

19th Nordic Symposium in Tourism and Hospitality Research

The Meaning of Age

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By Karina M. Smed

Background:

- Working with target groups
- Generalisation and respect for details
- Age as a factor in segmentation
- constant changes

Does age matter?

Construction and de-construction:

- Age stereotypes
- Self- and other perceptions
- inner and outer experiences

Fiction (Source: Lavery, 1999:2)	Fact
The "youth" market is the most free-spending and most influential consumer group.	On average, the over 50-65 consumer outspends their under 50 counterpart by around 20 per cent.
Mature people tend to hold on to their money and spend rationally – not on leisure activities.	They take more holidays than any other age group and outspend the young on leisure.
Mature consumers are indifferent to new technology.	In the USA the over-50s are the fastest-growing group online
Only certain consumer goods can be sold to mature consumers.	They are discriminating shoppers with defined but catholic tastes. Lifestyle is more important than chronological age.
Mature consumers are not concerned with the way they are portrayed in advertising.	Research shows they resent atypical "glamorous" models as well as "wrinkly" ones.
Mature consumers stick with products they are used to.	Some sectors report that up to 30 percent switch brands annually.

Relation to social identity theory:

- Identity as a social construction – age as part of identity
- Inner construction – outer confirmation
- Negotiation through discourse

“[...] the consuming individual is conceived as a *tourist* who is looking for new experiences via consumption. This is not done due to a need for it or due to a need for fulfilling wants to get beyond a cognitive dissonance. Instead, it is based on a *desire* for a meaning in life (Østergaard, 1991) because the consuming individual, in this approach, uses the consumption of products and services as bricks in the construction of a meaningful life. It is an ongoing project for the consuming individual to construct meaning, and it is based on emotions and feelings where the single consuming individual tries to create a coherent life” (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000:17)

The self-conception approach to consumer behaviour:

1. An individual does have a self-concept of himself
2. The self-concept is of value to him
3. Because this self-concept is of value to him, an individual's behaviour will be directed toward the furtherance and enhancement of his self-concept
4. An individual's self-concept is formed through the interaction process with parents, peers, teachers, and significant others
5. Goods serve as social symbols and, therefore, are communication devices for the individual
6. The use of these good-symbols communicates meaning to the individual himself and to others, causing an impact on the intra-action and/or the interaction processes and, therefore, an effect on the individual's self-concept

(Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967:25-26)

The consumer as a tribe member:

Self-identity +
distinction from
others



Group identity +
recognition from
others

→ Goods as a means to identity positioning and construction

Implications...:

- Goods carry symbolic meaning – also in relation to age
- Self affects motivations to buy – consequences of a non-age appropriate self
- Identity construction as motivation – eventually affecting behaviour
- Self and identity - and thereby age - are individually and socially determined

”We are what we have” (Belk, 1988:139)

Chronological age:

- Years lived

- Overt
- Factual
- Measurable

Cognitive age:

- Knowledge
- Experience
- Perception

- Covert
- Negotiable
- Constructed

Tourist Experience:

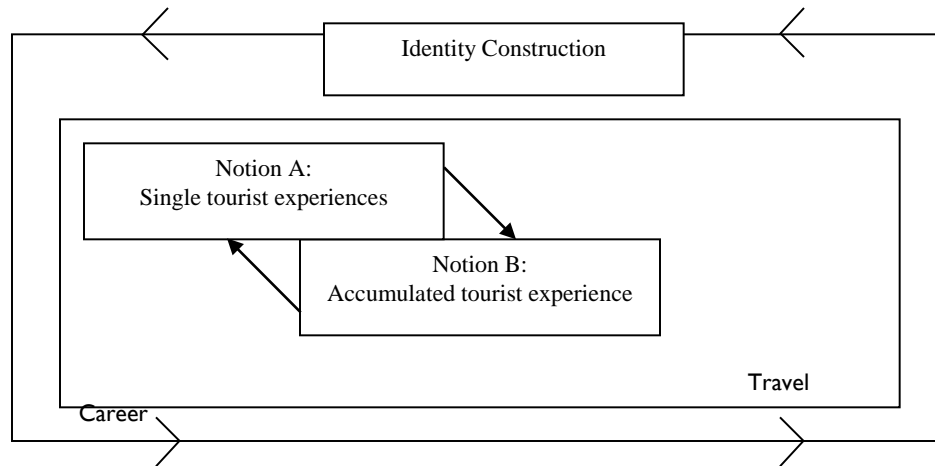
Notion A)

- experience may be understood as an actual, specific activity that gives a certain, instant to some extent, experience at a particular moment in time (oplevelse, Erlebnis)

Notion B)

- experience may be understood as a mental state of accumulating knowledge through an inherent experiencing of different situations, events etc. such as the ones mentioned in notion A (erfaring, erfahrung)

Tourist experience & Identity



A consumer perspective

- Advertising and cognitive age

”...media images of elderly people to a great extent consist of caricatures, which do not correspond to the way mature people live or perceive themselves” (Hodgetts et al., 2003)

several sources maintain that myths about mature people die hard (e.g. Evers 2004), which is evident e.g. in the use of young models in advertising, possibly reflecting negative stereotypes about the attractiveness of more mature people

- Context and chronological age

Chronological age may be controversial in a market communication context, but used nonetheless, even though cognitive age may have a greater impact on tourist behaviour

- Consequences of age-related images and text

Market Communication

- Discourse around age reveals underlying thinking
- Discrepancies between chronological age portrayls and cognitive age within the consumer may clash
- How is cognitive age brought forth in communication with tourists?

Where to go from here...?

Scenario A)

- Focus groups/qualitative interview
- Various chronological ages represented
- Information/advertising material (focus on differences)

Scenario B)

- Focus groups
- One chronological age group (mature consumers)
- Information/advertising material (reactions, appeals, dislikes, age discourse – characterisation)

Scenario C)

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