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Sociodemographic and Psychographic Variables in the Senior Travel Market

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SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC VARIABLES IN THE SENIOR TRAVEL MARKET

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ABSTRACT

Segmentation of the senior travel market has, until recently, focused on age groupings. Such segmentation has limited practical application, providing little direction for the development of travel services. Furthermore, age segments are not easily accessible for promotional communication. Investigations which segment the market into clusters, based on reasons for travel for example, may be limited to only the sample investigated. This investigation compares segmentation based on the sociodemographic variable of age to a proprietary psychographic segmentation technique. The latter is shown to provide a better view of the senior travel market and has the benefit of known avenues of accessibility.

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SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC VARIABLES IN THE SENIOR TRAVEL MARKET

INTRODUCTION

Relatively few investigations of the senior travel market have resulted in publications examining specific segments within the market. The extant published research tends to be general in nature, examining older adults as a single group. Segmentation of the senior market has been based until recently on specific age groups within the older adult population (2, 15, 25). Shoemaker (21) deviated from this pattern, using discriminate analysis to identify three segments of the senior market based on travel reasons. Replication and extension of this and similar investigations, such as that by Vincent and de los Santos (26) will lead to confirmation and refinement of the senior travel markets. Such segmentation analyses will be needed to provide a richer portrayal of older adult travel behavior. The present investigation segmented the senior travel market by a traditional sociodemographic variable, age, and by proprietary segmentation technique (VALS typing). The latter

analysis applied an existing consumer segmentation technique to a data set rather than defining the segments from the data.

SEGMENTING TRAVEL MARKETS

Investigations of the senior travel market using age as a basis for segmentation include Tongren's (25) investigation of travel plans of persons over the age of 65 and how those plans changed from pre- to post-retirement. Anderson and Langmeyer (2) studied the similarities and differences between travelers under age 50 and those over age 50. In another age-segmented investigation, Norvell (15) reported on the similarities and differences between those under 50, 50 to 64, and age 65 and older.

Segmenting travel markets has been advocated by a number of authors (1, 6, 16, 19, 20, 28, 29). The technique of choice for the majority appeared to be psychographic segmentation. Psychographic profiling has been defined as the classification of people by lifestyles, "those attitudes and beliefs that frame the way people think about themselves and their world" (30, p. 27).

Recent work by Shoemaker (21) employed discriminate analysis to segment the senior travel market according to reasons for travel. Three segments emerged; "Family Travelers", "Active Resters", and the "Older Set". Gladwell's (8) psychographic profile of state park inn users established three nearly-equal-sized groups; "Knowledgeable Travelers", "Budget Conscious", and "Travel Planners". While not focusing on the senior travel market, the study represents the most current research of this type.

Plog (17) wrote of the need to standardize profiling techniques. One of the most widely used, standardized psychographic techniques is the Values and Lifestyles (VALS) battery of questions developed by SRI International. VALS was conceived as a

> comprehensive conceptual framework describing people's values and lifestyles in such a way that it would help explain why people act as they do, both as consumers and as social beings (12, p. 4).

Respondents to a 32-item, attitudinal and demographic questionnaire are VALS typed by scoring their responses according to a weighted algorithm, thereby identifying their predominant VALS type. The eight VALS lifestyle types are: Survivor, Sustainer, Belonger, Emulator, Achiever, I-Am-Me, Experiential, and Societally Conscious.

According to SRI International (23) 20 percent or more of the persons in the Survivor, Belonger, Achiever, and Societally Conscious lifestyles were age 45 or older, making these lifestyles the predominate types among older adults. The principle concern among Survivors is how to survive from day to day. People in this VALS type typically have shied away from activities which require high levels of physical energy and they record the lowest in most travel related categories (13). Skidmore and Pyszka (22) found Survivors enjoyed travel most when occurring with relatives.

The central concern for people in the Belonger VALS lifestyle type is to belong and to be accepted by others (13). More vacations were found to be taken by all other VALS types combined than by Belongers. When they did travel, there was a strong likelihood that the trip would be taken by automobile (14). Belongers tend to limit the distance traveled from home and prefer to see America first (22).

Members of the Achiever lifestyle exist in a world where success, leadership, and power are central concerns (13). Mitchell's investigations revealed that

> achievers exhibit better than average participation in several pleasure and business travel activities. In pleasure travel they are higher than average in hotel/motel stays, use of rental cars, and use of travel agencies (12, p. 62).

Ploss (18) found higher than average participation in domestic and international travel by this group. Achievers were identified by Skidmore and Pyszka (22) as the primary market for business and pleasure travel. They were found also to travel more frequently than all other groups, but stayed away from home for shorter durations.

Finally, those in the Societally Conscious group emphasize social concerns and place less emphasis on materialism. The Societally Conscious group mirror the Achievers in their travel, participating in higher than average amounts in several travel activities (12). They were also found to be a large segment of business travelers and to do extensive research in planning for their travel (22).

PROCEDURES

A total of 1350 individuals age 50 to 85 was selected from a nationwide survey research panel developed by NFO Research and sent a two-part, sixteen item questionnaire in March, 1988. A response rate of 88 percent was recorded with 1184 useable questionnaires returned. The sample was representative of the 50 and older population according to U.S. Census quotas, balanced for geographic region, market size, age, household income, and household size. Standard questions regarding travel activity began with an inquiry concerning whether any trips involving four or more nights away from home were taken during 1987. Trips of this duration were specified in order to eliminate long weekend travel.

Nominally scale responses were created for the majority of items. The appropriate statistical procedures, therefore were Chi-square (X) analyses. Age was selected as the independent sociodemographic variable for this comparison and segmented in four groups (50-54, 55-59, 60-64, and 65 and over) to mirror previously cited investigations (2, 15, 25). The four predominate VALS types; Survivor, Belonger, Achiever, and Societally Conscious were the groupings for the psychographic independent variable. VALS typing of the sample revealed that Belongers were the largest group, comprising 58.7 percent. Achievers were the second largest group at 28 percent. Survivors and Societally Conscious types

were 5.3 percent and 5.2 percent of the sample respectively. The remaining four VALS types accounted for less than three percent of the sample and these 34 respondents were excluded from further analysis as assigning them to other groups would be inappropriate. The dependent variables in both analyses included traveler/non-traveler status, number of trips, reason for trip, number of nights away from home, mode of transportation, type of lodging, travel party size, and planning horizon.

FINDINGS

Among all respondents, no significant relationship was found between age group and travel status, revealing that travel activity appears to occur generally across the population irrespective of age.

The remaining discussion of the relationship between age groups and travel characteristics applies to those 703 respondents who traveled one or more times in 1987. Significance was found in the relationships between age and reasons for travel, the number of nights away from home, the types of lodging used, and the number of persons in the travel party (Table 1). The mode of transportation when traveling was found to be significantly related to age as well, however subsequent analysis revealed that income exerted an interactive influence.

In the relationship between age and reason for travel the oldest age group, those age 65 and older, traveled at a significantly greater rate to visit friends and relatives. The 65+ group, along with the 60-64 age group tended to travel for vacation only at slightly higher than expected rates. The two younger groups were more likely to have traveled for business reasons or to have combined business with vacation. Not an unexpected finding given that these groups are under the age of retirement.

While approximately 60 percent of all travelers spend four to seven nights away from home, those under the age of retirement took vacations of shorter durations at higher than expected rates, perhaps due to a commitment to full-time employment. Correspondingly, the oldest travelers (65+) appeared to become an increasingly larger share of the market as trip length increased, comprising fully 55 percent of all travelers who took trips exceeding three weeks in duration.

According to the findings presented in Table 1, the percentage of older adults who used camping related lodging appeared to decline up to the age of retirement, at which point nearly 39 percent of all campers are age 65 and older. This was still less than what might be expected. In fact the only lodging form where the oldest group comprised a larger than anticipated percentage was staying with family and friends. Those in the 55-59 category were much less prone to stay with friends and family, choosing instead to stay in hotels and motels.

Table 1 shows that the youngest respondents, age 50 to 54, were likely to travel in groups of three or four, perhaps due to the presence of children taking a vacation with their parents. The older age categories, 60-64 and 65+, were members of larger travel groups at higher than anticipated rates.

The relationship between age categories and VALS type for each of the groups identified as non-travelers and travelers is presented in Table 2. In both cases those age 65 and older were classified as Survivors and Belongers in numbers greater than expected. Conversely, those in the two youngest age groups were classified as Achievers and Societally Conscious at greater than expected rates. These findings are consistent with those of Mitchell (12) and SRI International (23) which identified Survivors as the oldest VALS types and Belongers as the second oldest.

Table 3 presents the relationship of travel status and travel characteristics to VALS type. Non-travelers were those persons who indicated they took no trips, while travelers took one or more trips. A larger percentage of the Survivors and Belongers were classified and nontravelers than one would suspect given their presence in the sample. This contrasted with the Achievers and Societally Conscious types which were classified as travelers at greater than anticipated rates. While Belongers make up the most sizeable segment of the senior travel market, it is the generally more affluent and upscale Achievers and Societally Conscious which travel.

The results presented in the remainder of Table 3 apply only to those respondents who were age 50 and older and identified as travelers.

The findings revealed that VALS type was significantly related to the number of trips taken. Surprising was the finding that Survivors took two trips at rates higher than expected, but in general this group, along with the Belongers tended toward one or two trips. Achievers, on the other hand took three or more trips at rates higher than anticipated. These findings confirmed those of Skidmore and Pyszka (22) who found that the number of trips varies by VALS type.

VALS type was found to be significantly related to the reason for travel. As shown in Table 3, trips taken by Survivors were more likely to be for family reasons. Belongers were also somewhat over-represented when traveling for these reasons. Achievers and Societally Conscious travelers indicated "business only" more frequently than expected and the Societally Conscious appeared more likely to combine business with pleasure.

The findings regarding the relationship of mode of transportation to VALS type indicate all groups traveled by automobile at expected rates. In spite of comprising only five percent of all bus travelers a larger percentage of Survivors traveled by this mode than their numbers would indicate. Interestingly, this group traveled by air at about expected rates, perhaps reflecting the need to visit distant family. Belongers were under-represented when traveling by air, but were over-represented when traveling by bus or recreational vehicle.

Trips taken by Survivors included stays with friends and relatives. Belongers used campground facilities more frequently during their travels than any other group and stayed with friends and relatives at about the same rate. Achievers made up the bulk of travelers who stayed in hotels, motels, and resorts. The Achievers, along with the Societally Conscious stayed in condominums and second homes at higher than expected rates, a

likely finding given the upscale nature of these two groups.

The number of persons in travel parties was found to be significantly related to VALS type. Interestingly Survivor trips tended to be in odd-sized parties. This is a group comprised of sizeable number of widowed individuals and this may be reflected in these findings. Belongers, displaying their group behavior, were the largest segment of travelers in groups of five or more. Achievers favored groups of two or four, possibly showing a disposition toward travel designed for couples. The Societally Conscious appeared to be the group most comfortable traveling alone.

The amount of time spent planning for travel was found to be significantly related to VALS type. The findings indicate that Survivors and Belongers were more likely than expected to spend under one month planning for their longest trip. Longer planning times were more likely among the Achievers and Societally Conscious with the majority of both groups taking one or months planning for their longest trip.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

From an applied perspective, the results of age segmentation yield sparse information for business decisions. For a market segmentation scheme to be effective, the segment must be accessible, that is, there should be a communication medium available to reach that particular segment of the market. Age does not provide any accessibility for the application of these results. The usefulness of age segmentation, more than anything else, expands the understanding of age-based differences. The results, for example, tend to support the activity theory, at least with regard to pre- and post-retirement age. Age appeared to have no significant relationship to travel status, number of trips taken, or planning horizon. The first two findings indicate no decline in activity and the latter shows that interest and enthusiasm in preparing for travel remains consistent across age groups. If anything, travel for pleasure, rather than business is more likely after 65, an understandable finding given this is the ordinary age of retirement. Additionally, the length of time spent away increases, most likely owing to the termination of work schedule obligations.

Comparing these results with the findings of Tongren (25), this sample yielded a relationship between age and travel mode, however income was found to exert an interactive influence. The problem with some modes may have less to do with age-related concerns than the financial costs associated with them. Anderson and Langmeyer's (2) investigation discovered adults over age 50 tended to travel for rest/relaxation or to visit friends and family. In the present investigation these same results were borne out, however business travel occurs among those under the age of 65. Finally, Norvell's (15) report showed differences in length of trip and lodging between those either side of 65. This investigation supported those findings.

The results of this investigation revealed significant relationships between VALS types and a number of variables related to their travel. VALS type was related to more aspects of older adult travel than age groupings. Additionally, VALS typing revealed some comparisons and

differences with the findings of Shoemaker (21), which indicated that the senior travel market was not homogeneous. His three clusters fit remarkably well with the VALS types; the "Family Travelers" appeared very similar to Survivors and Belongers, while the "Active Resters" seem to parallel the Achievers and Societally Conscious. Shoemaker (21) recommends that programs be designed for those who, like the "Active Resters", have specific activity interests. But how will travel providers access the particular market segment, placing promotions where the target is most likely to see them?

VALS typing provides added dimensions to understanding senior travel behavior, but its more immediate, practical application lies in the combination of these results with SRI International's findings regarding each type's media habits. Those who are interested in promoting travel related services to older adults might find greater success by targeting specific VALS types. For example, couching media efforts in a manner emphasizing economy and a sense of reunion with loved ones may be most effective for the Survivor group. Television was found to be the most effective medium for this VALS type, followed by radio (10). Motor coach lines might focus on the economy, security, and convenience of this travel mode, given that a large percentage of Survivors travel by bus.

Efforts to attract Survivors based on travel for family related reasons would have a strong appeal to Belongers as well, the largest group of all VALS types in this sample of older adults. However, this group will use campgrounds and represent the principal segment of older adults choosing to travel in groups. While television remains the medium of first choice for this group, newspapers are the second most preferred source of information (10).

Skidmore and Pyszka (22) determined that Achievers were the primary market for business and pleasure travel, findings supported by this investigation. Those responsible for designing promotional campaigns to appeal to the Achiever segment of the senior travel market would find the best accessibility in selected print media, specifically newspapers, followed by magazines (10). The VALS data have pinpointed selected sections of newspapers and types of magazines most likely to draw Achiever readers. As Achievers have longer planning horizons, it would be advisable to schedule print promotions well before the specific travel season.

Societally Conscious media habits deviated from the Achievers in that magazines were preferred, followed by newspapers. Business and financial journals, followed by specialty magazines were favored (10). This group also had a long planning horizon, necessitating promotions being placed several months in advance of the travel season.

Additional analyses of the data generated for this investigation and reported elsewhere (3) identified vacation related activities which varied by VALS type. Achievers and Societally Conscious types showed marked interests in a range of activities, the images of which could be used to draw attention to targeted promotional campaigns, and, more importantly, to design travel services and programs targeted at these well-traveled segments.

Suggestions by Gladwell (8), Shoemaker (21), and Vincent and de los Santos (26) provide those wishing to target the senior travel market with useful ideas to appeal to and meet the needs of older adults. However, in addition to having the limitation of creating segments difficult to access, their clusters are based on very specific data sets. As their results show, different data result in different clusters. Without creating a predictive tool based on attitudes, interests, opinions, and demographics it would be difficult to assess who in any given sample will fall into a particular cluster. Furthermore, media investigations on each cluster would be necessary to identify the most direct means to access the segment, a fact recognized by Gladwell (8).

The present investigation was based on known, accessible psychographic profiles and attempted to more fully describe each type's travel behavior. Age segmentation was found to yield little information of practical application, whereas psychographic segmentation provides lifestyle types which can be accessed directly through selected media.

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Table 1

Trip Characteristics of Respondents by Age Groups
(N=703 Travelers only)

Trip Characteristics	Age Groups (50-54)	(55-59)	(60-64)	(65 & over)
Reasons for travel in 1987				
Vacation only	16.31	17.86	22.91	42.91
Visit friends/ relatives	14.91	12.20	18.70	54.20
Vacation w/visit to friends/rel.	16.33	20.66	23.21	39.80
Vacation with business	28.28	29.29	21.21	21.21
Business only	31.43	37.14	14.29	17.14
Other reasons	15.44	25.50	20.81	38.26
TOTAL	17.91	20.25	21.03	40.81
Chi-square (X) = 114.33		Significance = .00		
Number of nights away from home				
Four to seven	21.01	21.70	21.11	36.17
Eight to 13	14.97	20.34	22.32	42.37
14 to 21	14.35	14.35	17.22	54.07
22 or more	7.14	15.18	22.32	55.36
TOTAL	17.99	20.07	20.96	40.97
Chi-square (X) = 43.91		Significance = .00		
Types of Lodging				
Camping/trailer/ Rec vehicle	23.97	21.49	15.70	38.84
Family/friends	15.50	14.88	22.02	47.60
Condo/second home	20.72	21.62	21.62	36.04
Hotel/motel/resort	18.91	24.51	19.75	36.83
Other	15.71	21.43	25.71	37.14
TOTAL	17.94	20.23	20.71	41.12
Chi-square (X) = 35.55		Significance = .00		

Trip Characteristics	Age Groups (50-54)	(55-59)	(60-64)	(65 & over)
Number of persons in travel party				
One	19.12	20.22	19.85	40.81
Two	14.86	21.01	20.00	44.13
Three	22.28	25.54	17.93	34.24
Four	26.74	18.22	23.26	31.78
Five or more	4.05	6.76	27.03	62.16
TOTAL	17.17	20.32	20.56	41.41
Chi-square (X) = 56.83				

Table 2

Age Groups of Non-travelers and Travelers by VALS Type (N=1184)

	VALS Type Survivor	Belonger	Achiever	Societally Conscious
Non-travelers (N=465*)				
50-54	2.60	55.84	37.66	3.90
55-59	6.98	65.12	22.09	5.81
60-64	7.69	65.38	23.08	3.85
65 and over	11.61	79.02	6.25	3.13
TOTAL	8.60	70.32	17.20	3.87
Chi-square (X) = 49.50			Significance = .00	
Travelers (N=685#)				
50-54	0.76	29.01	61.83	8.40
55-59	0.01	32.85	56.20	10.95
60-64	5.04	54.68	35.97	4.32
65 and over	5.40	75.18	15.47	3.96
TOTAL	3.26	53.72	36.64	6.28
Chi-square (X) = 141.65			Significance = .00	

*16 non-travelers were assigned to other VALS types and could not be reassigned.
#18 travelers were assigned to other VALS types and could not be reassigned to other groups.

Table 3

Trip Characteristics of Respondents by VALS Type
(N=685a Travelers Only)

Trip Characteristics	VALS Type			
	Survivor	Belonger	Achiever	Societally Conscious
Travel Status				
Non-traveler	8.60	70.34	17.20	3.87
Traveler	3.36	53.72	36.64	6.28
TOTAL	5.48	60.43	28.78	5.30
Chi-square (X) = 65.92			Significance = .00	
Number of trips				
One	3.66	61.79	29.67	4.88
Two	5.35	52.41	35.29	6.95
Three	1.94	47.57	40.78	9.71
Four or more	1.34	46.31	46.98	5.37
TOTAL	3.36	53.72	36.64	6.28
Chi-square (X) = 21.19			Significance = .01	
Reasons for travel in 1987				
Vacation only	1.00	50.00	42.20	6.80
Visit friends/ relatives	4.96	59.78	30.03	5.23
Vacation w/visit to friends/relatives	2.37	52.63	40.00	5.00
Vacation w/business	0.01	31.63	56.12	12.24
Business only	0.01	12.95	75.54	11.51
Other reasons	3.47	59.03	31.25	6.25
TOTAL	2.28	49.32	41.69	6.71
Chi-square (X) = 147.70			Significance = .00	
Mode of transportation				
Aircraft	2.14	40.39	49.64	7.83
Automobile	2.33	51.52	39.63	6.53
Bus	5.17	86.21	6.90	1.72
Rec. vehicle	0.01	70.59	28.24	1.18
TOTAL	2.24	49.84	41.39	6.53
Chi-square (X) = 74.83			Significance = .00	

Trip Characteristics	VALS Type Survivor	Belonger	Achiever	Societally Conscious
Type of Lodging				
Camping/trailer/RV	0.83	60.00	35.00	4.17
Friends/relatives	3.67	60.29	29.98	6.06
Condo/second home	.92	42.20	46.79	10.09
Hotel/motel/resort	1.15	39.31	52.65	6.89
Other	0.00	43.48	46.38	10.14
TOTAL	2.03	49.32	41.92	6.72
Chi-square (X) = 95.09			Significance = .00	
Number of persons				
One	3.37	49.44	38.58	8.61
Two	1.38	47.29	43.83	78.50
Three	4.97	55.80	34.25	4.97
Four	1.56	47.66	46.88	3.91
Five or more	4.11	68.49	24.66	2.74
TOTAL	2.25	49.57	41.55	6.63
Chi-square (X) = 38.37			Significance = .00	
Pre-travel planning				
Two weeks or less	8.13	64.23	22.76	4.88
Three or four weeks	3.88	61.24	31.01	3.88
One to three months	1.89	50.00	40.57	7.55
Four to six months	0.83	47.93	42.98	8.26
More than six months	2.17	43.48	47.83	6.52
TOTAL	3.25	53.47	36.93	6.35
Chi-square (X) = 35.57			Significance = .00	

a18 travelers were assigned other VALS types and could not be reassigned to other groups.
bApplies to all analyses except Travel Status where N=1150. Thirty-four respondents were assigned to other VALS types and could not be reassigned to other groups; 18 of these were travelers.