

Consumer Behavior in Malaysia Travel Marketplace: A Profile of Urban Travel for Senior Citizens

Abdul Razak Kamaruddin, Associate Professor, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu

ABSTRACT

Transportation is an essential part of the community infrastructure that individuals need to gain access to goods, services and social contact that support their day-to-day existence and quality of life. To date, however, there has been little research on the profile of urban travel among Malaysian senior citizens. The purpose of this paper is to better understand the transportation needs of older adults in Malaysia marketplace and to explore the problems encountered by them in relation to public transportation. The survey is particularly focused on travel concerns of adults age 55 and older, because it is known that personal mobility shrinks as individuals' age. It was found that own transport and bus were the most preferred modal choice among the majority of older consumers. In light of the demographic profile, bus and own transport were also the preferred mode of transport according to various categories of age, income and gender of older adults. The information derived from this study is essential to the development of marketing strategies that expand and improve transportation choices for older consumers and the accessibility that those choices provide.

Keywords: *transportation; travel behavior; senior citizen; urban travel*

INTRODUCTION

The provision of specialized facilities in the built environment for the elderly is a growing priority in Malaysia, with the population gaining an increasingly mature. It is anticipated that by year 2020, 9.5% of the Malaysian population will be 60 years and above. Statistical predictions estimate that the number our population over 60 years has increased significantly, bringing the number of people over 60 to 1.45 million in 2000, compared to 1 million in 1991. By 2030, the proportion of older consumers in Malaysia will hit 15% of the total population, completing Malaysia's demographic transition into a fully "aged" nation (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2004). Similarly, in all of the advanced countries of the world, the population is aging. As of the year 2000, Sweden has the oldest population in the world, with 17.2% of its people being 65 years of age or older, the U.S. accounted for 12.6% and Japan with 17% of its population over 65 years. However, by the year 2025, Japan is likely to become the oldest nation in term of its people, with 27.5% of the population being 65 years of age or older (United Nations, 2002).

This change has been brought about for a number of reasons, primarily improvements in healthcare and better living conditions over a lifetime which consequently raised the life expectancy of men and women. Similarly, the birthrate is declining. In the early 1940s, the birthrate in Malaysia was approximately seven children per woman. At that time, the Malaysian economy was driven by farming, and children were an economic asset. However, moving towards an industrial society and affluent lifestyle, children became more of an economic burden. Consequently, by 1980, the Malaysian birthrate had dropped to five children per woman; in the year 2000, it stood at three per woman (Malaysian Quality of Life, 2004). When fewer babies are born, the average age of the nation's population goes up. As the population is aging, there are also likely to be a number of consequences of the changing demographic, such as declining ability to provide financial support for the increasing number of older people, and a growth in demand for specialized services.

The aging of the population is creating new needs and wants. In particular, an aging population is relatively concerned about wellness, financial well-being, safety, accessibility, and recreation. Though it is important to accept that the elderly are a heterogeneous group, and consequently require as wide a range of services as the rest of society, there are some needs that can be viewed as prevalent. Studies conducted by Ogilvy in UK in 2002 and Association of Aging and Retired Persons (AARP) among a sample of senior citizens aged 55 and above across America in 1997,

produced closely correlating results. These allow some common needs to be identified across socio-economic boundaries which include healthcare, accommodation, transportation, accessibility and social activities. With homes paid for and children's tertiary education completed, the elderly find more discretionary income available for travel, eating out and other recreational activities.

Understanding older consumers' travel behavior is a critical issue to marketers who compete for this important segment (Crompton, 1979). According to Romsa and Blenman (1989), socio-economic variables, including age, gender, income and education status, play a crucial role in the vacation behavior of older consumers. Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) added that travel behavior can be understood by looking at the underlying motivations of individuals. Therefore, identifying the variables that influence seniors' travel motivation allows travel marketers to effectively understand the drives and better tailor tourism packages for the senior market segment.

In light of the significance of the senior market and lack of behavioral literature in Malaysia, this study attempted to fill a research niche by investigating Malaysian older consumers travel behavior and their preference for various modal choice. More specifically, the objectives of this exploratory study were (1) to profile the urban travel behavior of Malaysian elderly in the marketplace and (2) to identify relationship between their travel behavior and socio-demographic factors (urban/rural, age, gender, income, etc.)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Market Magnitude and Importance

Older consumers constitute a prime market for the travel industry both in the number of trips and magnitude of expenditures. Many of them have the time to travel and are willing to spend a significant amount of their savings doing so. In 1980 more than 50 percent of all Americans over the age of 65 took a vacation (Allen and Bretman, 1981). Older people spend more money than their counterparts on tourism, entertainment and restaurant meals (Wall Street Journal, 1983). They can afford to do so because their children are grown and their house payments are complete. In addition, seniors can fill the off-seasons activities of airlines and hotels because of their flexible schedules (Capella and Greco, 1987). They travel more frequently, go longer distances, stay away longer, spend more money, and rely more on travel agents than their non-senior counterparts (Rosenfeld, 1986).

Seniors also constitute a significant market segment in the travel industries of other countries as well. For example, in 1990 UK seniors (age 55+) took 4.25 million trips to international destinations. Likewise, in Germany, the elderly market comprises 32 percent of all international trips (Ryan, 1995; Romsa and Blenman, 1989). In Israel, 31 percent of seniors (285,000 people) took at least one overnight domestic vacation as compared to 60 percent of the entire population (Fleischer and Pizam, 2001). Worldwide, interest in seniors as a major force in world tourism has increased. The first International Forum on Tourism for the Senior Citizen was held in 1993 to discuss the emergence of this group as a highly viable and growing market. Besides increasing numbers and growing discretionary incomes, this group can travel outside peak seasons and stay longer (Sellick and Muller, 2004). Airlines and hotels are recognizing the potential of this market and are implementing special promotions to serve the needs of this senior segment.

Older People Travel Characteristics

An examination of the literature reveals that most previous studies on older travelers focused on the descriptive issues including the traveler's profile, preferences and behavioral patterns in order to understand who they are, where they go, how they go and where they go. Prior research of profiling and characterizing senior versus non-senior travelers have been conducted by Anderson and Langmeyer (1982), Javalgi, Thomas and Rao (1992), and Zimmer, Brayley and Searle (1995). Profiling similarities and differences of the under-50 and over-50 travelers, Anderson and Langmeyer (1982) claimed that both groups are likely to take a pleasure trip for rest and relaxation and for visiting family and relatives, but over-50 travelers are different in that they are more likely to visit historic sites. Javalgi et al. (1992) noted that senior travelers are less educated than non-seniors and tend to use travel agents for travel arrangement, package travel for travel mode, and bus or airplane for transportation.

Gerontologists have proposed that as people reach their mature stage of life, they become preoccupied with self-utilization. Thus, they search for self-fulfilling activities and experiences. They realize that there is only “so much time to live” and are anxious to squeeze in as many activities as they can in whatever number of good years they have left (Nuegarten, 1968). Like their younger counterparts, older people travel for numerous reasons: for rest and relaxation, social interaction, physical exercises, learning, nostalgia and excitement (Guin, 1980; McGuire, Uysal and McDonald, 1987). Those who go away were found to have different characteristics than those who do not.

In a study conducted in the United States, it was found that participants in travel activities were significantly more likely to be female, in the 65-74 age group, above average or excellent in health and with lower incomes (Blazey, 1987). On the other hand, those who stayed home were more likely to be males, in the 55-64 and 74+ age groups, with poor health and relatively high incomes. According to another study, nearly one-fifth (20.3 percent) of women and more than one-sixth (17.2 percent) of men between 50 and 59 years of age have taken an international trip in the previous three years (Littrell, Paige and Song, 2004). Also, more than one in six women and men from the same age group had taken a domestic trip in the previous year.

Studies conducted in other countries had shown some patterns of older travel behavior. For example, in a study on the vacation patterns of senior Australian older consumers, Cleaver, Muller, Ruys and Wei (1999) identified seven unique tourism-motive segments that they labeled “nostalgic”, “friendliness”, “learners”, “escapists”, “thinkers”, “status-seekers”, and “physicals.” You and O’Leary (1999) in a study of UK senior tourists visiting North America confirmed their diversity of demand and the heterogeneity of behavior patterns. In a study of older Germans, it was found that taking a vacation as a leisure experience declines with age where short holidays appear to be less common among the elderly. A majority of the seniors preferred domestic vacations, but this was found to be conditioned by the availability of transportation and the ability to drive, which is impaired with age (Romsa and Blenman, 1989).

Several travel researchers have examined older consumers’ preference in their travel activities (Bai, Jang, Cai and O’Leary, 2001; Hsu, 2001). In an effort to find out the major factors that influenced package tours by three senior groups from the UK, Germany and Japan, Bai et al. (2001) suggested that the number of people in the travel party and the length of the trip were found significant when all three groups chose package tours. Attempting to investigate seniors’ choice behavior for coach tour and to find the dimensions of their choice attributes, Hsu (2001) reported that tour operator reputation and seniors’ health and safety concerns were the most important. Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, the author also identified and verified six factors of the choice attributes: social activities, operator services and referrals, flexible schedule, health and safety, promotional materials and reputation.

Other studies have also been devoted to examining senior travelers’ behavior patterns (Hong, Kim and Lee, 1999; Shoemaker, 1989; Shoemaker, 2000). Hong et al. (1999) investigated the travel expenditure patterns of elderly households in the US and found that elder citizens spend most on transportation, followed by food, lodging and sightseeing/entertainment. In addition, they stated that age, health care expenditure and household incomes were significant in determining the level of expenditure on travel. Surveying senior people on travel behavior and reasons for travel, Shoemaker (1989) segmented the senior market into three subgroups: “family travelers”, “active resters”, and “older set.” Finally, Huang and Tsai (2003) reported a changing trend suggesting that Taiwanese older travelers were becoming more attracted to historical and beautiful sites, so that cultural and eco-tourism could be attractive products for them.

METHODOLOGY

Personal interviews were employed as the data collection technique because many older adults, in particular those in the age group of 65 years and older and those in rural areas, had very little education or no formal education at all. In addition, this method is anticipated to improve response rate. A pilot test (with a total of 30 sets of responses) was conducted check the clarity of concepts and the variables that were used for the purpose of this study. Potential problem areas were checked and clarity improved. Subsequent changes were then made to the questionnaire after the pilot testing.

This research is part of a larger survey looking into consumption activities of older adults comprising of their shopping behavior, expenditure pattern, life satisfaction and well being; transportation and consumer empowerment. Data collection for the study was organized in two separate durations with the first round being conducted from the months of May – June 2006. Data were collected from five metropolitan areas in Malaysia (Ipoh, Kuantan, Johor Bahru, Kuala Lumpur/Petaling Jaya and Penang). A total of 1200 sets were administered but only 762 sets were useable for analyses. The second round of data collection was conducted from August to mid-September 2006 at another four rural areas (Kuala Terengganu, Kota Bharu, Malacca and Alor Star. This was done to improve the quality of the data as well as to expand the areas covered. Out of 700 sets of questionnaire distributed, 594 sets were useable for analyses, making the overall number of responses at 1356. The data were described for their travel patterns with regards to modal choice, travel preference and problems encountered, and demographic differences.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Transport Modal Choice

Data has been analyzed to profile of urban travel of different modes by older consumers. Only the main modes are included because the limited use made by some transportation modes. The classification of travel behavior is according to urban and rural respondents and their modal choice of transportation.

Looking at urban travel among urban consumers, predominantly the use of own transportation (especially car) is the most preferred means of mobility (43.69%), second, bus (40.60%) and followed by taxi (32.74%). This implies the high usage of private transportation and car ownership among elderly due to convenience, door-to-door travel and less hassle of using public transport. For rural participants, bus is still the most preferred means of travel (50.44%), own transport as second (36.95%), and lastly followed by taxi (32.95%).

Table 1 Modal Choice of Urban Travel

Mode	URBAN		RURAL		TOTAL	
	N=904	%	N=452	%	N=1356	%
Bus	367	40.60	228	50.44	595	43.88
Taxi	296	32.74	149	32.96	445	32.82
Inter-city train	12	1.33	8	1.77	20	1.47
KTM commuter	21	2.32	-	-	21	1.55
LRT	39	4.31	-	-	39	2.88
Monorail	14	1.55	-	-	14	1.03
Minibus	45	4.98	27	5.97	72	5.31
Own transport	395	43.69	167	36.95	562	41.45

Purpose of Travel

Like non-disabled people and their younger counterparts, older people need to travel to fulfill a whole variety of elements of their life. For the majority, entertainment, shopping, socializing and religious activities all depend on being able to get to and from variety of destinations. Mobility is of greater importance to older consumers; adequate mobility is related to greater life satisfaction and is an important contributor to perceived quality of life. Access to transportation is also crucial to maintaining social relationships and independence for elderly.

In analyzing of urban travel, the most quoted trip purpose is social visits (family and relatives) for both urban and rural older consumers (49.23% and 57.96% respectively). Shopping trip accounted as the second importance trip purpose for urban respondent (47.79%), followed by medical check-ups (40.60%). A relatively low proportion was indicated on the travel purpose for attending charity events, participating in sports events or working.

Similarly, most trips made by rural elderly are meant for socializing (57.96%), shopping (41.59%) and medical check-up (50%). Other trip purposes such as working, charity participation, sport events and banking activities are not quite important contributor for travel purposes for rural consumers.

Table 2 Trip Purpose for Urban Travel

Trip Purpose	URBAN		RURAL		TOTAL	
	N = 904	%	N = 452	%	N = 1356	%
Entertainment	114	12.61	33	7.30	147	10.84
Shopping	432	47.79	188	41.59	620	45.72
Social visits	445	49.23	262	57.96	707	52.14
Banking	304	33.63	109	24.12	413	30.46
Religious events	248	27.43	121	26.77	369	27.21
Medical check-ups	367	40.60	226	50.00	593	43.73
Charity	38	4.20	17	3.76	55	4.06
Sports events	56	6.19	32	7.08	88	6.49
Working	77	8.52	33	7.30	110	8.11

Difficulties Encountered with Public Transport

The issues addressed at this point concern the general constraints faced by older consumers on travel by using different modes of transportation. Elderly may manage to undertake the journeys that they wish to make, but they may experience difficulty doing so. To explore the broad types of difficulties the older consumers have in respect of public transport service, they were asked to identify those difficulties accordingly.

According to urban respondents, the most serious difficulties that they encounter concern reliability (29.76%), safety (22.23%), staff attitude (21.02%) and confusing signage (19.91%) and affordability (19.80%). A relatively low proportion indicates that they have problems associated with accessibility (17.04%) or journey too long (16.37%). However the proportions that actually do have such difficulties may well be greater, as older consumers are not always fully aware of deterioration in mobility and cognitive capabilities.

For rural respondents, the most serious difficulty is reliability of using public transport (34.29%), followed by affordability (29.20%). Other significant factors also quoted by rural elderly include safety (24.56%) and staff attitude (24.12%), followed by journey too long (21.02). accessibility and availability are not considered as major difficulties faced by older consumers.

Table 3 Difficulties Encountered with Public Transport

Difficulty Attribute	URBAN		RURAL		TOTAL	
	N = 904	%	N = 452	%	N = 1356	%
Affordability	179	19.80	132	29.20	311	22.94
Accessibility	154	17.04	61	13.50	215	15.86
Confusing signage	180	19.91	89	19.69	269	19.84
Staff attitude	190	21.02	109	24.12	299	22.05
Availability	175	19.36	65	14.38	240	17.70
Reliability	269	29.76	155	34.29	424	31.27
Safety	201	22.23	111	24.56	312	23.01
Journey too long	148	16.37	95	21.02	243	17.92

Leisure Activities

Leisure activities are important for older consumers which can lead their life satisfaction. This is also related to the mobility factor to them in maintaining social relationships and independence. To improve the mobility and accessibility of older people there is a need to respond to a variety of needs for holiday destinations. In soliciting such information, older participants were asked about those holiday destinations ever visited by them. For domestic places, the most popular destination is big cities (46.90%), followed by beaches (43.51%), rustic villages (34.07%) and highland resorts (27.43%). For foreign destinations, the most popular place among senior citizens is big cities (31.42%),

followed by religious places (24.85%) and the third spot is historical sites (14.23%). This is mainly true for most elderly of their readiness to travel due to the availability of time and money to spend.

Table 4 Holiday Destinations Visited

Holiday Destination	DOMESTIC		FOREIGN	
	N=1356	%	N=1356	%
Historical sites	298	21.98	193	14.23
Rustic villages	462	34.07	71	5.24
Religious places	317	23.38	337	24.85
Big cities	636	46.90	426	31.42
Theme parks	91	6.71	20	1.47
Beaches	590	43.51	42	3.10
National parks	62	4.57	29	2.14
Highland resorts	372	27.43	50	3.69
Island resorts	280	20.65	63	4.65

Relationship between Travel Behavior and Demographic

Respondents were asked their choices of various transportation modes according to their age brackets from 55 years to those above 80 years old. Overall results shown that bus and own transports are the most preferred modes of transportation by all categories of older consumers, followed by taxi as the third preference.

As for the modal choice of urban travel, for those respondents of 55-59 years, their first preference is own transport (238 respondents), followed by bus (203 respondents) and taxi (155 respondents). The transport preference for other age groups (60-64 years, 65-69 years, 70-74 years and others) is consistent whereby bus is the most preferred mode, followed by own transport and taxi. The results also show that mainstream urban transport such as LRT and minibus are less preferred by older consumers due to the difficulties of boarding or alighting at terminals and inconvenience and hassle during travel.

Table 5 Modal Choice for Urban Travel: Age

Age	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	ABOVE	TOTAL	
						80	N=1356	%
Bus	203	142	121	56	40	29	591	43.58
Taxi	155	99	77	54	36	24	445	32.82
Inter-city train	5	5	4	2	4	-	20	1.47
KTM commuter	7	6	6	3	-	-	22	1.62
LRT	14	18	7	3	-	-	42	3.10
Monorail	5	5	3	1	-	-	14	1.03
Minibus	35	15	15	1	5	1	72	5.31
Own transport	238	137	94	50	34	9	562	41.45

Similarly, respondents of different income groups were asked about their modal preference. These income groups were classified into six income groups from RM1000 and below to RM5000 and above. Bus is the most preferred modal choice for lower income group (RM1000 and below, RM1001 – RM2000), followed by own transport and third, taxi.

Specifically, it was found that low income groups (RM2000 and below) would prefer to use bus (29%), followed by own transport (21%) and taxi (19%). Meanwhile of high income earners (RM3000 and above) stated their preference for own transport (11%) followed bus (5%) and taxi (4%). The obvious reason for this is most high income elder consumers are car owners and they would prefer to use their own means of transportation in making a long distance travel.

Table 6 Modal Choice for Urban Travel: Income

Income	Below RM1000	RM1000- RM2000	RM2001- RM3000	RM3001- RM4000	RM4001- RM5000	Above RM5000	TOTAL	
							N=1356	%
Bus	199	194	125	39	22	12	591	43.58
Taxi	124	142	121	30	15	13	445	32.82
Inter-city train	7	6	5	1	-	1	20	1.47
KTM commuter	3	15	3	-	1	-	22	1.62
LRT	7	12	8	1	4	10	42	3.10
Monorail	1	5	1	-	2	5	14	1.03
Minibus	25	29	10	6	1	-	71	5.24
Own transport	124	161	128	51	36	62	562	41.45

For modal choice according to gender, own transportation is most preferred mode of transportation (43.37%) for male elderly compared to bus (45.08%) for their female counterpart. The likely possible explanation for this is most men are still active car drivers and possessed driving license after their retirement age of 55/56 years old. The second preferred mode for men is bus (42.47%) and for women is own transport (38.86%). Taxi is quoted as the third preferred mode of urban travel for both male and female (32.56% and 33.16% respectively).

Table 7 Modal Choice for Urban Travel: Gender

Gender	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	N=777	%	N=579	%	N=1356	%
Bus	330	42.47	261	45.08	591	43.58
Taxi	253	32.56	192	33.16	445	32.82
Inter-city train	9	1.16	11	1.90	20	1.47
KTM commuter	12	1.54	10	1.73	22	1.62
LRT	17	2.19	25	4.32	42	3.10
Monorail	6	0.77	8	1.38	14	1.03
Minibus	36	4.63	36	6.22	72	5.31
Own transport	337	43.37	225	38.86	562	41.45

DISCUSSIONS

Maintaining mobility in later life is crucial to sustaining the autonomy that older people desire. In this context, mobility may be conceived as referring to the ability of the individual to gain access through movement to the facilities he or she desires. Constraints on mobility arise from physical or mental impairments that give rise to disabilities; design and capacity deficiencies in the transport system; and considerations of affordability for the individual traveler. Available, effective and affordable transport facilities are important for securing the ready access to people and places necessary to maintain a good quality of life. However, mobility is more than getting from A to B, whether to shop or to visit healthcare facilities, for instance. There are also the incidental benefits of the journey – the psychological boost from getting out and about, the benefits from social interaction, the exercise gained in the ‘slow modes’ – walking and cycling.

The main purpose of this study was two-fold: to delineate the travel behavior of Malaysian seniors and to assess this travel pattern in the context of selected demographic factors. Understanding travel variations with regard to socio-demographic characteristics should help transport industries to develop effective marketing programs to attract older consumers. This study found that bus and taxi were the most preferred means of public transport, apart from own transportation (cars). Bus is also preferred by different age brackets of older consumers (55-59 yrs to above 80 years) with varying levels of income. This suggests that marketing efforts need to be more aggressive in improving the service quality of stage buses and express coaches in terms of reliability, punctuality, cleanliness, fare and safety. This also

includes the facilities at terminals such as waiting area, information display, kerbside design and boarding/alighting assistance. Dissemination of information should be enhanced with respect to time-tabling, bus scheduling, delays and other necessary announcements.

Where public transport facilities are well designed, and staffing levels and facilities are well provided and managed, it is possible to go a long way to overcoming all the problems experienced by older people. But otherwise, further efforts will be necessary if the mobility of an aging population is to be improved. A number of product designs can be adopted that go some way to counter the problems experienced by older consumers with difficulties when using public transport, for example, low floor buses, particularly when coupled with raised kerbs at bus stops, aid entry not only for older people, but also for those with luggage and children. Experience is that speedier embarkation and disembarkation allows significant operational cost savings.

Results also showed that male and female seniors are more likely to travel by bus for their urban travel, which suggests that marketing efforts targeting older consumers may be more successful in enticing seniors to use public transport. Given the number of elderly people in years to come and the growing specificity of their demands, elderly consumers will become a major market in their own right. Apparently, public transport operators are still unaware of this and what it entails. For instance, while public transport signage may be adequate for younger people, it will not be for the elderly. To cater for the increased number of third-age users, transport operators have to adapt their goals and strategies to a segment of the population which will be divided according to levels of disability. Markets should be accordingly be segmented into age groups, in particular the female segment, whose needs could be more critical than male elderly. Rail transport has been losing its elderly clientele, whereas cars and buses remain the most popular means of travel.

Transport problems will also vary according to where people live, whether in urban or rural areas. While the transport problems facing the elderly will be relatively easy to resolve in cities, where any benefit to the older consumers will benefit the whole population, the same cannot be said for rural areas, where people rely on private cars or non-conventional means of transport. So it is important to begin devising solutions that tap the potential of new technologies to rationalize services, especially since conventional public transport will be unable to cope efficiently with an aging suburban population. Consideration should nevertheless be given to special transport services, such as taxi transfer to and from public transport routes.

The current research provides some initial insights about the travel profile and the heterogeneity of the older consumers in Malaysia. Because their activities have become more dispersed, mobility, although clearly a basic right, is sometimes an obligation to serve for them. Those responsible for transport marketing need to take more explicit account of the mobility and accessibility needs of older people when delivering the provision of transport services. The fact that older consumers' segments give high priority to transport issues suggests that marketers could usefully listen to what their needs and requirements. Relative small innovations requested by older consumer segment, which increase their service expectations, can be very critical for customer satisfaction. Transport marketers should also explore the lifestyle and travel motivations of this segment to understand how to match this segment's value orientations with significant consumption and lifestyle patterns. In particular, exploration of databases can help profile this group and assist marketers to target those with similar characteristics

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