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## Illustration by examination: Using segmentation analysis as a public relations research tool to differentiate America's travelling public

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### Abstract

*Using segmentation analysis, this study demonstrates how audience segmentation can be used as a viable public relations research tool. In particular, the study investigates how publics (travellers) can be differentiated based on information source factors (domains), generational cohorts, and travel behaviour participation. Over the course of a year, domestic and foreign travellers who were travelling to, from, or through a southeastern state were surveyed, resulting in 1,764 participants. Computer mediated communication sources, mass media sources, word-of-mouth, and travel/tourism sources were isolated as predictors for differentiating this public (e.g., travellers). Implications for both public relations practitioners and educators are discussed and recommendations for future research are suggested.*

### Introduction

Call it what you may: audience analysis, stakeholder differentiation, even target public variation. Regardless of its varying labels, there is no denying audience segmentation's robust history and ongoing stable use in the marketplace. First defined in 1956, Wendell R. Smith formalised segmentation as a marketing concept: "segmentation is based upon developments on the demand side of the market and represents a rational and more precise adjustment of product and marketing effort to consumer or user requirements. In the language of the economist, segmentation is *disaggregative* in its effects and tends to bring about recognition of several demand schedules where only one was recognized

before" (Smith, 1956, p. 5). Contrasting this concept with product differentiation, Smith explained that "segmentation consists of viewing a heterogeneous market (one characterised by divergent demand) as a number of smaller homogeneous markets in response to differing product preferences among important market segments. It is attributable to the desires of consumers or users for more precise satisfaction of their varying wants" (p. 6).

In 1964, segmentation's reputation catapulted when Daniel Yankelovich, founder and president of Yankelovich Market Research and founder and chairman of Public Agenda and DYG, explained that segmentation serves as an effective technique for conducting audience analyses (Yankelovich, 1964, p. 1). As a research analysis tool, segmentation allows practitioners to better understand their targeted audiences' behaviours, wants, and needs to more acutely structure messages and develop strategies and tactics aimed at these particular audiences.

In the public relations discipline, there tends to be a quiet undercurrent to stay away from terms that have marketing connotations. Part of the reason may be to try and preserve public relations' individuality. For example, encroachment, defined as "the practice of assigning the top management role in the public relations department to someone from outside public relations," (Dozier, 1988, p. 9) has been a concern for nearly three decades. As far back as 1981, Lesly's Task Force on the Stature and Role of Public Relations identified this issue as one of the major threats to the public relations profession. Among other scholars, Lauzen (1991, 1992, 1993, 1995) continued to study

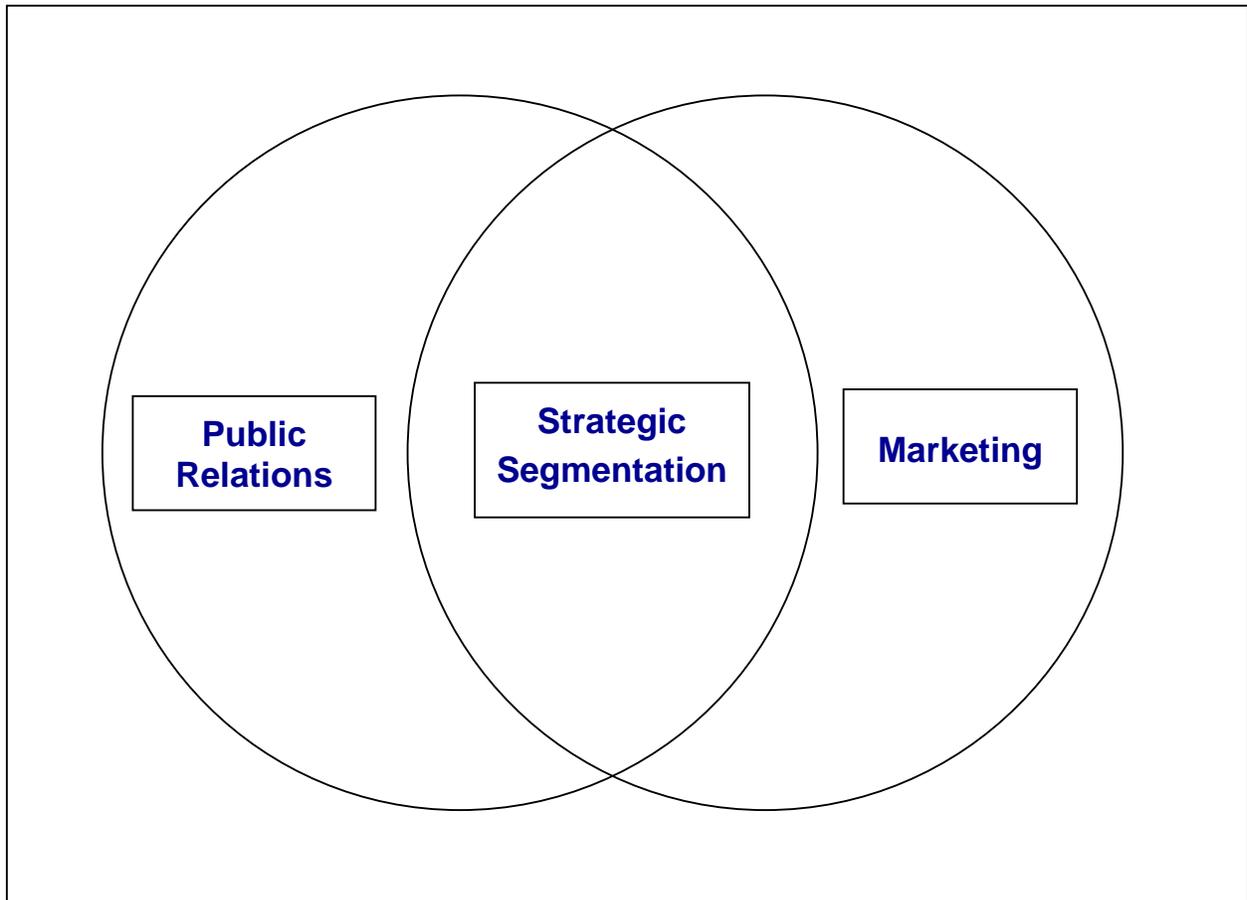
encroachment, in tandem with “imperialism” (1991, p. 246), which takes place when other departments (e.g., those which have domains similar to public relations) become more powerful and are able to take over activities traditionally performed by the less powerful department.

This rationale may also explain why segmentation analysis has not been widely used – given its historical underpinnings and relationship to the marketing field. As such, a recent review of the public relations literature produced rather scant results when the authors were searching for studies that utilise ‘segmentation strategies’ to examine and differentiate publics (e.g., Berkowitz & Turnmire, 1994; Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008; Sha, 2006). In the influential *Excellence Study*, Grunig and Repper (1992) provided further insight, by pointing out that there are more

market segmentation theories than mass communication segmentation theories. “As a result, techniques of *market* segmentation are used more widely in public relations than are techniques to segment *publics*” (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 128).

The authors of this study propose a ‘Venn diagram’ approach to segmentation with regard to its application to public relations. Said another way, segmentation falls within the overlapping area (e.g., the intersection) between public relations and marketing. (See figure 1.) Further, we believe segmentation analysis is a valuable and strategic research tool for use in differentiating key stakeholders. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: to demonstrate the use of audience segmentation as a useful tool for differentiating publics and to further extend the public relations travel and tourism literature.

**Figure 1: Venn diagram**



## Literature review

In 1964, Yankelovich stated his concern that researchers were not placing enough emphasis on actual consumer behaviour. It has been nearly 50 years since he made that observation. In 2006 Yankelovich and Meer reported that we still are not utilising segmentation strategies to their full potential. Today, though, we have more ‘clutter’ to break through than we did four decades ago when Yankelovich initially explained the significance of using segmentation analysis. He continues to suggest segmentation (if conducted correctly and used appropriately) as a viable asset for measuring present consumer behaviour so we can, in turn, predict future behaviour (Yankelovich & Meer, 2006).

### *Audience segmentation’s significance to the public relations discipline*

In 1999, The Commission on Public Relations Education identified audience segmentation as a necessary skill for those graduating with a degree in public relations (A Port of Entry, 1999). In 2006 the Commission updated its study. Again, audience segmentation was identified as a necessary skill – as well as a feasible technique for achieving critical outcomes that focus on enhanced diversity and intercultural communication (Professional Bond, 2006). The time has come for the public relations field to acknowledge that audience segmentation plays an important role in our discipline. No longer should we ignore this useful technique as a research tool for learning more about our publics.

Kim, Ni, and Sha (2008) supported the importance of breaking down stakeholder groups through segmentation and provided a review of major segmentation methods available, noting that this segmentation process should start in the formative research stage. Segmentation can serve as a viable technique for defining *potential publics* as well as learning more about the *present publics* we already know are important to our organisation. Grunig and Repper (1992) demonstrated this point by explaining that public relations practitioners can “increase the probability of

communicating with the strategic publics by dividing the category into segments. Segments must be definable, mutually exclusive, measurable, accessible, pertinent to an organisation’s mission, reachable with communications in an affordable way, and large enough to be substantial and to service economically” (p. 130).

Further, the marketplace continues to experience an ever-increasing fragmentation of audiences (Smith, Clurman, & Wood, 2005). With the advent of the internet, coupled with a plethora of social networking tools that have followed – now, more than ever before – we need to define who our active publics are – and focus our energy on them. As a practical research analysis tool for the public relations field, segmentation allows practitioners to better understand their public’s behaviours, wants, and needs to more acutely structure messages and develop strategies and tactics aimed at these particular audiences. Following is a further review of the literature, which supports and further explicates the goals of this study.

### *Grunig’s situational theory of publics/nested segmentation model*

The situational theory of publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Repper, 1992; Grunig, 1997) is used to predict communication behaviour, behaviour change, and attitude change. This theory explains that people do not stop to think about situations unless they perceive that something needs to be done to improve the situation (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 149). The three predictor variables are constraint recognition, problem recognition, and level of involvement. Grunig (1989) and Grunig and Repper (1992) introduced the concept of ‘nested segmentations’, which is rooted in situational theory. These segments range from the individual communication behaviours in the innermost layer and to mass audiences in the outer layer. Other nests (segments) embedded between these two layers include: publics; communities; geodemographics; psychographics, lifestyles, subcultures, and social relationships; and demographics/social categories (Grunig &

Repper, 1992, p. 133). As an illustration of the potential usefulness of audience segmentation in public relations, the current investigation examines lifestyles (leisure activities) and demographics (age) via segmentation analysis.

#### *Yankelovich's generational influences model*

In addition to Grunig's nested segmentation model, the generational influences model (Smith & Clurman, 1997, p. 5), which differentiates individuals based on the generational cohorts to which they are born, offers another valuable framework public relations practitioners should consider when designing targeted messages and communication campaigns. The generational influences model is derived from 30 years of research collected via the Yankelovich MONITOR, an annual study that tracks Americans' lifestyles and values. According to the generational influences model, people develop individualised value systems that affect the way they interact and view the world around them. Accordingly, our value systems are affected by an array of environmental conditions we experience as children. Members of a generation are linked through shared life experiences of their formative years. Specifically, this generational influences model explains that people's life stage, in combination with current conditions, aids in the development of their cohort experiences. These cohort experiences, in turn, are instrumental in developing their core values, which serve as decision-making guideposts for their preferences and influence their behaviours in the marketplace.

#### *Generational cohort segmentation*

'Cohorts' represent a form of lifecycle segmentation. Generations cohorts are defined by Straus and Howe (1991) as a "cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality" (p. 60). They defined a peer personality as "a generational persona recognised and determined by (1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation" (p. 64). To date, the most

mainstream, research-based cohorts represent *Matures* (born 1930-1945); *Baby Boomers* (born 1946-1964); *Generation X* (born 1965-1976); *Generation Y (AKA as Echo Boomers and Millennials)* (born 1977-1994); and *Generation Z (AKA: the 'Net Generation)* (born after 1994). These cohort designations represent the same periods used by Yankelovich Market Research, the US Census Bureau, and the US Travel Association (USTA).

#### **Public relations segmentation in the travel/tourism industry**

Public relations serves the unique purpose of developing and maintaining relationships between an organisation and its key stakeholders. However, within the travel and tourism literature, public relations studies are rather negligible. As Fall (2000, 2004) pointed out, public relations management should serve as the blueprint for the tourism industry due in large part to the service industry-specific role it plays. L'Etang, Falkheimer, and Lugo (2006) and Huerta (2008) noted that this field continues to be dominated by studies conceptualised within the marketing function.

In addition to illustrating how audience segmentation serves an important role as a research tool for the public relations discipline, this study extends the public relations travel and tourism literature. And with good reason: the travel industry has a significant impact on the local, state, regional, and national economies. The USTA (2010) estimates that travel in the United States alone resulted in spending of over \$755 billion in 2010, a growth of 7.3 percent over spending in 2009. The organisation also estimates that US travel will increase by 5.2 percent in 2011 to a total of \$794.9 billion. The website, *The Power of Travel* (2010), sponsored by the USTA, estimates that in 2009, the most recent year for which data was available, that travel in the US also resulted in tax receipts of \$113 million and the employment of 7.4 million people. The numbers substantiate the financial importance of the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries in the United States.

With so much at stake, it is critical that communications professionals identify cost-effective communication channels to ensure that potential travellers are being fully informed about tourism destinations. "While there may be a mix of personal communication, public relations, marketing, and advertising actions within destination campaigns, the challenge for marketers is to isolate those media (and messages) that cause changes in the traveler's image perceptions" (McCartney, Butler, & Bennett, 2008, p. 186).

Travel and tourism researchers are certainly no strangers to studying information sources and communication channels. Colleagues in the field have been examining various aspects of communication source use for more than three decades (e.g., from Nolan, 1976, to Wong, Keung, Liu, & Ching, 2011). And, as the vehicles for communication continue to expand, so does the research. From colour television advertisements and slick travel magazines to trade shows, travel agents, online blogs, webcams, and Internet websites, and now the explosion of social media, the academic literature is laden with a plethora of studies rich in exploration and lucrative in application to researchers and practitioners.

Beginning as early as the 1970s, researchers have been examining information source use. Nolan (1976) reported that friends and family, guidebooks and tourist information and state tourism organisations were the most frequently used sources. In terms of credibility, tourism-specific sources were most credible and mass media and commercial tourist information were the least credible. Various other studies have examined the relevance of information sources (communication channels) in the travel/tourism industry (e.g., Andereck & Caldwell, 1993; Fall & Lubbers, 2009 & 2010; Fodness & Murray, 1998 & 1999; Hsieh & O'Leary, 1993).

The literature demonstrates much evidence to suggest that external information search represents a motivated and conscious decision by consumers to seek out new information. Also included among these studies is a wide spectrum of information source typologies, ranging from travel/tourism specific (Molina & Esteban, 2006), internet-based mass media

(Jun, Vogt, & McKay, 2010; Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and word-of-mouth (Fall, 2000, 2004; Simpson & Siguaw, 2008) to social, personal, marketing, and editorial (Vogt, 1993); and print media, electronic media, and professional consultants and travel agents (Raitz & Dakhil, 1989).

Other studies are consistent with results to demonstrate that interpersonal sources, such as family and friends, are frequently cited as the most dominant source (e.g., Capella & Greco, 1987; Fall, 2005; Fall & Lubbers, 2009; Raitz & Dakhil, 1989; Rao, Thomas, & Javalgi, 1991; Snepenger & Snepenger, 1993). With regard to media, Seabra, Abrantes, and Lages (2007) found that non-media information sources influence expectation fulfillment among travellers. Further, Loda, Norman, and Backman (2005) found that publicity was more credible than advertising.

Some researchers have investigated travel-related variables that influence source selection. For example, Dey and Sarma (2010) learned that information source usage among travellers who were visiting newly emerging tourist destinations could be segmented by motive-based behaviours. Luo, Feng, and Cai (2005) found that situation trip factors such as trip purpose and travel party type were related to their choice of information sources. Rompf, DiPietro, and Ricci (2005) examined local residents' involvement with travellers and their influence on decision strategies, while Bieger and Laessner (2004) found that use of information source paths taken by travellers were best explained by the type of trip, the amount of trip standardisation, and the trip destination. Fodness and Murray (1999) demonstrated that the use of different types of externally oriented information sources differs greatly according to trip purpose, distance travelled, and travel cost. In yet another study, Snepenger, Meged, Snelling, and Worrall (1990) examined communication source strategies among 'destination-naïve' tourists.

The purpose of this study is twofold: to demonstrate the use of audience segmentation as a useful tool for differentiating publics and to further extend the public relations travel and tourism literature. The following hypotheses

were developed for testing: **H1:** Using information source factors as discriminators, visitors can be segmented based on generational age cohorts. **H2:** Using information source factors as discriminators, visitors can be segmented based on activities in which they participate.

### Method

#### *Selection of the sample/administrative procedures*

The population for this study consists of all travellers who stopped at various welcome centres within a southeastern state on eight different weekends between September 2007 and August 2008. The sampling frame consists of a purposive sample of visitors who stopped at these welcome centres during the study's time frame. Data were collected across four seasons to represent one entire year.

Determining how to reach respondents for this study was a key concern. In the hospitality industry, purposive sampling is suitable for studies that seek to examine "known characteristics" (Clark, Wiley, Wilkie, & Wood, 1998; Ritchie & Goeldner, 1994). To obtain the most representative sample of travellers coming not only from within the home state in which this study took place, but also to obtain data from travellers coming from outside the state, the researchers conducted the survey collection at various welcome centre locations throughout the state. Welcome centres were located among all three dominant regions of the state.

Therefore, the decision to conduct an intercept-type survey at various welcome centres throughout the state was based on three reasons. First, an array of academic researchers who have investigated both the use and usefulness of communication tactics have successfully conducted survey research at welcome centres throughout the United States (e.g., Fesenmaier & Vogt, 1993; Fesenmaier, 1994; Perdue & Pitegoff, 1990; Sims & Teaff, 1989; Stewart, Anderson, Fesenmaier, & Lue, 1992). Second, since vacation travel is an 'enduring' activity, the researchers wanted to examine respondents in a comfortable, non-

threatening environment that was complementary to their travel habits. Finally, nearly 65 percent of this state's visitors travel to/within the state via automobile (state's annual tourism marketing report). In short, the decision to collect data among travellers at various welcome centres was strategic and supports the objectives of the study. Further, for validity purposes, the researchers wanted to survey respondents while they were in *action* – doing what was actually being studied (e.g., travelling).

This study employed a self-administered survey method. A five-page questionnaire served as the research instrument. Prior to launching the survey, the questionnaire was pilot tested during the spring months of 2007 at various welcome centres located in the eastern region of this same state. The final sample size for the spring 2007 study totalled 763 respondents. As with the spring 2007 study, the questionnaires for this study were distributed to visitors at the respective welcome centres. Trained researchers were on hand to answer any questions. Respondents were advised that they must be 18 to participate and only one questionnaire per family was to be completed.

#### *Operationalisation of variables*

**Information sources.** When seeking to define which information source variables to investigate, the tourism literature was thoroughly examined and dominant communication sources were identified. A total of 22 information sources were identified for use in this study. Respondents were instructed as follows: "Please review the list of sources below that you may use when planning for a vacation/pleasure trip. In general, rate each source in terms of usefulness when planning for vacation travel." A 5-point Likert-type scale was used, where 1=not at all useful, 2=slightly useful, 3=neutral, and 4=moderately useful, and 5=extremely useful.

**Demographics.** Information for nine demographic variables were included in the instrument, including gender, gross annual household income, employment status, level of education completed, race, marital status,

number of children under the age of 18 living in the household, residency, and age. However, *age* is of special relevance to the objectives for this manuscript. Rather than asking respondents to check an appropriate age 'category', they were asked to numerically describe their age. These results enabled the researchers to develop age factors based on generational cohort criteria defined by Yankelovich Research, which is derived from its Travel MONITOR studies (Matures, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y). These cohorts are complementary to the United States Census Bureau cohorts.

**Travel activity and attractions.** The questionnaire included questions designed to ascertain the activities travellers would participate in and attractions they would visit while on their current trip. A total of 16 attractions and 23 activities were included.

Note: Trip-specific information (accommodations, number of people in the party, etc.), seasonality and qualitative data (words that come to mind when people think of this particular state) were also examined in this study. Results will be discussed in future manuscripts.

## Results

### *Profile of respondents*

The respondent pool consists of 1,667 individuals from 43 US states and 97 travellers from 11 foreign nations for a total of 1,764. There are slightly more female (52.2 percent) respondents, and 61 percent of all respondents reported being married. Ages range from 18 to 88 with the median of 49. Caucasians (72.4 percent) and African Americans (17.1 percent) represent the largest ethnic categories with fewer people identifying themselves as Asian (4.1 percent) or Spanish/Hispanic/Latino (1.7 percent). The

median household income was in the \$60,000-69,999 range. Just over two-thirds (67.4 percent) of the respondents are employed full-time, with 21.5 percent being retired and another 5.2 percent currently enrolled as students. Respondents report education levels from as low as elementary only all the way to postgraduate degrees. The most frequently earned degree among this sample is an associate's degree.

To further support validity of the results, the profile attributes were compared to data collected by the state's Department of Tourism Development. Characteristics found among the sample closely resemble those identified by this organisation.

### *Hypothesis results*

**H1: Using information source factors as discriminators, visitors can be segmented based on generational cohorts. [supported]**

To determine the influence of respondents' selection of useful sources of information with regard to their corresponding generational cohort, four analyses were conducted. First, an overall comparison of the mean rankings of the 22 communication sources for the entire respondent pool were calculated. Also, means were ranked with regard to each of the four generational cohorts, as reported in Table 1. Second, the information source factors were developed, as reported in Table 2. Third, cross-tabulation analyses were conducted to look for differences in expected versus observed responses concerning the four factors among the four generational cohorts. Results are reported in Table 3. Finally, linear regression analyses were conducted to determine a line of best fit to define the relationship between respondents' age and the index score for each of the four source factors, as reported in Table 4.

**Table 1: Means and mean ranking for sources by travellers' generational cohort<sup>a</sup>**

| Information source usefulness | Overall<br>n=1760 |      | Gen Y<br>n=292 |      | Gen X<br>n=438 |      | Boomers<br>n=722 |      | Matures<br>n=312 |      |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|------|----------------|------|----------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
|                               | Mean              | Rank | Mean           | Rank | Mean           | Rank | Mean             | Rank | Mean             | Rank |
| Word-of-mouth                 | 3.38              | 1    | 3.39           | 1    | 3.38           | 1    | 3.45             | 1    | 3.18             | 2    |
| Welcome/visitor centre        | 3.27              | 2    | 3.23           | 2    | 3.19           | 2    | 3.32             | 2    | 3.29             | 1    |
| State vacation guide          | 3.14              | 3    | 3.00           | 3    | 3.09           | 3    | 3.22             | 3    | 3.15             | 3    |
| City/state/regional website   | 2.95              | 4    | 2.99           | 4    | 2.91           | 5    | 2.94             | 6    | 3.00             | 4    |
| Travel channel                | 2.90              | 5    | 2.79           | 6    | 2.80           | 7    | 3.01             | 4    | 2.86             | 5    |
| Convention/visitor bureau     | 2.83              | 6    | 2.72           | 9    | 2.76           | 9.5  | 2.97             | 5    | 2.72             | 6    |
| Online travel planner         | 2.82              | 7    | 2.88           | 5    | 3.00           | 4    | 2.77             | 9    | 2.63             | 10   |
| Television advertisement      | 2.76              | 8    | 2.78           | 7    | 2.78           | 8    | 2.78             | 8    | 2.65             | 9    |
| Magazine article              | 2.72              | 9    | 2.73           | 8    | 2.56           | 14   | 2.84             | 7    | 2.66             | 7.5  |
| Television story              | 2.68              | 10   | 2.66           | 12   | 2.76           | 9.5  | 2.69             | 11   | 2.58             | 11   |
| Newspaper advertisement       | 2.61              | 11   | 2.63           | 13   | 2.65           | 11   | 2.62             | 12   | 2.52             | 13   |
| Travellers' blog              | 2.61              | 12   | 2.70           | 10.5 | 2.82           | 6    | 2.54             | 14   | 2.41             | 15   |
| Newspaper article             | 2.60              | 13   | 2.40           | 19   | 2.61           | 13   | 2.71             | 10   | 2.55             | 12   |
| Autoclub                      | 2.58              | 14   | 2.62           | 14   | 2.46           | 16.5 | 2.61             | 13   | 2.66             | 7.5  |
| Radio advertisement           | 2.51              | 15   | 2.70           | 10.5 | 2.63           | 12   | 2.46             | 17   | 2.27             | 18   |
| Direct mail                   | 2.46              | 16   | 2.44           | 18   | 2.46           | 16.5 | 2.47             | 16   | 2.48             | 14   |
| Travel agent                  | 2.43              | 17   | 2.52           | 15.5 | 2.44           | 18   | 2.45             | 18   | 2.31             | 16   |
| Travellers' reviews/ratings   | 2.39              | 19   | 2.52           | 15.5 | 2.49           | 15   | 2.34             | 19   | 2.24             | 19   |
| Billboards                    | 2.39              | 18   | 2.47           | 17   | 2.32           | 19   | 2.48             | 15   | 2.18             | 20   |
| Message/discussion board      | 2.21              | 20   | 2.35           | 20   | 2.22           | 20   | 2.23             | 20   | 2.02             | 21   |
| Trade show                    | 2.16              | 21   | 2.18           | 21   | 2.12           | 22   | 2.13             | 21   | 2.30             | 17   |
| Podcasts                      | 2.04              | 22   | 2.10           | 22   | 2.16           | 21   | 2.00             | 22   | 1.93             | 22   |

<sup>a</sup> Gen Y (1979-1994); Gen X (1965-1978); Boomers (1946-1964); Matures (1900-1945)

Table 1 presents the mean scores and the associated rankings for each of the 22 information sources. In the first group of columns, the information source usefulness scores are listed based on the ranking for the overall means presented. Additionally, the mean scores for each of the four generational cohorts are presented, along with the ranking for that information source within the group. The results demonstrate that some information sources are consistently ranked as being the

most or least useful. For example, word-of-mouth, welcome/visitor centre, and state vacation guide were consistently ranked as the top three most useful information sources – regardless of the respondent's age. At the other end of the spectrum, discussion boards, trade shows and podcasts were universally recognised as the three least useful information sources. The only exception was the trade show ranking among Matures, which was slightly higher than the bottom three.

While there is a great deal of consistency concerning the three least and most influential information sources, there are dramatic changes among some of the 16 sources among the middle rankings. For example, although radio advertisements and direct mail were ranked 15 and 16 among the overall sample of respondents, they were ranked 10 and 18 by Gen Y. However, while auto clubs were ranked 13 or 14 by three of the generational cohorts, Matures ranked them seventh. And, while some trends are clearly influenced by age, the relationship is not always linear. For example, the older generational cohorts, Matures and Baby Boomers, rated travellers' blogs as 15 and 14. However, the next youngest generation, Gen X, ranked blogs sixth and this information source was the tenth most useful among the youngest cohort, Generation Y.

In an effort to better understand if there are inherent groupings or factors underlying the 22 information sources, factor scales were developed based on previous research (e.g., Fall, 2000, 2004, 2005; Fall & Lubbers, 2009, 2010). The three factors are as follows: mass media sources (MM,  $\alpha = .789$ ), travel and tourism sources (TT,  $\alpha = .725$ ), and computer mediated communication sources (CMC,  $\alpha = .716$ ). As with previous studies, word-of-mouth (defined in this study as verbal – as opposed to social media) is represented by a single factor item. Before further analyses were conducted, each scale underwent reliability testing. Table 2 provides the information source variables associated with each of the factors and their accompanying alpha scores.

**Table 2: Communication variables for corresponding \*source factors**

| <b>Computer mediated communication<br/><math>\alpha = .716</math></b> | <b>Mass media<br/><math>\alpha = .789</math></b> | <b>Travel &amp; tourism<br/><math>\alpha = .725</math></b> |
|---|--|--|
| City/state/regional website   | Television advertisement                         | Welcome/visitor centre                                     |
| Online travel planner   | Magazine article                                 | State vacation guide                                       |
| Travellers' blog  | Television story                                 | Convention/visitor bureau                                  |
| Travellers' reviews/ratings   | Newspaper advertisement                          | Auto club  |
| Message/discussion board  | Newspaper article                                | Travel agent   |
| Podcasts  | Radio advertisement                              | Direct mail  |
|   | Billboards                                       | Trade show   |
|   |  | Travel channel   |

*\*Note – Word-of-mouth factor is a single item factor*

Several cross-tabulation analyses were conducted that compared the generational cohorts with the four source factors. Results are reported in Table 3. All of the comparisons were statistically significant at the standard .05 level. These results provide further support of

the results found in Table 1, indicating that there are significant differences in the observed and expected frequencies reported by the cohort groups' ratings of the usefulness of information sources.

**Table 3: Cross-tabulations of generational cohorts with four source factors**

|                     | Mass media factor<br>(recoded in thirds from low to high) |        |      |       |  |
|---------------------|---|--------|------|-------|--|
| Generation cohort   | Lower   | Middle | High | Total | <b>Chi-square test</b>   |
| Gen Y (1979-1994)   | 85  | 127    | 74   | 286   | Pearson $\chi^2 = 13.095$<br>df = 6<br>Sig. (2-sided) = .042<br>N valid cases = 1692 |
| Gen X (1965-1978)   | 125   | 175    | 123  | 423   |  |
| Boomers (1946-1964) | 192   | 278    | 214  | 684   |  |
| Matures (1900-1945) | 109   | 125    | 65   | 299   |  |
| Total               | 511   | 705    | 476  | 1692  |  |

|                     | Computer mediated communication factor<br>(recoded in thirds from low to high) |        |      |       |  |
|---------------------|--|--------|------|-------|--|
| Generation cohort   | Lower  | Middle | High | Total | <b>Chi-square test</b>   |
| Gen Y (1979-1994)   | 84   | 137    | 71   | 292   | Pearson $\chi^2 = 14.506$<br>df = 6<br>Sig. (2-sided) = .024<br>N valid cases = 1764 |
| Gen X (1965-1978)   | 129  | 199    | 110  | 438   |  |
| Boomers (1946-1964) | 256  | 307    | 159  | 722   |  |
| Matures (1900-1945) | 115  | 146    | 51   | 312   |  |
| Total               | 584  | 789    | 391  | 1764  |  |

|                     | Travel & tourism factor<br>(recoded in thirds from low to high) |        |      |       |  |
|---------------------|---|--------|------|-------|--|
| Generation cohort   | Lower   | Middle | High | Total | <b>Chi-square test</b>   |
| Gen Y (1979-1994)   | 91  | 117    | 72   | 280   | Pearson $\chi^2 = 23.150$<br>df = 6<br>Sig. (2-sided) = .001<br>N valid cases = 1689 |
| Gen X (1965-1978)   | 152   | 146    | 122  | 420   |  |
| Boomers (1946-1964) | 225   | 215    | 250  | 690   |  |
| Matures (1900-1945) | 89  | 127    | 83   | 299   |  |
| Total               | 557   | 605    | 527  | 1689  |  |

|                     | Word-of-mouth factor<br>(recoded in thirds from low to high) |        |      |       |   |
|---------------------|--|--------|------|-------|---|
| Generation cohort   | Lower  | Middle | High | Total | <b>Chi-square test</b>  |
| Gen Y (1979-1994)   | 55   | 105    | 132  | 292   | Pearson $\chi^2 = 19.62$<br>df = 6<br>Sig. (2-sided) = .003<br>N valid cases = 1759 |
| Gen X (1965-1978)   | 110  | 114    | 214  | 438   |   |
| Boomers (1946-1964) | 163  | 185    | 372  | 720   |   |
| Matures (1900-1945) | 84   | 96     | 129  | 309   |   |
| Total               | 412  | 500    | 847  | 1759  |   |

A linear regression analysis was then conducted to examine the influence the four information source factors have with regard to age. As indicated in Table 4, only one of the equations (CMC) was statistically significant. The results

indicate that younger respondents were more likely to find CMC sources to be useful. Although the results are significant, the equation explains a very small amount of the overall variance.

**Table 4: Regression analysis of age and four source factors**

| Dept. variable   | Indep. variable | Unstandardised coefficients |            | Standardised coefficients | T      | Sig. | R    | R square |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|------|----------|
|                  |                 | B                           | Std. error | Beta                      |        |      |      |          |
| CMC              | Age             | -.006                       | .001       | -.104                     | -4.374 | .000 | .104 | .011     |
| Mass media       | Age             | -.002                       | .001       | -.035                     | -1.457 | .145 | .035 | .001     |
| WOM              | Age             | -.002                       | .002       | -.025                     | .293   | .293 | .025 | .001     |
| Travel & tourism | Age             | .001                        | .001       | .018                      | .734   | .463 | .018 | .000     |

**H2: Using information source factors as discriminators, visitors can be segmented based on activities in which they participate.**

*Outdoor/recreational tourism factor development*

The questionnaire administered to travellers included questions designed to ascertain the activities travellers would participate in and attractions they would visit while on their current trip. A total of 16 attractions and 23 activities were included. To determine natural groupings of the attractions and activities, these 39 variables were submitted to a factor

analysis. While the analysis identified several factors and an acceptable degree of variance was explained (63 percent), one factor in particular explained a significant amount of the variance, had strong loadings and a well-defined focus. That factor dealt with outdoor/recreational leisure activities and serves as the focus of this current investigation. The seven-item factor indicated relatively high reliability ( $\alpha = .75$ ). See Table 5 for a complete listing of the outdoor recreational variables that comprised this factor.

**Table 5: Activity/attraction variables for outdoor/recreational leisure tourism factor**

|  |
|--|
| Outdoor/recreational tourism factor components |
| Bicycling                                      |
| Boating/kayaking                               |
| Camping  |
| Fishing  |
| Golfing  |
| Hiking   |
| Hunting  |

**H2a: Traveller use of computer mediated communication information sources will significantly predict the traveller's participation in outdoor/recreational tourism activities. [supported]** Table 6 presents the results of the regression results for the outdoor recreational tourism activities with the computer mediated communication (CMC) information source factor. The significant results indicate that the seven outdoor/recreational activities and attractions were able to predict the travellers' ratings of information source

usefulness of CMC information sources for their travel planning.

In addition to the significance of the F score, significant t scores were found for four of the activities: boating/kayaking, camping, golfing, and hunting. The positive relationships indicate that the greater the likelihood to participate in these four outdoor activities, the greater the likelihood of the travellers turning to computer mediated communication information sources. (See table 6)

**Table 6: Regression analysis of outdoor/recreational tourism and computer mediated communication source factor**

| Model summary |      |          |                 | ANOVA      |           |      |         |        |      |
|---------------|------|----------|-----------------|------------|-----------|------|---------|--------|------|
| R             | R Sq | Adj R Sq | Std. Err of Est |            | Sum of Sq | df   | Mean Sq | F      | Sig. |
| .323          | .105 | .101     | .85851          | Regression | 151.003   | 7    | 21.572  | 29.268 | .000 |
|               |      |          |                 | Residual   | 1293.508  | 1755 | .737    |        |      |

|                         | Unstandardised coefficients |             | Standardised coefficients |              | Sig.        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|
|                         | B                           | Std. error  | Beta                      | t            |             |
| (Constant)              | 1.864                       | .053        |                           | 35.282       | .000        |
| Bicycling               | .033                        | .017        | .051                      | 1.928        | .054        |
| <b>Boating/kayaking</b> | <b>.069</b>                 | <b>.018</b> | <b>.103</b>               | <b>3.752</b> | <b>.000</b> |
| <b>Camping</b>          | <b>.054</b>                 | <b>.015</b> | <b>.091</b>               | <b>3.469</b> | <b>.001</b> |
| Fishing                 | .026                        | .016        | .043                      | 1.618        | .106        |
| <b>Golfing</b>          | <b>.049</b>                 | <b>.016</b> | <b>.082</b>               | <b>3.168</b> | <b>.002</b> |
| Hiking                  | .010                        | .015        | .017                      | .670         | .503        |
| <b>Hunting</b>          | <b>.068</b>                 | <b>.021</b> | <b>.091</b>               | <b>3.294</b> | <b>.001</b> |

a. Dependent variable: CMC

**H2b: Traveller use of word-of-mouth (WOM) information sources will significantly predict the traveller's participation in outdoor/recreational tourism activities. [rejected]** Table 7 presents the results of the regression results for the outdoor/recreational tourism activities and attractions with the single-item word-of-mouth (WOM) information source factor. The results indicate that the seven activities were not able to predict the

traveller ratings of information source usefulness of WOM. In addition to the failure to achieve a significant F score, only the t score for hiking was statistically significant. The positive relationship between WOM and hiking indicates that the greater the likelihood of participating in hiking activities, the greater the likelihood of travellers turning to WOM as a useful information source.

**Table 7: Regression analysis of outdoor/recreational tourism and the word-of-mouth source factor**

| Model summary |      |          |                 | ANOVA      |                |      |             |       |      |
|---------------|------|----------|-----------------|------------|----------------|------|-------------|-------|------|
| R             | R sq | Adj R sq | Std. err of est |            | Sum of squares | df   | Mean square | F     | Sig. |
| .085          | .007 | .003     | 1.371           | Regression | 23.877         | 7    | 3.411       | 1.815 | .080 |
|               |      |          |                 | Residual   | 3288.838       | 1750 | 1.879       |       |      |

|                  | Unstandardised coefficients |             | Standardised coefficients |              | Sig.        |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|
|                  | B                           | Std. Error  | Beta                      | t            |             |
|                  | (Constant)                  | 3.308       | .084                      |              |             |
| Bicycling        | -.024                       | .028        | -.025                     | -.888        | .375        |
| Boating/kayaking | .041                        | .030        | .040                      | 1.402        | .161        |
| Camping          | -.042                       | .025        | -.047                     | -1.682       | .093        |
| Golfing          | -.015                       | .025        | -.017                     | -.617        | .537        |
| Fishing          | -.006                       | .026        | -.007                     | -.236        | .814        |
| <b>Hiking</b>    | <b>.064</b>                 | <b>.024</b> | <b>.070</b>               | <b>2.647</b> | <b>.008</b> |
| Hunting          | .010                        | .033        | .008                      | .290         | .772        |

a. Dependent variable: Word-of-mouth

**H2c: Traveller use of traditional travel and tourism information sources will significantly predict the traveller's participation in outdoor/recreational tourism activities. [supported]** Table 8 presents the results of the regression results for the outdoor/recreational activities with the traditional travel and tourism information source factor. The significant results indicate that the seven activities were able to predict the travellers' ratings of information source usefulness of the

traditional travel and tourism information sources. In addition to the significance of the F score, significant t scores were found for four of the activities: bicycling, boating, fishing, and hunting. The positive relationships for all four significant predictors indicate that the greater the likelihood to participate in these activities, the greater the likelihood of the travellers turning to the traditional travel and tourism information sources to plan their trip.

**Table 8: Regression analysis of outdoor/recreational tourism and the traditional travel and tourism source factor**

| R    | R Sq | Adj R Sq | Std. Error of the Est |
|------|------|----------|-----------------------|
| .252 | .064 | .060     | .77226                |

| Model      | Sum of squares | df   | Mean square | F      | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|------|-------------|--------|------|
| Regression | 71.064         | 7    | 10.152      | 17.022 | .000 |
| Residual   | 1044.279       | 1751 | .596        |        |      |
| Total      | 1115.343       | 1758 |             |        |      |

| Model                   | Unstandardised coefficients |             | Standardised coefficients | t            | Sig.        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|
|                         | B                           | Std. error  | Beta                      |              |             |
| (Constant)              | 2.320                       | .048        |                           | 48.806       | .000        |
| <b>Bicycling</b>        | <b>.031</b>                 | <b>.016</b> | <b>.054</b>               | <b>2.008</b> | <b>.045</b> |
| <b>Boating/kayaking</b> | <b>.051</b>                 | <b>.017</b> | <b>.086</b>               | <b>3.091</b> | <b>.002</b> |
| Camping                 | .017                        | .014        | .033                      | 1.232        | .218        |
| <b>Fishing</b>          | <b>.032</b>                 | <b>.014</b> | <b>.061</b>               | <b>2.242</b> | <b>.025</b> |
| Golfing                 | -.004                       | .014        | -.007                     | -.264        | .792        |
| Hiking                  | -.002                       | .014        | -.005                     | -.181        | .856        |
| <b>Hunting</b>          | <b>.080</b>                 | <b>.019</b> | <b>.121</b>               | <b>4.270</b> | <b>.000</b> |

**H2d: Traveller use of mass media (MM) information sources will significantly predict the traveller’s participation in outdoor/recreational tourism activities. [supported]** Table 9 presents the regression results for the outdoor/recreational tourism activities and attractions with the mass media (MM) information source factor. The significant F score indicates that all seven outdoor activities were able to predict the travellers’ ratings of information source usefulness for MM information sources.

Significant t scores were found for two of the activities: boating/kayaking and hunting. The positive relationship between MM and these two information sources indicates that the greater the likelihood to participate in boating/kayaking and hunting, the greater the likelihood of the travellers turning to MM as a useful information source.

**Table 9: Regression analysis of outdoor/recreational tourism and the mass media source factor**

| Model Summary |      |          |                       | ANOVA <sup>b</sup> |                |      |             |        |      |
|---------------|------|----------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|------|-------------|--------|------|
| R             | R Sq | Adj R sq | Std. error of the est | Model              | Sum of squares | df   | Mean square | F      | Sig. |
| .247          | .061 | .057     | .84027                | Regression         | 80.401         | 7    | 11.486      | 16.268 | .000 |
|               |      |          |                       | Residual           | 1236.313       | 1751 | .706        |        |      |
|               |      |          |                       | Total              | 1316.714       | 1758 |             |        |      |

| Coefficients <sup>a</sup> |                             |             |                           |              |             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Model                     | Unstandardised coefficients |             | Standardised coefficients |              | Sig.        |
|                           | B                           | Std. Error  | Beta                      | t            |             |
| (Constant)                | 2.182                       | .052        |                           | 42.193       | .000        |
| Bicycling                 | .031                        | .017        | .049                      | 1.820        | .069        |
| <b>Boating/kayaking</b>   | <b>.048</b>                 | <b>.018</b> | <b>.075</b>               | <b>2.673</b> | <b>.008</b> |
| Camping                   | .006                        | .015        | .010                      | .371         | .710        |
| Fishing                   | .025                        | .016        | .044                      | 1.633        | .103        |
| Golfing                   | .018                        | .015        | .032                      | 1.180        | .238        |
| Hiking                    | -.003                       | .015        | -.006                     | -.218        | .828        |
| <b>Hunting</b>            | <b>.096</b>                 | <b>.020</b> | <b>.134</b>               | <b>4.701</b> | <b>.000</b> |

a. Dependent variable: Mass media

### Discussion/implications

Results from this study led to a few overarching conclusions. First, this study demonstrates how segmentation analysis serves as a valuable research tool for public relations practitioners. Therefore, audience analysis/segmenting (profiling) our publics should not be overlooked. In the case of this study, travellers were able to be identified based on their age, information source usefulness and travel behaviours in which they participate. Second, this study extends the use of information source factors identified in earlier studies and substantiates the universality of these communication factors. Third, the results demonstrate how these factors can be used to distinguish travellers based on the generational cohorts they represent.

To recap, in this current investigation the information sources were collapsed into the four factors and were regressed with the outdoor recreational activities that were found

to coalesce during a factor analysis of 39 activities and attractions that are commonly examined in leisure travel studies. Three of the four factors (mass media, computer mediated communication, and traditional travel/tourism) indicated that the outdoor activities can predict travellers' perceptions of the usefulness of various communication channels. However, the outdoor activities did not significantly predict the likelihood that travellers would turn to word-of-mouth information sources. On its face, this last result is indeed surprising. However, when considering the proliferation of consumers who are now turning to social networking and internet-based channels (e.g., to hear about what others are saying about a hotel, restaurant, or attraction or to review a 360-degree view of the resort they are planning to visit), it makes sense that word-of-mouth is going by the wayside and being replaced with 'word-of-net'.

Further, all of the significant correlations were positive, offering public relations practitioners insight for developing more effective and efficient communication campaigns. For example, boating and hunting were both positively correlated with three of the four information source factors. Practitioners may consider enhancing their messages by linking appeals for both activities. However, state tourism communication managers who are trying to reach golfers, for example, might find greater success turning to computer mediated communication sources to distribute their messages, given the results revealed in this study. Finally, results of this investigation clearly note that the potential to participate in outdoor activities can significantly predict leisure travellers' selection of particular information source factors.

Regarding age, these results also illustrate the relevance of information source usefulness in relation to the generational cohort travellers represent. In short, information source usefulness does, in part, correlate with age. While the two older cohorts (Matures and Baby Boomers) report that the more traditional information sources are most useful (e.g., mass media and travel/tourism-oriented factors), the younger cohorts (Gen X and Gen Y) report that technology based sources are more useful. Individual mean score rankings also support these findings; this is consistent with market research data. Public relations practitioners should conduct formative research to learn more about the idiosyncrasies among members of these age cohorts before developing messages. Specific to this study, it is important that travel professionals design information campaigns that speak to Boomers and Matures differently than to the Gen X and Gen Y cohorts – and that these messages are distributed by means of channels each cohort deems most useful.

Note: for reasons of space, the cohort descriptions are not included in this article but can be found among articles included in the reference section. For examples of travel/tourism studies that use segmentation analysis to differentiate the generational age

cohorts, refer to Beldona, 2005; Beldona, Nusair, & DeMicco, 2008; Cleaver, Green, and Muller, 2000; Dey and Sarma, 2010; Dou, Wang, and Zhou, 2006; Fall, 2004; Fall, 2005; Fall and Knutson, 2001; Fall and Lubbers, 2009; Kattiyapornpong and Miller, 2011; and Peterson, 2007.

### **Recommendations for the public relations discipline**

This study has demonstrated how public relations practitioners and academicians can use audience segmentation as a viable tool for conducting formative research to define target publics. Further, segmentation is a valuable technique for carrying out a situation analysis – a critical first step in the public relations process. Therefore, recommendations include integrating projects and case studies in the public relations undergraduate curriculum to provide opportunities for students to refine their audience analysis skills. This suggestion supports findings suggested by the Commission on Public Relations Education in 1999 and again in 2006. Additionally, public relations researchers may consider using segmentation analysis for developing profiles and learning more about under-studied stakeholders as defined by the unique subcultures they represent (e.g., online learners, military, etc.).

### **Limitations/recommendations for future research**

As with all studies, this study has some shortcomings. First, it only examines travellers in a specific state. Second, given the fact that the data were collected onsite at welcome centres, the respondents were limited only to those travellers who drove to their destination. Researchers should make sure that the publics they are studying are 'automobile-bound' if they also use welcome centres as their venue to replicate this study in the future. In tandem to this issue, the authors acknowledge the bias of data when collection takes place at a certain venue. As such, the mean scores for welcome centres and visitor centre usefulness may be a bit inflated. Also, for a more well-rounded respondent profile, which is a primary outcome

of conducting an audience segmentation analysis, other demographic variables should be included. Such findings for this study are being reported in alternative research manuscripts.

In conclusion, as Internet technologies and social networking tools continue to become more commonplace, communication professionals should continue to isolate variables that better explain stakeholders' behaviours. Further, public relations research that focuses on generational cohorts should be expanded as well – considering that age provides valuable insight as both a demographic and psychographic variable. Finally, the authors propose that if researchers can view strategic segmentation as a viable research tool, which sits in the intersection of public relations/marketing Venn diagram, this perspective will break down territorial barriers and open the gates for more fruitful future stakeholder research.

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