

The Effects of Travel Motivation on Satisfaction: The Case of Older Tourists

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Abstract

Older tourists have become an increasingly attractive market segment for both tourism businesses and tourist destinations. Specifically, several studies have shown that older tourists tend to travel in off-peak seasons, thus representing an interesting target, especially for destinations willing to reduce seasonality. Destination marketers should strive to understand older tourists' travel motivations and their effect on overall satisfaction with the destination. Based on these premises, this paper investigates the effect of older tourists' travel motivations on overall satisfaction with a mature, highly seasonal destination. A survey was carried out among a sample of 211 older tourists in Sirmione, a destination located on Lake Garda, Italy. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and linear regression. The findings highlight the relationships between four motivations—culture, pleasure-seeking, relaxation, and physical—and overall tourist satisfaction with the destination. In particular, the results indicate that the effects of the four motivations vary markedly depending on the age of the respondents. This study contributes to the literature on older tourist behavior. In addition, the findings may assist both destination managers and tourism operators (such as hoteliers) to position their offerings to intercept the growing demand from older tourists.

Keywords: Older tourists; Seasonal destination; Tourist satisfaction; Travel motivations; Destination marketing

1. Introduction

Population aging has been defined as one of the most important demographic trends of this century (United Nations Population Fund & Help Age International, 2012). Older tourists represent an increasingly attractive market segment for the tourism industry because they are willing to spend more than younger cohorts for quality experiences, have more free time, and are keen to travel in off-peak season (Nimrod & Rotem, 2010; Thompson & Thompson, 2009). Therefore, tourist destinations willing to reduce seasonality and reposition themselves as a less intensive, more quality-oriented type of tourism might address their marketing strategies to this segment.

To improve destination attractiveness, it is important to understand why older tourists travel and how travel motivations affect their satisfaction with the destination. Travel motivation can be described as the expression of a travel need that has become intense enough to stimulate travel (Fodness, 1994; Moutinho, 1987). Both tourism scholars and practitioners have devoted great attention to travel motivations because of their importance in defining tourists' expectations and as drivers of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Crompton, 1979; Sangpikul, 2008). Regarding older tourists in particular, research has emphasized the heterogeneity of this market segment in terms of travel motivations and travel behavior (Vigolo, 2017) and found significant correlations between some of the push and pulls factors (Prayag, 2012). However, little research has been conducted on the relationship between travel motivations and satisfaction with a destination for this specific segment. In addition, while some studies have argued that motivations tend to be stable over time (e.g., Chen & Shoemaker, 2014), others maintain that they tend to evolve and change with aging (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002).

Therefore, this paper intends to fill this gap in the literature by addressing older tourists' travel motivations in relation to a mature, seasonal destination (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). Specifically, it investigates the effect of travel motivations on older tourists' overall satisfaction with the destination. The study was conducted in Sirmione, which is a well-known summertime destination located on Lake Garda, Italy. Based on a structured questionnaire, a survey was conducted among a sample of 211 international tourists aged 60 and older during their stay in Sirmione. Regression analyses were used to explore the relationship between motivations and satisfaction. In addition, two different age groups were compared: those aged 60–69 and those aged 70 years and over. The findings revealed that travel motivations significantly affected overall tourist satisfaction with the destination, with significant differences between the two age groups. The paper is structured as follows. First, a brief literature review provides the conceptual framework for the study. In particular, Section 2.1 outlines the importance of travel motivations in relation to tourists' satisfaction and Section 2.2 delineates the main types of travel motivations that have emerged in studies about older tourists. Next, the methodology of the study is presented, followed by the results, the discussion, and future research directions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 The impact of travel motivation on tourist satisfaction

Several studies have highlighted the relationship between the performance of a destination and the satisfaction level of tourists (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000; Truong, Lenglet, & Mothe, 2017; Salleh, Omar, Yaakop & Mahmmod, 2013). Kozak (2002b) developed a model to benchmark different tourism destinations by customer-driven performance (tourist satisfaction) and to understand the factors behind the high or low performance of each tourism destination.

Tourist satisfaction has been addressed using several perspectives and theories (Kozak, 2000). Among them, one of the most commonly used is the expectation disconfirmation model (Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008; Oliver, 1980). This model suggests analyzing and comparing ex-ante tourists' motivations and their actual satisfaction and dissatisfaction with a destination to derive informative insight (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Motivations behind tourists' decisions to travel have been explored widely in the literature, and a wide range of motivation variables have been identified, and divided into internal, psychological drivers and external drivers related to destination attributes (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977, 1981; Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Uysal & Jurowski, 1993). Kozak (2002a) analyzed the travel motivations of tourists from the same country visiting two different geographical destinations and of tourists from two different countries visiting the same destination. Through this procedure, he developed a tourism motivation model that measures motivation with 14 items grouped into four constructs: culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, and physical.

Wang, Qu, and Hsu (2016) found that travel motivations “influence travelers' cognitive image and cognitive image interacts with affective image to form individuals' expectations toward travel destinations” (p. 58). Their study also noted that travel motivation and advertising had a stronger effect on cognitive image for males than females. Hsu, Cai, and Li (2010) showed that “expectation of visiting an outbound destination has a direct effect on motivation to visit the destination; motivation has a direct effect on attitude toward visiting the destination” (p. 282).

Therefore, the motivations for traveling can be internal and external, and satisfaction and behavioral intentions are affected by travel motivations (Fielding, Pearce, & Hughes, 1992; Mason, Gos, & Moretti, 2016; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991). In addition, satisfaction is a significant antecedent of a tourist's intention to return to a destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Taher, Jamal, Sumarjan, & Aminudin, 2015), in particular, for destinations that are in the mature stage of the life cycle (Nilplub, Khang, & Krairit, 2016). Many studies have analyzed the relationships between travel motivations and tourist satisfaction. Kao, Patterson, Scott, and Li (2008) used importance-performance analysis to investigate the relationship among factors of motivation to visit Australia and the importance and performance of these motivations for Taiwanese visitors. Other studies have shown that the relationship between travel motivations and tourist satisfaction is stronger for certain types of tourism, such as tourism to attend festivals (Lee & Fung, 2013; López-Guzmán, Lotero, Gálvez, & River, 2017), tourism linked to religion and affected by religious (Islamic) norms (Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awais, 2017).

Film tourism (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015), rural tourism (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010), tourism in sun and sand destinations (Prebensen, Skallerud, & Chen, 2010), and dental tourism (Jaapar, Musa, Moghavvemi, & Saub, 2017; Kovacs & Szocska, 2013).

For example, as regards tourism to attend festivals, Lee, Lee, and Wicks (2004) “explored any potential importance of motivation clusters and visitor types as factors of influencing their overall satisfaction based on main and interaction effects” (p. 61). In conclusion, even though the relationship between travel motivation and satisfaction with a destination is well established, there is a need to further explore older tourists’ travel motivations in relation to a mature, seasonal destination.

2.2 Travel motivations for older tourists

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have devoted increasing attention to the older adult travel segment. Population aging is a global phenomenon and is expected to produce profound changes in both social and economic activities, including traveling (United Nations Population Fund & HelpAge International, 2012). However, the literature does not provide a unique definition of older tourists. Various terms and expressions have been used to refer to this segment, including mature travelers, senior tourists, gray or silver tourists, and gray nomads. Chronological age is often used to define older tourists, even though different age thresholds have been applied in different studies. For example, the United Nations (2015) as well as some tourism marketing scholars (Hung et al., 2016; Romsa & Blenman, 1989) have used the age of 60 as a criterion to define older adults.

With respect to the travel motivations of older adults, early research (e.g., Guinn, 1980; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) emphasized the importance of relaxation and seeking. Subsequent studies (e.g., Boksberger & Laesser, 2009; Prayag, 2012; Sangpikul, 2008; Ward, 2014) corroborated the importance of escaping from routine (i.e., resting and relaxing) and exploring in explaining older individuals’ travel behavior. For example, Prayag (2012) found that escape and relaxation predict older tourists’ intentions to revisit a destination.

Other scholars have found that social purposes often represent a travel motivation for older tourists (e.g., Patterson, Pegg, & Mahadevan, 2015). In this regard, You and O’Leary (1999) identified visiting friends and relatives or spending time with family as some of the main travel motivations for older British travelers. Cleaver, Muller, Ruys, and Wei (1999), following the seven most important travel motives, labeled senior tourists as nostalgic, friendlies, learners, escapists, thinkers, status-seekers, or physical, and highlighted how important is to distinguish these different types of senior tourists when developing tourism products. Similar results have emerged in studies conducted in different countries (e.g., Horneman, Carter, Wei, & Ruys, 2002; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Musa & Sim, 2010). For example, Huang and Tsai (2003) explored the travel motivations among older Taiwanese tourists and found that most respondents traveled to relax, to meet people and socialize, or to spend time with their family. Similarly, Musa and Sim (2010) found that older adults in Malaysia were motivated to travel mainly by a desire for social interaction.

In addition, health and well-being have emerged as primary travel motivations for older adults in several studies (e.g., Horneman et al., 2002; Kim, Wei, & Ruys, 2003; Lee & Tideswell, 2005). For instance, Kim et al. (2003) found that for the over 50s market in Australia, health and well-being were among the most important travel motivations. Specifically, literature focusing on wellness tourism has shown that older tourists want to combine the benefits of health resorts and spas with recreational facilities (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Conversely, in a recent study about the travel motivations of European baby boomers, Borges Tiago, de Almeida Couto, Gomes Borges Tiago and Costa DiasFaria (2016) found that health and well-being were only secondary motivations, and sun and beach, social interaction, and experiencing nature adventures were the main travel motivations for baby boomers.

Although to a lesser degree, some scholars have also highlighted the role of learning as a travel motivation for older tourists. Jang and Wu (2006) found that “knowledge-seeking” was the most important motivation of Taiwanese older tourists, in particular, women. In addition, Sie, Patterson, and Pegg (2016) found that educational and cultural touristic experiences have a significant impact on the well-being of older tourists. Self-fulfillment and self-enhancement have also emerged as a travel motivation for older tourists (Jang & Wu, 2006; Lu, Hung, Wang, Schuett, & Hu, 2016). Specifically, in a study conducted among French retirees, Le Serre and Chevalier (2012) found that the importance of self-actualization as a travel motivation was increased. Hence, as tourists grow older, they tend to travel to reduce the gap between their actual self-concept and their ideal self-concept.

Interestingly, some studies have also revealed that older tourists' travel is motivated by the desire to play sports and engage in physical activities (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009; Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012), thus extending Guinn's (1980) results. Religious or spiritual purposes are in general considered less important travel motivations among older tourists (Jang & Wu, 2006; Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012; Ward, 2014). In addition, a few scholars have found that older tourists tend to travel for nostalgic reasons, that is, to revisit places that arouse positive memories from their past (Cleaver Sellick, 2004; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

A recent study (Lu et al., 2016) conducted among older Chinese tourists showed that travel motivation mediates the relationship between time orientation (i.e., being focused more on the present or on the future) and travel intention. Specifically, present-time orientation is associated with sensation-seeking and self-fulfillment travel motivations, whereas future-time orientation is associated with self-fulfillment and knowledge enhancement.

From the literature review, a great variety of travel motivations have emerged, to the extent that travel motivations have also been used in segmentation studies (e.g., Alén, Losada, & de Carlos, 2015; Carneiro, Eusébio, Kastenholz, & Alvelos, 2013; Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012). Based on a study conducted among a sample of older tourists in Thailand, Batra (2009) showed that older tourists are far from a homogeneous, conservative market. In a different study, Le Serre and Chevalier (2012) clustered French retirees into four groups: relaxed intellectual senior travelers, knowledge hunter senior travelers, hesitating, non-intellectual and non-sportive senior travelers, and active and open-minded senior travelers. While the first segment is motivated mainly by intellectual and knowledge factors, the last one is motivated to travel by the desire to discover new places and play sports. Faranda and Schmidt (2000) recommended using multiple segmentation models to increase the effectiveness of segmentation strategies and support strategy formulation. To conclude, the literature analysis has shown that a great variety exists in travel motivations for older tourists. However, there is a need to further explore the relationship between motivation and satisfaction with the destination for this specific segment.

3. Methods

A survey was conducted among 211 older visitors in Sirmione, a typical summertime tourism destination on Lake Garda, Italy. Sirmione is a well-established, mature, tourist destination subject to high seasonality of tourist flows. Using the tourism area life cycle model (Butler, 1980, 2004), Sirmione is situated between the development stage and the consolidation stage (Simeoni, Cassia, & Ugolini, 2016): the area's economy is largely dependent on tourism and there are still positive growth rates, although they are no longer particularly remarkable. In fact, in 2016 Sirmione registered 383,166 arrivals and 1,288,690 overnight stays (<http://turismoweb.provincia.brescia.it/statistiche/index.php>) and both arrivals and overnight stays increased only slightly over the preceding decade, with the number of international tourists progressively overtaking that of national tourists. Specifically, foreign tourists accounted for 64.27% of the arrivals and 72.89% of the overnight stays, and Germany was the main tourism source country. The number of same-day visitors is also remarkable in Sirmione, which attracts visitors from other destinations in the Lake Garda area as well as cities such as Verona. Sirmione is a tourism destination that developed around thermal treatments, and, traditionally, people have visited Sirmione in order to relax. Tourism in Sirmione is characterized by a high level of seasonality. Arrivals and overnight stays are concentrated in the period from April to October. For example, in 2016, tourism arrivals were 262,453 in August and only 13,359 in January.

Data were collected in two waves during the peak seasons: from August to September 2015 and from April to September 2016. Visitors were approached by interviewees in several areas of Sirmione and asked to complete a questionnaire. Overall, 706 questionnaires were collected; of these, 211 were completed by people aged 60 or over, and thus were considered suitable for the purpose of this paper. Of the 211 participants, 13 were same-day visitors and the others were tourists. The questionnaire included measures of tourist motivations and tourist satisfaction, as well as several questions related to aspects such as the respondents' nationality and other demographic details, type of accommodation, length of stay in Sirmione, and number of prior stays. Tourism motivations were measured through the 14 items developed by Kozak (2002a), who grouped motivations into four constructs: culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, and physical. Respondents were asked to rate each motivation on a seven-point scale, with extremes being 1 = very unimportant and 7 = very important. Satisfaction with the destination was measured on a seven-point scale with extremes being 1 = completely unsatisfied and 7 = totally satisfied. Finally, participants' intention to revisit Sirmione in the next two years were measured using a seven-point scale, with extremes being 1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely.

Data analysis was conducted through the following procedure. First, we ran a principal component factor analysis to check the validity of the measures of the four motivation constructs. We then performed a linear regression that included the four motivation constructs as the independent variables and satisfaction as the dependent variable. The linear regression was then re-estimated for two subsamples based on the age groups of the respondents: those aged 60 to 69 and those aged 70 and over.

4. Results

As shown in Table 1, respondents were mainly female in the 60–69 age range. Of the 211 participants, 157 were retired, and they generally had an average self-perceived economic status. As regards nationality, 86 were domestic visitors, and Germany and the United Kingdom were the most important foreign markets. About two-thirds of the tourists were staying at a hotel with a length of stay that in the vast majority of cases exceeded seven days. Finally, about three-quarters of the tourists who completed the questionnaire had already been in Sirmione before.

Table 1. Profiles of the participants

Dimension	Items	Frequencies	Percent
Gender	M	91	43.1%
	F	120	56.9%
Age	60-69	134	63.5%
	70-79	62	29.4%
	80+	15	7.1%
Occupation	Retired	157	74.4%
	Housekeeper	14	6.6%
	Self-employed	10	4.7%
	Manager	9	4.3%
	Employed	21	10.0%
Economic status (self-perception)	Low	5	2.4%
	Enough to cover costs and live daily life respectably	101	47.8%
	Above the average level	57	27.0%
	Largely above the average level	16	7.6%
	Prefer not to answer	32	15.2%
Country of origin	Italy	86	40.8%
	Germany	45	21.3%
	United Kingdom	37	17.5%
	Netherlands	15	7.1%
	Denmark	9	4.3%
	Austria	4	1.9%
	Switzerland	4	1.9%
	Ireland	3	1.4%
Others	8	3.8%	
Type of accommodation in Sirmione*	Hotel	131	66.2%
	Tourist resort	4	2.0%
	Apartment	15	7.6%
	Camping	17	8.6%
	Caravan parks	24	12.1%
	Others	7	3.5%
Length of stay in Sirmione*	2-7 days	56	28.3%
	8-14 days	81	40.9%
	15-21 days	34	17.2%
	More than 21 days	27	13.6%
Number of previous stays in Sirmione*	0	56	28.3%
	1	23	11.6%
	2	19	9.6%
	3	12	6.1%
	4	12	6.1%
	5-10	32	16.2%
	11-20	27	13.6%
	>20	17	8.5%

* Questions answered only by tourists and not by same-day visitors (n=198).

Before investigating the relationship between visitors' motivations and their satisfaction, we conducted a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation to check whether the 14 items suggested by Kozak (2002a) fitted within the four intended motivations (culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, and physical). The results highlighted that two items ("to meet local people" and "to spend time with people they cared deeply about") had high cross-loadings. Therefore, they were excluded from the analysis.

Table 2. The results of Factor Analysis (Varimax rotation)

Item	Factor loading			
	1	2	3	4
Culture ($\alpha=0.74$)				
To increase knowledge of new places	.185	.160	.064	.825
To visit historical and cultural sites	.093	.041	.034	.883
Pleasure-seeking/Fantasy ($\alpha=0.69$)				
To have fun	.805	.132	-.125	.116
To mix with fellow tourists	.618	.199	.221	-.009
To seek adventure	.748	-.197	.103	.233
To get away from home	.658	.325	.173	.067
Relaxation ($\alpha=0.69$)				
To relax	.042	.815	.111	.121
To be emotionally and physically refreshed	.066	.765	-.043	.162
To enjoy good weather	.227	.736	.051	-.064
Physical ($\alpha=0.71$)				
To engage in sports	.162	-.114	.774	-.072
To be active	.098	.022	.853	.037
To get close to nature	-.014	.303	.741	.198
<i>Variance extracted</i>	<i>27.45%</i>	<i>14.58%</i>	<i>13.17%</i>	<i>10.72%</i>

The final results of the factor analysis are summarized in Table 2. Specifically, four factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 emerged as expected and all items loaded on the intended factors. In addition, Cronbach's alpha values were estimated to confirm the reliability of the scales. All four constructs were found to have a Cronbach's alpha value very close to or greater than 0.70, providing evidence that the scales were internally reliable (Cortina, 1993).

With respect to the mean values of the four motivations, Fig. 1 shows that relaxation was by far the most important, with an average rating of 6.20 on a seven-point scale. Cultural motivation received a lower but still high rating (5.25), whereas pleasure-seeking and physical motivation ranked low (respectively 4.26 and 4.02). We also conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate whether the mean values of the four motivations varied depending on the age group to which the respondents belonged (see Table 3). Specifically, we considered the following three age groups: 60–69, 70–79, and 80 and over.

Fig. 1. Mean values of the four motivations.

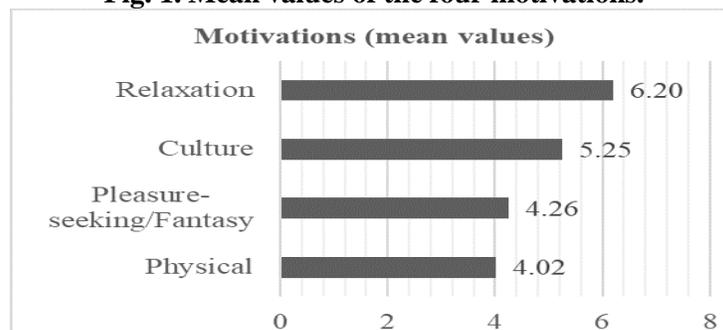


Table 3. Analysis of variance

Motivation (Dependent variable)	Age Group (A)	Age Group (B)	Mean difference (A-B)	F
Culture	60-69	70-79	.27282	10.330***
		80+	2.08532***	
	70-79	60-69	-.27282	
		80+	1.81250***	
	80+	60-69	-2.08532***	
		70-79	-1.81250***	
Pleasure-seeking/Fantasy	60-69	70-79	.52413*	0.2514*
		80+	.47686	
	70-79	60-69	-.52413*	
		80+	-.04727	
	80+	60-69	-.47686	
		70-79	.04727	
Relaxation	60-69	70-79	-.02133	0.088
		80+	-.11569	
	70-79	60-69	.02133	
		80+	-.09436	
	80+	60-69	.11569	
		70-79	.09436	
Physical	60-69	70-79	.53378*	4.411**
		80+	1.08295**	
	70-79	60-69	-.53378*	
		80+	.54917	
	80+	60-69	-1.08295**	
		70-79	-.54917	

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10

The results of the ANOVA highlighted some significant differences. In particular, culture as a motivation was significantly less important for people aged 80 or over than it was for all other respondents. The motivation related to physical aspects was more relevant for people in the 60–69 age range than for any other age group. Pleasure-seeking/fantasy was more important for people between 60 and 69 than for people between 70 and 79. Finally, relaxation was equally relevant for all age groups. Three linear regressions were run: the first considered the entire sample, and the other two were performed on two subsamples, people aged 60–69 and people aged 70 or more.¹ The results for the entire sample (see Table 4) indicate that relaxation was the only motivation significantly related to satisfaction ($\beta = .227, p < 0.01$). As previously noted, relaxation was the most important motivation making participants decide to visit Sirmione. The results of the linear regression analysis were consistent with this previous result because they indicated that the respondents’ satisfaction was related to the destination’s ability to fulfill their need for relaxation.

Table 4. The results of the linear regression analysis

	Entire sample		60-69 age group		70 or over age group	
	Std.Beta	T-value	Std.Beta	T-value	Std.Beta	T-value
(Constant)		88.927		67.867		66,316
Culture	.052	.671	.318**	3.432	-.475**	-4.112
Pleasure-seeking/Fantasy	-.059	-.773	.037	.408	-.235*	-2.065
Relaxation	.227**	2.950	.267**	2.959	.105	.931
Physical	.006	.075	-.018	-.199	.304**	2.616
R ²	.058		.178		.325	

Dependent variable: Satisfaction with the destination

¹Because of the small size of the group of respondents aged 80 and over, it was not possible to run a regression on this groups. Therefore, respondents aged 70–79 and those aged 80 and over were merged into a unique group.

Mean values of satisfaction: 6.24 for the entire sample; 6.17 for the 60-69 age group; 6.36 for the 70 or over age group.

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

However, when considering people aged 60–69 and those aged 70 and over separately, relevant differences emerged from the analysis. For the 60–69 age group, both culture ($\beta = .318$, $p < 0.01$) and relaxation ($\beta = .267$, $p < 0.01$) were strong and positive predictors of satisfaction. In contrast, for the over 70 age group, the only positive and significant predictor of satisfaction was related to physical aspects ($\beta = .304$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, culture ($\beta = -.475$, $p < 0.01$) and pleasure-seeking/fantasy ($\beta = -.235$, $p < 0.05$) had negative effects on satisfaction. Therefore, the satisfaction of visitors belonging to the two age groups was explained by different factors. Gender, perceived economic status and number of previous visits to the destinations were used as control variables in the regression analyses, but the findings did not show any significant effect on satisfaction ($p > 0.5$). Finally, the data collected highlighted a medium-to-high intention to revisit Sirmione in the next two years (on average, 5.53 on a 7-point scale) and revealed that such intention was strongly correlated to the respondents' satisfaction with the destination (Pearson's r was equal to $.307$, $p < .01$).

5. Discussion and implications

The results of this study shed new light on travel motivations and overall satisfaction with the destination for the older tourist segment. Overall, the findings showed that travel motivations, overall satisfaction with the destination, and the impact of travel motivations on satisfaction varied depending on the age group to which older tourists belonged. Therefore, destination managers and tourism operators should not treat older tourists as a unique, homogenous segment when implementing their marketing strategy.

On this point, our study provided some interesting and unexpected results. For example, cultural motivations were positively related to satisfaction with the destination of Sirmione for the 60–69 age group, but they had a negative impact for people aged 70 and over. This finding may suggest that the cultural offering of Sirmione is not consistent with the expectations of tourists aged 70 and over. Following the expectation disconfirmation model, we can hypothesize that when these tourists were driven by strong cultural motivations, they developed high expectations for their stay in Sirmione. However, the disconfirmation of their expectation had a negative impact on their satisfaction.

In addition, while all age groups gave equal importance to relaxation, this travel motivation positively predicted satisfaction only for the younger cohort (60–69 years old). Conversely, relaxation as a motivation to visit Sirmione had no effect on satisfaction for the older age group. Further, for tourists aged 70 and over, physical motivation was the only positive determinant of satisfaction. We might argue that this age group takes for granted the possibility of relaxing at the destination, while valuing the opportunity to be engaged in physical activities while on holiday. This unexpected result differs from previous studies. For example, Littrell, Paige, and Song (2004) found that the older the tourists, the lower their interest in sports. However, as emphasized by Muller and O' Cass (2001), self-perceived age rather than chronological age may better define tourists, their travel motivations, and activities. Specifically, the “young at heart” (i.e., individuals who feel younger than their actual age) are motivated to travel mostly by the desire for physical stimulation, such as playing sports, and have higher expectations; therefore, they are more likely to be disappointed by the lack of these elements at the destination. Thus our findings suggest that destination managers should go beyond a stereotyped image of older tourists and instead address the heterogeneity of this segment with a variety of activities. In this regard, a recent study conducted among Spanish tourists aged 55 and over showed that the availability of sports activities at a destination contributes to increasing older tourists' length of stay (Alén, Nicolau, Losada, & Domínguez, 2014). Finally, this study shows that the intention to revisit Sirmione was strongly correlated to respondents' satisfaction with the destination, thus extending the results of previous studies (Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Taher et al., 2015) to older tourists.

6. Limitations and conclusions

Several limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, the data came from a specific tourist destination. Second, even if the overall sample size was adequate, the number of tourists aged 70–79 and 80 and over was relatively small. In particular, it was not possible to run a regression for the segment of people aged 80 and over. Moreover, other variables not included in this research could have moderated the relationship between travel motivations and satisfaction, such as self-perceived age or self-perceived health.

Although this research contributes to our understanding of the relationships between travel motivations and tourist satisfaction for older tourists, future studies addressing other age groups may provide new insights into these relationships.

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