence different subjects that depend on many factors. Gender, age, demography characteristics and health conditions are going to have an important role in senior decisions. Normally they look for resting and relaxing; meeting people and discovering new places and experiences. The experts declare that when people reach maturity, they care more about how to live his life fully and they want to find new things to do. It has been produce a change in motivations and benefits looked for seniors since the early and the late 90s.

According to some papers nowadays, it is trying to shape the senior market using the motivation as a base for segmentation. Authors think that current tourism is more active and focus on health and welfare. Also they recognize the interest of results of these researches to know the senior tourist profile; however they consider the need of researching using other variables and techniques of market segmentation.

The study of consumer behaviour is crucial for enterprises can design effective marketing activities to offer better services. In the USA it exists a large number of papers about the elderly tourist behaviour since late in 80's but in the rest of the countries do not have much interest on understanding this phenomenon. In Spain this segment has been ignored as a consumer group because they have been associated with the stereotype of bad health and limited economic resources. However, little by little, behaviour of senior tourist is starting becoming important for researches and for tourist industry. Travelling can be an enrichment experience for seniors because it involves a change in their routine lives. Normally the organization of vacation depends on health status above all. Other elements that can influence are the rank of age, from 60 to 70 years old is the group more important for tourist industry, beliefs or experiences. It exists some specific limiters related to the perceived or real limitations linked to the age. The elderly can feel limited because of worries about the others can think about their behaviour and what they really think they are able to do. There are probabilities that next generation have different preferences than the current one. They will have more travelled so it is possible that they continue doing it, they will act similar that in the present.

All of that can cause that seniors give to the tourism practice a different meaning, and that they participate in this activity with feelings and ideas very different. According to many authors for understand the behaviour of seniors is necessary to know their culture, lifestyle or familiar relationships.

In this paper it is going to be discussed the sources of information in senior tourism market. Some researches have concluded that the main information source for this group is their experience as consumers and the searching process is conditioned by their incomes, cultural level and social conditions. First they tend to collect information by their own and after they contrast it with other information given by external media. Also family, friends, neighbours or acquaintances, that is to say, the word of mouth, is a source to take into

account because commentaries about places or accommodation play a significant role in decisions of senior travellers. Mass media are important for reaching this sector too, above all the press and the radio. On the other hand, the use of information sources has changed due to Internet. It has become one of the most popular places to publish and search for every sort of information. In the last years the use of online information to organize trips has increased considerably in the different age cohorts, not only young people, and the forecast for next years is that the elderly will use more the Web and the email. The results show that online information is perhaps more effective when people have to take decisions about the destination choice. So the tourist industry should take it into account in distribution and communication strategies.

To conclude we can say that tourism is an important part of contemporary and habit society. Different forms of tourism are becoming relevant little by little, as senior tourism. It presents interesting opportunities to this industry mainly because of the ageing process of population and new profiles of old people, so this situation can help to reduce the unwanted seasonality.

Till this moment literature about this segment has been poor and it do not exist a consensus for defining senior tourism. Definitions are divers and the age used to classification varies. Some studies have treated this group in a homogeneous way, basing on the socioeconomic status or in simple segmentation variables. But the current tourist consumer does not configure a unique pattern; it is a group with different interests, attitudes and consumer guidelines in tourist activity. They have more experience in trips and this can generate new reasons for the elderly to travel or not. For next researches it will be necessary develop a more complete study adding new variables as lifestyle, cultural values or tourism perception, that could identify the fundamentals elements that influence and characterize the traveler and the non traveler, and that allow us to elaborate explicative patterns of motivations and behavior for senior tourist.

These kinds of tourists are not very different from the other tourists, perhaps they have more experience, and consequently they are more exigent when they have to value tourist services. So they have to be offered a quality product; because a positive experience will contribute to the image, fidelity and word of mouth. People with more than 55 years old, at least in the first period of age (55-56), have good intellectual and physical faculties. Generally this group has an establish job or they are retired. Nowadays they think more in personal enjoyment than in save money. The best way in order to reach them is to know the accurate means of communication.

Tourist sector should be take advantage of market opportunities that can generate the senior group, because it is a segment that grows very fast, they want to travel, they are in better conditions and they have more incomes. It is also very exigent and has a great control knowledge and practice of ICT. This new opportunity, can lead to create new firms and tourist packages, so as a new market segment for analyzing the offer diversification. The existence of this group of particular characteristics is a chance really improbable that happens again in a long term. Nowadays, even lot of advance have been done, there are still many researches to do. Satisfying necessary quality levels and wishes of this segment is the key to establish fidelity bounds.

