

Tourism and Demography

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'It's the People You Know'

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'It's the People You Know': The Collection and Analysis of Demographic Data by Tourism Managers and Marketers

Adam Weaver

Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- ◆ Demonstrate that the collection and use of demographic data is taking place across the tourism industry and will probably intensify in the future;
- ◆ Show that data mining technologies are used to record and aggregate certain pieces of information about individuals, usually with the intention of understanding the economic lives of large numbers of people and increasing future consumption;
- ◆ Illustrate that demographic data is used by corporations to render (potential) consumers 'knowable' and calculable;
- ◆ Identify concerns about power, influence, access to demographic data, and efforts to produce intelligence about consumers' commercial value;
- ◆ Address the implications of intensified personal data capture for tourism providers in the future.

Mass Customization and Monitoring Consumers

Commentators argue that the present-day economy has changed from one oriented around mass production to one driven by mass customization (Pine, 1993, 2004; Taylor and Lyon, 1995; Moynagh and Worsley, 2002). To a large extent, mass production depended upon mass media to do mass marketing; more or less similar products were sold on a mass scale to consumers perceived to have more or less similar characteristics. Mass customization, in contrast, is oriented around customizing products and services for consumers who must be differentiated into distinct audiences for customized marketing messages (Pine, 1993, 2004; Taylor and Lyon, 1995; Moynagh and Worsley, 2002). The need to differentiate consumers is the main reason that commercial enterprises have expressed interest in demographic data in an era of improved information collection and retrieval technology. Corporate demand for greater and ever-increasing information about consumers accounts for the increased use of customer surveillance by the private sector (Elmer, 2004; Lace, 2005); businesses can therefore modify products to meet changing consumer tastes and preferences.

The databases, itemized billing systems, and customer relationship marketing (CRM) techniques of different organizations that service modern living and travel have come to acquire vastly more information about consumers. What is known about consumers is increasing as more interactions and transactions become computer mediated and thus easily captured by various 'machines' (Agre and Rotenberg, 1998; Lyon, 2003; Elmer, 2004). The collection and use of demographic data is typically related to efforts to understand both the present and future. Businesses seek to make the attributes of consumers more visible and measurable as part of ongoing attempts to understand current trends and anticipate future ones. Demographic criteria contribute to the identification of market segments (Foot and Stoffman, 1996). The essential similarity of people within a group or cohort is derived from certain personal attributes (age, gender, and ethnicity) that are seen to influence lifestyle choices and patterns of consumption. New and emerging groups may be identified and then labeled as either 'lucrative' or 'less lucrative' consumers. The power of classification may be applied in ways that lead to the 'discovery' of previously unrecognized markets. A number of the examples addressed in this chapter illustrate that there is a predictive element to today's data collection and analysis. The future is often depicted as accessible and knowable through comprehensive data gathering, and data mining

Chapter extract

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