Determining Engagement in Responsible Tourism Decision Making Amongst the Baby Boomer Generation

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Abstract: With their leisure time and disposable income, baby boomers are frequent travellers, but their engagement with Responsible Tourism often lacks consistency. This study explores their motivations, preferences, and barriers, identifying age-related differences within the cohort.

While Baby Boomers express environmental concerns, their travel decisions rarely prioritise sustainability. A key finding is the value-action gap, driven by scepticism about responsible travel options and limited trust in tour operators' eco-friendly practices. Clearer communication and transparent offerings could address this.

The study reveals a preference for new and familiar destinations, with repeat visits fostering deeper connections and behavioural shifts. However, sustainability is more often deprioritised by older Baby Boomers, who also view luxury travel as incompatible with Responsible Tourism. Younger Baby Boomers, by contrast, show greater openness to eco-friendly luxury services.

This research highlights the importance of segmenting Baby Boomers by age when designing Responsible Tourism initiatives. It recommends improving transparency, offering alternative transport options, and creating experiences aligned with Baby Boomers' values. Emphasising tangible environmental and social benefits could encourage more responsible travel behaviour within this demographic.

Keywords: Responsible Tourism, Responsible tourism behavior, Baby Boomer, Tourism decision making, Intragenerational differences

Introduction

In today's service-driven society, tourism significantly impacts global GDP (around 9.1%) and employment (8.2%) as of 2023, approaching pre-pandemic levels (Statista Research Development, 2024; ILOSTAT, 2024). Tourism offers economic benefits and potential drawbacks for destinations, with COVID-19 amplifying scrutiny on its unchecked growth and revealing the social and environmental costs (UNWTO, 2008; Hu and Sung, 2022; Li, 2023). As a result, interest in Responsible Tourism (RT) has surged, emphasising the need for sustainable practices to protect environments, communities, and resources in the long term (Kim et al., 2018; Prasongthan, 2023; Kubíková and Rudý, 2024).

RT incorporates social and environmental dimensions beyond economic factors, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals 8, 12, and 14 (Dias et al., 2021; Mondal and Samaddar, 2021; Pinho and Gomes, 2023; Viglia and Acuti, 2023; ILOSTAT, 2024). However, implementation is hampered by overlapping terminologies and limited demand-side research (Lee et al., 2017; Mihalic et al., 2021; Baloch et al., 2022; Hu and Sung, 2022; Salinero et al., 2022; Prasongthan, 2023; Kubíková and Rudý, 2024). Consequently, the role of tourists as responsible participants remains underexplored, while the gap between responsible awareness or intention and action is yet to be fully addressed, restricting broader adoption of responsible practices (Budeanu, 2007; Gonda and Ratz, 2023; Nieto-García et al., 2024).

Consumer behaviour has transformed as demographic shifts, particularly in developed countries like the UK, where the senior population increasingly influences tourism (WTO, 2013; Centre for Ageing Better, 2021; Otoo and Kim, 2020). The Baby Boomer generation is expected to outpace younger cohorts in leisure tourism, with higher disposable incomes and flexible schedules (Patterson and Pegg, 2009; Stončikaitė, 2022; Balderas-Cejudo and Patterson, 2023). As a healthier, wealthier, and more educated cohort, Baby Boomers are well-suited to drive sustainable practices in tourism, considering their preference for off-peak travel and extended stays, which reduces destination strain (Cleaver et al., 2000; Alén et al., 2016; Špindler, 2018). Yet, they remain underrepresented in research, often focusing on younger travellers (Santos et al., 2016). Since the characteristics of each generation shape tourism engagement, generational analysis is crucial for understanding travel attitudes and enabling practitioners to adapt swiftly (Li, 2023; Tiago et al., 2016; Špindler, 2018).

The aim of this research is, therefore, to explore how the Baby Boomer cohort engages in RT during their travel decision-making processes. Investigating their level of engagement, motivations and perceived barriers will not only address a gap in the literature but also offer practical insights for tourism operators and policy makers striving seeking effective strategies for this demographic. This study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of RT by acknowledging the role of older travellers and promoting ad-hoc strategies.

Literature Review:

Consumer behaviour is a complex, multidimensional concept studied across various disciplines since the early twentieth century (Juvan et al., 2017; Reina Paz and Rodríguez Vargas, 2023; Sethna, 2023; Kotler et al., 2024). Kotler and Keller (2016, p. 179) define it as "how individuals, groups, and organisations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants", emphasising consumer desires. Alternative definitions, such as those by Bennett (1995) and Peter and Olson (2005), emphasize the dynamic, interactive nature of consumer behaviour, which involves complex exchanges of thoughts, feelings, and decisions.

In tourism, investigating consumer behaviour presents unique challenges due to limited empirical research, reliance on outdated data, and a lack of longitudinal studies across geographic and cultural contexts (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016). While tourism-specific models, like those developed by Wahab et al. (1976), Mathieson and Wall (1982), and Gilbert (1991), provide a basis for understanding decision-making, these models often prove overly linear and lack testing against real consumer behaviours, underscoring the need for further research. Internal and external influences further complicate efforts to manage consumer motivators, and many of these influences remain poorly understood (Kotler et al., 2024).

In the current era of the "changing traveller" (Deloitte, 2024, p. 3), understanding the diversification of consumer groups and what drives their behaviour is critical (Deloitte, 2020; Sethna, 2023). Trust in businesses remains low, and demographic variables such as race, health, and education create unique consumer needs (Deloitte, 2020). This nuanced understanding is essential for effective tourism marketing, as companies adapt their distribution methods and tailor experiences to meet diverse consumer expectations (Moschis and Ünal, 2008; Otoo et al., 2020).

Responsible Tourism

Since the 1980s, RT has emerged as an alternative to mass tourism, reflecting a shift towards sustainable development in academia, the tourism industry, and society (Spenceley, 2008; Caruana et al., 2014; Weeden and Boluk, 2014; Kim et al., 2018; Li, 2023; Prasongthan, 2023). Goodwin (2016) defines it as a collective and individual responsibility to create better environments for both residents and visitors. However, the vagueness of this well-known definition has led researchers to explore its overlap with concepts such as sustainable tourism and ecotourism (Bramwell et al., 2008; Mondal and Samaddar, 2021; Baloch et al., 2022). Despite its appeal, some critiques suggest RT's effectiveness may be limited within capitalist frameworks (Hall, 2014; Weeden, 2014; Butler, 2015; Mondal and Samaddar, 2021).

The Cape Town (2002) and Kerala (2008) Declarations have advanced theoretical and practical understanding, emphasising sustainability, localism, and human rights while warning against oversimplification (Burrai et al., 2019). Nevertheless, ongoing ambiguity persists in its definition, and its implementation may be hindered by stakeholder confusion and lack of awareness (Van der Merwe and Wocke, 2007).

To promote RT, multiple stakeholders must collaborate to maximise benefits and minimise harm to natural and social resources (Cape Town Declaration, 2002; Bramwell et al., 2008; Burrai et al., 2019; Dias et al., 2021; Mondal and Samaddar, 2021; Hu and Sung, 2022; Gonda and Rátz, 2023; Prasongthan, 2023). While stakeholders play a role, individual tourist behaviour is crucial yet often overlooked (Lee et al., 2017; Saarinen, 2021; Schönherr, 2023). Understanding tourists' attitudes and behaviours toward RT is key to fostering

sustainability (Caruana et al., 2014; Mody et al., 2014; Mihalic, 2016; Gao et al., 2017; Gonda and Rátz, 2023; Prasongthan, 2023).

Responsible Tourist Behaviour

Interest in Responsible Tourist Behaviour (RTB) is growing, especially post-pandemic, driven by factors like risk aversion, environmental awareness, and cultural values (Gonda and Rátz, 2023). RTB addresses tourism's negative impacts through actions that support environmental protection, respect for local communities, and destination resilience (Kim et al., 2018; Hu and Sung, 2022). Balancing destination enjoyment with fair reciprocity exemplifies tourist citizenship behaviour, integrating environmental, social, and economic concerns (Stanford, 2008; Caruana et al., 2014; Mihalic, 2016; Calderon-Monge et al., 2020).

Despite considerable research, RTB remains poorly defined due to a lack of consensus, the complexity of destination-specific issues, and an overemphasis on its environmental dimension, with limited research addressing the socio-cultural and economic spheres (Xu et al., 2018; Calderon-Monge et al., 2020; Dias et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2022; Schönherr, 2023). Additional challenges stem from demand-side perspectives, including insufficient stakeholder participation and low RT awareness (Caruana et al., 2014), thereby limiting a holistic understanding of RTB.

There has been relatively limited exploration of the gaps between attitudes, intentions, and actions in RT, which hinders consumption (Budeanu, 2007; Nikolic et al., 2021; Thimm, 2022). Despite tourists' growing awareness of sustainability, translating beliefs and willingness into actions is challenging due to practical concerns like convenience and time (Weeden, 2014; Higham et al., 2015; Juvan et al., 2017; Li, 2023; Wu et al., 2023). Consequently, spending on recent travel reveals a significant value-action gap, particularly in the UK, where a 44% disparity was found between willingness to pay for sustainable options and actual behaviour (Statista Consumer Insights Global, 2022). Understanding these drivers is essential for tailoring services and supporting post-pandemic sustainable tourism recovery (Hu and Sung, 2022; Gonda and Ratz, 2023; Viglia and Acuti, 2023).

Motivation remains the primary driver in RTB studies, although the interdisciplinary complexity of travel behaviour resists a single explanatory framework (Crompton, 1979; Fodness, 1994; Weeden, 2014). Several factors influence tourists' decisions, including escapism, cost considerations, and alignment with environmental values (Schmidt, 2001; Goodwin and Francis, 2003). These factors clarify destination choices, segmentation, and satisfaction (Carr, 2002; Lam and Hsu, 2006). Moreover, personal values and lifestyle factors are key in travel choices (Pitts and Woodside, 1986; Muller, 1991). Place attachment and destination involvement also drive RTB (Cheng et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2018; Hu and Sung, 2022), as engagement with a destination influences

cultural identity, personal traits, and actions (Caruana et al., 2014; Santos et al., 2014; Al-Gharibah and Mahfod, 2022).

Tourism, however, remains a personal choice, making human behaviour complex to predict (Weeden, 2014). Some argue that responsible tourists often show conscientious behaviour in daily life (Sambri and Pegan, 2007; Dolnicar et al., 2008), but empirical support is limited. Many prioritise escaping daily challenges over addressing ethical concerns or are unaware of their vacations' environmental impacts, illustrating the difficulty in fostering ethical travel choices (Weeden, 2014; Selänniemi, 2000; Stončikaitė, 2022).

A final limitation in RTB research is the insufficient adaptation of models across generations, despite evidence that generational differences in environmental values influence RTB (Dias et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Most treat tourists as a homogeneous group, overlooking these differences (Salinero et al., 2022). While age-related consumer behaviour is well-studied (Lipowski, 2017; Li, 2023), such variations are underexplored in tourism, particularly in RTB (Gonda and Ratz, 2023). Salinero et al. (2022) presented a model focused on Gen Z (born 1995–2009), but other generations, including older cohorts, remain under-researched.

Baby Boomers' travel behaviour

The ageing population represents one of the most significant social changes of the 21st century: by 2050, the global number of people aged 60 and over is projected to double, reaching 2 billion (United Nations, 2015). In the UK, Baby Boomers constituted 20% of the population in 2022, with life expectancy increasing between 1999 and 2019 (Deloitte, 2020; Statista, 2021; Statista, 2024a). This demographic shift is reshaping the tourism sector, with senior tourism emerging as a dynamic and expanding market in which the well-being of older travellers is increasingly prioritised (Kim et al., 2015; Sie et al., 2016; Patterson and Balderas, 2018; Otoo et al., 2020; Stončikaitė, 2022). Nevertheless, Baby Boomers' importance as a key segment has only recently been recognised, resulting in limited research (Patterson et al., 2017).

Baby Boomers are defined as those born between 1946 and 1964, reflecting the post-World War II population surge (Sie et al., 2016; Patterson et al., 2017; Sethna, 2023; Kotler et al., 2024). In tourism research, terms like 'senior,' 'grey,' 'silver,' and 'mature' are often used interchangeably, causing ambiguity about Baby Boomers inclusion (Shoemaker, 2000; Carrigan et al., 2004; Gillon, 2004; Moschis et al., 2004; Reece, 2004; Wang et al., 2007; Tiago et al., 2016).

They are targeted by marketers for their health, financial stability, and desire for novelty and authentic experiences, which also shape their travel preferences (Jang and Wu, 2006; Patterson and Pegg, 2009; Meiners and Seeberger, 2010; United Nations, 2015; Stončikaitė, 2022). They seek personalised experiences that cater to social, cultural, and self-improvement needs, with many preferring diverse, exotic locations over revisiting previous destinations (Harper, 2006;

Patterson and Pegg, 2011; Alén et al., 2016; Sie et al., 2016; Patterson et al., 2017; Balderas-Cejudo and Patterson, 2023; Stončikaitė, 2022).

Baby Boomers value luxury experiences and prioritise comfort and quality – the reason they are often termed 'comfort-seeking explorers' (Faithfull, 2023). They account for 80% of global spending in this sector (Ma, 2023) and typically spend more on travel than other generations, making them a lucrative target for many companies (Stončikaitė, 2022; Balderas-Cejudo and Patterson, 2023; Kotler et al., 2024). As the cost-of-living crisis eases, the affluent ageing population is expected to drive holiday market growth (Mintel, 2024a). Many travel companies still lack a deep understanding of this diverse segment (Patterson and Balderas, 2018).

Despite existing research identifying Baby Boomers' travel motivations (Sie et al., 2016), gaps remain in understanding how their evolving needs influence their behaviours (Blackwell et al., 2007; Hosany et al., 2019; Otoo et al., 2020). Ahn and Janke (2011) observed significant variations in intrinsic motivations based on gender, educational attainment, perceived health, and programme activity levels, highlighting the intricate interactions between socio-demographic factors and travel motivations. However, there is no consensus on the best theory to explain the psychological factors influencing tourists' travel decisions, making the relationship between motivations and behaviours in senior travellers complex (Otoo et al., 2020).

The segment is often inaccurately seen as homogeneous, with studies comparing them to other generations rather than focusing solely on their distinct profiles, preferences, and behaviours, neglecting intragenerational differences (Tiago et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2016; Qiu et al., 2022; Gonda and Ratz, 2023). Understanding Baby Boomers' distinct characteristics, shaped by their unique historical and socio-cultural contexts, is essential (Kenebayeva, 2020).

In terms of RT, the tendency to travel in low seasons aligns with efforts to address seasonality (Tiago et al., 2016; Otoo and Kim, 2020; Patterson and Balderas, 2018). However, many in the UK do not prioritise sustainability when booking holidays (Mintel, 2024a), with older luxury travellers often prioritising premium services over sustainable options (Ma, 2023; Mintel, 2024b). Lack of awareness and scepticism around sustainability claims presents another barrier, with 80% expressing doubt about travel companies' sustainability efforts (Mintel, 2024b). As they tend to require more time and detailed information when making travel decisions, encouraging Responsible Tourism among this segment remains to be fully explored (Jang and Wu, 2006; Expedia Media Solutions, 2017; Juvan et al., 2017; Patterson and Balderas, 2018; Otoo and Kim, 2020).

Methods

A mixed-method approach was adopted, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. By focusing on participants' shared experiences,

qualitative methods offer valuable insights into the under-researched RT behaviour of Baby Boomers (Kieżel et al., 2019).

Data were collected using a self-completed questionnaire, accessible online between August and September 2024. This approach was chosen for speed and cost efficiency, allowing respondents to complete questions independently and at their own pace, potentially leading to more thoughtful answers (Clark et al., 2021). Additionally, this format increases accessibility, which is important given the target demographic (ages 60-78), some of whom may not be experiencing optimal ageing. Inclusion criteria required participants to be individuals residing in the UK for most of their lives, born between 1946 and 1964, with an interest or experience in RT.

The design was guided by the research objectives and trends identified in the literature and was divided into two main sections: the first focused on factual and demographic data, while the second addressing attitudes, opinions, and behaviours (Dillman et al., 2014) combining open-ended and closed-ended questions, following standard practices.

Thematic analysis was selected to examine data from the questionnaire by identifying key patterns through systematic coding processes. Given the subjective and context-dependent nature of knowledge creation, researcher subjectivity becomes an asset in the analytical process (Gough and Madill, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2022b).

Results and discussion:

A total of 141 individuals completed the questionnaire. To explore differences in preferences, behaviours, and perspectives, respondents were placed in two subgroups: older Baby Boomers (1946–1955) and younger Baby Boomers (1956–1964) (Bell, 2013; Fleming, 2015). The younger group includes 94 participants while the older group has 42. The sample consists of more females (73.5%) than males (25.8%). In terms of income, the primary source for respondents is private pensions. Notably, 95.2% of older Baby Boomers rely on pensions, compared to 62.8% of younger Baby Boomers, reflecting differing life stages. Almost all older Baby Boomers are retired, while younger Baby Boomers are more evenly split between employment (37.3%) and retirement (62.8%).

Total household income is relatively even between lower (<£30,000) and middle (£30,000–60,000) brackets, with 71.3% of respondents in these categories. Among older Baby Boomers, 52.4% report incomes of less than £30,000, while younger Baby Boomers show more variation: 31.9% earn less than £30,000, and 38.3% fall within the £30,000–£60,000 range. This distribution likely relates to the 37.3% of younger Baby Boomers still active in the workforce. Gender differences in income are apparent, with 41% of females reporting household incomes of less than £30,000, compared to 28.6% of males.

Travel behaviour patterns

The majority of respondents (42.7%) reported travelling for leisure 2–3 times a year, followed by those who travel more than five times a year (27.2%) and those who travel 3–4 times (23.5%). Altogether, 93.4% of Baby Boomers travel at least 2–3 times annually, suggesting they represent a consistent and significant market segment for leisure travel (Kotler et al., 2024; Statista Consumer Insights Global, 2024a). Younger Baby Boomers are slightly more likely to travel 3–4 times a year (24.5%) and more than five times (29.8%) compared to older Baby Boomers, both of whom report a travel rate of 21.4%.

In terms of gender, females are more likely to fall into higher travel frequency categories, which contrasts with broader findings that 58% of frequent travellers are male (Statista Consumer Insights Global, 2024b). 30.9% of respondents indicated stable leisure travel frequency, while 46.4% travelled more and 22.8% travelled less. Younger Baby Boomers tend to travel more (51.1%) compared to older Baby Boomers, 26.2% of whom reported a decrease in travel frequency. This may suggest the differences in age, time constraints, retirement, and health are likely to be significant factors affecting travel behaviour, along with past experiences tied to life stages (United Nations, 2015). These aspects merit further investigation.

Destination choice

When selecting destinations, 47.4% of respondents prefer a mix of new places and revisiting significant locations, followed by 33.8% who exclusively seek new destinations and 18.8% who only revisit meaningful spots. Age group analysis shows similar patterns, with older respondents slightly more inclined to explore new destinations. These findings differ somewhat from previous research, which suggests Baby Boomers typically value new experiences over familiar ones (Harper, 2006; Patterson and Pegg, 2011; Stončikaitė, 2022).

Exploration is the primary motivation across all age groups (41.3%), followed by nostalgia and sentimentality (19.1%) and familiarity/comfort (18.3%). Purpose-driven travel, more prevalent among younger respondents, ranks next (15.9%). Health and age (4%), security (0.8%), and environmental or ethical concerns (0.8%) are the least cited motivations. The latter tend to favour revisiting familiar places.

Respondents motivated by curiosity and exploration prefer visiting new places (23%). Age, time and health also play significant roles: older respondents (R119) highlight that their *ability to visit is limited by age and mobility*, while younger participants (R14) feel an urgency to explore whilst they *are young enough*. These respondents tend to travel more frequently, with 55.6% travelling more than five times annually.

Those driven by nostalgia or familiarity are more likely to revisit special places or mix new and familiar destinations, partially supporting Sie et al.'s findings (2016) around nostalgia as a motivator for older travellers. Many older

respondents combine curiosity with nostalgia, as reflected by R95: *new places are stimulating, and old favourites are comforting*. Younger respondents echoed this balance, particularly focusing on exploring the UK.

Revisiting Behaviour

Revisiting special places is the least common motivation, driven by familiarity and comfort for older Baby Boomers and visiting friends and family, especially children and grandchildren overseas, for the younger group. Some respondents aim to reduce their environmental impact by limiting air travel and focusing on familiar destinations. Familiarity also provides a sense of security. R130 noted: *We revisit places because it's easier to relax knowing what the area offers, and we prefer certain accommodations.* This familiarity often leads to more responsible behaviour. For instance, R97 remarked: *We tend to drive less on subsequent visits, partly because we've already explored by car*, while R48 added: *We explore places on foot*. Connecting with locals fosters a sense of belonging, as R119 noted: *You gain a better appreciation of local people, their environment, and the challenges they face.*

Revisiting familiar destinations can foster deeper connections: engaging with locals enhances authentic experiences, mutual respect, and cultural and environmental awareness (Diallo et al., 2015). R90 described returning to Italy as *a homecoming; there's a lot of hugging, and I feel protective of the small town*. These findings align with research by Hu and Sung (2022), Cheng et al. (2013), and Xu et al. (2018), suggesting that tourists more involved with a destination are more likely to engage in RTB. Additionally, destination context (Stanford, 2008) and personality traits (Al-Gharibah and Mahfod, 2022) contribute to this.

Decision-making factors

Most respondents (85.4%) agreed personal values shape their travel choices, especially in terms of travel style (29.8%) and destination selection (25.5%). Safety, family, and environmental concerns were recurring themes. R120 valued safety due to their partner's disability, and R129 prioritised family time.

Respondents also linked their values to RT, citing environmental (8.7%), economic (5%), and local community impacts (8.7%). Many were conscious of their carbon footprint. R28 refuses to fly because *it is the most environmentally damaging thing to do*. R61 avoids crowded areas to reduce strain on local infrastructure. However, gaps between stated values and behaviours persist. R3 also noted it's almost ten years since I took a flight. However, *I hope to visit a couple of places [..] where flying is the only option,* highlighting how sustainability is likely to be viable when convenient (Weeden, 2014; Wu et al., 2023).

Respect for local communities shapes travel decisions. For instance, R102 chose *local guides and accommodations to support economic impacts*. Political

and human rights issues also deterred some respondents from visiting destinations with unrest due to misaligned values on safety and ethics.

According to the responses, the destination is the top priority for Baby Boomers, followed by cost, comfort/quality, safety, sustainability, and lastly, accessibility. Sustainability ranked only fifth out of six, which aligns with Mintel's (2024a) findings that older UK travellers (54% of whom are Baby Boomers) are unlikely to prioritise sustainability during the booking phase. Both age categories showed a notable inclination to pay more for higher comfort and/or quality, though younger Baby Boomers are generally more willing to pay for comfortable travel experiences compared to the older group. The majority of responses were concentrated in the upper half of the willingness scale, aligning with the literature (Sie et al., 2016; Faithfull, 2023).

Perspectives on Responsible Tourism

It was observed in the literature that defining RT practices is not straightforward. Therefore, it's unsurprising that the respondents' interpretations varied as well. Most respondents associate RT with environmental responsibility (33.5%), socio-cultural responsibility (21%), responsible tourism management (14.3%), and awareness and education (14.3%). Less common associations included economic considerations (11.8%) and participant perspectives (5.1%).

R5's explanation of environmental responsibility shows a broad understanding of the principles: using local produce, supporting local industries, saving water, conserving energy, leaving a place as you found it, protecting local wildlife, reducing single-use plastics, and implementing effective recycling procedures. The multidimensionality of RT became evident, as most replies spanned multiple categories. For instance, sociocultural responsibility emphasises avoiding exploitation and balancing the needs of local communities with tourism.

While the economic dimension received less attention, respondents demonstrated an awareness of its significance. R102 emphasised *using locally sourced guides, companies, and products, contributing to the local economy by buying local produce and gifts*, and supporting travel companies committed to offsetting tourism impacts.

Overall, respondents demonstrated a good understanding of responsible practices, contrary to Mintel's (2024a) findings, which indicated that older British travellers have limited knowledge of RT. This divergence may be explained by the fact that Mintel's older traveller category only includes 54% of Baby Boomers and thus does not fully capture their views.

Older Baby Boomers expect environmentally friendly holidays from their TO/TA.

There is limited research on travellers' expectations regarding sustainability from their Tour Operators (TO) or Travel Agencies (TA). In this study, the majority of respondents (52.2%) expect their TO or TA to ensure their holiday is

environmentally friendly. 61.9% of older Baby Boomers expect eco-friendly practices. In contrast, younger Baby Boomers show a smaller gap, with 47.9% expecting it to be. This indicates a generational difference in expectations.

Most respondents (38.2%) were neutral about the importance of their TO or TA being responsible and sustainable when booking travel. However, 51.5% consider it important or very important, compared to 10.3% who deem it unimportant. This indicates a growing awareness of sustainability, even if it's not always a top-booking priority (Weeden, 2014; Li, 2023; Wu et al., 2023). The gap between neutral and positive responses suggests a need for clearer communication from travel providers about the tangible benefits of sustainable choices.

Responsible Tourism behaviour: actions, barriers and encouragement

Most respondents (86%) take actions to minimise their environmental impacts, while 11% do not. 36.1% of responses related to "respect for the environment," covering carbon offsetting, waste reduction, and energy and water conservation. Common actions included avoiding littering, recycling, avoiding plastic, and reusing materials.

Additionally, 6% of respondents followed local recycling rules, and 4.3% adhered to the principle of *taking nothing but footprints, photos, or memories* (R3). In contrast to the tendency to relax environmental standards while travelling (Selänniemi, 2000; Stončikaitė, 2022), 4.3% stated they maintain the same eco-friendly habits on holiday as at home. R44 commented, *just as environmentally conscious as at home*, challenging the notion that holidays are for disconnecting (Weeden, 2014).

Transport choices to and within destinations were another focus. Flying was a significant issue, with 15.3% of responses addressing this. 58.6% reported flying less, while others avoided flights entirely or took only short-haul trips (17.2% each). R98 noted a commitment to reduce air miles, and others preferred alternative options in the UK, such as trains or buses. For local travel, 30.2% of respondents opted for public transport, particularly trains, while walking was another popular choice.

Diverse interaction levels with locals

The most common response for engaging with communities was supporting local businesses (37%), then engaging with locals (direct interaction, communication, and learning a few words of the local language) at 36.7%. Participating in local activities accounted for 21.2% of respondents, while cultural immersion was noted by 3.7%. R5 encapsulated many opinions: *I'm very keen to experience different local customs and food. I always speak to local people and join in activities when possible. I visited many local businesses in India and participated in laughing yoga with locals in Vietnam.*

Supporting local economies

Most respondents (56.6%) consider supporting local businesses a high priority during their trips. When combined with those viewing it as a moderate priority (31.6%), 88.2% regard supporting local businesses as important. Only a small proportion (9.6%) consider it neutral, and an even smaller fraction (2.2%) view it as a low priority.

Older respondents are more likely to regard supporting local businesses as a high priority than younger respondents. This indicates that most respondents are inclined to contribute economically locally during their trips. While expressing such priorities does not always translate into concrete actions, it may reflect a growing awareness of responsible practices or signify an expression of personal values and a desire to foster meaningful connections with destinations, as noted by previous researchers.

Credibility and Trust

Of the respondents, 33.1% indicated that those who value the sustainability of their TOs and TAs face challenges when booking responsible holidays. Genuineness, credibility, and trust were the main challenges (23%), followed by a lack of information and transparency (19.7%), cost (16.4%), and transportation concerns (16.4%). When cross-tabulated with age, older respondents ranked genuineness, credibility, and trust as their top concern (28.6%), while younger respondents placed it second (20%), equal to transportation concerns. For younger respondents, the main challenge was a lack of information and transparency (22.5%). Local impact and ethical concerns ranked second for older Baby Boomers (19%) but were a concern for only 5% of younger respondents, just above health considerations.

R29 noted that *it can be difficult to identify sustainable aspects unless they are specifically highlighted in the holiday information*. This ties into a broader issue of transparency, particularly for younger Baby Boomers, who perceived advertising as prioritising client attraction over clear sustainability details. R52 observed that *the brochures, publicity, and adverts are developed to attract you, but they never mention the impact on the area or what is/can be done to mitigate this*. It is generally difficult to assess how much economic, environmental, and societal factors have been considered and measured.

These findings align with literature suggesting Baby Boomers often need more information during the booking process. The lack of knowledge among older sustainable travellers in the UK contributes to confusion and scepticism - reflected in the 66.9% of respondents potentially showing scepticism - two major barriers to RT bookings (Śniadek, 2006; Mintel, 2024b).

Barriers to Engagement

76.9% of respondents felt that specific factors could motivate more RTB, and the majority cited increased information and marketing as the most influential

factor (22.3%), followed by availability and accessibility of RT practices (20.4%) and cost concerns (18.5%). Respondents highlighted that reliable, accurate information on RT practices is often hard to find. Many emphasised the role of tour operators, airlines, and hotels in providing this information. The data suggests that this would be particularly impactful during the pre-travel phase and especially at the booking stage.

Many participants felt unclear about what RT entails, contrasting with previous findings on RT definitions. Respondents wanted clarity on how RT practices benefit society and the environment and requested evidence of these benefits, including an understanding of the negative impacts of irresponsible tourism (R69) and greater transparency from tourism businesses on their business practices (R49). Cost and affordability also play a significant role, with 18.5% of respondents stating that lower costs would encourage them to adopt more conscious travel habits. Cheaper, more accessible options are likely to attract more people to RT practices.

Luxury Travel

Respondents offered varied definitions of luxury, aligning with existing literature that notes how luxury is a subjective, dynamic concept shaped by individual social contexts (Conrady et al., 2020; Correia et al., 2020; Ribeiro Santos et al., 2023).

4.2% of respondents expressed negative views of luxury travel as unnecessarily expensive and a waste of money (R67). This perception, reflecting traditional ideas of luxury tied to economic excess rather than intangible experiences, was more common among older Baby Boomers (Conrady et al., 2020; Correia et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2023). Most associated luxury with high-quality accommodations (22.8%), high-end food experiences (13.5%), exceptional service (12.6%), and comfort (12.6%). Descriptions of 5-star experiences dominated, aligning with Baby Boomers' reputation as comfort-seekers prioritising quality (Faithfull, 2023).

The relationship between luxury travel and RT was also explored. 33.8% believe luxury can align with RT, 28.7% disagree, 13.2% are unsure, and 18.4% think it can align conditionally. Notably, younger Baby Boomers expressed a more positive view of luxury travel, suggesting shifting perceptions. Many agree that luxury is more about the mode of travel than the destination itself (Riley, 1995).

Interestingly, luxury accommodations were associated with environmentally friendly practices such as recycling, renewable energy use, and reduced waste, and respondents felt that luxury establishments could contribute to local communities by hiring and training staff. R116 observed that *extra costs should include improvements and investments in Responsible Tourism*.

However, the high price of luxury makes this more conscious form of travel inaccessible to many. Some respondents highlighted a disconnect between

luxury and RT, arguing that luxury fosters isolation from local communities and the environment, shifting the focus from the destination to affluent visitors. These respondents critiqued luxury travel's excessive consumption and environmental impact, stating that *any form of luxury usually involves greater levels of consumption* (R31). There was also a strong sense of traveller responsibility. R106 pointed out that *hotels should encourage and clearly explain the reasons for not changing towels daily*. This underscores the role of communication between luxury providers and guests in fostering a more sustainable travel experience.

Conclusion:

This study found that many Baby Boomers tend to travel frequently (2-3 times a year or more), with an increase in travel over the past decade driven by curiosity for new experiences. Participants showed a balanced preference for new and familiar destinations, with repeat visits fostering deeper connections and place attachment, potentially leading to positive behavioural changes (Cheng et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2018; Hu and Sung, 2022).

Personal values influence travel choices, and some older participants feel pressure to be more responsible, though logistical challenges hinder sustainable behaviours (Weeden, 2014; Higham et al., 2015; Juvan et al., 2017; Li, 2023; Wu et al., 2023). Many participants, especially older Baby Boomers, support local businesses and cultures but do not prioritise sustainability during booking. However, they expect eco-friendly practices from tour operators, revealing a gap between concerns and actions (Trang et al., 2019; Statista Consumer Insights Global, 2022). Distrust in sustainable travel options and a lack of transparent information are key barriers (Van der Merwe and Wocke, 2007; Mintel, 2024b). Improved information, accessibility, and affordability of RT could boost engagement.

The findings add to limited research on consumer behaviour in tourism by focusing specifically on British Baby Boomers and their relationship to RT (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016; Gonda and Ratz, 2023). The research underscores the importance of examining this demographic independently rather than in comparison to other generations (Qiu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023) and addresses the lack of research on internal differences within the Baby Boomer cohort by distinguishing older (1946-1954) from younger (1955-1964). For instance, older Boomers may view luxury and RT as misaligned, whereas younger Boomers are more open to luxury's benefits, seeing it as a means of enhancing comfort and quality. These insights lay the groundwork for future research to refine age segmentations and deepen understanding of shifting travel behaviours.

Although the relationship between socio-demographic factors and travel motivations among Baby Boomers remains complex, the study suggests their desire to explore new places, alongside a tendency to revisit familiar destinations, offers valuable insights into existing models like the Push-Pull

model (Kim et al., 2003; Prayag and Ryan, 2011; Ahn and Janke, 2011; Otoo et al., 2020). It highlights how novelty and familiarity coexist, especially in later life stages, contrary to Patterson and Pegg's (2011) findings. The results also align with motivational factors within the ETRB framework, suggesting further investigation into Baby Boomers' perceptions of RT, environmental and social concerns, and destination involvement.

The research offers valuable insights that travel operators and agents can use in product development, marketing strategies, and sustainability communication. Understanding intergenerational differences and similarities enhances segmentation, enabling better-targeted approaches that reflect each subgroup's preferences and attitudes towards sustainability. Effective segmentation enables businesses to tailor products to the diverse needs of tourists, particularly Baby Boomers, who seek everything from independently planned soft-adventure trips to group package tours with luxury accommodations (Moschis and Ünal, 2008; Patterson and Pegg, 2009; Otoo et al., 2020).

Key recommendations include:

(1) **Alternative and informed transportation options**: Offering carbon-neutral options, transparent information on the environmental impacts, and promoting shorter flight destinations can address this concern. Baby Boomers often lack awareness of RT options, and sustainability is rarely a priority when booking holidays (Mintel, 2024a; 2024b). Travel companies must bridge this gap by providing clear, tangible examples of RT practices, such as carbon offsetting, alternative transportation, or tourism business support (Tolkes, 2020).

(2) **Meaningful local experiences**: Tour operators can offer RT options, such as locally guided tours or culinary experiences, which enhance place attachment and foster sustainable behaviours.

(3) **Responsible luxury options:** Promoting eco-friendly luxury accommodations and value-for-money experiences may appeal to this segment, while location and exclusivity remain important factors (CBI, 2024).

(4) **Convenient, sustainable options:** Travel companies should partner with local suppliers to secure better pricing and more authentic experiences. Given Baby Boomers' scepticism about sustainability claims, providing clear, transparent information about eco-friendly practices can build trust and influence decision-making (Nieto-García et al., 2024).

(5) **Developing Accreditation Schemes**: Implementing an accreditation process for eco-friendly travel companies could enhance credibility, especially for older Baby Boomers who expect transparency and accountability in sustainability practices.

Finally, there is a need for robust theoretical models that address the three-dimensionality of RTB among Baby Boomers (Kim et al., 2018). A potential avenue for future research could involve applying established models, such as

Salinero et al.'s (2022) model on Generation Z, to assess its relevance across different generations and/or identify Baby Boomer-specific influential factors.

Declaration of interest statement:

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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