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A PLEASURE TRAVEL TARGET: THE MATURE WEST GERMAN TRAVELLER

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ABSTRACT

Mature West German travellers represent an important recreation market for the U.S. While they tend to agree with their younger counterparts how the United States compares to other countries in the world in terms of destination attributes, they rate the importance of these attributes very differently. These differences have important implications for packaging vacations, market positioning, distribution channels, training programs, and promotional materials. Because of the strong interest of the international traveller in recreational resources, each of these implications must become an important management priority.

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INTRODUCTION

A new group of leisure travellers is entering the U.S. and recreation picture. This "emerging giant" includes all of those individuals that have come here from overseas for the sole purpose of leisure participation. Special differences characterize the overseas traveller which only recently have been given attention. They are likely to be very unfamiliar with North American customs, settings, and language. Because these visitors are so different in their backgrounds, their essential needs and wants also differ. Since overseas travellers are a relatively new entry in the recreation market, only superficial observations have been made about their unique characteristics and the subsequent impact on our recreational areas and resources. Economic and resource-related impacts have only been studied and evaluated in the last decade. Demographic characteristics of the overseas traveller have been readily observed, but the depth or complexity of these studies has been very limited (6).

West Germany is one of the international leaders in generating tourists to the rest of the world. Market Facts (1) reports that approximately six million West Germans had taken a trip overseas of more

than four nights and that another five million had expressed interest in doing so within the next two years. With 46.8 million people in West Germany, this interest in long haul pleasure travel points toward about 24% of adults in the country interested in travelling. Approximately 35% of the adult population is 55 years of age and older. Currently about two million of these persons are mature travellers, i.e., they have either travelled overseas or plan to do so in the next two years. Since many of these older West Germans have the time, interest, resources and a favorable exchange rate, they warrant attention in terms of their interests and choices.

The purpose of this paper is to identify what motivates the mature West German traveller to visit an overseas country, and how those motivations determine what destination items are important. This information can be used to develop new programs, products, and opportunities, increase revenues, and expand packaging and marketing skills.

#### BACKGROUND

Several aspects have been found to contribute to the selection of a site for leisure purposes (3). First, the importance of given attributes to the traveller determine what kind of environment he wishes to visit. But not only the actual characteristics of a place determine whether the visitor will go. How a site is cognitively perceived is also important. A place that is perceived to be lacking in certain attributes, whether it actually has them or not, will probably not be considered in the decision process. Another aspect that must not be overlooked is individual variation in personality and preferences. Not only do the traveller's individual preferences, purposes, needs and wants come into play, but cultural and social values as well (3).

International tourism preferences, activities and motivations have now been identified, but how do these items influence destination choices? One very general preliminary finding for several international populations surveyed (West Germany, France, United Kingdom and Japan), is that the opportunity to learn new things is one of the most important motives for considering an overseas trip (5). This has serious implications for most sites, from national parks and forests to museums and art galleries. More specifically, a closer look at West Germany reveals that there is a strong interest in historic places, different lifestyles, learning, roughing it, and a desire for adventure which can all strongly influence a visit to the United States or Canada. In addition, more than one-third of those surveyed from West Germany had already visited a national park or forest, one-third had visited a historical place, one-third an archaeological site, and fifteen percent had been to an area that is significant in military history. Recreational and historical elements appear to be key components influencing interest. As O'Leary and Uysal (2) have stated, the next logical step is to link the underlying feelings (motivations) of those surveyed with their reasons for choosing the destinations that they visit. These factors along with the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the West German traveller will allow the development of more specific and useful user groups for a greater understanding of the overseas traveller to the United States and Canada.

## METHODS

Personal in-home interviews were conducted throughout West Germany from May to June 1989. A total of 1212 personal interviews were completed with persons who were 18 years of age or over and who had taken a vacation trip of four nights or longer outside of Europe and the Mediterranean in the past three years, or intended to take such a trip in the next two years. For purposes of analysis, persons 55 years of age and over and those less than 55 were identified as two separate groups. The first question examined asked people to indicate on a four point scale ranging from "Very important" to "Not at all important," how important an item is when choosing a destination for an overseas trip. There were 492 persons less than 55 years of age and 120 greater than 55 years of age responding to this list of attributes. The second question asked people how the U.S., when compared to other places, "performs" on items that might attract people to choose a particular destination. A five point scale ranging from "A Lot Better" to "Not Nearly as Good" was used for the evaluation of each item. There were 977 people less than 55 years of age and 235 persons greater than 55 year of age responding to this question. Fifteen items (Table 1) were chosen for examination. Statistical tests for differences between means (Student's t-test) were used to compare between group differences. Factor analysis was used to determine which items grouped together so that an emphasis on an area of interest rather than the individual item could be done. An Action Grid was also developed to examine the importance and performance responses concurrently of the mature group. This analysis allows for the simultaneous examination of features of a travel destination, and suggests actions that can be taken to achieve one's marketing goals.

## RESULTS

### Comparing Two Groups

The first issue to be addressed was whether differences existed between the mature group over 55 years of age and the remaining persons in the travelling population. For the performance evaluations of U.S. attributes there were only two areas where differences between the groups showed up--"budget accommodations" and "entertainment/nightlife." Mature travellers were very sensitive to the budget issue, even though they are often perceived to be in a better financial position than their younger counterparts.

However, when important attribute responses are examined, sharp differences are evident. Eight of the fifteen items show statistical differences. Mature travellers are more concerned about safety than are their younger counterparts. Both groups assign similar levels of importance to scenery, knowledge development, national parks and forests, and budget accommodations. Other differences emerge in the activity area with older travellers assigning less importance to the outdoor and indoor activities than the younger traveller.

The mean item scores for individuals 55 and over were plotted on the Action Grid for both the importance and performance responses (Figure 1). The items that are circled represent responses that grouped together in

the factor analysis that was done. To the extent that these items are located in the same general area on the group suggests consistency in the way in which people responded to the items.

The "Needs Improvement" quadrant shows that personal safety represents the most important concern for the West German traveller. It is the most important item and has one of the lowest performance ratings. The next two items in need of attention relate to value for money--budget accommodations and inexpensive restaurants. Finally, museums and art galleries as well as historical, military and archaeological sites are important, but the U.S. is not seen as performing very well in this area. Areas of importance that the U.S. is doing well in--knowledge, scenery, national parks and forests, and native and immigrant cultural groups--are strong opportunities to be showcased.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The domestic visitor has been the cornerstone for many of those providing recreation and leisure services and products. In most cases this pattern will continue. However, for those public and private groups that make the decision to accommodate the international visitor, the traditional program is probably dated and unresponsive to the demands for a contemporary vacation and recreation experience.

These data point out several interesting outcomes. If we follow the traditional approach to performance or satisfaction measurement, there appears to be little we could say about the differences between younger and older West Germans. However, when we incorporate the item importance information the situation changes. There are certain elements including safety, restaurants, and outdoor activities which separate the two groups. There is a core of common elements that all travellers seem to be interested in (scenery, parks and forests, new knowledge, and budget accommodations) that represent opportunities for leisure and recreation professionals to take advantage of.

The mature traveller is interested in learning new things and expanding knowledge as well as experiencing native and immigrant cultures. A response that develops opportunities for archaeological tours, dinosaur products, ethnic festivals and events, and historic and cultural tours represents tremendous opportunity. In addition, the interest and importance of national parks and forests provide for Eco-Tour development packages. In many instances, the attractive regional parks and forests that are not managed by the federal government could also be featured. Combining the natural scenery with opportunities for eating in local restaurants, shopping, going to a festival, or putting together urban-nature wildlife tours could be of great interest to these travellers. While we are certainly talking about a broad range of activities, the lower level of interest expressed by the mature West German in outdoor activities should certainly be a major focus area of interest. In fact, opportunities that emphasize the relevant importance items could be put together at almost any time of the year in many communities, taking advantage of budget rates, cheaper fares, and slower seasons often experienced by some public or private groups. Thus the economic opportunity potential could be an exciting draw for the recreation and leisure provider.

Host countries and the organizations that represent them, both public and private, need to emphasize their unique travel characteristics and develop the themes that are important to those that travel. These results will have important implications for packaging vacations, programming market position, distribution channels, training programs and promotional materials. As the world shrinks in the minds of the traveller, the attention paid to different traveller groups will strongly influence whether a program will be a success or failure.

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Table 1

AVERAGE RATING OF IMPORTANCE (FROM A SCORE BETWEEN 1 AND 4), AND U.S. PERFORMANCE  
(FROM A SCORE BETWEEN 1 AND 5) FOR WEST GERMAN PLEASURE  
TRAVELLERS OVER THE AGE OF 55

Item	Importance	Performance
1 High quality restaurants	2.077	2.775
2 Budget accommodation	2.068	3.058
3 Entertainment/nightlife	3.379	2.633
4 Outstanding scenery	1.685	2.025
5 Personal safety even when travelling alone	1.545	2.942
6 Snow skiing	3.574	3.342
7 Casinos/gambling	3.562	2.283
8 Museum/art galleries	2.315	2.667
9 Inexpensive restaurants	2.813	2.850
10 Unique/different native cultural groups	2.204	2.233
11 Unique/different immigrant cultural groups	2.447	2.208
12 National parks/forest	2.013	1.975
13 Historical/military/archaeological sites	2.345	2.892
14 Opportunities to increase knowledge	1.826	2.358
15 Water sports	3.413	2.617

Table 2

TWO-TAIL T-TEST PROBABILITIES WHEN COMPARING THE UNDER 55 AGE GROUP AND  
THE 55 AND OVER AGE GROUP

	Significance*	
	Importance	Performance
1 High quality restaurants	.000	.470
2 Budget accommodation	.076	.052
3 Entertainment/nightlife	.000	.001
4 Outstanding scenery	.810	.457
5 Personal safety even when travelling alone	.000	.962
6 Snow skiing	.000	.333
7 Casinos/gambling	.000	.181
8 Museum/art galleries	.000	.685
9 Inexpensive restaurants	.304	.400
10 Unique/different native cultural groups	.434	.574
11 Unique/different immigrant cultural groups	.568	.949
12 National parks/forests	.978	.686
13 Historical/military/archeological sites	.034	.306
14 Opportunities to increase knowledge	.796	.166
15 Water sports	.000	.119

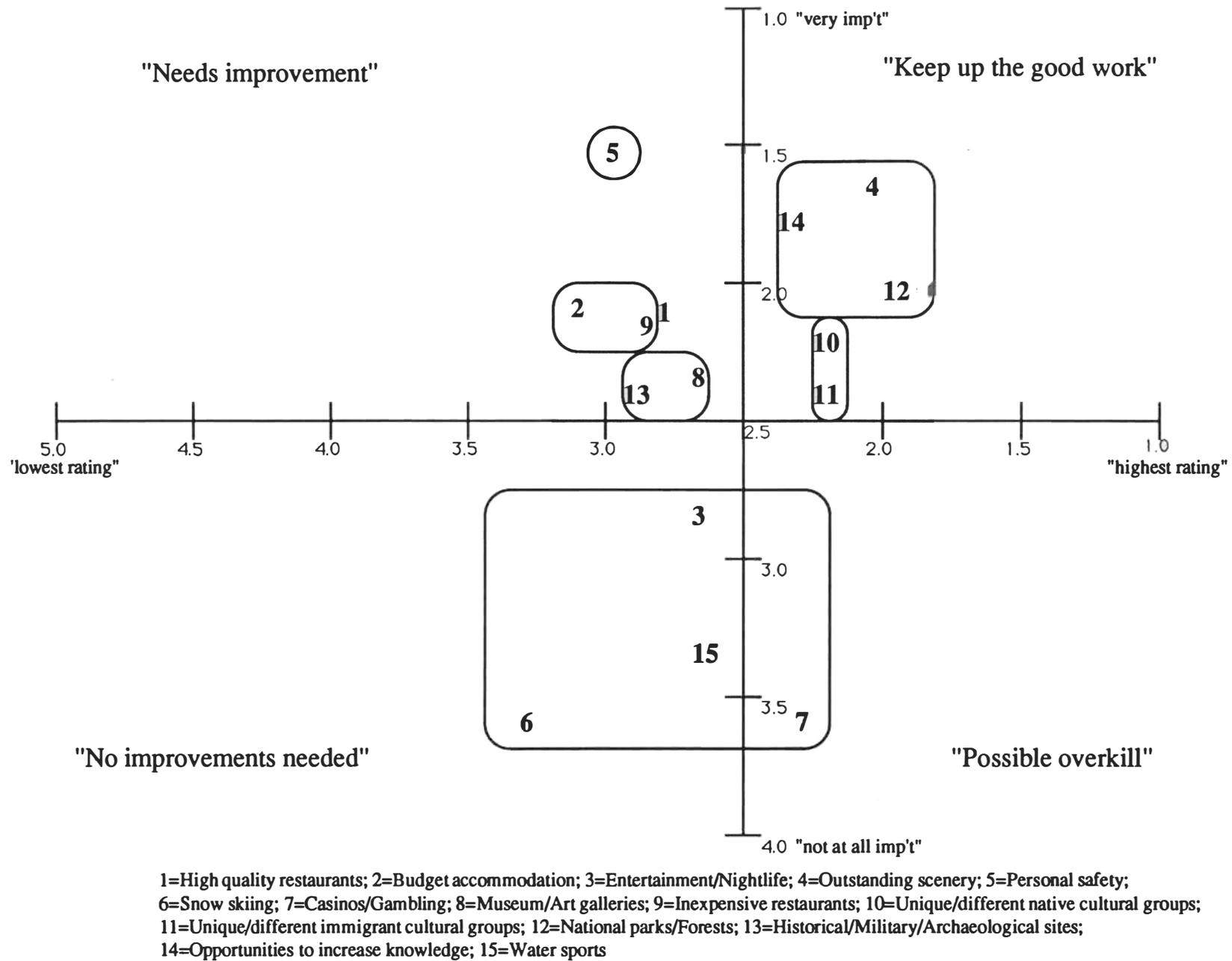


Figure 1. Importance/Performance grid, according to factor groups for West German pleasure travellers over the age of 55.