

# How Situational Factors Influence Boomers' Travel Intentions

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## Abstract

*Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are now a large segment of the population in the United States. Studies showed that baby boomers have huge power to influence the future tourism industry because they represent a sizable market (AOA, 2003). Moreover, according to Travel Industry Association (TIA) research (2007), the average age of people who travel in the United States is 46 years old. Travelers employed full-time or part-time travel more than retired people (TIA, 2007). As a result of TIA and AOA research, it is important to investigate boomers' travel intentions by understanding situational factors. This significant phenomenon will impact the future tourism industry. This research investigated whether the situational factors influence boomers' travel intentions.*

**Keywords:** *baby boomers, situational factors, travel intention*

## Introduction

Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are now a large segment of the population in the United States. The baby boomers represent nearly one-fourth of the population in the United States (Rogerson & Kim, 2005). In 2008, the Administration on Aging (AOA) estimated the number of baby boomers at around 78.2 million. Due to the huge population of boomers, they have a significant influence on the tourism industry (Thompson, 2005). According to the U.S. Travel Association (2004), boomers generated the highest travel volume in the U.S. in 2003. Boomers registered 268.9 million trips, more than any other age group. As indicated by Lehto, Jang, Achana, and O'Leary (2006), boomers will become the new biggest segment in the travel market. However, little travel and tourism research discusses the boomers' segment and their travel intentions (Muller & Cleaver, 2000) as many studies are devoted to the senior segment (Chen & Wu, 2005; Huang & Tsai, 2002; Jang, Bai, Hu & Wu, 2009; Jang & Wu, 2006; Lee & Tideswell, 2005).

Baby boomers are anticipated to have different attitudes and lifestyles than the current senior generation (Moisey & Bichis, 1999). For instance, boomers have traveled more than their previous generations (seniors). Boomers, though, travel as a necessity instead of luxury. Additionally, boomers would like to pay for luxury and convenience (Ross, 2008). Thus, the research on the seniors can not be entirely applied to the boomers and an investigation focus solely on boomers' travel behavior is needed.

Belk (1975) and Mowen (1990) stated that consumer behavior can be explained by knowing and predicting situational factors. Past scholars indicated that situational factors do influence purchase intentions and behavior (Belk, 1974, 1975). The situational factors involve five categories: physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspective, task definition, and antecedent state. Physical surroundings refer to the crowd of the travel destination. Social surroundings refer to decision makers' friends or relatives. Temporal perspective refers to the time of travel (e.x. summer/winter). Task definition means the reasons that people decide to take a trip. Antecedent states refer to momentary conditions (e.x. sufficient fund) and momentary moods (e.x. happy).

Applying the situational factors to assess boomers' travel intentions will help the travel industry to better cater to their particular needs and wants. The purpose of this study is to examine how situational factors influence boomers' travel intentions.

## **Literature Review**

### **Segmentation of baby boomers**

Because the baby boomers represent a huge span of 19 years, demographers and marketers often split them into two segments. The older group – or leading-edge boomers – comprises those who were born between 1946 and 1955, and their ages are from 54 to 63. The older group shared “galvanizing experiences”, such as Vietnam and the “cultural revolution,” including modern feminism and civil rights (Green, 2005, p. 1).

The younger group – or trailing-edge boomers – include those born between 1956 and 1964 and they are between 45 and 53 years old (Sondergeld, 2004). The younger group, who started their careers after the Vietnam War ended in early 1975, faced a more peaceful, less culturally chaotic period. They started their lives with confident expectations (Green, 2005).

### **Physical surroundings**

The first situational factor is physical surroundings. Kotler (1973) is the first person to

coin the term “atmospherics” to describe the internal control and manipulation of environmental cues. Bitner (1992) coined the term “servicescape” to describe the “built environment (i.e., the manmade, physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment)” (p. 58). Hence, Bitner’s definition of servicescape is consistent with Kotler’s (1973) definition of atmospheric.

Physical surroundings are obvious features, such as institutional location, geographical location of the destination, décor, sounds, light, and the crowdness of the destination, and destination density, which have important implications for building a business image. Even before visitors make a travel intension, they commonly look for cues about the destination’s quality (Berry & Clark, 1986). The physical environment is rich in such cues and may be influential in communicating the destination’s image to visitors. Visitors’ images of the destinations are built more on their perceptions than reality because tourism service is intangible. If a destination manager wants to present an upscale image, it is important that the destination’s physical surroundings match the image. Thus, the destination atmospherics can be the visitor’s perception of the destination image. Tourism industry can use atmospherics as a marketing tool to describe the designing of a space in order to attract more visitors.

*H1 : There is a relationship between physical surroundings and travel intentions among boomers.*

### **Social surroundings**

The second situational factor is social surroundings. Hyman (1942) is the first person to coin the term social status, when he asked respondents with which individuals or groups they compared themselves. The term has been redefined and given broader definition. Social surroundings refer to “the effects of other people on a consumer in a consumption situation” (Mowen & Minor, 2001, p. 131). Social surroundings have long been considered as an important influential factor of an individual’s behavior (Sherif, 1936).

Crompton (1981), in his research on pleasure travel, found that friends or relatives impact behavior throughout the recreation experience. Friends or relatives provide information to share their particular experiences with decision-makers. In reality, when asked what sources provide travel-related information, friends or relatives are considered as the most credible sources. Those persons or groups that are influential in visitors’ attitudes, choices and beliefs are reference groups (Moutinho, 1987). Reference groups are: family, peers, work colleagues, friends, religious and ethnic groups, formal social and leisure groups, trade unions, neighbor, teachers, and sports and entertainment figures (Childers and Rao, 1992; Khan and Khan, 2005; Moutinho, 1987). Reference groups are defined as “social

groups that are important to a consumer and against which he/she compares him/herself (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 341).” For instance, people may choose destinations due to friends or relatives’ previous experiences because they would rather follow the suggestions and opinions of others than make wrong decisions. Ajzen and Driver (1991) found that peer groups impact travelers through social interaction, directly becoming the primary and secondary sources of information. This may apply to the tourism industry where a visitor’s peers had experiences at a given destination. Mieczkowski (1990) states “tourists establish their images of destination on the basis of less biased sources like opinions of friends and relatives who visited these destinations” (p.180). Thus, reference groups have visited a destination; they may provide prior experience to tourists through word-of-mouth.

*H2: There is a relationship between social surroundings and travel intentions among boomers.*

### **Temporal perspective**

The third situational factor is temporal perspective. The definition of temporal perspective refers to time, ranging from day to season of the year, and length-of-time (Belk, 1975), for instance, the amount of time available may influence boomers’ travel intentions. Customers’ behavior changes as a result of the time of year, such as seasons, which influence people’s choices of activities.

Reese (1995) stated that marketers can track customer expenditure in prime times of the year by predicting seasonal factors. Seasonal factors influence travel and entertainment (Roslow, Li & Nicholls, 2000). For instance, TIA found seasonal factors impacted consumers to travel in the different seasons, such as the summer, spring or fall. TIA (2007) found that most of the domestic travelers chose a destination during the summer in 2004. Especially, travelers are more likely to travel in July and August. They spent much more money during summers when they travelled to a destination (TIA, 2005). Jones and Scott (2006) showed that travelers would like to travel to national park of Canada in between May 1 and September 30 which was impacted by seasonal factors. The findings showed that travelers’ choice of Canada’s national parks is highly impact by season and the country’s regional climates. Travel Blog (2008) showed that the weather may influence people travel intentions. People may avoid destinations if it is so hot or so cold that it would be intolerable to be there. However, some of people said they would personally enjoy the bad weather, so they would like to plan on going at those times of year. Thus, the season of year may influence people’s travel intention.

*H3 : There is a relationship between temporal perspective and travel intentions among*

*boomers.*

### **Task definition**

The fourth situational factor is task definition. Task definition refers to the set of goals a visitor forms to resolve needs deriving from a specific situation (Marshall, 1993). More formally, it is “the orientation, intent, role, or frame of a person through which certain aspects of the environment may become relevant. (Foxall and Foldsmith, 1994, p. 184).” From Belk, (1975) point of view, task definitions are “the reasons that occasion the need for consumers to buy or consume a product or service” (p. 159). People travel to different types of destinations due to different purposes. Task definition impacts visitors choosing a destination. Therefore, visitors may seek specific messages or information which depends on the task definition they are experiencing. Likewise, when visitors choose destinations, it depends on their different purposes, for example, they travel for personal reasons or travel for business.

*H4: There is a relationship between task definition and travel intentions among boomers.*

### **Antecedent states**

The fifth situational factor is antecedent states. Antecedent states refer to momentary conditions or momentary moods (Belk, 1975). Momentary conditions are such as people have cash on hand, or they feel fatigued or ill. For instance, before visitors make travel intentions whether they have sufficient funds or they feel fatigued may impact their travel decisions. People may expect certain salaries or holidays when making decisions; however, unexpected situations may arise to affect their decision. Besides, researchers find that mood factors influence consumer behavior. Mood factors range from happiness to negative feelings, such as excitement, pleasure, displeasure, or anxiety. Individuals' moods can impact their decision making. Typically, boomers can realize whether they have a good mood or bad mood. They may also recognize that mood can impact their desires and their intentions toward travel destinations. A good mood leads to more favorable decision outcomes; however, a bad mood tends to lead to unfavorable decision outcomes.

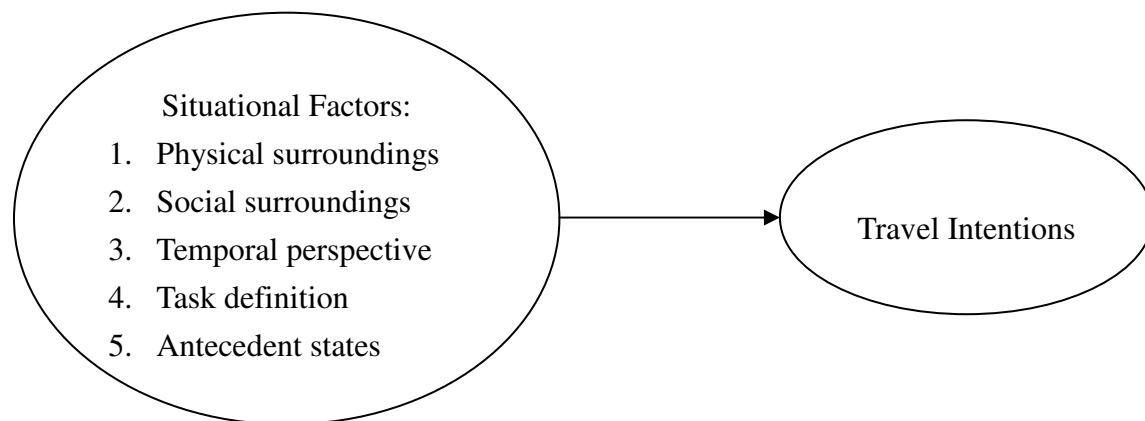
*H5: There is a relationship between antecedent states and travel intentions among boomers.*

### **Travel intentions**

Consumer behaviors include all the actions taken by consumers, such as buying products or services, providing word-of-mouth to others, or searching information for a purchase (Mowen & Minor, 2001). Consumer behaviors mean people engage in an action; however, they may build an intention toward their likelihood of engaging in the behavior. Behavioral

intentions are defined as “expectations to behave in a particular way with regard to the acquisition, disposition, and use of products and services” (Mowen & Minor, 2001, p. 125). Thus, consumers may build the intention to collect information, tell others about their experience, or purchase a product or service. Behavioral intention can predict future consumer purchase behavior, and can be used as an indicator or representation of behavior (Murray, 1991) because it is highly predictive of actual behavior.

### **Model of study**



### **Methodology**

#### **Development of Survey Instrument**

A survey questionnaire which measured the constructs was modified from previous studies. A seven-point Likert type scale was used for the questionnaire in the study, 1= absolutely unimportant, 7= absolutely important; 1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part is designed to determine the situational factors in selecting destinations by using the following constructs: physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspective, and task definition. The second part examines antecedent states and boomers’ travel intentions toward destinations. The final part is designed to collect respondents’ information.

#### **Situational factors**

Respondents were asked about their intentions to go to a destination by measuring the situational factors. The following criteria were modified to measure the influence of situational factors when respondents selected a destination.

Physical surroundings construct was measured by eight items modified from Anic, I.-D. and Radas (2006), and Machleit, Eroglu and Powell (2000). The questions are as follows: the destination has a pleasant atmosphere; the destination seems to be too crowded for me to have a good time; the destination is very popular; the destination has convenient transportation; the destination is easy to access; the signage at the destination is explicit, and the destination is visually appealing the destination allows me to move around easily.

Social surrounding construct was modified from Hsu, Kang and Lam (2006). The questions are as follows: the destination is recommended by my family; the destination is recommended by my friends; the destination is recommended by relatives; the destination is recommended by business associates, and the destination is recommended by travel agents.

The statements used to measure temporal perspective are as follows: the destination is suitable for weekday vacations; the destination is suitable for weekend getaways; the destination is suitable for summer vacations, and the destination is suitable for winter vacations.

The statements used to measure task definition are as follows: the destination is suitable for multiple family gatherings; the destination is suitable for family vacations; the destination is suitable for social gatherings; the destination is suitable for conducting business; the destination is suitable for conventions and conferences; the destination is suitable for relaxation, and the destination is suitable for escaping from the routine life.

Antecedent states construct was modified from Sirakaya, Petrick and Choi (2004). The questions are as follows: when I planned the trip, I felt “edgy” or irritable; when I planned the trip, I felt distressed; when I planned the trip, I felt tensioned; when I planned the trip, I was joyful; when I planned the trip, I was excited; when I planned the trip, I was very comfortable; when I planned the trip, I was not pressed for money, and when I planned the trip, I was pressed for time.

### **Travel Intention**

The following criteria measured the respondent travelers’ intentions toward the destination in a future trip was modified from Hsu, Kang and Lam, 2006. The questions are as follows: I intend to visit the destination within the next 12 months; I would like to visit the destination; it is likely that I will visit the destination in the next 12 months.

## **Results and Discussion**

A face to face interview method was implemented to collect the data in this study. The data was collected at a tourist destination in an east coast metropolitan city. A screening question at the beginning of the survey to make sure the respondents are baby boomers who are 45 and 63 and they have considered traveling in the past 12 months. A total of 612 surveys were distributed. There were 250 valid respondents, generating a 40% response rate. Males make up 54.8% of the respondents, and females make up the remaining 45.2%. The respondents were divided into two groups according to their ages. The older group falls into the age 54 - 63 category with 112 respondents (44.8%). The younger group falls into the age 45 - 53 category with 138 respondents (55.2%).

The results (Table 1) indicated that among the five situational factors, only one construct - Antecedent states has a relationship with travel intentions among boomers. The other four Situational Factors do not have a relationship with travel intentions among boomers.

**Table 1 Relationship between Situational Factors and Travel Intentions**

Situational Factors \ Travel Intentions	Physical surroundings	Social surrounding	Temporal perspective	Task definition	Antecedent states
Travel Intentions	.048	-.014	.038	.036	.348**

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level

Additionally, the results indicate that respondents' demographic background influence their perception toward those situational factors. For instance, based on the t-test results, there are significant differences between male and female travelers on the following two questions: "The destination is suitable for multiple family gatherings" and "The destination is suitable for family vacations." Female travelers tend to consider those two functions more important when selecting a travel destination than male travelers. The ANOVA results indicated that travelers' budget of the trip influenced their perception of the situational factors of the travel destination on the following two questions: "The destination is very popular" and "The destination is suitable for weekend getaways." Comparing to other trip budget groups, the trip budget of \$1,001-1,500 group considered it much more important to choose a destination which is popular and suitable for weekend getaways destination.

In conclusion, this study provides the tourism industry a better understanding of how destination situational factors influence boomers' travel intentions. The result of this study identified that Antecedent states is the major situational factor which have impacted boomers' travel decision. A full discussion is not provided in this extended abstract and will be in the full paper.



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