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# A factor-cluster analysis of tourist motivations: A case of U.S. senior travelers

## Abstract

*The senior travel market has become an increasingly important area of interest to the tourism industry for more than a decade due to its market size and potential growth. The trends toward early retirement, increased number of leisure years, active lifestyles, longevity, and time flexibility after retirement make the elderly an attractive market for the tourism industry. The U.S. senior travel market is one of the important senior segments for Thailand's tourism industry. However, little knowledge is known regarding this segment, particularly its travel related-behavior and motivations to visit Thailand. The purpose of this study is to investigate travel motivations of U.S. senior travelers to Thailand by adopting the theory of push and pull motivations as a conceptual framework. This study also examines the possibility of segmenting the U.S. senior travel market by utilizing attribute-based benefits segmentation (pull motivational factors). The results of factor analysis identify three push and four pull factor dimensions. Among them, 'novelty & knowledge-seeking' and 'cultural & historical attractions' are viewed as the most important push and pull factors, respectively. Based on cluster analysis, the study reveals two distinct segments within the U.S. senior travel market (i.e. 'cultural & historical seekers' and 'holiday & leisure seekers'). The results of the study provide important implications for both policy makers and industry practitioners to develop effective marketing strategies for each segment. The findings also contribute to the tourism literature in the area of travel related-behavior and motivations of the senior travel market.*

### **Keywords:**

*travel motivations; market segmentation; U.S. senior travelers; Thailand*

## Introduction

Tourism researchers have long been aware of the growing importance to the travel and tourism industry of senior travelers (Reece, 2004). During the past decade the senior travel market has received much attention from industry practitioners in many countries. One of the major reasons is that the number of international senior tourists, especially from Europe and North America has consistently increased over the past ten years (Cleaver, Muller, Ruys, & Wei, 1999; Thai Farmers Research Centre, 1999).

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Senior people are believed to have large amounts of discretionary income due to the wealth they have accumulated over their lifetimes (You & O'Leary, 1999; Bai, Jang, Cai, & O'Leary, 2001). Many of them, when traveling overseas, tend to spend a large portion of their discretionary income on travel and leisure activities (Thai Farmers Research Centre, 1999; Bai et al., 2001). More importantly, senior travelers seem to have more time to travel than any other age group as most of them have retired, and due to the fact that they have less family responsibilities (Teaff & Turpin, 1996). Time flexibility after retirement among seniors seems to make the senior travel market more attractive to travel and hospitality industries that suffer from seasonal demand fluctuation (Jang & Wu, 2006). The senior travel market is expected to become more important and will have greater impact on hospitality and tourism industry over the next decade because of its size, potential for growth, and attractive financial status (Cleaver et al., 1999; Faranda & Schmidt, 1999; Bai et al., 2001; Horneman, Carter, Wei, & Ruys, 2002).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), a state agency in charge of marketing and promoting Thailand's tourism, regularly launches several marketing campaigns and travel activities to attract international tourists to Thailand. One of its objectives is to promote and develop proactive marketing strategies to approach new target markets with an aim to attract more tourists and to boost country's economy and revenues. The senior travel market, a potential and growing segment, is one of its new targets for the international tourist market. The overseas senior market generally generates approximately 45 billion Baht a year or 18.6 percent of the nation's tourism revenues (Thai Farmers Research Center, 1999). According to the Thai Farmers Research Center (1999), the number of inbound tourists aged between 55-65 years has expanded rapidly during recent years, especially from principal markets such as Japan, USA, UK, German, and France.

The U.S. senior travel market, in addition to the Asian markets, is one of the important senior segments for the Thailand's tourism industry. According to the statistical report (TAT, 2007a), the number of in-bound U.S. tourists aged 55 or above has been increasing over the recent years, from 93,458 in 1999 to 144,565 arrivals in 2005. This makes the U.S. senior travel market one of the largest segments among the non-Asian markets, while the UK (118,608) and Germany (83,925) ranked the second and the third in importance. In terms of revenue, the U.S. travel market generates approximately US\$ 730 million a year (TAT, 2007a). Despite the fact that the U.S. travel market is one of the important international travel markets for the Thailand's tourism industry, little is known about its travel related-behaviors in relation to Thai context. In particular, research relating to senior travelers and their travel characteristics is still limited. In order to be successful in tourism, travel marketers need to understand basic wants and needs as well as travel behaviors of the target tourists (Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Jang & Wu, 2006). One of the useful approaches in understanding tourist behavior and regarded as a key factor in tourism marketing is the analysis of tourist motivations (Crompton, 1979; Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Jang & Wu, 2006). Understanding the needs of tourists and their travel motivations is the starting point for the success of any tourism marketing program (Shin, 2003). Knowledge of tourist motivations enable tourism marketers not only to attract tourists to their destinations, but also to better satisfy traveler needs and wants (Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Ciffer, 2006).

In addition to investigating travel motivations of U.S. senior travelers to Thailand, this study examines the possibility of segmenting the U.S. senior travel market on the basis

of pull motivational factors or destination-based attributes. A review of literature indicates that the senior travel market is a heterogeneous market and worth of further analysis such as market segmentation (You & O'Leary 2000; Lehto, O' Leary, & Lee, 2001). The senior travel market is a diverse market with respect to different socio-demographic characteristics, lifestyles, interests, attitudes, and consumption patterns (Faranda & Schmidt, 1999; You & O'Leary, 2000; Lehto et al., 2001). The major reason behind this is that as consumers grow older, they become less similar and more diverse in their lifestyles and consumption patterns (Moschis, 1991 cited in Faranda & Schmidt, 1999). Lehto et al. (2001) noted that a broad marketing strategy aimed at the entire senior market is likely to be ineffective. To better satisfy a diversity of travel needs of senior travelers, a number of studies have attempted to segment the international senior travel markets based on various techniques. In Thailand, researchers have used several techniques to segment the international travel markets such as geographic characteristics, demographics factors, and activity-based technique. However, researchers are yet to utilize the application of pull motivational factors or destination-based attributes for market segmentation purposes. The destination-based attribute method is associated with benefit segmentation approach which provides a better understanding and prediction of traveler behaviors. In light of the significance of the U.S. senior travel market to the Thailand's tourism industry, and lack of empirical data investigating U.S. senior travelers, this study attempts to fill a research gap by examining travel motivations of U.S. senior travelers to Thailand by adopting the theory of push and pull motivations as a framework. More specially, the objectives of this study are: 1) to uncover underlying factors of push and pull motivational forces associated with U.S. senior travelers to Thailand and 2) to determine the possibility of segmenting the U.S. senior travel market based on the pull motivational factors. The results of the study are expected to provide useful and practical insights for destination marketers to develop and design effective marketing strategies for the U.S. senior travel market.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THAILAND'S TOURISM INDUSTRY**

This section aims to briefly overview Thailand's tourism industry. The following tourism information is mainly based on the database of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2007a). Thailand is famous for its impressive historical sites, unique culture, beautiful scenery and friendliness of local people. It is one of the most favorite tourism destinations in Asia voted by many international media. Tourism industry is regarded as one of the most important industries in Thailand, generating foreign revenue of more than US\$ 11,400 million a year. In 2006, there were 13,821,802 international tourists to Thailand with a 20 percent increase compared to 2005. The top ten tourist generating markets for Thailand are Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China, Singapore, UK, USA, Australia, Germany and Taiwan, respectively. These major markets include countries from Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, and Australia. Among them, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, and China are the countries generating, together, more than 1 million tourists per year. Most visitors to Thailand are in the age range of 25 – 34 years (7,004,056 arrivals), followed by 45 – 54 years (2,758,816 arrivals), and 55 years and above (2,119,675 arrivals). Most of them (60%) come to Thailand as free individual travelers (FIT), while the rests are group travelers with tour companies. The average length of stay in Thailand is approximately 8 days with an average expenditure of US\$ 115 a day. Major tourism destinations among international tourists include Bangkok (capital), Ayutthaya (historical city), Chiang Mai (cultural city), Pattaya (beach town), and Phuket (beach city). As being a tropical country, tourists usually visit Thailand throughout the year. However, the busiest season in Thailand starts from November – April (higher season).

## Literature review

### THE APPLICATION OF PUSH AND PULL MOTIVATIONS IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM RESEARCH

One of the common theories used to examine tourist motivations is the theory of push and pull motivations (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Klenosky, 2002). A review of literature on tourist motivations indicates that the theory of push and pull motivations is a useful approach to understand travel motivations of various traveler groups (You, O'Leary, Morrison, & Hong 2000; Klenosky, 2002). The idea behind this two-dimensional approach is that people travel because they are driven by internal forces (called push factors) and attracted to a particular destination by destination attributes (called pull factors) (Dann, 1977). Push factors refer to internal forces that motivate or create a desire to satisfy a need to travel such as the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, excitement, prestige, health and fitness, and social interaction (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; You et al., 2000; Klenosky, 2002). While pull factors are recognized as destination attributes that respond to and reinforce inherent push motivations (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; You et al., 2000). Pull factors are the attractiveness of a destination as perceived by travelers such as beaches, recreation facilities, natural attractions, culture attractions, travelers' perceptions and expectations (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994).

According to Lubbe (1998), people's motivations to travel begin when they become aware of certain needs and perceive that certain destinations may have the ability to serve those needs. As such, academics argue that the investigation of travel motivations to a particular area is viewed as a critical variable to develop a successful marketing program to satisfy tourists' needs and expectations (Crompton, 1979; Cha et al. 1995; Jang & Wu, 2006). An understanding of tourist motivations for visiting a particular destination can help tourism marketers manage more appropriate marketing programs and attract more tourists to visit the area (Jang & Cai, 2002; Jang & Wu, 2006; Beh & Bruyere, 2007).

Several studies have been conducted using the push and pull motivations theory to investigate tourists' motivations in order to develop appropriate marketing program for the desired targets. Cha et al. (1995), for example, examined push motivations of Japanese overseas travelers and segmented them into three distinct groups: sport seekers, novelty seekers, and family/relaxation seekers. The study disclosed that there were differences in push motivations among Japanese overseas travelers and suggested three different types of advertisement to approach each segment (e.g. advertising sport activities for 'sport seekers' or adventure trips for 'novelty seekers'). Zhang and Lam (1999) identified the key push factors influencing the Mainland Chinese to visit Hong Kong including 'knowledge', 'prestige', and 'enhancement of human relationship', while the key pull factors of Hong Kong were 'hi-tech image', 'expenditure', and 'accessibility'. As the mainland Chinese travelers perceived Hong Kong as a unique, modernized, friendly, and convenient place for holidays, the authors suggested that concerned parties should build Hong Kong's image as a high-tech multinational city in the world to Chinese people via various accessible media. Another interesting study conducted by Jang and Cai (2002) revealed that 'knowledge seeking', 'escape', and 'family togetherness' were major internal motives for British travelers to travel abroad, whereas 'cleanliness & safety', 'easy-to-access', and 'economical deal' were the most important pull factors attracting British travelers to overseas destinations. The study indicated that the British tended to visit the U.S. for 'fun & excitement', Oceania for 'family & friend togetherness', and Asia for 'novel experience'. The authors suggested that the findings based on tourists' motivations should be used for developing destination products and effective marketing strategies for the British travelers. A recent study by Zhang, Yue and

Qu (2004) explored travel motivations of domestic urban tourists in Shanghai, China. The study showed that 'prestige' and 'novelty' were regarded as the top two important push factors of domestic tourists, while 'urban amenity' and 'service attitude and quality' were the most important pull factors of Shanghai appealing to domestic tourists. To promote Shanghai, the authors recommended positioning Shanghai as a city of unique cultural and economic image as well as improve the service quality in Shanghai in order to attract the domestic tourists.

According to the literature, the examination of push and pull motivations provides a useful framework to better understand tourists' motivations to visit a particular destination. Tourism marketers should realize the importance of push factors which are driving forces for people to travel. At the same time, they should understand that tourists' perception toward a destination is a measure of that destination's ability to attract tourists. Knowing what motivates people to travel (push factors) by offering the products (pull factors) that match those needs will enable destination marketers to better satisfy travelers' needs and wants (Cha et al. 1995; Zhang et al., 2004; Jang & Wu, 2006). The results from push and pull motivations will help them plan and execute effective marketing related-activities such as product development, packaging and advertisement (Jang & Cai, 2002; Jang & Wu, 2006). Given the importance of the U.S. senior travel market to the Thailand's tourism industry, empirical studies exploring its travel motivations to visit Thailand should provide destination marketers with some useful insights about U.S. senior travelers; thereby helping them to plan appropriate marketing strategies targeted at this segment.

#### **PULL MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS: AN ATTRIBUTE-BASED BENEFIT SEGMENTATION APPROACH**

An examination of previous studies on travel motivations and tourist segmentation reveals that most researchers seem to focus on push motivational factors (internal needs) or reasons/desire for traveling as a segmentation base (e.g. Cha et al., 1995; Loker-Murphy, 1996; Pyo, 1996; You & O'Leary, 1999; Andersen, Prentice & Watanabe, 2000; Sirakaya, Uysal, & Yoshioka, 2003). Little attention has been paid to the application of pull motivational factors or destination-based attributes to group the tourists on the basis of similar perception of destination attractions. In this study, it is argued that segmenting travelers based on pull motivational factors should provide useful implications for destination marketers in developing appropriate marketing strategies to approach the desired market segments. This is because pull factors (destination-based attributes) are fundamentally related to benefit segmentation which is regarded as a useful segmentation technique to understand tourists' buying behavior.

Benefit segmentation is a powerful segmentation method for grouping consumers as the benefits sought by people are the basic reasons for the existence of true market segment and they determine consumers' behavior much more accurately than do other descriptive variables such as demographic and geographic characteristics (Haley, 1968 cited in Jang, Morrison, & O' Leary, 2002, p. 367). In this study, benefit segmentation is argued to be associated with pull motivational factors since it is based on the attributes of products (or destination-based attributes) as seen and wanted by customers (travelers). According to Sarigollu and Huang (2005), in the early tourism literature, benefits were defined as visitors' rating of desired amenities or activities, and this approach was then used in image studies to describe and evaluate visitors' perception of destination. A review of current literature also indicates that several tourism scholars have used destination attributes as the benefits that tourists seek or expect to receive/ experience when visiting a particular destination (Frochot & Morrison, 2000).

This approach has been then adopted as one of the segmentation techniques in tourism research and referred as attribute-based benefit segmentation (Frochot & Morrison, 2000). Furthermore, in several tourism studies of benefit segmentation approach, the list of benefits included mostly destination-based attribute items such as natural attractions, cultural and historical sites, shopping facilities, availability of entertainment and services, etc. (e.g. Yannopoulos & Rotenberg, 1999; Sarigollu & Huang, 2005). In this study, attribute-based benefit segmentation (based on pull motivational factors) is employed to group the U.S. senior travelers on the basis of their similar perception of Thailand's attractions.

In terms of merits of using benefit segmentation (including attributed-based benefit segmentation), Frochot and Morrison (2000) identified potential advantages including a better understanding and prediction of traveler behaviors. Some authors demonstrated the superiority of benefits segmentation when compared to other segmentation techniques. For instance, benefit segmentation was found to predict tourist behavior better than personality, lifestyle, demographic and geographic techniques (Haley, 1985 cited in Jang et al., 2002). These findings were echoed by Goodrich (1980, cited in Frochot & Morrison, 2000) indicating that benefits discriminated significantly among the sample groups while demographic variables did not. The standard variables such as gender, age, income, occupation, and education may not be appropriate as primary bases for segmenting tourist market (Frochot & Morrison, 2000). According to Ahmed, Barber and Astous (1998 cited in Jang et al., 2002, pp. 367-368), benefit segmentation is an appropriate approach for defining destination segments and developing marketing strategies because it identifies travelers' motivations and the satisfaction of what they need and want from their travel trips. Furthermore, several scholars argue that benefits segmentation is helpful in designing vacation packages, activity programming, promotional messages and advertising (Frochot & Morrison, 2000).

With the contribution of benefit segmentation and limited research on the attribute-based benefit segmentation in Thailand context, this study aims to examine the possibility of segmenting the U.S. senior travelers to Thailand based on their similar interests/perception on the destination attractions of Thailand.

## Methodology

In this study, the target population was U.S. senior travelers aged 55 years old or over who were traveling with local tour companies in Thailand. This segment was the largest segment of overall U.S. in-bound market to Thailand (TAT, 2007a). A pilot test was conducted with 50 respondents to obtain feedback on the clarity and appropriateness of the questionnaire. Based on the pilot test, some wordings of the questions were modified to ensure respondents could understand and choose an appropriate answer.

The questionnaire was developed from a comprehensive review of previous studies focusing on push and pull motivations (Cha et al., 1995; Zhang & Lam, 1999; Klenosky, 2002; Jang & Cai, 2002; Jang & Wu, 2006). Based on the review of literature, a total of 20 motivational items were generated for each set of push and pull factors. The questionnaire was designed in English and consisted of three sections. The first section was aimed at ascertaining socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. In the second section, containing push factors (reasons/desires for traveling), respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements describing their reasons for traveling abroad - for example, "*one of main reasons why I travel abroad is to experience cultures that are different from mine*". Respondents were presented with a five-point Likert-type scale to express their opinions, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree). The third section dealt with pull factors (destination-based attributes), where respondents were asked to rate the attractiveness of destination attributes that draw them to Thailand. For instance, they were asked "do you think Thai culture and local people's way of life are important factor in attracting you to Thailand?". Like push factor, the same five-point Likert-type scale was used to identify the attractiveness of pull factors.

Using a convenience sampling method, data were collected at major tourist attractions in Bangkok during April and May 2006, through a closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire. Potential respondents (i.e. participants in group tours consisting of the majority of older/senior tourists) were approached by asking the permission from the tour leaders before collecting the data. Tour leaders and respondents were asked if they were interested to participate in the study. Once they agreed, questionnaires were distributed to the potential respondents. The participation was voluntary and only the respondents who were willing to participate in the survey were asked to complete the questionnaires. Small souvenirs (i.e. postcards) were given to respondents who completed the questionnaires. To ensure a high return and usable rate, questionnaires were collected on site and checked for completeness. Two trained graduate students helped collect the data during the surveys. In total, 438 usable questionnaires were obtained.

The data analysis consisted of four steps. Firstly, each set of 20 push and pull motivational items were factor analyzed using a varimax rotation procedure to delineate the underlying dimensions that were associated with tourist motivations. The pull factors identified from factor analysis were then further used as the variables in cluster analysis. Secondly, a cluster analysis was performed to segment the market into homogeneous groups based upon the identified pull factor dimensions. In this study, two types of cluster analysis, hierarchical and non-hierarchical cluster analysis, were employed to segregate respondents into mutually exclusive groups based on their perceived importance ratings on the pull factors (destination attributes). Using two cluster analysis approaches was proven to be more reliable than using only one method because the two techniques complement each other's benefits (Frochot & Morrison, 2000; Kang, Hsu, & Wolfe, 2003). Thirdly, cross-tabulations were employed to describe and profile each cluster based on socio-demographic characteristics. Finally, to further validate the clusters, chi-square tests were performed to examine whether there were any statistical differences among the clusters. A .05 level of significance was employed in the statistical assessments.

## Results and discussions

### PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 shows respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. The proportion of male respondents (56.0%) was higher than that of females (44.0%). About 48.3% were in the age group between 55-59 years, while 43.5% were between 60-69 years, and 8.2% were 70 years and over. The mean age of the respondents was 60.3 years, and the standard deviation was about 4.2 years. The majority of the respondents were married (73.5%), and nearly 57% had education at college level. The respondents had different backgrounds and occupations, such as 19.9% were company employees, 12.2% were business owners or self-employed, 6.4% worked for the government, and 11.5% were professionals and technicians. About 8.7% were housewives and 39.1% were retired people. Most of them had annual incomes less than \$30,000 (32.8%) and between \$30,000 – 44,999 (30.3%). While 19.9% earned between \$45,000 – 59,999, 12.8% earned between \$60,000 – 74,999 and only 4.2% had annual income \$75,000 or more.

Regarding the number of visits to Thailand, most respondents (69.6%) were first-time visitors, however, nearly 31% had traveled to Thailand more than two times.

Table 1

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF U.S. SENIOR TRAVELERS TO THAILAND**

Socio-demographic variables	Percent (%)	Socio-demographic variables	Percent (%)
Gender		Occupation	
Male	56	Company employee	19.9
Female	44	Business owner/self-employed	12.2
Age (mean 60.3 years, S.D. 4.2 years)		Government sect	6.4
55 – 59 years	48.3	Professionals and technicians	11.5
60 – 69 years	43.5	Housewife	8.7
70 and above	8.2	Retired	39.1
Marital status		Others	2.2
Married	73.5	Annual income (US\$)	
Single	8.3	Less than \$30,000	32.8
Divorced/widowed	18.2	\$30,000 – 44,999	30.3
Education		\$45,000 – 59,999	19.9
High school or lower	28.6	\$60,000 – 74,999	12.8
Technical/vocational school	14.9	More than \$75,000	4.2
College degree	56.5	Number of visits to Thailand	
		One time	69.6
		Two – three times	24.9
		Four times or more	5.5

**FACTOR ANALYSIS: PUSH FACTORS (REASONS/DESIRE TO TRAVEL)**

As shown in Table 2, three factor dimensions were derived from the factor analysis of 20 push motivational items, and were labeled: (1) ‘novelty and knowledge-seeking’, (2) ‘ego-enhancement’, and (3) ‘rest and relaxation’. Each factor dimension was named based on the common characteristics of the variables it included. The three push factor dimensions explained 60.19 percent of the total variance. Among them, ‘novelty & knowledge-seeking’ emerged as the most important push factors motivating the respondents to travel abroad with the mean scores of 4.09. According to Kaiser’s (1974) criterion, factor dimension with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 would be reported in the final factor structure, and only items with factor loading greater than 0.4 would be retained for each factor grouping. In this study, all the push factor dimensions had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the items in each dimension had factor loading greater than 0.4. This means that all the push factor dimensions and their items met Kaiser’s (1974) criterion and were retained for the final structure. In addition, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to test the internal consistency of items within each factor dimension. The results showed that the alpha coefficients for all the three factor dimensions ranged from 0.81 to 0.89, well above the minimum value of 0.6 as an indication of reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

The results of push factor analysis (reasons for traveling) showed similarities with other studies on Asian travelers (e.g. Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Cha et al., 1995; Zhang & Lam, 1999) and other senior traveler groups (Horneman et al., 2002; Jang & Wu, 2006) in that ‘novelty & knowledge seeking’ was found to be one of the important push factors for people to travel to overseas destinations. This could be that traveling overseas allows people to explore the world and new things in different environment (Cha et al., 1995).

Table 2

**FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PUSH FACTORS** (reason/desire to travel)

Push factor dimensions (reliability $\alpha$ )	Factor loading	Eigen-value	Variance explained	Factor mean
Factor 1: Novelty & Knowledge-seeking ( $\alpha = 0.82$ )		8.59	40.11%	4.09
• I want to see something new and exciting.	0.79			
• I want to travel to a country that I have not visited before.	0.78			
• I want to see something different that I don't normally see.	0.75			
• I want to enhance my knowledge about a foreign country.	0.73			
• I want to see and meet different groups of people.	0.72			
• I want to see how other people live and their way of life.	0.70			
• I want to experience cultures that are different from mine.	0.68			
• I want to learn and meet new people.	0.65			
• I can fulfill my dream and self-curiosity about the country I want to visit.	0.60			
• I can spend more time with my couple or family members while traveling.	0.45			
Factor 2: Ego-enhancement ( $\alpha = 0.81$ )		2.35	12.35%	3.25
• I can talk about my travel experience with other people after returning home.	0.85			
• I can talk about the places visited and the things I have seen in a foreign country.	0.79			
• I want to go to the places my friends want to go.	0.75			
• I want to experience luxury things, nice food, and a comfortable place to stay.	0.72			
• I want to visit a country which most people value and appreciate.	0.60			
• I just want to travel, to go somewhere and do something in different environment.	0.55			
Factor 3: Rest & relaxation ( $\alpha = 0.89$ )		1.47	7.73%	3.87
• This is the time I can physically rest and relax.	0.72			
• This is the time I can escape from stress in daily life	0.71			
• This is the time I can escape from the ordinary or routine environment at home.	0.69			
• I want to enjoy and make myself happy while traveling.	0.61			
Total variance explained			60.19%	

One major reason to travel abroad is to seek new experiences and learn something (e.g. cultures, local ways of life, lifestyle) that people can not obtain from their usual environment (Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Kozak, 2002). According to Kozak (2002), many tourists prefer to visit destinations where the cultures or attractions are different in order to increase their knowledge of new places or people's ways of life. Enjoying something different from home country and experiencing new culture (gaining new knowledge) could be one of the major motives for U.S. senior travelers to travel abroad.

### FACTOR ANALYSIS: PULL FACTORS (DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES)

With regard to pull factors, a similar factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to group the pull motivational items into similar characteristics. As shown in Table 3, four factor dimensions were derived from the factor analysis of 20 pull motivational items, and were labeled: (1) 'travel arrangements & facilities', (2) 'cultural & historical attractions', (3) 'shopping & leisure activities', and (4) 'safety & cleanliness'. These four factor dimensions explained 61.82 percent of the total variance. Among them, 'cultural & historical attractions' was considered the most important pull factors attracting the respondents to Thailand with the highest mean score of 3.91. In this study, all the pull factor dimensions had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and their items had factor loading greater than 0.4. Cronbach's alpha was also calculated to test the internal consistency of items within each factor. The results showed that the alpha coefficients for all pull factor dimensions ranged from 0.72 to 0.89, well above the minimum value of 0.6 as an indication of reliability (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, all the four pull factor dimensions (factor 1 – factor 4) were retained for the final structure.

Table 3

#### FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PULL FACTORS (destination attributes)

Pull factor dimensions (reliability alpha)	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Factor mean
Factor 1: Travel arrangements & facilities (alpha = 0.85)		8.11	38.41%	3.53
• Convenience of traveling and ease of tour arrangement	0.85			
• Quality of tourist places and facilities	0.79			
• Tour programs offered by tour companies	0.73			
• Reasonable price of goods and services	0.64			
• A variety of tourist attractions	0.55			
• Travel distance	0.43			
Factor 2: Cultural & historical attractions (alpha = 0.80)		2.83	9.61%	3.91
• Cultural & historical places	0.89			
• Thai temples	0.85			
• Thai arts and cultures	0.80			
• Natural scenery and landscape	0.59			
Factor 3: Shopping & leisure activities (alpha = 0.89)		1.35	7.25%	3.33
• A variety of shopping places	0.79			
• Seasides/beaches	0.77			
• Thai spa and traditional massage services	0.67			
• Thai food	0.64			
• Night life and entertainment	0.60			
• Friendliness of Thai people	0.53			
• A availability of travel related information	0.52			
Factor 4: Safety & cleanliness (alpha = 0.72)		1.24	6.55%	3.23
• Safety and security	0.76			
• Hygiene and cleanliness	0.73			
• Weather	0.58			
Total variance explained			61.82%	

The results of pull factor analysis were similar to previous studies (You & O'Leary, 2000; Jang & Wu, 2006) examining different samples in that cultural experience and historical attractions appear to be the major factors attracting most travelers to visit a particular destination. It should be noted that pull factors, the destination attributes of a

particular destination, could be many and differ from one destination to another (Kozak, 2002), depending on the perception of travelers towards a particular destination (Zhang & Lam, 1999; Kozak, 2002). The reasons why the U.S. senior travelers perceived cultural and historical attractions as the most important pull factor attracting them to Thailand could be explained that Thailand is one of the few countries in the world that has never been colonized by any western power. This phenomenon affects the nature of the land, culture, history, and Thai people to this day. Tourists around the world visit Thailand to learn and experience what we call 'Thainess' (i.e. culture, historical background, local ways of life). Previous research indicates that millions of international tourists come to Thailand because of the attractiveness of Thai unique culture and historical background (Prasertwong, 2001; Zhang, Fan & Sirirassamee, 2004). According to Prasertwong (2001), Thailand is perceived as the destination that is rich in historical and cultural attractions, making it different from other Asian countries. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2007b), the travel theme used to market the U.S. travel market mainly focuses on Thai culture, local ways of life and religion (Buddhism and temples). Recently, 'TravelAge West', a leading travel magazine in U.S., has announced Thailand the top five best Asian countries for a cultural travel experience (other included China, India, Japan, and Malaysia) (TAT, 2007b). Other travel magazines in USA (e.g. *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Travel & Leisure*) also announced Bangkok (the capital) the best tourism city in Asia based on cultural attractions and other characteristics (TAT, 2007b). With these reasons, it is apparent that the U.S. travel market (including senior travelers) is dominated by cultural-oriented marketing strategies. As being exposed to the cultural-marketing aspects and the image of Thailand as a cultural-based country presented by the media, it could be possible that the U.S. senior travelers may perceive the cultural and historical attribute as the major factor drawing them to Thailand.

#### **CLUSTER ANALYSIS: MARKET SEGMENTATION OF U.S. SENIOR TRAVELERS TO THAILAND**

A combination of hierarchical and non-hierarchical cluster analysis was employed to identify market segment of U.S. senior travelers based on their perceived importance rating on the pull factors (destination-based attributes). The four pull factor dimensions extracted in the factor analysis were used as clustering variables. Firstly, the hierarchical procedure with a Ward's method was performed to obtain an initial seed point and to establish the number of cluster by reviewing the dendrogram and cluster (agglomeration) coefficients. The dendrogram and agglomeration coefficient revealed that a two-cluster solution was most appropriate. Secondly, the solutions or the number of clusters defined from the hierarchical clustering were used a starting point for subsequent K-means clustering (non-hierarchical procedure). Cluster memberships were saved for further comparison between the cluster groups.

To delineate the two identified clusters and label them, the mean scores for each pull factor dimension were computed as suggested by previous studies (e.g. Jang et al., 2002) and the results are presented in Table 4. Based on the scores of factor mean in each factor dimension, cluster 1 had the highest mean score on factor 2 'cultural & historical attractions' ( $M=4.14$ ) and factor 4 'safety & cleanliness' ( $M=3.53$ ), respectively. This suggests the label of cluster 1 as 'cultural & historical seekers'. For cluster 2, it appears that the segment had the high mean score on factor 1 'travel arrangement & facilities' ( $M=3.84$ ) and factor 3 'shopping and leisure activities' ( $M=3.60$ ). Therefore, it is suggested to label cluster 2 as 'holiday & leisure seekers'.

Table 4

**MEAN SCORES OF PULL FACTOR DIMENSIONS AS RATED BY THE TWO CLUSTERS**

Pull factor dimensions (detonation attributes)	Cluster 1 (n=285)	Cluster 2 (n=153)
Factor 1: Travel arrangements & facilities (factor mean)	(M=2.94)	(M=3.84)
• Convenience of traveling and ease of tour arrangement	3.06	3.90
• Quality of tourist places and facilities	2.99	3.88
• Tour programs offered by tour companies	3.10	3.93
• Reasonable price of goods and services	2.78	3.75
• A variety of tourist attractions	2.85	3.85
• Travel distance	2.83	3.73
Factor 2: Cultural & historical attractions (factor mean)	(M=4.14)	(M=3.31)
• Cultural & historical places	4.06	3.24
• Thai temples	4.24	3.41
• Thai arts and cultures	4.25	3.38
• Natural scenery and landscape	4.02	3.19
Factor 3: Shopping & leisure activities (factor mean)	(M=2.65)	(M=3.60)
• A variety of shopping places	2.47	3.46
• Seasides/beaches	2.46	3.39
• Thai spa and traditional massage services	2.65	3.64
• Thai food	2.58	3.63
• Night life and entertainment	2.57	3.55
• Friendliness of Thai people	3.12	3.88
• A availability of travel related information	2.59	3.58
Factor 4: Safety & cleanliness (factor mean)	(M=3.53)	(M=2.41)
• Safety and security	3.77	2.63
• Hygiene and cleanliness	3.43	2.26
• Weather	3.40	2.35

**PROFILE OF U.S SENIOR TRAVELERS TO THAILAND  
(BASED ON EACH CLUSTER)**

Cross-tabulations were performed to provide socio-demographic profiles of the two clusters as shown in Table 5. The chi-square analyses were used to identify whether there were any significant differences existing between the two clusters.

Table 5

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF THE TWO CLUSTER  
OF U.S. SENIOR TRAVELERS TO THAILAND**

Socio-demographic characteristics	Cluster 1 (n=285)	Cluster 2 (n=153)	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Gender			22.57	0.001**
• Male	47.30%	65.20%		
• Female	52.70%	34.80%		
• Totals	100%	100%		
Age			18.04	0.032 *
• 55-59 years	39.40%	56.10%		
• 60-69 years	55.50%	33.30%		
• 70 or older	9.50%	10.60%		
• Totals	100%	100%		

Table 5 continued  
**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF THE TWO CLUSTER  
 OF U.S. SENIOR TRAVELERS TO THAILAND**

Socio-demographic characteristics	Cluster 1 (n=285)	Cluster 2 (n=153)	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Marital status			3.04	0.865
• Married	75.50%	72.80%		
• Single	8.70%	7.80%		
• Divorced/Separated/Widowed	15.80%	19.40%		
• Totals	100%	100%		
Education			2.03	0.731
• High school or lower	33.90%	27.30%		
• Technical or vocational school	13.80%	15.10%		
• College/university degree	52.30%	57.60%		
• Totals	100%	100%		
Occupations			20.07	0.004**
• Company employee	17.70%	21.10%		
• Business owner/self-employed	11.40%	15.10%		
• Government officer	5.20%	7.30%		
• Professionals	9.50%	12.60%		
• Technician	5.00%	6.90%		
• Housewife	7.30%	10.10%		
• Retired	42.50%	24.30%		
• Others	1.40%	2.60%		
• Totals	100%	100%		
Annual Income (US Dollars)			17.59	0.038 *
• Less than \$30,000	40.40%	24.90%		
• \$30,000 – 44,999	23.80%	30.80%		
• \$45,000 – 59,999	18.10%	27.50%		
• \$60,000 – 74,999	11.80%	13.50%		
• More than \$75,000	5.90%	3.30%		
• Totals	100%	100%		
No. of visits to Thailand			10.70	0.335
• First time	64.40%	58.90%		
• 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup> times	30.40%	33.40%		
• 4 times or more	5.20%	7.70%		
• Totals	100%	100%		

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

#### CLUSTER 1: CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SEEKERS

This segment represented 65% of the total samples ( $n=285$ ). It consisted of travelers who demonstrated a strong desire to learn about Thai culture and the history (from Table 4). They traveled to Thailand to seek new knowledge and experience different culture that they could not obtain from their usual environment. They were also concerned about safety and cleanliness when traveling to Thailand. The members of this cluster appeared to place the greatest importance on Thai cultural experience such as Thai arts, the temples, and visiting historical places. More than half (52.7%) were female travelers and somewhat older travelers (60-69 years) than the members of cluster 2. Almost 56% of the members were in the age between 60-69 years. Most of them were married (75.5%), and had education level at university degree (52.3%). The group members had different occupation backgrounds. However, nearly 43% were retirees and 8% were housewives. The majority of respondents in this cluster had annual incomes less than \$30,000 (40.4%) and between \$30,000 – 44,999 (23.8%). About 64% were the first-time visitors to Thailand.

## CLUSTER 2: HOLIDAY AND LEISURE SEEKERS

Travelers belonging to this segment represented 35% of the total samples (n=153). The members of this cluster were eager to get away from their ordinary environment and busy lives (based on Table 4). They tended to enjoy holidays and vacations overseas. They considered Thailand as a good place for overseas vacation with a variety of tourist attractions and reasonable prices of goods and services. They traveled to Thailand to enjoy and experience a variety of leisure and holiday experiences such as Thai food, Thai spa and massage, beautiful beaches, entertainment, night life and shopping activities. The majority of this cluster were male travelers and somewhat younger than cluster 1. About 56% were in the age between 55-59 years. Most of them were married (72.8%), and had education at the university level (57.6%). Most of them were still working and had different occupation backgrounds. Nearly 31% had annual incomes in the range of \$30,000 – 44,999, while 27.5% earned income between \$45,000 -59,999, and 24.9% earned less than 30,000. More than half (58.9%) were first-time visitors to Thailand.

As shown in Table 5, significant differences (by chi-square tests) among the socio-demographic variables between the two clusters were found for gender, age, occupations, and annual income. Cluster 1 had a higher proportion of female respondents (52.7%) when compared to cluster 2 (34.8%). However, male respondents represented the majority of cluster 2 (65.2%). For age distribution, people aged 60-69 years appeared to be the majority of cluster 1 (55.5%), while cluster 2 was dominated by younger seniors aged 55 – 59 years (56.1%). For the number of retirees, it appeared that cluster 1 had a higher proportion of retired people (42.5%) than cluster 2 (24.3%). With regard to annual income, it appeared that almost 65% of the members in cluster 1 had annual incomes in the ranges of less than \$30,000 (40.4%) and between \$30,000 – 44,999 (23.8%). However, approximately 59% of cluster 2 earned annual incomes in the ranges of \$30,000 – 44,999 (30.8%) and \$45,000 – 59,999 (27.5%), while only 24.9% earned less than \$30,000.

The results of this study suggest that there are differences among U.S. senior travelers to Thailand based on the importance rating of pull factors (destination attributes). The findings reveal that U.S. senior travelers to Thailand are not homogeneous in their travel preferences and perceptions on the destination attributes of Thailand. The findings show some similarities to previous studies (Cleaver et al., 1999; You & O'Leary, 1999; Horneman et al., 2002) in that there is a diversity of travel preferences and perceived destination attributes/attractions among international senior travelers. This should provide implications for destination marketers, aiming at senior travel market, in the area of product development and marketing programs.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The present study used the theory of push and pull motivations to investigate travel motivations of U.S. senior travelers to Thailand. Based on factor analysis, this study identified three push and four pull factor dimensions. The three push factors were labeled as: (1) 'novelty & knowledge-seeking', (2) 'ego-enhancement', and (3) 'rest & relaxation', while the four pull factors included: (1) 'travel arrangements & facilities', (2) 'cultural & historical attractions', (3) 'shopping & leisure activities', and (4) 'safety & cleanliness'. Among them, 'novelty & knowledge-seeking' and 'cultural & historical attractions' were viewed as the most important push and pull factors influencing U.S. senior travelers to Thailand. By using cluster analysis, this study showed that it is possible to segment U.S. senior travelers to Thailand based on pull motivational factors (destination-based attributes). The two segments were labeled as 'cultural & historical

seekers' and 'holiday & leisure seekers'. The results of the study contribute to the existing literature (i.e. seniors' travel behavior and motivations) to better understand U.S. seniors' travel motivations to visit Asian countries, especially Thailand. The findings are also useful for the destination marketers to develop effective marketing programs to approach this segment.

Zhang and Lam (1999) noted that knowing the importance of push and pull factors perceived by travelers can help destination marketers meet the desired needs of individual travelers. The results of present study can provide useful implications for both policy makers and industry practitioners to effectively design the products and tourism strategies corresponding to the needs and wants of U.S. senior travelers. In order to approach this market, tourism marketers should concentrate on developing the products that can better satisfy customers' travel needs by matching what they want (push factors) and how the destination (pull factors) can offer to meet their needs. Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that there are the differences among U.S. senior travelers to Thailand based on the interests and perceptions of destination attractiveness of Thailand. Instead of viewing one homogeneous market, tourism marketers should develop appropriate marketing strategies to approach each segment. Significant differences in socio-demographic characteristics among the two clusters could help tourism marketers develop most effective marketing strategies to attract each segment such as product development, marketing promotion, and advertising.

Based on the results, it indicated that the members of cluster 1 (cultural & historical seekers), the largest segment identified in this study (65% of the samples), seemed to perceive Thailand's cultural and historical attractions as the major factors drawing them to Thailand. They came to Thailand with the main purpose to see different culture and experience Thai hospitality and local ways of life. The result of the study is similar to You and O'Leary (2000)'s study in that cultural and historical aspects are regarded as the important factors motivating overseas seniors to visit an overseas destination. This implication should be useful for destination marketers who target senior travel market to highlight the cultural tourism, particularly for the design of the tour packages and marketing programs. Based on this finding, this suggests that cultural and historical attractions of Thailand should be developed as the major theme when marketing the U.S. senior travel market. The promotion will be more effective if destination marketers can position Thailand as the land of unique and exotic culture that is different from other nations in the South Asia-Pacific region. The highlight should focus on Thailand's history and its independence from western powers. This phenomenon makes Thailand different from other nations in the region with a unique and attractive culture. Typically, many tour companies offer cultural tours in Bangkok and nearby cities such as Ayutthaya (former capital) or Nakhon Pathom (e.g. visiting cultural villages). To better satisfy this segment and provide a truly experience on cultural and heritage tours of Thailand, tour companies should offer programs to visit the three capitals of Thailand (i.e. Bangkok, Ayutthaya and Sukhothai). The trip will provide travelers with a better understanding of Thais' origin and historical background of the kingdom of Thailand. In addition, visits to associated historic towns in the northern region and tour programs relating to religious tourism (e.g. temple tours, visiting ancient towns) should be included in the tour packages. The tour programs may be also designed to provide travelers with the opportunities to learn and experience Thai hospitality and locals' way of life by visiting local or cultural villages/communities. According to Lehto et al. (2001), older travelers appear to value local cuisine/new food and local crafts/handwork. This suggestion seems to be relevant to the needs of this segment. During the trip, tour companies should provide travelers the opportunities to experience and try a

variety of Thai traditional food and local herbal cuisines. A visit to local villages producing and demonstrating Thai traditional crafts and handiwork is also strongly recommended. The opportunity to try and produce a simple handiwork item could provide a great experience and enjoyment for travelers.

As for the cluster 2 (holiday & leisure seekers), the majority of this segment was repeat travelers; suggesting that the products offered for this segment should be different from the first group. In particular, their main objectives to visit Thailand appeared to focus on travel and leisure activities. For marketing purposes, there is a need to communicate to the 'holiday & leisure seekers' that there are a variety of travel and leisure activities available in Thailand than a typical package tour. As the members of this segment are likely to prefer products that are different from those in segment one, it is suggested that products offered for this group should be focused on leisure and relaxation activities. To satisfy this segment, tour companies should offer several kinds of holiday and leisure products such as ecotourism or nature-based tourism, resort stay (mountain or beach area), island/beach tourism, river/canal excursion, safari trip, shopping, health tourism (e.g. Thai traditional sap and massage, Thai hot spring), and cultural tours. For cultural tours, many of them used to travel to Thailand and they might already have visited several famous cultural and historical places in Bangkok and Ayutthaya. It is suggested that the cultural tours designed for this segment should be different from the first time travelers. In addition to Bangkok and Ayutthaya trips (central region), there are several cultural and historical places/sites throughout the country such as in the north (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Sukhothai, and Phitsanulok), the northeast (Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, and Udon Thani), and the south (Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat). The new programs will broaden travelers' knowledge and understanding about Thailand.

As for the limitations, this study used a convenient sampling method and the results obtained may not be generalized to the overall U.S. senior travelers to Thailand (e.g. FIT travelers). In this study, data were collected on site where the respondents were already in Thailand. The results may not truly reflect their actual motivations to visit Thailand because some factors such as trip experience, perceptions, and attitudes may influence the assessment while the respondents were on the site locations. As this study examined only one single market, the U.S. senior travel market, researchers may conduct a comparative study of international senior travelers to Thailand to provide more meaningful results. It would be more useful to examine travel motivations of U.S. senior travelers in other destinations to compare and cross-validate what this study has found.

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