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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Stimulating the growth of "silver" tourism through the development of relationships and the creation of targeted communications with travellers

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, the population of older individuals is on the rise, bringing about a transformation in the profile of "silver" tourists. These individuals lead active lifestyles, with many still engaged in work, possessing a relatively high level of savings, and demonstrating a willingness to allocate those funds towards travel. The "silver" age tourism segment is experiencing annual growth, underscoring the importance of meticulously studying the requirements, preferences, and limitations of this demographic. Elderly travellers express a keen interest in fostering relationships with travel companies, emphasizing the need to pay attention to this expanding segment by crafting travel products tailored to their needs and leveraging pertinent communication channels. This article elucidates the distinctive features of "silver" age tourism, delving into the needs of these travellers and their preferred communication channels for relationship-building. The study encompasses a market overview spanning European countries, the USA, Asia, and Russia. The conducted survey and cluster analysis revealed the heterogeneity within the "silver" age tourist group, necessitating a meticulous approach in the formulation of marketing strategies by travel companies.

Keywords

"silver" tourism, building relationships, targeted communications, Russia

JEL codes: L83, J14, M31

Introduction

The proportion of older individuals in the global population is steadily increasing, driven by a rise in life expectancy and a decline in fertility rates, a trend observed over the past few decades. In 2020, the global population aged 65 and above reached 727 million, and projections indicate that by 2050, this number will surpass 1.5 billion (UN 2020). This demographic shift poses both an opportunity and a significant challenge for businesses, as this expanding and lucrative consumer segment remains relatively overlooked in many industries. For instance, in the United States, individuals aged 60 and above currently contribute to 70% of the total net income of all Americans, while in Europe, consumer spending within the 60+ segment has outpaced that of individuals under 30, growing at a rate 50% faster over the past two decades (RBC.Trends 2023). Notably, as men generally have a lower life expectancy than women, the consumer segment of the "silver" age is predominantly composed of women (UN 2020).

The demographic landscape in Russia mirrors a global trend marked by a growing proportion of individuals in the "silver" age category — those who have either retired or are poised to retire within the next five years. This worldwide phenomenon is primarily attributed to an increase in life expectancy and a decline in fertility rates. Presently, in economically developed countries, the segment of the population aged over 60 constitutes approximately 22%-24% (Sheresheva & Polyanskaya 2017). This demographic shift implies a simultaneous rise in socio-economic engagement and purchasing power among consumers in the "silver" age group. For businesses, this evolving scenario serves as a growth driver, presenting a new and financially viable consumer segment.

Drawing from the European experience, there is a widespread trend of growth in "silver" age tourism. European pensioners and those approaching retirement actively engage in travel, both within and outside the European Union. According to Eurostat, in 2021, the share of European tourists in the "silver" age category travelling for personal purposes constituted 33% of the total number of European tourists (Eurostat 2021). While this trend may not be as pronounced in Russia currently, given the rising life expectancy and socio-economic activity within this demographic, it is expected to gain momentum in the near future. In order to cater to the evolving needs of this target segment in Russia, it is crucial to understand which travel products need to be developed and offered, as well as how to effectively interact with "silver" age tourists. Currently, many travel companies lack a comprehensive understanding of the specific features required in services for this segment, hindering their ability to provide products that meet the expectations of older travellers. The objective of this study is to explore the needs of the older tourist segment, understand their preferences for tourist products, and assess their interest in establishing relationships with travel companies.

Building relationships with tourists of the "silver" age

Building relationships with consumers involves a series of measures geared towards retaining customers and enhancing their satisfaction with interactions with the company. The ultimate goal is to foster loyalty, encourage repeat purchases, and extend the duration of customer relationships. For long-term relationship building, it is crucial for the company to ensure that its products, services, and customer interactions are convenient for consumers. The process of creating and nurturing successful relationships requires the identification and differentiation of customers, active interaction with them, and the adaptation of business strategies and products accordingly (Peppers & Rogers 2022). To develop a product successfully, it is imperative to comprehend the pains[1] and needs of target consumers, a task that can be achieved through thorough marketing research. This approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also saves time and resources by preventing the creation of irrelevant offers or the utilization of inappropriate communication channels. Special emphasis should be placed on building relationships with older customers, given that they represent a promising and expanding segment (Batra 2009).

Tourists in the "silver" age category encompass individuals aged 50 and above (in some studies, over 65), with the specific age limit influenced by living conditions, average life expectancy, and legally defined retirement age (Kyriakou & Belias 2017). This demographic stands out not only for their increasing financial capacity but also for adopting a lifestyle centered around the enjoyment of travel (van den Berg et al. 2011). Moreover, "silver" tourists exhibit a greater availability of free time for travel and a willingness to embark on longer journeys for extended periods (Littrell et al. 2004). Several studies emphasize the importance of determining age restrictions for this traveller segment based on cognitive rather than solely physical age. Field studies have uncovered disparities between the passport age and cognitive age of respondents (Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2021; Le Serre & Chevalier 2012). In our study, we will categorize individuals over the age of 50 with sufficient income and free time for travel as belonging to the "silver" age tourist group.

Tourism of the "silver" age in the world

Presently, the market for "silver" age tourism is typically treated as an integral component of the overall tourism services market. This approach poses challenges to the analysis of the "silver" age tourism market and its associated indicators. However, drawing insights from various previous studies allows for an examination of the behaviour of "silver" tourists across Europe, America, and Asia. This comparative analysis facilitates the juxtaposition of findings from these regions with the results obtained from the authors' study on the behaviour of Russian tourists.

Studies on older age tourism within the European Union reveal that travelers aged 65 and above constitute 22% of the total tourist population, a figure that rises to 33% when considering trips made for personal purposes in 2021 (Eurostat 2021). In terms of travel habits and motivation, European "silver" age tourists predominantly explore destinations within their own country or the European Union (Eurostat 2021). This demographic primarily funds their travel through personal savings and funds, often without relying on financial assistance from relatives (Santos & Santos 2021). Some may also benefit from government support measures designed to provide financial assistance for organizing tourist trips, contributing positively to "silver" age tourism in Europe.

On average, the duration of tourist trips for European consumers in the "silver" age group is 6.6 nights, compared to an average of 5.5 nights in the 15-64 age segment (Eurostat 2021). Notably, European "silver" age tourists tend to avoid peak tourist seasons, opting for periods of stagnation, typically during spring and autumn. This behaviour makes this group of tourists promising for the entire tourist market as it can help reduce the gap between peak and low tourist seasons (Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2021). The primary motivations for elderly

1 A marketing term meaning knowing the customers' problems, enabling the creation of a product that will solve their problems, and promote it, informing consumers about how the product will make their lives easier

Europeans undertaking tourist trips include relaxation from everyday life, reunions with distant relatives and friends, visits to interesting sights, cultural heritage sites, or natural attractions, as well as the desire to diversify their leisure time (Alén et al. 2014; Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2021).

Several government programs operate in the European region to support elderly and socially vulnerable groups of travellers. These include the "Voucher model" in countries such as France, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, and Romania (also known as the "Vacation Check" program), the "Partner Triangle" model in the UK and Belgium, and the "Destination model" in Spain, Portugal, Argentina, and Chile (Chuvatkin & Gorbatova 2021). Social tourism is a crucial component of social policy in these countries, and in some cases, commercial and public organizations provide financing to reduce the financial burden on the state, as seen in the voucher model and the Partner Triangle model. In Spain, a vacation program for unemployed pensioners and the elderly has been in operation since 2000, aiming to organize tourist trips during the low season. The program provides compensation payments to tour operators offering services to pensioners (Khorosheva 2015).

In the United States, the "silver" age tourist segment constitutes approximately 25% of the American tourist market, with baby boomers alone spending a staggering $157 billion annually on travel (Widmer 2022). American "silver" consumers are characterized as a high-income group, often indulging in premium services and spending substantial amounts on their tourist trips. Statistics reveal that "silver" age tourists in America can afford expenses exceeding $6,000 per trip, a figure that is 20% higher than vacation expenses in other segments. Remarkably, they contribute to approximately 88% of all premium travel services in the country (Widmer 2022). American tourists of the "silver" age typically finance their travel through personal income and savings. Similar to their European counterparts, they choose to travel during low tourist seasons, effectively reducing the gap between peak and low seasons. Planning their trips well in advance, American elderly tourists, on average, embark on personal trips around 45 times a year, both domestically and internationally. However, the majority of "silver" consumers from America exhibit a preference for domestic travel, with only 41% opting for international destinations (Levy 2022; Widmer 2022).

In the United States, weekend tours and cruises are particularly popular among American tourists in the "silver" age demographic, although more traditional formats such as resort holidays, bus and sightseeing tours continue to be in demand. In terms of motivation for travel, the primary reasons cited by American "silver" age tourists include visiting family and friends, diversifying leisure time, taking a break from routine, and exploring various attractions. Loyalty programs are also of interest to American elderly tourists, with many holding loyalty cards from cruise companies, airlines, hotels, and car rental companies (Widmer 2022).

In the Asian region, tourists in the "silver" age category account for approximately 30% of the tourism services market, a percentage that is 5-7% higher than the share of "silver" travellers in Europe and America (Tuo et al. 2022). Asian consumers in the "silver" age group are well-integrated into active social lives due to a culture that values longevity. They prefer group travel and often require the assistance of interpreters. Educational components play a significant role in their choice of tours, and many older Asians have a solid financial foundation for several reasons. First, in Asia, particularly in Japan, consumers of the "silver" age often remain employed beyond retirement age, contributing to a sustained high level of income and savings (Izvestia 2020). This, in particular, explains the fact that Asian silver-age travellers are similar to younger segments in terms of trip duration and timing, as work is a major factor in planning tourist outings when it comes to timing and seasonality (Kim & Kim 2020). Second, the cultural emphasis on collectivism in Asia means that younger generations often provide both financial and non-material support to their elders, contributing to the financial well-being of elderly Asians. Third, the one-child policy in China, in effect until 2016, has influenced the elevated material well-being of older people, although it has also resulted in feelings of loneliness.

Tourists in the "silver" age from Asia often prefer to travel to add variety to their leisure time and experience spiritual satisfaction (Tuo et al. 2022). Similar to Europe, Asia has specific benefits and state support measures for senior tourism. Initiatives such as the "Happy Holidays - Happy Old Age" project launched in China in 2018, which allows retirees to visit one of 15 countries (including Cyprus, the Netherlands, Greece and Egypt) once a year (Rubenstein 2018), or the announcement in May 2023 of vouchers for retirees to attend cultural and tourism events (Xinhua 2023), demonstrate a commitment to making travel easier for seniors. Additionally, the Wellness model of social assistance for the elderly, launched as part of China's "Healthy China" strategy, provides services for healthy aging (Tuo et al. 2022; Dong 2022).

In Asia, tourists in the "silver" age group often choose to travel during peak seasons, but they also frequently embark on short trips during low seasons. The preference for domestic travel is prominent in this segment, with a lesser inclination to venture abroad. When "silver" age tourists from Asia do opt for international destinations, they typically choose neighboring countries and rarely venture far from home. In essence, the majority of overseas travel for Asian "silver" tourists occurs within the borders of the Asian region. The motivations for Asian tourists in the "silver" age group are similar to those in Europe and America, with commonly mentioned factors including visiting attractions, unique natural places, family and friends living far away, and seeking relaxation from routine. Notably, wellness trips are also popular among Asian consumers in the "silver" age, distinguishing them from their counterparts in Europe and America. Asian "silver" age consumers highly value travel and recreation, seeing tourism as a means to diversify their lives, bring joy, and gain new experiences (Tuo et al. 2022).

In Russia, the market for "silver" age tourism is estimated to constitute 10-15% of the total tourism market (Sheresheva& Polyanskaya 2017; Association of Tour… 2019). Over the period from 2014 to 2018, despite some fluctuations, indicators for "silver" age tourism demonstrated an average annual growth of approximately 2%, indicating a consistent and increasing trend in travel among older generations (Association of Tour… 2019). While the incomes of older citizens in Russia are generally lower than those in other developed countries, and they have limited opportunities for long-term financial accumulation, Russian tourists in the "silver" age predominantly rely on their current incomes and assistance from relatives, particularly adult children, when planning trips.

There is a growing emphasis in Russia on creating conditions that foster the development of "silver" age tourism, with contributions from both the public and private sectors, including tourism operators, the hotel industry, airlines, and more (Sheresheva & Polyanskaya 2017; Association of Tour… 2019). For instance, some hotels and hotel chains provide discounts on accommodation for citizens of retirement age (IHG hotel chain, Azov resort complex, and others); airlines offer discounted tickets to "silver" tourists (special Aeroflot fares); museums, galleries, theaters, and other cultural and art institutions often provide discounts for holders of a pension certificate. However, the current support for tourism in the "silver" age segment in Russia is still considered insufficient to achieve benchmarks comparable to other countries.

Russian tourists in the "silver" age category, similar to their foreign counterparts, predominantly favour domestic travel, with most foreign trips being to CIS countries. Within this demographic, there is a notable preference for domestic beach holidays, wellness retreats, sightseeing, and educational tourism. The Southern regions of Russia, including Krasnodar Krai, Crimea, and the North Caucasus, are overwhelmingly popular, constituting 78.5% of travel choices. Rostov Oblast follows with 30.7%, while Moscow and St. Petersburg hold the third position with 16.3% of preferences (SFU 2023). Notably, Russian "silver" tourists often choose destinations within their own region or neighboring regions when planning their trips. Additionally, these tourists frequently opt for rest during the low tourist season, contributing to smoothing fluctuations between high and low seasons in the tourism market.

Among consumers in the "silver" age category, those who live alone show the highest interest in tourist trips, with 25% expressing a desire to travel. For "silver" consumers with adult children living separately, the proportion interested in making tourist trips tends to be 19%. Conversely, within the group of "silver" consumers living with their adult children, 16% express a desire to travel (Association of Tour… 2019). The variation in the percentage of elderly individuals interested in travelling, based on living arrangements, is attributed to the motivations for "silver" age tourists, which revolve around enhancing the diversity of their lives, taking a break from routine, seeking new impressions, and engaging in socialization.

The underdevelopment of the "silver" age tourism market in Russia can be attributed to insufficient government support and a limited number of adapted offers for "silver" tourists. This encompasses tour offers, the organization of resort and leisure activities, as well as conditions suitable for the travel of "silver" tourists, such as transport accessibility, provision of transfer services, and accommodation tailored to their needs. Currently, there is a limited number of offerings in the Russian tourism market that meet the needs of "silver" tourists, and they operate in a small number of cities and regions, hindering industry development.

Another contributing factor to the lag in the Russian "silver" age tourism market compared to other countries is the lack of travel habits among older citizens. The primary form of tourist trips for the current elderly generation during their youth involved hiking trips and local excursions, with occasional vacations in resorts of the former USSR countries. Presently, Russian "silver" age tourists face challenges in undertaking such trips, and geopolitical tensions have further complicated international travel options.

Current support initiatives encompass the identification of a specific category of pensioners eligible for preferential access to sanatorium and resort rehabilitation, financing and support programs designed for tour operators offering specialized tours with preferential benefits for pensioners and preferential travel options on public transport.

The Features of Behaviour of Older Age Customers in Choosing Tourist Products

The behaviour of older tourists exhibits several characteristics that pertain to both product and service requirements, as well as the selection of messages and communication channels. Older tourists predominantly favour resort, cultural and educational, cruise, health and wellness, and event tourism. Specific traits of travellers in this age group include a preference for extended family travel, a wealth of travel experience in youth, loyalty to familiar destinations, repeated trips to favourite places, and a high interest in auto tourism. "Silver" tourists find safety, natural and climatic conditions, historical attractions, quality of service, convenient transport accessibility, and the desire to escape from the hustle and bustle of the city to be the most attractive factors for travel. The most common modes of transport for older tourists, listed in decreasing order of proportion, are bus tours, car travel, and flights (Buzulukova et al. 2022). Older Russian tourists enjoy travelling with family and relatives, good friends, or in a tour group. The primary source of information when choosing a trip for older tourists is the Internet, followed by travel agencies in second place, and acquaintances and friends in third. The availability of timely provision of necessary medical services at the place of stay is a critically important factor for tourists in the "silver" age, as many aspects associated with biological aging require daily attention and treatment (Alén et al. 2014; Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2021).

Most tourists of the "silver" age prefer to spend their holidays in their country of residence, but about a quarter of pensioners travel to other countries. Therefore, another motivator for tourist trips of consumers of the "silver" age is the desire to visit new places, get acquainted with the culture of another country or explore their country and its cultural heritage. An important motivating factor for this group of tourists to travel is the opportunity to temporarily abandon everyday routine worries and enjoy peace and quiet.

Most tourists of the "silver" age prefer to spend their holidays in their country of residence, but approximately a quarter of pensioners choose to travel to other countries. Another motivating factor for tourist trips among consumers of the "silver" age is the desire to explore new places, acquaint themselves with the culture of another country, or delve into their own country's cultural heritage. An important motivating factor for this group of tourists is the opportunity to temporarily escape from everyday routine concerns and savor moments of peace and tranquility.

When selecting a travel destination, consumers of the "silver" age primarily rely on personal experiences and desires. Factors such as dreams of visiting a specific country or a desire to see landmarks described in a book or film can play a decisive role. Additionally, the opinions of family and friends contribute significantly to their decision-making process. Spouses, family members, friends, and close relatives often accompany tourists of the "silver" age. Furthermore, the distance between family members often serves as a motivating factor for this group of tourists. Some "silver" consumers choose vacation spots where their children, grandchildren, and other immediate relatives reside, combining family reunions with the opportunity to explore new places and attractions (Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2021).

When selecting travel products, the primary barriers for older travellers include financial aspects, health problems, a lack of travel companions, and inadequate transport links. Additionally, the perceived security of a destination may serve as a barrier to visiting a particular place for tourist purposes. The duration of trips for older travellers generally does not exceed the duration of trips for younger segments. However, a key distinction lies in the preference of consumers in the "silver" age for higher-quality accommodations (Alén et al. 2014; Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2021).

Contrary to stereotypes, consumers of the "silver" age actively utilize Internet resources to meet their needs. For instance, older individuals primarily use search engines to find answers to their questions or to read news and articles on topics that interest them (Sheresheva & Polyanskaya 2017; RBC.Trends 2023). Overall, consumers in the "silver" age tend to comprehend lengthy textual materials better than younger travellers and are less susceptible to banner blindness[1] (RBC.Trends 2023). They frequently engage with social networks, and online purchases on marketplaces and the Internet, in general, are relevant and appealing to them. During the pandemic, this age group increased their online spending by 49% compared to previous periods, and this trend has persisted based on the results of several studies

1 Banner blindness is a user's perception of information on the Internet, in which he does not pay attention (does not perceive, does not see) to elements of the web interface similar to advertising (Alfimtsev & Khaet 2014).

(DHL 2022). It is essential to note that consumers of the "silver" age often opt for goods in online stores but make their actual purchases at physical points of sale to ensure the quality of the products (RBC.Trends 2023). Consumers in the "silver" age actively pursue discounts and engage with loyalty programs (DHL 2022; RBC.Trends 2023), demonstrating a preference for the best products and services that offer a balance between price and quality.

Despite the active engagement of "silver" consumers with society and Internet technologies, it is crucial to employ large fonts and buttons to facilitate the ordering system for goods (RBC.Trends 2023). Additionally, considerations should be made for age-related visual impairments that may affect the perception of textual materials designed for younger audiences. To address this, increasing the size of visual elements and enhancing their contrast is advisable (Tréguer 2002). The 50+ consumer group exhibits variations in health status and cognitive age, emphasizing the importance of tailoring communication of value propositions to suit these diverse characteristics. Statistics reveal that one-third of "silver" age consumers experience age-related hearing impairment. Therefore, when planning marketing communications, it is advisable to use a lower sound frequency and increase the volume. Many consumers in this age group express dissatisfaction with video advertising, citing its often rapid and incomprehensible nature. To address this, consider lengthening videos and emphasizing informational content (Tréguer 2002). Marketing materials targeting "silver" consumers should depict older individuals without discrediting their age characteristics. The focus should shift from highlighting the problems of the audience to promoting positive emotions and the potential for new experiences that consumers of the "silver" age can enjoy when interacting with the offered product or service.

A field study was conducted to gather up-to-date information on the behaviour of "silver" age tourists, their requirements for tourist products, and their preferred methods of building relationships.

Research methodology and data analysis

In-depth interview and survey methods were employed to gather primary information. The interviews aimed to explore the behaviour and attitudes of older tourists towards the selection of travel companies and services, laying the foundation for questionnaire development. The questionnaire comprised four distinct blocks: motivations for recreation and requirements for tourist products, criteria for choosing a tour, internet usage patterns, and preferred channels of interaction.

In March-April 2023, the authors conducted 15 interviews using both face-to-face and online formats, with recordings made with the respondents' permission. The data was subsequently analyzed through content analysis. The respondents included 9 women and 6 men aged 52 to 72 years, with 10 currently employed, and 11 living with a spouse. The majority of respondents expressed a preference for a resort holiday (12 out of 15) and highlighted the importance of having a leisure component in their travel plans (8 out of 15).

The primary purposes of the trip for respondents were to take a break from routine (12 out of 15) and seek new impressions (10 out of 15). Regarding trip duration, 10 out of 15 preferred to travel for one to two weeks, and they generally like to plan their vacations in advance. A majority of 11 out of 15 respondents are not constrained by seasonality, choosing to travel whenever they can. Notably, 12 out of 15 respondents indicated that they read articles and reviews on the Internet before embarking on a vacation, relying on this information source for trip planning. Additionally, 7 out of 15 interviewees have one or more preferred travel companies whose services they regularly utilize

When comparing destinations, the majority (13 out of 15) of the interviewees prioritize comfortable living conditions, with a significant reliance on the location of hotels, resorts, or apartments (12 out of 15). Notably, 6 out of 15 respondents emphasized the importance of peace and tranquility in the hotel and its surroundings, along with convenient transport links to the place of stay. In terms of purchasing travel products and services, a significant portion (9 out of 15) prefer the convenience of online platforms, particularly those offering an "all-included" system. Interestingly, 9 out of 15 interviewees are unaware of state support measures for tourism in the "silver" age, with the rest being mostly informed about subsidized air tickets for pensioners and attempting to take advantage of such opportunities. A common sentiment among respondents (9 out of 15) is the perception of weak government assistance in this sector. Many express a desire for increased material support, expanded proposals and measures, as well as improved information dissemination to ensure more pensioners are aware of available opportunities.

As part of the quantitative stage, the authors conducted a survey in April-May 2023. A total of 324 respondents were interviewed, with 68 of them under the age of 50. Twenty-five participants had not travelled at least once in the last 2 years, and consequently, their questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. Alongside screening questions pertaining to age and recent travel experiences, the questionnaire covered various blocks, including socio-demographic details, motivation for recreation, choice of travel products, behavioural characteristics during the search for travel products on the Internet, and preferred channels of interaction with a travel company. The questionnaire comprised a total of 33 questions.

The survey was conducted using both online platforms, specifically Google Forms, and offline methods. The sample profile is presented in Table 1.

To process the data from the quantitative stage, we utilized frequency and cluster analysis. Through frequency analysis, we identified the interrelationships between socio-demographic and other characteristics of respondents and their preferred communication channels. Ward's cluster analysis, based on the behavioural characteristics of respondents, helped identify relevant channels for building relationships within each cluster (for a detailed description of clusters, refer to Appendix 1).

Respondents identified the main purposes of tourist trips as follows (participants could choose multiple options): 74% for gaining new experiences, 48% for being in nature, 41% for visiting attractions and cultural heritage sites, and 35% for engaging in a variety of leisure activities. Regarding preferred recreation formats, the majority (61%) of "silver" age tourists prefer trips that combine a resort holiday with a leisure component. Sightseeing tours took second place in popularity, with 44% of respondents choosing them.

Approximately 50% of "silver-age" tourists prefer to plan key vacation moments, such as buying air tickets and choosing tours, in advance. The remaining decisions are made spontaneously. Interestingly, 52% of "silver-age" tourists express readiness to purchase last-minute packages at a discount. About 35% of respondents embark on tourist trips several times a year, while 30% opt for an annual vacation. Nearly half (47%) of "silver" tourists plan their vacations several months in advance. Regarding the duration of tourist trips, 70% of older tourists have trips lasting from one to two weeks. The most popular season for making tourist trips is summer, with 65% of respondents preferring to relax during this time of the year. Additionally, 60% of respondents choose autumn for their holidays, while only 39% prefer winter and spring. When it comes to travel companions, 60% of respondents prefer to travel with a spouse, and 56% with children.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Parameters	Frequency	In %
	50-55	76	33%
	56-60	62	27%
	61-65	31	13%
	66-70	32	14%
	71-75	25	11%
	76-80	4	2%
	Over 80	1	0%
Gender	Male	54	23%
	Female	177	77%
Income level	There is not enough money now even for the purchase of food	4	2%
	Right now there is only enough money to buy food	8	3%
	There is enough money to purchase the necessary food and clothing, but larger purchases have to be postponed	87	38%
	Buying durable goods (TV, refrigerator) does not cause difficulties, but buying a car, or a summer house is currently unaffordable	87	38%
	At the moment we can buy a car, a summer house	45	19%
Who do you live with (there are several possible answers)	I live alone/alone	34	15%
	I live with my spouse	97	42%
	I live with adult children over the age of 18	37	16%
	I live with children under the age of 18	62	27%
	I live with my grandchildren	1	0%

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of their own research

In choosing a travel agency, tourists of the "silver" age rely on information about favourable prices for vouchers (50%), recommendations from acquaintances (46%), reviews, news, and articles about the company on the Internet (43%), as well as the company's reputation in the market (40%). The majority (86%) of "silver" tourists read reviews and articles on the Internet before purchasing travel products and services, with more than half expressing trust in them.

When selecting and purchasing travel services, approximately 30% of respondents prefer to use the Internet, while another 32% utilize both the Internet and physical points of sale on a case-by-case basis. About 21% of "silver" travellers are comfortable using both channels when organizing a single tourist trip — for example, booking a hotel online and buying tickets at the box office. The remaining 17% prefer to choose and buy travel products and services exclusively through physical points of sale. Among the "silver" tourists who visit the offices of tour operators when organizing their trips, the primary factors considered are favourable prices for vouchers (46%), friendly staff (42%), and a convenient catalogue of services provided (32%) at physical points of sale.

In terms of factors influencing the choice of a particular destination, the most crucial considerations for "silver" age tourists are comfortable living conditions (82%), picturesque nature (75%), safety at the place of stay (74%), and the availability of interesting cultural programs and attractions (70%). When it comes to purchasing travel-related products and services, 82% of "silver" age tourists prefer buying air tickets via the Internet, 70% book hotels, hostels, and apartments online, 65% purchase train tickets online, and 48% buy tickets for events or tours at the place of stay. Only 6% of "silver" tourists indicated that they would not prefer buying any products or services related to the tourism sector via the Internet. The most popular messengers for the study group include WhatsApp[1] (81%), Telegram (71%), and YouTube (35%). Instagram[2] (29%), Viber (26%), and VKontakte (22%) are less popular but still in demand. "Silver" tourists often use messengers and social networks for communicating with friends and relatives (83%), scrolling through the news feed (74%), viewing photo and video content (44%), and exploring posts in thematic communities (34%).

When displaying ads in search engines, 17% study the advertising offer but do not click on it. Among "silver" tourists, 21% click on advertisements leading to the company's website if the ads are located on information sites. Additionally, 22% of "silver" travellers seek answers to questions about interesting offers through the company's open sources. Travellers prefer promotional offers with transparent, understandable content (65%) and advertisements that provide a direct link to the company's website or specify details for contacting the company (60%). "Silver" travellers express interest in interacting with tour operators, with 70% of respondents answering this question affirmatively. Regarding preferred channels of interaction, 30% would like to follow the company's news on social networks, 29% prefer receiving emails, 27% follow the news through the company's website, and 22% receive messages through messengers. Simultaneously, 68% emphasized the need for polite treatment by representatives of the travel company, while 58% stressed the importance of using convenient communication channels.

The majority of respondents (75%) are unaware of government support measures for older tourism, and an even larger percentage (91%) do not utilize support measures when organizing their trips.

Next, a cluster analysis was conducted, resulting in the identification of 5 clusters of respondents: mass tourists restoring health, adventurers, organized tourists, researchers. A detailed description of the selected clusters is provided in Appendix 1; here, we will focus only on the distinctive features and peculiarities of building communications with them.

Representatives of the "*mass tourists*" cluster most often reside with a spouse and minor children. This group of "silver" tourists embarks on trips to gain new experiences, take a break from routine, visit interesting sights and cultural heritage landmarks, as well as enjoy natural surroundings. For such tourists in the "silver" age, the decisive factors when choosing a destination are comfortable living conditions, picturesque nature, safety at the place of stay, and convenient transport links. These tourists utilize the Internet for information searches, reading news, online shopping and communication, with a preference for using

1 Belongs to the Meta company, which is banned in the territory of the Russian Federation
2 Belongs to the Meta company, which is banned in the territory of the Russian Federation

the Internet on mobile devices. Members of this cluster frequently make online purchases, ranging from several times a month to several times a week, showing interest in buying air and train tickets, as well as booking hotels online.

When responding to advertisements on social networks and messengers, they seek answers to their questions in the company's open sources. Additionally, "silver" tourists from this cluster rely on the company's open sources when engaging with advertisements on search engines (from both mobile and stationary devices), on information sites, and on marketplaces. When encountering advertising on video hosting sites, they study the offer but do not click on it. This cluster prefers interacting with the company beyond the process of choosing and purchasing travel services. They express a preference for receiving notifications through the application, subscribing to the company's social media accounts, receiving messages in messengers, and independently exploring the company's website. For these consumers, courtesy (politeness), convenient communication channels, and personalized content are particularly important when interacting with a tour operator.

Representatives of the "*Restoring health*" cluster often live alone or with a spouse and adult children. They go on vacation to improve their health and gain new impressions, making medical and wellness tourism, either in its pure form or with a leisure component, their preferred recreation formats. Planning is essential for them, and they typically plan their trips in the long term — six months to a year in advance. These tourists usually favour the "all-included" holiday format and rely on articles and reviews on the Internet before travelling, placing trust in them. When choosing and buying travel products or services, these tourists equally use both the Internet and physical points of sale. However, in offices, they particularly value favourable prices for vouchers, friendly staff within their age group, clean and bright premises, and the ability to pay in various ways. Among all the clusters, this one is the most active in viewing and downloading entertainment content.

They use both mobile and stationary devices to access the Internet. While they do not make online purchases very frequently — on average, once every few months — they express a willingness to buy tickets for events and tours at their destination, as well as air tickets and vouchers from tour operators via the Internet. This group tends to overlook outdoor, television, and radio advertising. However, when they come into contact with print advertising, they study the advertising offer. Ads with transparent and understandable content attract them. This cluster is more focused on interacting with the tour operator than any other. Their preferred channels in this case include the company's social media accounts, the company's website, mailing lists, and notifications in the company's application. In their collaboration with the tour operator, these travellers value polite treatment from the company's representatives and appreciate the availability of interesting information articles on the site.

Representatives of the "*Adventurers*" cluster mostly live alone or with their spouse. They embark on vacations to seek new experiences, enjoy nature, explore interesting sights, and diversify their leisure time. These tourists prefer intensive relaxation, opting for a resort holiday with a leisure component, sightseeing tours, and active recreation. They enjoy spontaneous getaways but can plan key points of the vacation; moreover, they are willing to purchase last-minute deals at discounted prices. Adventurous tourists take several vacations a year, and their trips typically last no more than two weeks. Among all the clusters, this group engages with forums and blogs the most.

These tourists make online purchases several times a month and express a willingness to buy air tickets, train tickets, book hotels, and purchase tickets for events and excursions at the place of stay via the Internet. They place more trust in advertising channels such as social networks, search engines, information sites, and marketplaces. Compared to all other clusters, this group is less interested in interacting with travel companies outside the process of obtaining travel services. However, they consider studying content on the company's website, receiving messages in messengers, and following the company's social media accounts as appropriate forms of interaction. Courtesy (politeness), convenient communication channels, and the availability of interesting informational articles on the site are considered the most important factors in such interactions for this cluster.

Representatives of the "*Organized*" cluster live with their spouse and minor children. They embark on tourist trips to seek new experiences and relax from the routine. The preferred recreation formats for this cluster include resort holidays in their pure form or with a leisure component, as well as sightseeing tours. They prefer to plan their vacation in advance, with planning timelines ranging from several months to a month or less. These tourists typically take trips once a year, lasting 1-2 weeks, and choose autumn and winter for their holidays. Members of this cluster are less inclined to interact with a travel company outside the process of choosing a travel service. However, they find it appropriate to interact through mailing lists, content on the site, company accounts on social networks, and messaging in messengers. Convenient communication channels, the courtesy (politeness) of company representatives, and the availability of interesting informational articles on the site are considered key factors in their interaction with travel companies

Representatives of the identified cluster "*Researchers*" mostly live with their spouse. They embark on tourist trips to gain new experiences, see interesting sights, and take the opportunity to be in nature. Optimal recreation formats for them include a resort holiday with a leisure component, active recreation, and sightseeing tours. They express willingness to purchase last-minute deals at a reduced price and prefer planning key moments of their vacation in advance while making the rest of the decisions spontaneously. These tourists prefer planning their holidays independently. This cluster is interested in buying air tickets, making room reservations, purchasing train tickets, tickets for events and tours at the place of stay, as well as bus tickets via the Internet. Representatives of this cluster positively perceive advertising in search engines with a clear, transparent advertising offer. Members of this cluster would like to interact with the company outside the process of choosing and purchasing travel services. The most convenient channels for them are mailing lists and the company's social media accounts. Key factors in such interaction include the courtesy of the company's representatives and the materials sent, personalization of content, and the availability of convenient communication channels.

Differences in preferred types of tourist trips and recreation, as well as in preferred advertising channels and interaction channels, identified during the description and comparison of clusters, demonstrate the heterogeneity within the segment of "silver" tourists in terms of their behaviour and preferences. This underscores the necessity to identify individual clusters and tailor relationships with each of them according to their unique needs.

Conclusions based on the results of the study

Based on the conducted research, several features of the behaviour of Russian tourists in the "silver" age group have been identified, which should be considered when creating a tourist product and conducting marketing campaigns. Older Russian tourists embark on trips with the aim of gaining new experiences, and the most relevant vacation formats for the majority of "silver" tourists are resort holidays with a leisure component and sightseeing tours. This is further supported by the fact that 70% of "silver" travellers consider the availability of interesting cultural programs and attractions when choosing a destination. Therefore, to meet the expectations of the target audience, travel companies should prioritize the inclusion of tours, events, and cultural heritage sites in their tourist offerings

Approximately half of the "silver" travellers embark on tourist trips with the intention of enjoying nature, often selecting their place of stay based on these preferences. However, considering the unique biological characteristics of "silver" tourists and the challenges presented by the Russian landscape, which may involve difficulties in reaching places with picturesque nature, travel companies should explore the possibility of creating organized tourist trips to nature, ensuring comfortable transportation for this consumer group. Given that tourists in the "silver" age prefer the "all included" format, offers featuring tours with this type of recreation organization are particularly relevant for them.

Most "silver" tourists prefer vacationing in summer and autumn, typically once or several times a year. Additionally, these travellers favour planning key aspects of their vacation well in advance, often several months before the trip. Leveraging these insights, travel companies could potentially boost the percentage of sales of travel products and services by actively sending offers to "silver" tourists from mid-winter to mid-summer — just a few months before the proposed trip dates. Considering the interest of "silver" age tourists in last-minute deals, tour operators could tailor offers that align with the preferred seasons and travel planning timelines for this demographic.

The majority of "silver" tourists prefer to take the initiative and plan their trips independently, often with spouses and children as their travel companions. Consequently, marketing campaigns should not only target older travellers but also their adult children, who frequently play a role in initiating trips for their elderly parents.

When selecting a travel company, most "silver" tourists prioritize favourable prices for vouchers. Cluster analysis revealed that the price factor is crucial for each of the analyzed clusters. Therefore, the pricing of vouchers for older tourists should be positioned in the middle range or slightly below average to align with the preferences identified during the cluster analysis.

The majority of "silver" tourists actively engage with reviews and articles on the Internet, covering aspects such as travel companies, tours, hotels, and destinations, demonstrating a high level of trust in these online channels. When collaborating with travel operators, "silver" travellers also emphasize the importance of having engaging and informative articles on the company's website. Therefore, companies offering travel products or services to this demographic should consider updating the information sections on their websites. This indicates that articles or other informational content related to places of interest, attractions, and tourist destinations would be well-received among this age group if presented through convenient communication channels. "Silver" age tourists place significant importance on the solid, stable, and reliable reputation of travel companies, valuing public opinion from family, friends, acquaintances, as well as online articles and reviews. As such, travel companies should prioritize and focus on building and maintaining a positive reputation in their activities.

In essence, when selecting and purchasing travel products and services, "silver" consumers utilize both online platforms and physical points of sale. Consequently, when engaging with this consumer segment, it is imperative to develop strategies for both channels. "Silver" tourists who prefer physical points of sale highlight the significance of friendly staff, underscoring the importance of high-quality personal communication in building relationships with this demographic. During interviews, nearly all "silver" travellers emphasized the importance of staff professionalism, a willingness to assist and address client concerns, as well as personal, face-to-face communication, as opposed to communication through scripted dialogues. Therefore, to establish strong connections with "silver" tourists, it is crucial to provide staff training that focuses on enhancing service quality for this demographic at physical points of sale.

Most "silver" age travellers are inclined to purchase travel products online, with popular categories including air and train tickets, accommodation reservations, and tickets for events and tours at the destination. To accommodate the biological age characteristics of this consumer segment, travel company websites should be adapted accordingly. This involves incorporating large buttons with clear actions, user-friendly and transparent purchase systems, and enhancing visual elements by increasing their size and contrast. Given that "silver" tourists predominantly use mobile phones and tablets for internet access, it becomes imperative to ensure the mandatory adaptation of travel company websites to the mobile format.

Print advertising holds more appeal for "silver" tourists compared to outdoor, television, and radio advertising. Many respondents, during interviews, mentioned their preference for reading travel magazines, especially during journeys on airplanes and trains. In the realm of online promotion, advertising on social networks, messengers, search engines, marketplaces, selling sites, and information sites garners a more substantial response. These platforms should be the focal points for advertising campaigns targeting this demographic. Tourists of the "silver" age are drawn to advertising that features understandable content and facilitates direct interaction with the company. Hence, it is crucial to tailor advertising materials to the preferences of this consumer group by simplifying the visual elements, increasing text contrast, and creating longer posts and articles to provide a detailed overview of the offerings.

At present, the majority of "silver" age tourists are unaware of and do not utilize government assistance programs available for organizing their trips, despite their existence. To address this gap, there is a need for information support to enhance awareness of existing government measures and benefits. This crucial information can be disseminated through travel company websites.

A significant portion of respondents expressed interest in interacting with travel companies beyond the process of selecting and purchasing a tour, especially if this communication includes informative content or personalized offers. Preferred communication channels include following company news on social networks, receiving emails, and messaging through messengers. Among "silver" age tourists, popular platforms include WhatsApp[1], Telegram, YouTube, Instagram[2], Viber, and VKontakte. Therefore, when establishing channels, accounts, and newsletters on social networks and messengers, these platforms should be prioritized.

Consumers in three out of five clusters frequently listen to music on social networks, making audio advertising on these platforms potentially effective. It's essential to consider the nuances of biological aging, such as using a lower sound frequency and increasing volume for optimal engagement.

Conclusion

The study delved into the intricacies of "silver" age tourism in Russia, exploring the preferences and demands of elderly tourists regarding travel products, along with the dynamics of relationship-building and communication. This demographic encompasses in-

1 Belongs to the Meta company, which is banned in the territory of the Russian Federation
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dividuals aged 50 and above who actively participate in social activities, leverage online resources, and engage in online purchases. They prioritize face-to-face interactions with company representatives and appreciate personalized marketing communications. Despite a strong interest in travel, financial constraints, health concerns, and difficulties in finding suitable travel companions and transportation persist as common obstacles for this group.

The development of the Russian market for "silver" tourism lags behind its foreign counterparts, attributed to factors such as inadequate government support, lower income levels, limited travel readiness among the older generation, and a scarcity of travel options tailored to this age group. A comparative analysis of Russian and foreign travellers reveals distinctive features, including a lower proportion of "silver" travellers in our country compared to European countries, the United States, and Asian nations such as China and Japan. Moreover, there exists a notable lack of awareness among Russian travellers about the benefits, such as financial assistance or discounts, provided by the state for citizens of retirement age who aspire to travel. Our study also indicated a higher inclination among Russian travellers to utilize the Internet for purchasing tickets and booking tours. Simultaneously, Russian travellers share commonalities with their global counterparts, such as sensitivity to price, a desire to integrate leisure components into recreation, a strong interest in wellness tourism, and a willingness to travel during the low season to economize.

Based on the findings of an empirical study, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative phases, it was observed that Russian tourists in the "silver" age group exhibit a high level of confidence in reading articles and reviews on the Internet. The reputational aspect of travel companies holds significant weight for them, and they display a strong inclination towards making online purchases of tickets and "all-included" vouchers. Friendliness and professionalism of staff are particularly valued by "silver" tourists, emphasizing the importance they place on assistance. In the online realm, their priorities include the adaptability of websites to mobile devices, as well as the simplicity and transparency of the tour purchasing process and review reading. "Silver" tourists generally harbor skepticism toward mass advertising that aggressively promotes purchases. Instead, they pay attention to print advertising, social networks, messengers, search engines, marketplaces, sales sites, and information sites. Many Russian travellers highlighted the underdeveloped state of tourism infrastructure, citing issues with transport accessibility and convenience, as well as a limited number of tourist offerings tailored to the older generation.

The study discerned five distinct clusters characterized by varying needs, travel objectives, planning methodologies, attention to channels and advertising messages, and willingness to establish relationships with a travel company. These clusters are categorized as "Mass tourists," "Restoring health," "Adventurers," "Organized tourists," and "Researchers." Interestingly, the obtained data deviated from a study on European tourists (Avelar et al. 2019), which identified four clusters: "Vacationers," "Without borders" (travellers with special needs), "Researchers," and "Stay-at-homers." A notable contrast lies in the considerably low adaptability of the Russian "silver" tourism market to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Despite being offered state-sponsored opportunities for sanatorium treatment, the tourist activity among this group remains notably low, primarily due to the inadequate adaptation of transport and other tourist infrastructure to their specific needs.

The study uncovered the needs, behavioural traits, and shopping habits of elderly tourists, shedding light on crucial aspects to consider when cultivating connections with Russian tourists in the "silver" age group. The findings, along with the derived conclusions and recommendations, can be applied in the business sphere to enhance tourism products, refine promotional strategies, and foster relationships with the elderly tourist demographic in Russia.

Limitations

The survey was conducted in March-April 2023, a period that might influence respondents' moods and their inclination to travel due to the lengthening of daylight hours and an increase in average temperature after winter. The sample size for the targeted age group comprised 231 respondents, falling below the desirable minimum of 384. Nevertheless, the study's results allow for an assessment of the reliability of the obtained data. Descriptive statistics revealed consistent trends in the selection of tourist products by this consumer group, aligning with findings from prior studies (Sheresheva & Polyanskaya 2017). Additionally, cluster analysis facilitated the identification of distinct segments among age-specific tourists, providing comparability with foreign studies conducted previously.

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Appendix 1. Description of the identified clusters of "silver" tourists

Parameters	Cluster 1: mass tourists	Cluster 2: Restoring health	Cluster 3: Adventurers	Cluster 4: Organized tourists	Cluster 5: Researchers
Number	46	32	56	65	32
Who they live with	Spouse, minor children	Alone, spouse, adult children	Alone, spouse	Spouse, minor children	Spouse
Initiators of the trip	Independently, spouse	Independently, friends	Independently, friends, children	Independently, spouse	Independently, spouse
Fellow travellers	Children, spouse	Friends, spouse	Alone, friends, children	Spouse, children	Spouse, children
Travel objectives	Get new impressions, take a break from routine, visit landmarks, be out in nature	Wellness, get new impressions	Get new impressions, be out in nature, visit places of interest, diversify leisure time	Get new impressions, take a break from the routine	Get new impressions, visit places of interest, be out in nature
Type of recreation	A holiday resort with a leisure component, a holiday resort	Health and wellness tourism with a leisure component	Resort holidays with a leisure component, sightseeing tours and active recreation	Holiday resorts, holiday resorts with a leisure component, sightseeing tours	Resort holidays with a leisure component, active recreation, sightseeing tours
Season	Summer, autumn	Autumn	Autumn, summer	Autumn, winter	Autumn, winter
Approach to the organization	Planned	Planned	Spontaneous	Planned	Planned
Frequency of trips	Once or several times a year	Once a year or less	Several times a year	Once a year or less	Several times a year
Type of recreation organization	Choose between "All included" and independent planning	"All included"	Choose between "All included" and independent planning	Choose between "All included" and independent planning	Independent planning
Destination selection factors	Comfortable living conditions, picturesque nature, safety of the place of stay, comfortable transport links	Peace and quiet, comfortable living conditions, convenient transport links, good transport infrastructure near the hotel.	Availability of cultural programmes and attractions, picturesque nature, comfortable transport links, safety of the place of stay	Comfortable living conditions, safety of the place of stay, availability of cultural programmes and attractions, picturesque nature	Comfortable living conditions, picturesque nature, safety of the place of stay, availability of cultural programmes and landmarks

Parameters	Cluster 1: mass tourists	Cluster 2: Restoring health	Cluster 3: Adventurers	Cluster 4: Organized tourists	Cluster 5: Researchers
Factors of choosing travel agencies	Recommendations from friends, favourable prices, reviews on the Internet, the duration of the company's work in the market, the ability to pay in different ways, the availability of convenient means of communication	Favourable prices for vouchers, the possibility of paying in different ways, a comfortable location of the company's branches	Favourable prices, recommendations from friends, reviews on the Internet, the duration of the company's work in the market, the opportunity to visit the physical office of the company	Reviews on the Internet, duration of the company's existence on the market, recommendations from friends, favourable prices for vouchers	Reviews on the Internet, prices for vouchers, recommendations from friends, the possibility of paying in different ways, the specialization of the tour operator
Willingness to build relationships with the company	Yes rather than no	Most focused on interaction	No	Rather no than yes	Yes
Preferred channels of interaction	Notifications in applications, subscriptions to company accounts on social networks, mailing in messengers	Social media accounts, the company's website, mailing lists, notifications in the company's applications	Studying the content on the company's website, mailing in messengers, social media accounts	Mailing list, content on the website, company account on social networks, mailing in messengers	Mailing list, company's social media account
Important factors in interaction	Courtesy of representatives, convenient communication channels, personal treatment	Courtesy of the company's representatives and the availability of interesting informative articles on the site	Courtesy of representatives, convenient communication channels, availability of interesting informative articles on the site	Convenient communication channels, courtesy of company representatives and the availability of interesting information articles on the site	Courtesy of company representatives, personal content, convenient communication channels

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of their own research

The distinctive features of tourists of a particular cluster are highlighted in gray