

# Does Generation Matter? Differences in Perceived Benefits Among Baby-boomers, Generation-X & Generation-Y at a Water-Based Recreation Area

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## INTRODUCTION

Benefits-based management (BBM) is an emerging framework designed to incorporate outdoor recreation area values into a management framework. BBM emphasizes identifying desired outcomes & managing towards those outcomes.

Benefit segmentation is increasingly common in outdoor recreation as managers seek to better understand and provide for their visitors. Although life stage and age have been of interest in the past, the emphasis on generational cohort has intensified. Although life stage and age have been of interest in the past, the emphasis on generational cohort has intensified since 2000.

The Corps of Engineers (CE) initiated a project to better understand benefit attainment at their projects. The CE provides 20% of federal land recreation & hosts 360 million visitors a year. Subsequently, population changes are of imminent interest to them. In an effort to extend the benefits work, the purpose of this project was to explore differences in perceived benefits among generational cohort, specifically:

- ~ Baby-boomers (born in the 1940's & 1950's)
- ~ Generation-X (born in the 1960's & 1970's)

## METHODS

**Sample:** Systematically Selected visitors to Lake Shelbyville, IL (n=1495)

**Data collection:** on-site spring –fall 2003 & 2004 mail questionnaire following Dillman (2000)

**Instrument:** 2-page onsite & 8-page mail (see below)

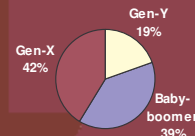
**Variables:** Year of birth; Benefit Importance; Benefit Attainment (if indicated is important)

**Analysis:** Descriptive Factor analysis (principal components w/ oblique rotation),



## RESULTS- Generational distribution among visitors

On average, visitors were:  
~ male  
~ white, non-Hispanic  
~ income \$50,000-\$75,000



## RESULTS- Benefit factor analysis & differences in benefits

**Analysis:** 26 items factor analyzed resulted in 5 factors, each with 3-8 items, with alpha's .76 & greater

- Recreation in a natural environment*
- Achievement*
- Learning*
- Autonomy*
- Recreation w/ Similar People*

### Differences:

- Benefit importance items: 7 of 26 items significantly differed
- Benefit importance factors: 2 of 5 factors significantly differed (autonomy & rec with similar people)
- Benefit attainment items: 1 of 26 items significantly differed (family activity)
- Benefit attainment factors: 1 of 5 factors significantly differed (learning)

	F-value	Difference Summary
<b>Benefit Item- Importance</b>		
Be on my own	3.23**	Baby Boomers > Gen-X
Use my own equipment	3.72**	Baby Boomers > Gen-X & Gen-Y
Do something with family	4.27**	Gen-X > Gen-Y
Participate in rec. activities	2.83*	Gen-X > Baby Boomers
Test skills & abilities	3.09**	Gen-Y > Baby Boomers
Have thrills & excitement	6.09**	Gen-X > Gen-Y
Challenge myself	2.52*	Gen-Y > Baby Boomers & Gen-X
<b>Benefit Item- Attainment</b>		
Do something with family	2.74*	Gen-X > Baby Boomers
<b>Benefit Factor- Importance</b>		
Autonomy	2.85*	Baby Boomers > Gen-X
Rec with similar people	3.37**	Gen-X > Gen-Y
<b>Benefit Factor- Attainment</b>		
Learning	3.65**	Baby Boomers > Gen-Y

\*Indicates significance where  $p < .1$ ; \*\*Indicates significance where  $p < .05$

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## DISCUSSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

This project sought to identify differences in perceived and realized benefits among visitors of different generations. The majority of benefit items and factors were similar across generational cohorts. Therefore, recreation opportunity providers (water based, in this case) can take these results and assume that their marketing and programming efforts will continue to reach a broad audience.

Areas and/or organizations seeking to differentiate themselves or target niche markets can use these results to focus. Such marketing & planning efforts should attune to the important differences of solitude, excitement and social opportunities by generation. Similarly, educational offerings should consider their age market and the benefits sought by them. Specifically,

- ~Baby boomers indicate greater importance for solitude opportunities & autonomy than other generations
- ~ Gen X seeks family experiences with thrills, excitement & recreation more than others

~Gen Y/millennials attach importance to social ~recreation, opportunities for challenge as well as testing skills & abilities

~Family activities are of interest to both Baby-boomers & Gen X

### Future Research:

- ~Investigate visitor segments by generation during the shoulder & winter seasons
- ~Examine differences in values, conflicts & constraints among the generation segments

