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Marketing the Leisure Experience to Baby Boomers and Older Tourists

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interests of today's older tourists before concluding with a discussion of key marketing considerations for this growing cohort group.

KEYWORDS: [Baby boomers](#) [cohorts](#) [leisure experiences](#)

INTRODUCTION

It has become generally accepted that most people travel for the leisure experiences that they actively pursue. [Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, and Wanhill \(1998\)](#) stated that “most tourism throughout the world is a leisure activity” (p. 11). [Leiper \(1990\)](#) argued that tourism was a valued category of leisure, and that similar benefits such as relaxation can be derived from both the leisure/and or the tourist experience. The types and variety of leisure experiences that are engaged in by people while on holiday have also been of interest to several researchers ([Wei & Millman, 2002](#)). This is because tourists participate in different types of leisure experiences when they are away from home. [Leontido \(1994\)](#) and [Carr \(2002\)](#) found that tourists often behave in a more liberated, and less restrained manner in contrast to their leisure time behaviour at home. Tourists are also more likely to engage in conversations that help facilitate social

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There is little doubt that baby boomers are increasingly placing travel as a higher priority in their retirement years, mainly because they are feeling healthier, wealthier, better educated, more independent, have an abundance of leisure time and a lessening of social and family obligations than younger people ([Martin & Preston, 1994](#)). Because many have larger amounts of time for leisure and are relatively free of family obligations, they generally prefer to take trips for longer periods of time, often travel off season and have a greater concern for personal safety when travelling compared to younger age groups ([Zimmer, Brayley, & Searle, 1995](#)). Because of the greater heterogeneity and diversity of the older population, they often require a greater variety of choices in their travel experiences than previous generations of cohort groups. These can range from soft adventure travel that they want to organize themselves, to booking travel on the Internet, or to group package tours where everything is done for them by the travel agent and they stay in 5-star hotels.

In view of the importance of the aging baby boomers to tourism, this article aims:

1. To gain an understanding of the demographic characteristics of baby boomers and to investigate their changing needs for more challenging tourism and leisure experiences.
2. To recognize that the baby boomer market is a heterogeneous one and marketing needs vary according to demographic variables.
3. To suggest ways in which the tourism industry can better promote the needs of baby boomers.



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similar qualities. These included both being undertaken in people's free time, being regarded as pleasurable, intrinsically motivating and a rewarding experience that has formed the basis of the subjective definition of leisure ([Neulinger, 1974](#)).

The field of leisure studies research has also undergone major changes in recent years. In particular, the term leisure 'experience' is now being more commonly used by leisure researchers and this has replaced the use of terms such as 'activities' or 'patterns' ([Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987](#); [Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986](#); [Lee, Datillo, & Howard, 1994](#)).

More recently, researchers have begun to refer to the leisure experience as multi-dimensional in nature and characterized by the variety of experiences that occur. For example, [Lee et al. \(1994\)](#) referred to the transitory, dynamic and complex nature of leisure experiences. To most people, leisure is seen as a mixture of pleasurable (and sometimes unpleasurable) experiences that are generally characterised by feelings of fun, enjoyment and relaxation.

Contemporary leisure researchers such as Witt, Ellis, Mannell and Kleiber are now applying social psychological theory to the study of leisure. Such terms as perceived freedom, internal locus of control, optimal arousal, intrinsic motivation, and flow have been found to be useful concepts that when operationalized, have helped researchers to better define the 'leisure experience'. [Csikszentmihalyi \(1975, 1990, 1997\)](#) first coined the term 'flow' to describe those exceptional moments in life, and the effortless action that is characteristic of flow. Flow is a state of mind that is often experienced by elite athletes and is referred to as:



We now live in a world where tourism and leisure experiences are now being increasingly catered for by the commercial sector. The modern tourism and leisure industry is now all about providing experiences at a profit for the pleasure of others. [Grant \(2007\)](#) stated that, "We want to escape, socialize, fantasize, be creative, learn new skills, engage in some form of physical activity or interact with the environment" (p. 30). It is now the experience and not the event or activity that has become important for consumers. As [Pine and Gilmore \(1999\)](#) stated, people want to, 'buy an experience' and to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that engage them in a memorable way. This change in mindset also has meant that tourist agencies have had to rethink about how they view their customers, and how they are going to service their changing needs and desires. That is, there has been a shift from a product centric mindset to a customer centred one in which:

- Customers are no longer targets; they are humans to be served.
- Marketing is no longer a game of persuasion; it is a service.
- Customers are no longer data sets; they are human beings.
- The focus is no longer on products; it is on the customer experience ([Gilmartin, 2007b](#), p. 2).

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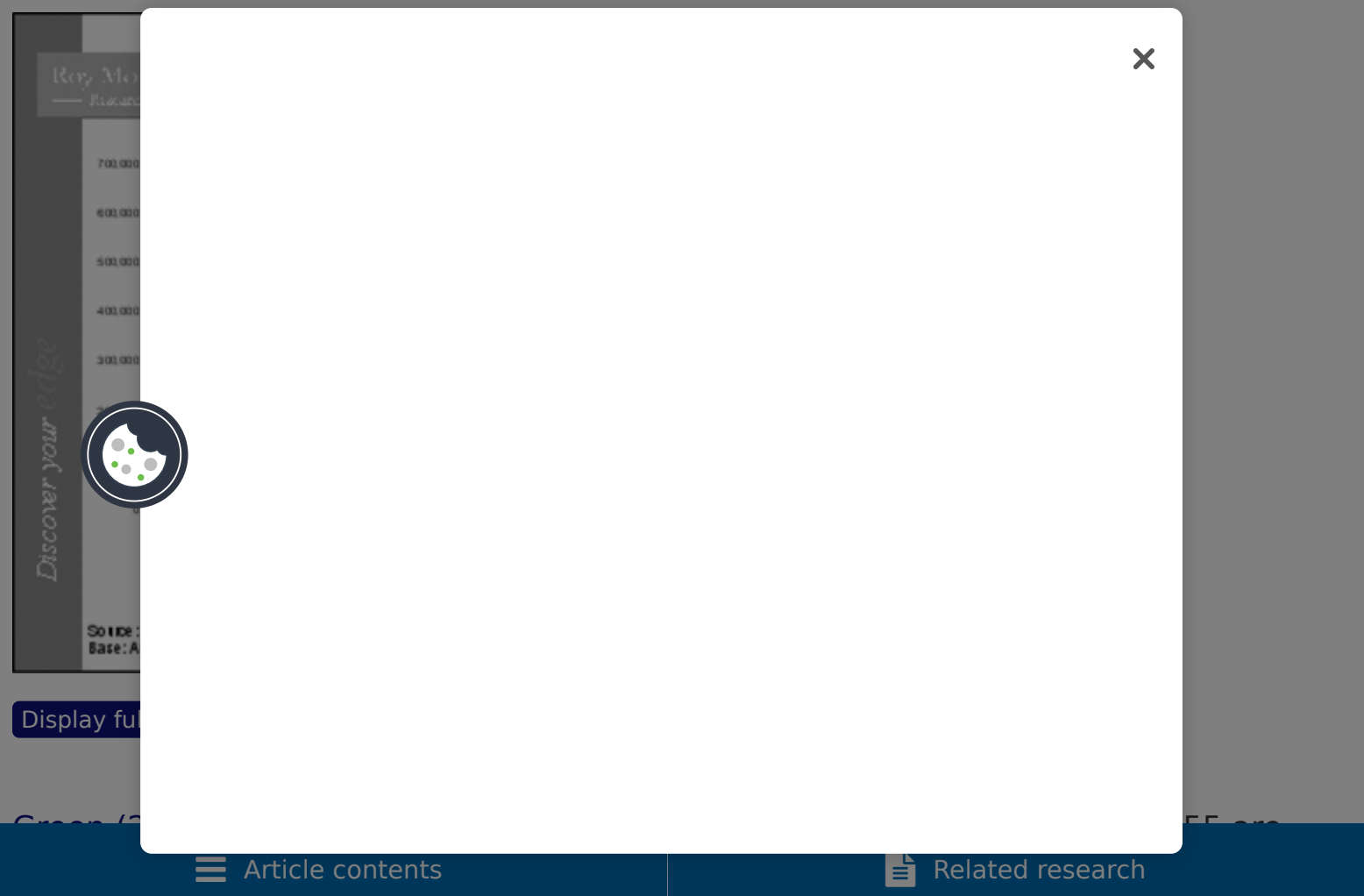


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[Labour Organisation, 1997](#)). Europe's share of global tourism dollars has diminished over the years, which some sectors of the tourism industry have attributed to ignorance and a lack of information about the size and growth potential of the senior market. As a result, the promotional strategies that have been used to attract the senior market have lagged well behind the US ([Viant, 1993](#)). Germany and the United Kingdom are the largest senior domestic and international markets, while seniors in Scandinavia and Spain show the greatest propensity to travel.

On a global scale, the world is becoming increasingly aware of the significant impact that older adults will have on the tourism industry in the decades ahead ([Goeldner, 1992](#)). This trend is beginning to become noticed in the statistics that have been collected on travel in the Asia Pacific Region. In 2006, [Ianniello \(2006\)](#) from Roy Morgan Research reported that 40% of Australians and New Zealanders who were taking an overseas holiday in the Pacific Asia Region were baby boomers. In 2005, 664,000 Australian Baby Boomers and 302,000 New Zealand Baby Boomers took a holiday in the Pacific Asia region, spending \$AUD 4.1 billion and \$AUD 1.2 billion respectively (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 Overseas holidays taken in the last 12 months by Australians in the Pacific Asia region ([Ianniello, 2006](#)).



For example, he argued they will have little tolerance for stereotypes or ageism. Importantly, as consumers they will have an increased expectation of products and services that instil value beyond mere utility. That is to say they will seek out products and services that speak to deeper values, and they will reward those that crack the marketing code ([Green, 2006](#)). Such a shift in mindset will thus have an immediate and notable impact on the type of holidays undertaken and the destinations that are chosen by older adults. For example, there is a likelihood that in the future, the volume of beach holidays will fall significantly, while at the same time it is likely that educational or cultural experiences will increase as older people show a marked preference to take holidays where they will learn something new, and/or embark on different historical and cultural experiences (World Tourism Organization, 2001).

It has been generally accepted that not all older people want to do the same sorts of things, and they need to be seen as a heterogeneous group of people with different motivations, destination preferences, preferred modes of travel and personal values ([Cleaver, Muller, Ruys, & Wei, 1999](#)). Some prefer to travel with their family in their own cars and caravans. Others are more adventurous travellers who travel with a companion or friends and explore new and different locations, while others prefer to totally enmesh themselves in a different culture, living in a new country for an extended period of time.

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danger, travel arrangements falling through, and/or becoming ill while on vacation. A greater proportion of females were in this group, and they were more likely to prefer travelling with either a group of friends, or with family members.

One of the new emerging markets is adventure tourism that focuses on more challenging, exciting and authentic experiences, and has become a new niche market for baby boomers who may be bored with being a mass tourist and a passive sightseer.

Adventure Tourism Experiences and Older Adults

A new generation of retirees have emerged that are 'hungry to go off the beaten path' resulting in the adventure travel business now growing to a \$500 million segment and at a rate of 30% per year, and is driven in partly by, "... more and more retirees with time, money, and a yen for the exotic" ([Symonds, 1998](#), p. 102).

Many want to escape the stress and boredom of their everyday routine, to spend their vacation time on pleasure filled trips with a range of exciting and new physically challenging experiences, as well as expressing their need to meet people and build new friendships. Gene Wellman, 71 years old, is a retired environmental consultant from Klamath Falls, Oregon, USA and typifies this type of traveller. "Wellman has no desire to be herded onto sightseeing buses. So he and his wife Genevieve have joined a small group trip

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The self-fulfilling experier c ([Muller & Cleaver,](#) at recent er & Cleaver,. aged 55 or adventure tourism



Over the last 10 years, I have slept in a mountain hut while climbing 19,300 ft. Uhuru Peak on Mount Kilimanjaro and pitched a tent in a sandstorm in the Gobi desert. I have been to Mongolia, Madagascar and Peru and I am already planning this year's trips to the Andes and Ethiopia. When I first began travelling after her husband died in 1993, my friends could not understand why I did not choose more relaxing vacations in Hawaii or California. I told them that those were very nice places, but I can visit those places when I get older. ([Bierman, 2005](#), p. 53)

Therefore, one area that is attracting greater attention in the tourism and leisure literature is the need to cater for the very active, able, adventurous traveller. There is a greater demand for the travel experience to become a learning adventure in itself. Lipscombe (1996) stated that travelling is an important aspect of one's life adventure and exemplifies the search for meaning in later life. He suggested that the taste for new adventures might be more intense and addictive as we grow older. Older people are craving new experiences with a substantial adventure component, and are requesting that they be part of the decision-making process, and these, "... involve physical challenge, if not actual danger, travel that involves an inner journey, intellectual challenge, as well as exploration of new places and cultures" (Friedan, 1994, in [Lipscombe, 1995](#), p. 44).

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should be on the actual feelings and emotions that people experience while participating in tourism.

Based on an examination of the current research literature, future marketing campaigns should place greater emphasis on the authentic statements used by older people that enable them to describe their “real” experience – such as a sense of adventure, escapism and the challenge of actual involvement. Terms such as enjoyment, flow, optimum arousal, and meeting new friends should be emphasised so as to encourage feelings associated with a sense of freedom, fun and escape from a mundane and sometimes boring lifestyle at work and perhaps an unhappy family life. In addition, marketing strategies that promote images of older people doing soft and hard adventure activities so that they can feel younger and healthier by literally ‘buying back their youth’ should also be encouraged by the media.

Segmenting the Market

The tourism industry must not consider older adults to be one single distinct group, but rather as a heterogeneous group of people that include many distinct market segments. The broad range of people that we classify as older aged adults actually includes a wide range of ages ranging from approximately 50 years to 100 years or more. Every cohort group (50 to 60 years; 60 to 70 years; 70 to 80 years, etc) has lived

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([Cleaver & Muller, 2002](#)). This age difference gap seems to become larger as a person ages, for example, travellers from the United States who were aged 80 years and older still felt that they had a subjective age of around 65 years ([Smith & Jenner, 1997](#)).

Segmentation based on income

There is a growing market of wealthy seniors that are able to afford a higher quality of travel. [Penalta and Uysal \(1992\)](#) noted that the financial health of a large number of older people made them with an excellent market for luxury goods and services. As a result, resorts and hotels are specifically designing programs and activities that target older people. Group travel and package tours were also popular with older travellers, as well as the provision for quality travel, and travel related products and services.

Package tours are very popular because many middle and upper class people are often too busy to spend time organising their trip plans themselves, and as a result prefer to leave this task in the hands of professionals such as travel agents.

Special interest tourism has become more popular in recent years and trips are very expensive because of the tour companies desire to cater for the older adult's need to travel to remote areas of the world, sometimes with limited access by air. This is because guided tours such as soft adventure activities that include wildlife safaris, white water rafting trips, mountain treks and sea kayaking are generally more

expensive. [Sorenson, 1993](#) noted that the nature of these specialized locations is often remote and difficult to reach. [Sorenson, 1993](#) noted that the general trend toward more specialized leisure activities for older adults (Jensen & Jensen, 1993).

Segmentation based on gender

Women are more educated and have a higher income than many other age groups. They tend to specialise and participate in activities such as attending cultural events, travel, and recreation. Older women are more likely to be active and engaged in their communities.



terrorism. Men on the other hand prefer activities that are outdoors and emphasise their health and fitness through such sporting activities as golfing, fishing and hiking.

[Statts and Pierfelice \(2003\)](#) found strong support for the belief that travel is a frequently desired and continuing activity for groups of long-term retirees, most of whom were women. [Lehto, O'Leary and Lee \(2001\)](#) also found that females were more sensitive to safety issues than men, and requested greater opportunities to socialise and interact with other people. Most women prefer shorter trips possibly because they do not want to be away from their family and pets for longer periods of time.

Segmentation based on education

When baby boomers reach their later years, they will have attained significantly higher levels of formal education than their predecessors. In 1990, about 46% of Americans aged 65 and over had completed less than four years of high school, 33% had received a high school diploma and 13% had completed 4 years or more of college (United States Department of Commerce, 1993). In contrast to this, presently, well over half of all baby boomers have earned at least a high school diploma, and approximately 1:4 will have completed four years of college ([McNeil, 2001](#)). Similarly, Australian baby boomers have more years of formal education than the average Australian, with 27.3% of baby boomers completing a university degree compared to 13% of Australian full-time workers.

The research on leisure preferences of baby boomers is generally positive and satisfactory. The research on leisure preferences of baby boomers in the United States (Zimmerman, 1993) and in Australia (McNeil, 2001) shows that baby boomers have a higher level of leisure participation than previous cohorts, and that they are more likely to engage in leisure activities that are health-promoting and socially beneficial.

Segmentation

Health and fitness are important concerns for baby boomers, and they have a greater knowledge of health and fitness issues than previous cohorts. They are more likely to engage in health-promoting activities such as walking, swimming, and gardening, and they are more likely to consume healthy and nutritious foods. They are also more likely to engage in leisure activities that are health-promoting and socially beneficial, such as walking, swimming, and gardening. They are also more likely to consume healthy and nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. They are also more likely to engage in leisure activities that are health-promoting and socially beneficial, such as walking, swimming, and gardening. They are also more likely to consume healthy and nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.



through their emphasis on swimming pools and spas, gymnasiums and walking trails. Swimming and aqua aerobic classes have become popular because of their well known therapeutic benefits, particularly for older people who have arthritis and osteoporosis.

Retirement communities such as Sun City in Arizona, USA has emerged from nothing but desert in 1959, to a large community of 46,000 seniors. The success of Sun City has encouraged DEVCO, the developer to expand their concept to provide residents with the choice of living in eight different retirement communities in Arizona, South Carolina, and California. The emphasis of their advertising campaigns has been to promote active adult communities and is pitched at encouraging older people to enjoy the freedom of a range of leisure activities such as croquet, ceramics, golf, gardening, and swimming that highlights a 'golden' or 'treasured' time of life ([Luken & Vaughn, 2003](#)).

These 'young at heart boomers' prefer to enjoy their holidays with younger people and still want to be involved in active and more adventurous leisure experiences ([Cleaver & Muller, 2002](#)). It has also been found that many older people are becoming younger in outlook, with similar types of leisure behaviour overlapping with younger and older age groups. As a result, leisure activities such as going to the movies, undertaking do-it-yourself renovation activities, eating out, and watching DVD's at home were found to be blurred across a range of different age groups ([Henley Centre, 1992](#)).

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operators. Not before time it should be added, as researchers have indicated that many boomers are already bypassing the high street travel agent and ignoring the well-intentioned tour operator packages specifically targeted at their age bracket as they do not want to be tagged as “goldies,” nor do they want to be directed to the limited range of passive offerings for individuals they perceive to be much older and senior to themselves ([Juliet, 2003](#)).

While it can be said that the renewed interest in better servicing the needs of baby boomers is in part because tourism agencies have begun to appreciate more fully the sheer size of the market numbers involved, it also has much to do with the recognition of the diverse lifestyle patterns and consumption habits of this cohort where the “one size fits all” mindset just does not cut it. It is a group which is very clearly different across a range of characteristics in comparison to previous generations of older people. The average age of retirement is falling and many people in this “young old” age group are now ‘empty nesters’ whose children have left home. They are generally healthy, more highly educated and financially secure, and as a result, this group wants to increasingly enjoy special interest travel that caters for new and innovative ‘hands on’ experiences. This is especially true for older women and those who are widowed and single who will become a much larger segment of the older adult market as their needs become further recognized.

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participate with them. [Goodman \(2007\)](#), noted that companies looking for ways to motivate the 'been there, done that' boomer cohort need look no further than creating tourist opportunities that tap into their renewed interest for history and nostalgia that they perceive as adventurous or new, but relatively safe. Strategies for selling these opportunities need to be aligned with how baby boomers think and act. That is,

- As a cohort, baby boomers are more resistant to absolute propositions. The implication of this is that tourism agencies need to present information on services and products in a qualified, even differential manner.
- They are more sensitive to metaphorical meanings, nuances and subtleties. The implication of this is that tourism agencies need to take greater heed to the importance of expanding the content of a given message, especially in terms of its metavalues. That is, to emphasise values that transcend the generic value of a service or product and expand its perceived attractiveness.
- They are more sensitive to narrative-styled presentations of information, and less responsive to information presented in an expository style. The implication of this is that tourism agencies should make greater use of story-telling techniques to convey information to baby boomers.

- Their preference for narrative-styled presentations of information should focus on providing a story that is relatable and engaging. This might need a particular focus on the emotional aspects of the story.

The research also found that baby boomers have a high level of interest in real life experiences and are more likely to engage in activities that provide a sense of adventure. This is reflected in their high levels of interest in travel and outdoor activities. The research also found that baby boomers have a high level of interest in a variety of activities and are more likely to engage in activities that provide a sense of adventure. This is reflected in their high levels of interest in travel and outdoor activities. The research also found that baby boomers have a high level of interest in a variety of activities and are more likely to engage in activities that provide a sense of adventure. This is reflected in their high levels of interest in travel and outdoor activities.

At present, the research has identified a number of key findings that should be considered by tourism agencies. These findings include the need to focus on providing a story that is relatable and engaging, the need to focus on the emotional aspects of the story, and the need to focus on providing a sense of adventure. The research also found that baby boomers have a high level of interest in real life experiences and are more likely to engage in activities that provide a sense of adventure. This is reflected in their high levels of interest in travel and outdoor activities.

poised to become a larger part of the leisure market. The over 50's are more adventurous than their parents, and are driven to discover new destinations and to try new and exciting leisure activities. Tourism operators must quickly adapt their marketing strategies to this emerging market otherwise they will be left behind. As noted by [McDougall \(1998\)](#), those products and services that can best cater to the sophisticated travel tastes of the baby boomer generation and, at the same time, meet the sensitivities of older travellers may well be the winners in the market place in future years.

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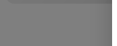
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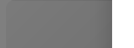
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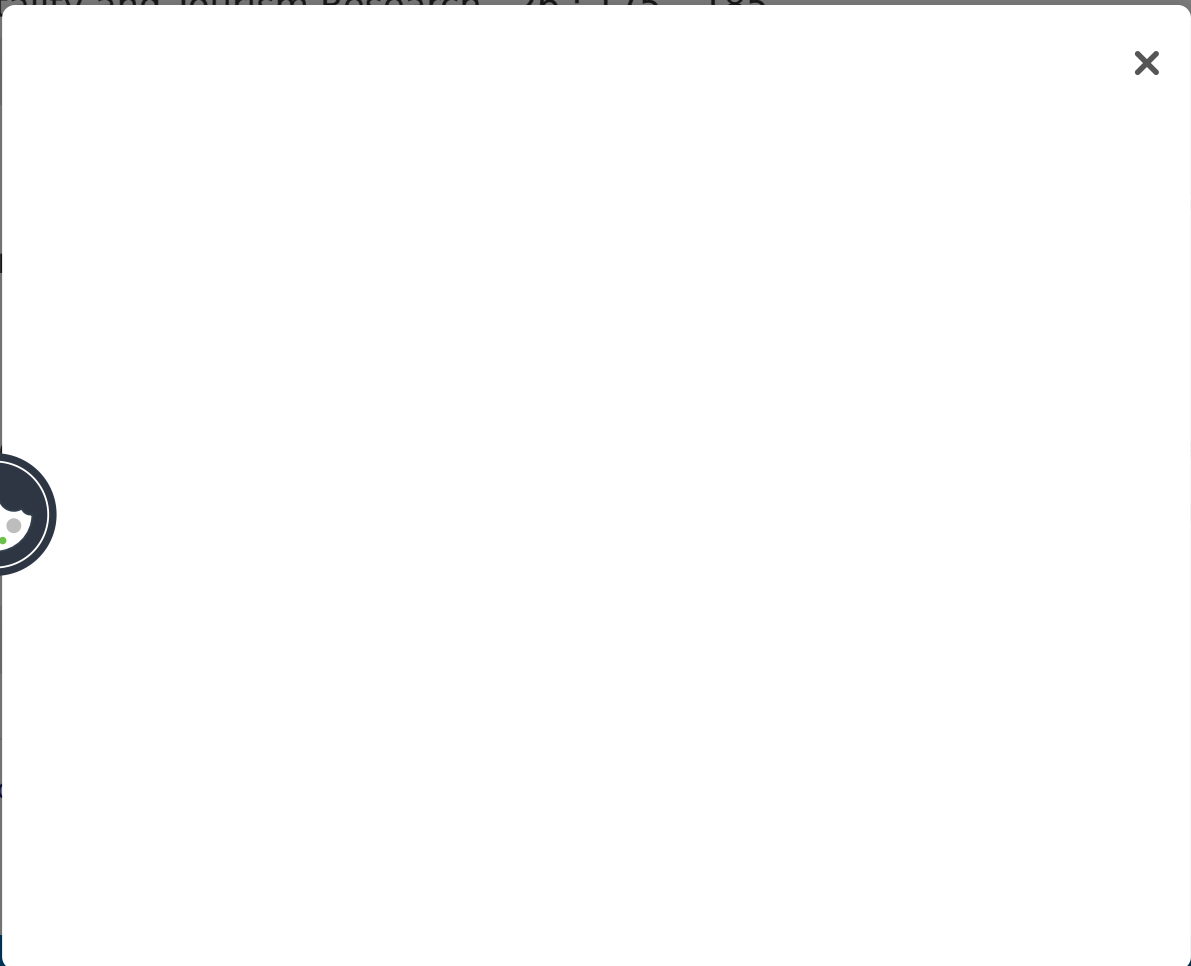
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