Chapter 7
Strategic and Operational Marketing Tools for Older Tourists

Abstract Building on the literature review and the case studies previously discussed, this chapter identifies some key strategic elements suppliers should consider before addressing the older tourist market, such as terminology issues, segmentation approaches, positioning, service design and customer care. In addition, it proposes some operational directions for implementation of the marketing mix. For example, companies need to clearly define their product offerings according to the level of specialization and accessibility, and to go beyond mere discount policies for older tourists and pursue a differential pricing strategy. Further, companies should boost the potentialities of the Internet, both as a distribution channel and as a communication or interaction platform for older tourists. This chapter provides a practical toolbox, as well as hints for future research, which can benefit both researchers and professionals or practitioners.

7.1 Strategic Marketing for Older Tourists

The tourism industry has been described as "the constellation of businesses, public agencies, and non-profit organizations that create products to facilitate travel and activity for people away from their home environment" (Smith 1994, pp. 592–593). Older tourists represent an attractive market for all the operators within the tourism industry, from hospitality and accommodation businesses, to museums, shopping centers and service providers in general. Older tourists, especially retirees, could also represent an important tool to contrast the negative effects of seasonality because they are more flexible and tend to travel in off-peak season (Tiago et al. 2016). Drawing on the literature review about older tourist behavior and on the case studies[1] discussed in Chap. 6, Sects. 7.1 and 7.2 intend to offer some practical directions for professionals in the tourism industry willing to target older individ-

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[1]The three case studies presented in Chap. 6 include a Canadian-based tour operator offering exotic adventure travels (ElderTreks), a Slovenian-based tour operator and travel agency specializing in slow garden travels (Viaggi Floreali), and a United Kingdom-based company providing long-term accommodation solutions in Southern Europe (Algarve Senior Living).

uals. In particular, Sects. 7.1.1, 7.1.2, 7.1.3 and 7.1.4 focus on strategic marketing tools (i.e., terminology issues, segmentation approaches, positioning strategies, service design and customer care), while Sect. 7.2 addresses the marketing mix (i.e., product, prince, place and promotion strategies). Next, Sect. 7.3 discusses the limitations of this study and provides directions for future research in this field.

7.1.1 Terminology Issues: Older, Senior, or …

Both the literature review and empirical analyses have revealed a variety of approaches to defining older people. Two main concerns arise when labeling older individuals with age-related terms: the first regards self-perceptions of age and the second to the connotation of words, as explained hereafter.

(1) **Self-perceptions of age**. Defining older individuals in terms of chronological age is risky because people do not like to be categorized in rigid schemes. In addition, subjective age (Tuckman and Lorge 1953), that is, how individuals perceive themselves, more than chronological age influences individuals' interests, lifestyles, and consumer and travel behavior (Muller and O'Cass 2001; González et al. 2009; Le Serre and Chevalier 2012; Guido et al. 2014). For example, within the same Senior Travel Forum of TripAdvisor, it is possible to find people with different chronological and self-perceived ages. Tom, about 50 years old, asks:

> Too old for backpacking and staying in hostels? What are the pitfalls of a person in their 50's going traveling and using hostels?

In the same forum, Lisa, 92 years old, asks for recommendations since she is about to plan her next independent holiday:

> I'm 92 and still upright. I've traveled the world but now I can't walk far. … Now I am looking for a warm alternative for Sept/Oct—a hotel or apartment preferably near a bus station where I can board the buses to travel around, a level road outside with shops and supermarket. Not bothered about restaurants—I usually book half-board or self-catering … a good view from a balcony would be a bonus. Any suggestions would be appreciated.

Both academic researchers and practitioners hold different ideas about "how old is old," about the bottom-age threshold to start considering a person as "old" or "older." Some scholars use the age of 50 to refer to older adults (e.g., Littrell et al. 2004; Sellick 2004; Sudbury and Simcock 2009; Le Serre and Chevalier 2012; Chen et al. 2013b), others consider the groups 50–64 as pre-seniors (Caber and Albayrak 2014) or prospective seniors (Chen et al. 2013a), while yet others consider 60 or 65 as the minimum age to refer to older adults (Chen et al. 2013a, b; Caber and Albayrak 2014; Friemel 2014). In the case studies examined, both ElderTreks and Senior Algarve Living explicitly target the 50-plus age group. However, several companies in the tourism industry provide price discounts for individuals aged 65-plus, which in many countries corresponds to retirement age.

(2) **The connotation of words**. Words are not neutral. Naming objects implies giving them a meaning. Several studies show that ageism occurs through the use of words (Nielson and Curry 1997; Thompson and Thompson 2009; Milner et al. 2012). Research has demonstrated that persons exposed to negative images tend to perform worse than persons exposed to positive stimuli (Levy and Langer 1994; Guiot 2001; Coudin and Alexopoulos 2010). In other words, negative stereotypes about age affect older people's self-esteem and self-efficacy. Therefore, addressing tourists with words that define them in terms of age is not an easy task for scholars and industry professionals. During the in-depth interviews conducted for the case studies, ElderTreks and Senior Algarve Living discuss their concerns with the terms "elder" and "senior," respectively, even though they consider them extremely important as a positioning strategy referring explicitly to their target market. It is of capital importance for firms to consider their use of words when referring to the older tourist market, and to be aware of the possible shortcomings of using one term or the other.

In this book, the term "older" has been used to refer to a group that is purposefully not strictly age-defined (see Chap. 1). This term was chosen in line with the definitions adopted by international organizations (e.g., the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank), as well as by research centers (e.g. the Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre at the University of Adelaide). However, several recently published academic articles refer to "senior" tourists, even though they do not explain this specific choice. Other studies use the word "elder" or "elderly," even though these terms have been questioned by academics (Fiske et al. 2002; Mautner 2007) as well as by mass media (Wordrop 2009) as being negatively connoted. Sometimes, "mature age" or "the matures" have been used to refer to older tourists (e.g., Hudson 2010), but these expressions seem to be implicitly derogatory toward younger ("immature") generations. The terms "silver" or "gray" might evoke negative connotations, as well. An interesting post (Graham 2012) published on the New Old Age Blog of The New York Times reports the opinions of industry experts and academics about the terms that should be used to refer to people aged 65 and older. Even if no common view emerge, what is clear is that hardly anyone wants to be defined as "old." Therefore, from a strategic point of view, it is important to refer to people not exclusively by age, but also by their interests and passions. In this sense, Viaggi Floreali (literally, "Floral Travels"), overcomes the issue of referring to customers in terms of age, instead selecting customers on the basis of their interests (i.e., gardening is especially practiced by individuals aged 50+) and travel type (i.e., Viaggi Floreali proposes a slow travel approach that well suits the needs of older people with special needs in terms of mobility or pace of travel). In recent years, new terms have been introduced to refer to older tourists without mentioning their age, such as "keenagers," a word that combines the terms "keen" and "teenagers", thus referring to people's interests and passions. However, these terms run the risk of sounding pretentious and carry connotations that older age is negative, something to be ignored or denied —or worse, something to be embarrassed about.

7.1.2 Segmentation Approaches

A core decision for a travel company should be about the segmentation strategy it intends to pursue (Tkaczynski et al. 2009). The literature identifies several types of segmentation strategies, ranging from mass marketing (i.e., an undifferentiated approach to a large segment with a standardized product offering), to niche marketing (i.e., a customized or tailor-made product offering for a narrow subgroup of a segment) (Kotler 1989). In between, segmented marketing or diversified marketing strategies can be adopted, the first approach looking for minor but still important differences between segments, the second considering segments with very diversified needs and desires. In other words, companies must decide whether older tourists represent a core target or just a secondary target along with other segments, and whether they want to address such targets with a standardized generalist offer or a specialized offer. Figure 7.1 graphically represents the four main marketing segmentation approaches in relation to older tourists:

(1) mass marketing approach: generalist offer for all types of tourists, e.g., standardized seaside holiday
(2) segmented marketing approach: low specialization for older tourists, e.g., seaside holidays for older adults, typical of traditional forms of social tourism
(3) inclusive marketing approach: specialized offer that combines the needs of several types of segments, e.g., accessible safaris suitable for young couples, families, older tourists, and people with mobility special needs
(4) niche marketing approach: highly specialized or tailor made offer for older tourists, e.g., gardening travels for older adults.
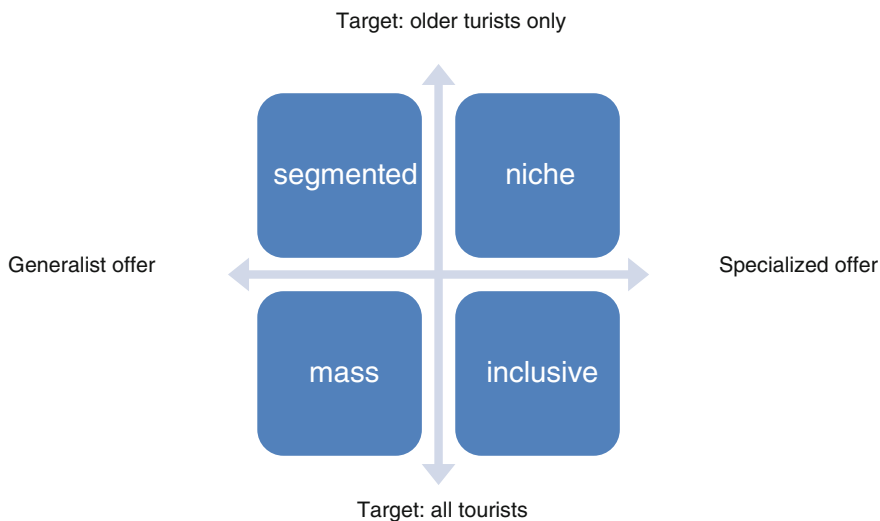

Fig. 7.1 Segmentation approaches to the older tourist market. *Source* Author's elaboration

Once the company has decided the segmentation approach, it can explore more specific segmentation variables.

In relation to this, it is clear from the literature review that older tourists are not a homogeneous market segment (see Chap. 2). Many typologies have emerged, for example with regard to self-perceived age (e.g., González et al. 2009; Le Serre and Chevalier 2012), travel motivations (e.g. Sangpikul 2008; Ward 2014; Eusébio et al. 2015), travel barriers (e.g., Li et al. 2011), values and lifestyle (e.g., Cleaver et al. 1999) and preferences for type of travel (e.g., Tiago et al. 2016). A multiple segmentation approach is recommended to identify tourists' needs and expectations beyond mere chronological age and age-related stereotypes. In fact, chronological age is just one of several variables that can be used to profile older tourists, almost certainly not the most important. A combination of segmentation variables would provide a better base to cluster tourists more precisely. A multi-segmentation approach seems to be necessary to manage the variety of the older tourist market.

Regarding socio-demographic segmentation variables, it can be argued that cohort effects will be particularly important in the next years in relation to technology "savviness." Technology is progressing at a fast pace, offering tourists new types of product offerings (e.g., peer-to-peer accommodation, see Chap. 5) and opportunities to search for information and interact with other tourists as well as with organizations (see Chap. 4). People who are today in their 50s will most probably be much more technology savvy in 10 years than are people today in their 60s. As emphasized by several scholars (Patterson and Pegg 2009; Le Serre and Chevalier 2012; Kazeminia et al. 2015), today's older individuals are different from yesterday's older individuals, and also from tomorrow's. In addition, technology devices might help overcome travel barriers and help persons with physical or mental disabilities to travel (Winstead et al. 2013). For example, as discussed in Chap. 4, augmented reality is being used in several service contexts, such as health, education, and entertainment, because it can support older people by facilitating their interaction with the physical and social environment (Cobelli et al. 2014; Liang 2015; Malik et al. 2015).

In addition, gender as a segmentation variable could be further explored. Recent studies have emphasized gender differences in needs and expectations at hotels (Chen et al. 2013a; Suki 2014). For example, there already exist women-only hotels or hotels with a separate floor for women. Hotels provide specific types of amenities or facilities, and some older women traveling solo might feel safer in these contexts. This trend is now quite common in the Middle East since the 2008 opening of the Luthan Hotel and Spa in Saudi Arabia, even though a range of hotels in Western countries already offer women-only floors, responding to the need for security and privacy, such as the Hamilton Crowne Plaza in Washington DC and Hotel Bella Sky in Copenhagen (Stephenson 2014).

Moreover, in the coming years, there will be an increasing number of people living on their own. The number of solo travelers is projected to increase because of social changes in family composition and lifestyles. In addition, older individuals who live with a partner might want to travel on their own to pursue their interests. In the experience of Viaggi Floreali, whose customers are mainly women aged 55–65, there are a number of married women who decide to travel on their own because their husbands are not interested in gardening, or simply because they want to live the travel experience with people who have a similar passion. Some tour operators are already organizing travels for older solo tourists, such as One Traveler, a United Kingdom singles holiday specialist "for the mature single traveller". As explained on One Traveller's website (www.onetraveller.co.uk):

> Our fully escorted holidays are tailored for people who choose, for whatever reason, to travel by themselves in the company of like-minded individuals.

In addition, the occupational situation, which has often been used to segment older tourists (Le Serre and Chevalier 2012), needs to be reconsidered in the light of recent socio-economic changes. In fact, retirement age is moving toward a later threshold, and the age can vary considerably across countries. While some studies pointed out that barriers to travel decrease with older age (e.g., the children have left home and there are no more mortgages to pay), others argue that after retirement people may have more available time but less discretionary income (Patterson 2006; Losada et al. 2016). However, some studies (e.g., Dunifon 2013; Thomese and Liefbroer 2013; Geurts et al. 2015) comment about the increasing importance of the role of grandparents in society: the grandparents take care of their grand-children while their children work, often for long periods of time during the school-holiday season, thus having less free time.

Other under-researched demographic variables could be considered to segment older tourists. Traditionally, pilgrimage has represented (and still represents) a common type of travel motivation for older people. In addition, recent research has emphasized the role of religion in affecting destination attractiveness and tourist satisfaction. Specifically, Battour et al. (2017), in a study about Islamic tourism, found that the variable "religion," referring to the availability of Islamic norms and practices relevant to tourism at the destination, significantly moderates the rela-tionship between pull motivation and tourist satisfaction. In relation to this, HalalBooking.com was established in 2009 with the aim of providing "Holidays with an Islamic ethos." The company offers halal leisure holidays and Islamic heritage tours, as explained on their website:

> All accommodation facilities are operated in accordance with Islamic norms. Our resorts and hotels do not serve alcohol and have separate swimming pools and beach, leisure areas and spa facilities for men, women and families […] there are also family-oriented facilities, which enable the family to enjoy their holiday together in a suitable atmosphere, while catering for children by special clubs and games rooms.

With regard to psychographic segmentation variables, besides the importance of understanding more in depth the specific types of travel motivation for older

tourists, the importance of tourism for quality of life could represent an interesting variable for segmenting older tourists (Dolnicar et al. 2013; Kim et al. 2015). Not all people love to travel; therefore, it would be useful to differentiate people for whom travel represents an important part of life from those who have no interest in traveling. It would also be helpful to understand whether certain older individuals who do not travel feel genuinely indifferent toward travel, or whether they do not travel because of specific barriers or concerns (e.g., financial or time constraints, or lack of a travel companion). For instance, some older people may not have been presented with the possibility of traveling when they were younger. Even though they might like to travel now, they could face psychological barriers such as the fear of being judged (McGuire 1984; Lee and Tideswell 2005), not perceiving themselves as healthy enough (McGuire 1984; Fleischer and Pizam 2002; Nyaupane et al. 2008), or being alone (e.g., Huang and Tsai 2003; Lee and Tideswell 2005; Nyaupane et al. 2008; Kazeminia et al. 2015; Gao and Kerstetter 2016). Others might not have specific concerns about traveling, but they simply do not find it attractive. Traveling is, in its most restrictive view, a leisure activity; therefore, it competes with other kinds of activity that can be pursued by individuals, such as going to a spa, going to the cinema, going to the golf club, taking a walk, or meeting friends. Therefore, companies need to segment their potential customers by understanding the importance of travel for quality of life and defining attractive products for each specific market segment.

7.1.3   Positioning

Positioning strategies can be defined only after carefully segmenting and understanding customers' needs and defining a company's unique selling proposition (Baccarani and Golinelli 1992; Horner and Swarbrooke 2016). First and foremost, in their brand name decisions and positioning strategies, companies willing to target older tourists need to decide whether to refer explicitly to a certain age group or not. From the case studies analyzed, two main types of strategy emerged: (1) age-related brand name and positioning strategies, and (2) non-age-related brand name and positioning strategies.

(1) Referring explicitly both in the brand name and in positioning strategies to the age group (e.g., "50+" "senior") enables self-recognition by a specific age category or by persons who feel "older" or "senior." Conversely, this approach might prevent potential customers who are interested in the type of offering from choosing the company because they are not willing to be associated with a certain age group.

(2) Referring to non-age-related elements, such as passions or types of travel, could encourage persons of any age group to participate in the travel. Conversely, this could carry the risk of not focusing on the product offering or of not being clearly positioned. For example, an adventure package tour with people

belonging to a wide range of age (e.g., 30–70) might be difficult to manage because of the varying needs and expectations of participants.

Interestingly, a well-known travel company targeting older tourists that had been in the market for 35 years decided to change its brand name and reposition itself. Elderhostel was founded in 1975 as a non-profit educational travel organization that combined classroom time with tours and experiential learning in inexpensive accommodation for older adults (mainly retirees), from a lifelong learning perspective. In 2010, Elderhostel changed its brand name to Road Scholar, after a short experiment with the brand name Exploritas (i.e., a combination of the words "explore" and "veritas"). Changing a brand name implies a change in positioning, in product offerings, and communication (Dibb and Simkin 1993). On the corporate website, Road Scholar describes itself:

> We are explorers, adventurers and students of the world.

> We are a diverse community of knowledge seekers and explorers, united in the belief that lifelong learning is a vital part of overall well-being. We believe in living life to the fullest at every age—by experiencing the world, and not just looking at it. By meeting new people, touching history where it happened and delving deep into the cultures and landscapes we explore.

The president and chief executive officer James Moses (DiGiacomo 2015) explained the reasons behind the push for toward the rebranding of Road Scholar, emphasizing the negative associations of the words "senior" or "elder" for the baby boom generation:

> If you talked to any baby boomer and you called them a senior or an elder, they would say you're nuts. Someone who's 70 thinks they're middle-aged. It's an interesting phenomenon —the World War II generation wore the name "elder" with real pride, like an elder statesman or an elder in a tribe. But baby boomers don't see it that way.

Moses explained that not only was the word "elder" dropped from the brand name, but also the word "hostel" because it was no longer representative of the product offering:

> I think it was a misperception of what we really were. We launched in 1975—I would say by 1985, we were almost always using hotels. After years of research and focus groups, we found there was a real aversion to participating in a group called Elderhostel. It denoted they would be staying in hostels and would be backpacking and that it would be hard to do.

7.1.4 Service Design and Customer Care

The customer journey describes the services process from a customer perspective by adopting a bottom-up approach (Stickdorn and Zehrer 2009). Service moments include service touchpoints, which may be combined in terms of space, time and

topic, for example, touchpoints within a certain hotel in a destination. A customer journey includes both direct touchpoints between customers and a service provider (e.g., the check-in at a hotel) and indirect touchpoints, such as traditional word of mouth, a travel review website (e.g., TripAdvisor.com), or an advertisement. By attracting the tourist's attention, indirect touchpoints often represent the starting point of a customer journey (Stickdorn and Zehrer 2009; Zomerdijk and Voss 2010). The same touchpoints that are used by tourists as a source of information (e.g., a travel forum) in the pre-service phase can also be used in the post-service phase to share information and experiences. Chapters 3–5 have described several critical direct and indirect touchpoints for older tourists, such as traditional information sources, service encounters, and social media. What emerged from the case studies is the need to carefully design the customer journey to make the whole process flow smoothly, with no problems or stress for older tourists. This implies, for example, providing detailed and rich information on the website, including both text and visual content (i.e., photos and videos) and having an updated Facebook page (even if older tourists may not actively participate in discussions). The phases of the booking process, for instance, should be intuitive and easy to handle independently by tourists (e.g., booking a hotel online). Alternatively, a step-by-step assisted procedure should guide the older tourist through the journey process. In service design, it is important to consider that not all tourists have the same level of travel experience and that nothing should be taken for granted.

Based on the literature review discussed in Chap. 5, to satisfy customers it is important to go beyond their expectations (Testa and Ferri 2009), respecting the basic needs while offering at the same time satisfactory performance attributes and unexpected attractive (or exciting) service attributes (Torres and Kline 2006; Tung and Ritchie 2011). Extreme satisfaction and delight will result in memorable tourist experiences, which, in turn, will stimulate positive word of mouth and customer loyalty (Loureiro et al. 2014). With specific regard to older tourists, what emerged from the case studies is the need to provide personalized, high quality customer care at every moment of the customer journey, from first contact on the phone and throughout the travel experience. For example, Senior Algarve Living recognizes the importance of long phone calls with customers, not only to understand their needs, but also to guide them through a rich product offering. ElderTreks emphasized that customers want to be taken care of during the whole travel experience—they want to feel they can rely on the travel company or organization for any needs that might arise before and during the travel. The customer care approach is important not only for package tourists but also for independent tourists. For example, some studies have shown that the presence of a doctor at the hotel or in the proximity of a hotel is an important driver of customer satisfaction (Chen et al. 2013b; Vigolo and Bonfanti 2016); this was confirmed also by the experience of Algarve Senior Living. Independent tourists prefer to stay in proximity of centers with health-care facilities. However, the front office personnel (such as hotel receptionists or tour guides) should be trained to recognize customers' special needs without them having to ask. This is because sometimes older tourists might simply feel too embarrassed or uncomfortable to ask direct questions. For example, Viaggi

Fig. 7.2 Strategic marketing
tools for targeting older
tourists. *Source* Author's
elaboration

Floreali makes frequent stops at rest rooms to respond to, or better, anticipate an unexpressed need.

Finally, studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between older tourists' participation in travel activities and their overall satisfaction with their travel experiences, as well as between participation and psychological well-being (Wei 2002; Morgan et al. 2015). Therefore, based on the characteristics and needs of the specific target segment, different levels of participation could be proposed by travel companies, ranging from high intensity to low intensity activities. As emphasized by Viaggi Floreali and Senior Algarve Living, being active and participating does not necessarily imply physical effort. Activities could respond to learning needs (as in the experience of Road Scholar) or social needs (using travel as a means to connect with people who share similar interests and passions).

Figure 7.2 summarizes the main strategic marketing tools companies should consider toward the older tourist market.

7.2   Managing the Marketing Mix

This section proposes some practical directions for companies concerning the marketing mix tools for older tourists (i.e., product, price, place, and promotion) as summarized in Fig. 7.3.
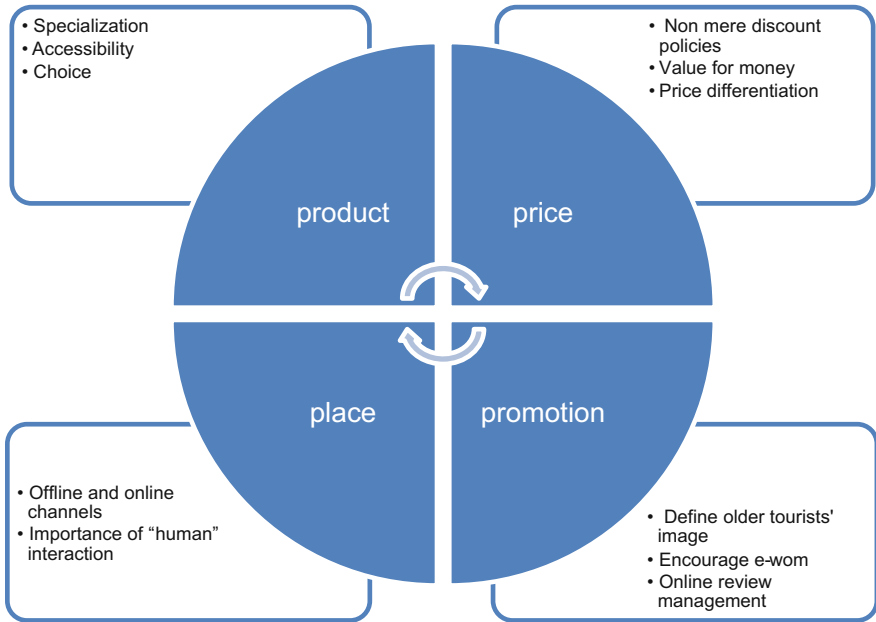
Fig. 7.3 Operational marketing tools—the marketing mix for older tourists. *Source* Author'selaboration

7.2.1 Product

A product can be described as anything that can be offered to satisfy a want or need. It includes a variety of elements such as physical objects, services, persons, places, organization, and ideas (Kotler et al. 2014). In the tourism industry, a tourism product can thus be intended as a bundle of services, activities, tourist attractions, and benefits that constitute the whole tourism experience (Smith 1994). Three main themes regarding product strategies emerged from the interview with the companies: specialization, accessibility, and choice.

First, with regard to specialization of product offering, companies can choose different types of strategies. As shown in Fig. 7.1, the tourism product can refer to several types of offering. Companies may decide to specialize their offerings, focusing on specific target segments' needs and expectations, or to standardize their offerings. Considering the heterogeneity of the older tourist segment and the need to profile older tourists, travel companies should offer specialized products (Cleaver et al. 1999) to meet the expectation of the intended target and to gain a competitive advantage. As emphasized by ElderTreks, in the next years an increasing number of companies will attempt to target older tourists. To be competitive, companies must find the best match between market segments and their product offering. For

example, recent statistics have shown (Preferred Hotel Group 2014) that multi-generational travel represents 27% of all overnight United States leisure travel and that 77% of multi-generational travelers plan to take a multi-generational trip every year. About 35% of leisure travelers who are grandparents travel with their grandchildren. This proportion rises to 41% for grandparents with over $250,000 in annual income. In addition, regarding intergenerational travels, grandparents are more likely than parents to pay for the trip and on average they spend significantly more than other leisure travelers (Preferred Hotel Group 2014). A new word has been coined to informally define this type of travel: "Gramping," that is, "holidaying with grandparents," especially with reference to camping holidays (Simeoni and Dal Maso 2016). This word has apparently (Wollop 2011) been introduced by Eurocamp, a European up-market chalet and camping company. Eurocamp reported an emerging trend of grandparents, children and grandchildren taking camping holidays together. Bookings from extended family groups have increased by as much as 325% in recent years (Wollop 2011). Moreover, Road Scholar proposes a wide array of intergenerational trips, as described on their website:

> Make lasting memories with your grandchild on learning adventures packed with exciting field trips designed to keep explorers of all ages engaged. Learn about marine life in Hawaii, discover Paris, or search for dinosaur fossils in Utah—most importantly, do it together!

Second, accessibility emerged as a key requirement with regard both to the hospitality industry and more generally to the destination (Cleaver et al. 1999; Darcy 2010). Accessibility implies a change in service design, in communication, and in infrastructures such as hotels' physical surroundings and destinations. Many destinations still lack accessibility, hotel doors are not automatic, not all restaurants and shops have ramps to facilitate accessibility, and menus are written in small fonts. An inclusive offer for people with reduced mobility or other types of disability, both mental and physical, still represents a challenge for the tourism industry. In fact, besides having huge social importance, in line with the inclusion and participations principle advocated by the World Health Organization (see Chap. 1), inclusive tourism could represent an interesting travel niche. Some studies emphasized the travel barriers caregivers must face because of the lack of institutional support from governments as well as the lack of a valid market offering for caregivers and their families (e.g., Gladwell and Bedini 2004). Travel companies could address this market by combining adequate support and services to allow people with special needs to travel with their families or independently. In this regard, FirstLight Home Care has developed a travel companion program, which provides care and companionship for people with disabilities or special needs to enable them to travel alone or with their family, as described on the company website:

> Whether you're on a cruise, staying at a resort, attending a business meeting, or simply visiting family or friends, we strive to make your vacation or visit as comfortable as possible, with qualified travel companions to accommodate your needs. They can help you get there, get home, and even help throughout your entire stay.

Finally, tourists want to choose between different types of travel, from extreme adventure travel to slow travel, from pilgrimage to sun and beach holidays, from volunteer tourism to shopping tourism. Flexibility and customized products are

highly appreciated by older tourists, they want to choose among different services and possibilities. Choice should concern several facets of the product, such as length of stay (from short breaks to long term stays), travel companion (from solo travels to intergenerational travels), travel organization (from independent to organized tours), flexibility (from standardized to personalized offers), travel comfort (from high-end services to basic offers), and travel type (as many as there are travel motivations). New types of motivations and new forms of travel needs to be explored. For example, volunteer tourism represents and alternative type of tourism in which tourists volunteer for part or all of their travels (Wearing 2001). According to Wearing (2001, p. 1), volunteer tourists "undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment". From the industry perspective, volunteer tourism can be described as a "type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people" (Brown 2005, p. 480). This type of tourism could be an interesting niche also with regard to older tourists. In fact, some studies (e.g., Kim et al. 2016) have emphasized that older tourists can be motivated in their choices by altruistic behavior and social motives that could be satisfied by this type of travels.

7.2.2 Price

Companies should consider three major points with regard to pricing strategies: the use of discount and special rates for older tourists, value for money, and the relationship between segmentation strategies and possible price levels.

First, when searching on Google for companies to interview, by using keywords such as "senior/older tourist + hotel/tour operator," the first pages of results reported mainly discounts or special rates for "seniors" or over 65s from generalist travel companies that were not specifically targeting older tourists. Systematic discount policies for older adults seem to be a limited price policy if not integrated within a wider strategic perspective.

Second, even though previous studies and the empirical analysis conducted in Chap. 6 highlighted the importance of price in older tourists' decision-making, it is worth underlining that price is also a positioning tool and a representation of the value of a product. More than just low prices in themselves, older tourists look for good value for money and might even compromise on travel length to reduce travel costs, as explained by Viaggi Floreali, but would not compromise on service quality.

Third, prices could be differentiated according to the type of segmentation approaches adopted by the company. Based on the four segmentation strategies proposed in Fig. 7.3, and on customers' preferences, it is possible to identify four price strategies:

(1) In a mass marketing approach, with standardized products for an undifferentiated market, prices are usually lower. No-frills standardized services can help companies to reduce costs and propose budget prices.

(2) In a segmented marketing approach, with a generalist offer for older tourists, prices are lower than specialized offerings but are usually higher than mass market offerings.

(3) In an inclusive marketing approach with heterogeneous segments and specialized offers, prices are still high (above the market or luxury), but usually the market is wider and economies of scale and scope allow companies to keep prices below niche-market or tailor-made offerings.

(4) In a niche marketing approach with highly specialized offers or tailor-made travels, prices are usually high (above the market or luxury prices).

A separate consideration should be made regarding social tourism, which derives from "the participation of disadvantaged groups in tourism activity, facilitated by financial and social measures" (McCabe and Johnson 2013, p. 43). In this case, tourists pay very low prices because their travel activity is facilitated and economically supported, usually by governments or publishing institutions.

7.2.3 *Place*

As concern distribution strategies, companies should consider the opportunities of online and offline channels and the importance of "human interaction" in the purchasing process of older tourists.

Older tourists are reported to prefer traditional distribution channels such as travel agencies (Huang and Tsai 2003; Batra 2009; Chen et al. 2014). Each of the three companies interviewed emphasized the importance of direct contact with customers, either in person (e.g., at exhibitions and events) or over the phone. Older tourists seem to value human interaction in the pre-purchase and purchase phases, although they do look for information online, on the company website and on social media (see Chap. 5).

However, meta-search websites and social media, in particular travel review websites, have increased possibilities for older tourists willing to arrange and book their travel independently (Graeupl 2006; Yoo and Gretzel 2009; Pesonen et al. 2015). Video tutorials as well as step-by-step guides help older tourists to increase confidence with the travel experience and with technology. "My digital travel for seniors" (Rich 2016) is a recently published book providing practical information about how to arrange a trip in the Web 2.0 era. It contains detailed recommendations for older tourists on many travel aspects, such as where to look for information, how to book online, and how to find the best airfares.

Experienced and budget tourists seem to prefer making independent travel arrangements by purchasing travel directly from the service provider. Less experienced tourists, or tourists who like to dedicate their time and energy to other activities, prefer to purchase from intermediaries.

In addition, sometimes older tourists may rely on hobby clubs or associations (e.g., the golf club or the local cultural association), for travel arrangements. For example, Viaggi Floreali reported having been contacted by gardening clubs to arrange tailor made tours for gardening lovers. These associations can act as intermediaries between older tourists and travel companies and provide assistance in the booking process, as well as during the travel.

7.2.4   Promotion

In line with brand name decision and positioning strategy, promotion strategies should first of all define whether to explicitly address older tourists or not. Instead of referring to older or senior adults, communication activities could be supported by the use of photos or images depicting older people. A major challenge is to communicate a positive non-stereotyped image of older people, as explained in Chap. 1. With this regard, the International Longevity Center—USA[2] and Aging Services of California (2009) published a communication style guide intended to help journalists, companies and entertainers to avoid the risk of ageist language and stereotyped representation of older individuals.

The case studies revealed that, from the travel companies' perspectives, older tourists tend to prefer traditional forms of communication, mainly personal contact (face-to-face or on the phone), or print advertising. However, companies should not underestimate the role of online communication (electronic word-of-mouth, in particular) in defining tourists' expectations (Yoo and Gretzel 2009; Kazeminia et al. 2015). Given the importance that older tourists assign to word of mouth by friends or online, companies should encourage older tourists to become brand advocates and provide testimonials, for example by writing a review about their travel experience on the company website or on the travel review website or on social media. In these cases, it is also of utmost importance for the company to closely monitor customer reviews and decide its review management approach (e.g., not responding to reviews, responding to only negative reviews, or responding to both positive and negative reviews (Bonfanti et al. 2016). An accurate and effective management of online and social media presence can help companies to improve their reputation and increase older customers' trust of the company.

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[2]The International Longevity Center—USA, now The International Longevity Centre Global Alliance, is a non-profit research, education and policy organization whose aim is "to help societies to address longevity and population ageing in positive and productive ways, typically using a life course approach, highlighting older people's productivity and contributions to family and society as a whole" (www.ilc-alliance.org). Aging Services of California (now LeadingAge California) is public-interest association that represents more than 400 nonprofit providers of senior living and care—including affordable housing, continuing care retirement communities, assisted living, skilled-nursing, and home and community-based care; as well as our business partners and residents (www.aging.org).

7.3   Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study intended to combine a demand-side and a supply-side perspective to the older tourist market. The first part of the book (Chaps. 1 and 2) offered a wide perspective on the population ageing phenomenon and its implications for the tourism industry, with a focus on segmentation strategies towards this specific market. The second part (Chaps. 3–5) addressed older tourist behavior by examining the travel planning process, the impact and opportunities of ICT on the tourist experience, and tourists' accommodation choices. This last third part (Chap. 6 and this chapter) was business-oriented and aimed to offer and in-depth analysis of the marketing strategies adopted by three companies targeting the older tourist market (Chap. 6). As a result, this chapter offers some key practical guidelines for professionals concerning both strategic and operational marketing tools. However, some caution must be taken in interpreting the results due to some limitations.

First, this exploratory study adopted a qualitative approach based on the case study method and the findings cannot be generalized. However, as argued by Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 228) "the force of example" is an underestimated source of social scientific knowledge. In fact, just because knowledge deriving from case study research cannot be formally generalized, "does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation" (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 227). It is with this spirit in mind that the case studies were analyzed and the practical implications derived. Second, three case studies were selected for their relevance in this study and because they primarily target older tourists. However, their selection was arbitrary and they cannot be representative of the variety of operators in the tourism industry. Still, the in depth-analysis of the case studies can hopefully provide interesting insights into the marketing strategies toward this market. In fact, Patton (2002, p. 244) argues that "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" and scholars suggest that "the value of samples should be based on their ability to provide important and insightful information, not because they are indicative of the perspectives of a large group" (Priporas et al. 2012, p. 388). Therefore, even though the implications suggested in this chapter are subject to personal interpretation by the researcher and may not be universal to all other cases, they can provide some insights that can stimulate thinking also among other subjects. Third, this book focused on single companies, however, a wider level of analysis is necessary to further understand the potentialities and the challenges of aging in the tourism industry. In fact, the destination represents a crucial component of travel experience and it is especially at a destination level that older tourists require an accessible environment.

These limits provide opportunities for future research directions. As concerns travel behavior, future studies should explore self-perception of age (and aging) among older tourists, as well as new travel needs and motivations to identify emerging patterns among today's older individuals. In addition, scholars should propose multi-segmentation models that take into account the transformation of society and travel behavior. For example, cohort differences in the use of ICT, gender differences, and family composition are still under-researched with regard to older

tourists. Further, the role of tourism for quality of life among older people represents a promising stream of research with important social and marketing implications. As concerns marketing strategies, future research could address more in depth the effect of brand name decisions and branding strategies on the company image. In addition, it would be interesting to explore the customer journey from a service management perspective. Additional studies could investigate older tourists' price sensitivity in relation to service quality perceptions and importance of tourism for quality of life. As concerns promotion and distribution strategies, the role of ICT needs to be further investigated, for example within the framework of co-creation theory.

To conclude, older tourists represent both a stimulating field of research for scholars and a great market opportunity for companies able to go beyond the stereotyped image of older age. Growing older entails physiological, physical and psychological changes that need to be reflected in the service design, not shouted at older tourists. In fact, for many of them, traveling is the ultimate expression of self-determination and freedom.

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