



Black middle-class tourists' segment in South Africa: a critical analysis

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Abstract

In many African countries, tourism is the most viable and economic development option. To promote tourism, further knowledge is required to understand the market for promoters who can engage with distinct tourism market segments. This article has a twofold function: (i) to present black middle class as a viable market that needs to be considered for tourism studies and (ii) present benefit segmentation as a possible segmentation criterion tourism for black middle class in South Africa. Black middle class research remains marginal to tourism enquiry in South Africa. The paper suggests a possible future of black middle class-aware tourism research using benefit segmentation as an ignition.

Keywords: black middle class, market segmentation, benefit segmentation, marketing, SA Tourism

Introduction

Innovation and strategy are at the forefront of any business organisation, including tourism or the marketing of tourist destinations. Destination marketing facilitates the achievement of tourism policy, which is coordinated with a regional development strategic plan (Buhalis, 2000:97). Many businesses focus more on knowing consumers, failing to understand that each consumer is trying to make a decision in a given circumstance (Christensen, Hall, Dillon & Duncan, 2016:54). Knowing more about consumers is a process of market segmentation. Consumers are becoming sophisticated in their tourist behaviour; therefore, it is important for destination managers to understand this behaviour in order to know when to mediate in the process to achieve the necessary outcomes (Moutinho, 2011:83; Page, 2014:90; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007:3). Travel behaviour involves the process a tourist goes through to make a purchase decision: how the service is disposed most importantly influences the holiday purchase decision (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2011:191; Moutinho, 2011:83). Therefore, it is important for the industry to understand the reasons and motivations informing tourist decisions to take a holiday. In South Africa, there is very little information on the emerging domestic market that is the black middle class (Mabena, 2016). Unilever conducted a study in the early 2000s labelling the black middle class as "black diamonds" based on the spending power of the market, but travel was not included in this research. This demonstrated a need for enquiry into this market for segmentation purposes. A revised national tourism strategy maintains a focus on foreign tourism as the driving force for the industry, but also emphasises investment in the domestic segment to stoke growth in domestic travel (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

The question is how can growth be achieved within the emerging markets without understanding the benefits this market seeks to derive from their holidays. Seemingly, the identification of market segments is necessary to create a product differentiation strategy to target the black middle class. Once the segments are identified, organisations can then offer customised products and services to their consumers. The aim of this article is to suggest a



benefit framework to be used as a tool that destination marketing organisations can use to segment black middle-class tourists in South Africa. Up until now, marketers have approached the black middle class as a homogeneous market (Brown, 2017).

Methodology

The article is explorative in nature and included a theoretical review of related literature on black middle class consumers in South Africa to encourage a much-needed local debate in tourism studies. Traditional literature review is beneficial in gathering literature in a specific subject area, summarising, and synthesising it (Cronin, Ryan & Coughlan, 2008). As a critical review of the studies on black middle class consumers, this study involves a desk research of conceptual and empirical studies that include black middle class consumers and segments, titles of articles, abstract, keywords or within the actual texts. A search on multiple scholarly work sources, and also public online sources were conducted to obtain various relevant articles related to black middle class consumers, black middle class segments, and benefit segmentation studies. The article also utilised literature sources from relevant studies, dissertations, websites and tourism related press releases. Frochot and Morrison's (2000) approach for the application of a literature review on benefit segmentation in tourism was followed whereby twenty-six benefits were evaluated against nine benefit segmentation studies in order to ascertain which benefits are still actively used in tourism studies.

The analysis and synthesis of the literature revealed that there is lack of understanding by tourism marketers regarding the behaviour of black middle class tourists. Especially, when making travel decisions or rather seeking benefits influencing their travel decisions. The growth of the black middle class and changes in the spending power of various groups in South Africa, present this class as a potential viable market segment for various industries, tourism being one of them. Understanding the black middle class tourist is vital in developing a viable market segment for tourism. Benefit segmentation analysis conducted in this study suggests that marketers can investigate benefits sought by black middle class tourists in order to (i) understand their behaviour, (ii) develop benefit segments and (iii) align the promotion of tourism products to benefits sought by this market. Undertaking research with the aim of understanding this class, can offer significant opportunities for tourism marketers in South Africa and for the industry in general

The South African black middle class

The South African Audience Research Foundations (SAARF) Living Standard Measure (LSM) has become a means of classifying middle-class segments, and is used as a marketing research tool in South Africa (SAARF, 2006). Since LSM categorisation only reveals what different groups have more of as opposed to other groups, it cannot be used as a psychographic or attitudinal measure. The classification originated after 1994, as black consumers were never viewed in terms of consumer living standards, but only as a mass market for cheap goods (Iqani, 2017). The present study repeatedly used the terms "class", "black" and "black middle class", therefore, further clarification is necessary. Originating during the Industrial Revolution in European history which began in Britain, class is construed as a social stratum in which members share similar economic, social or cultural characteristics (American Heritage Dictionary, 2007). There is a lower, middle and upper class. The lower class is referred to as working people with the least money and occupying the lowest socio-economic position in a society, whereas the upper class is the highest socio-economic class in a society and its members own the means of production, distribution and the institutions that make it possible for them to maintain that level of economic control (American Heritage Dictionary, 2007).

Globally, there are numerous definitions of the term 'middle class'; whether or not an absolute global or relative definition should be followed for each country, using social, income, or



expenditure measures, seems to be an issue. Metrics used to identify classes in South Africa are occupation, per capita household income, income measures based on life-style, and status (Visagie, 2013a). Generally, the term “middle class” refers to a particular situational lifestyle and the means to access this lifestyle (Simpson, 2007). Simpson (2007) suggests three descriptors of middle class: type of job, education level and lifestyle. From a socio-political perspective, the term “black”, refers to groups of people that were previously known as bantu, coloured or Indian (Malinga, 2005). This definition identifies with the Employment Equity Act (EEA) 55 of 1998, and The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act of 2003, which defined “black people” as including Africans, coloureds and Indians. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2016) categorises race group populations as follows:

Table 1: South African population by race

Population Group	Number	%
African	45 109 900	80.7
Coloured	4 897 200	8.8
Indian/Asian	1 386 000	2.5
White	4 515 800	8.1
Total	55 908 900	100

Source: Stats SA (2016)

This article adopted a purist approach, whereby “black” is defined as what was previously known as Bantu and, more recently, what the EEA and BBBEE refer to as African. Therefore, the terms “middle class” and “black” are merged to formulate the notion of “black middle class”, often referred to as the black diamonds in the media. This group has shifted and experienced growth since the end of apartheid in 1994 (Garcio-Rivero et al., 2003; Southall, 2004; Udjo, 2008; Visagie, 2013a,b). Before and throughout apartheid, a black middle class existed, due to missionary education and existing elite hierarchies in indigenous cultures (Iqani, 2017). According to Kharas, (2010:5), “consumer class[es]” should be a descriptor of the black middle class.

The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2011) describes the African middle class as individuals spending between US\$2 and US\$20 a day. Easterly (2001) defines middle class as those lying between the 20th and 80th percentile on the consumption distribution scale of the country. Whereas Birdsall (2000) defines middle class as those between 75% and 125% of median per capita income. In South Africa, BusinessTech (2016) defines black middle class by using a monthly per capita expenditure ranging from R2,920 to R10,678, based on January 2015 prices. Visagie (2013a) defines black middle class is “per capita household income indicating a certain degree of conception of relative affluence” (often associated with certain patterns of expenditure and possessions). Visagie (2013a) considers the income interval to correspond to households in which the highest income earner is in a typically “middle class” occupation. Such occupations include managers, senior officials, legislators, professionals (such as teachers and nurses), associate professionals, technicians and clerks. Working class occupations would include plant and machinery operators, craft and related trade workers, skilled agriculture and fishery workers, service and market sales (Visagie, 2013).

Simpson and Dore (2008:44) describe the black middle class as “characterised by having white collar, professional jobs which they have achieved largely through exposure to higher levels of education. They have a commitment to ensuring that their children will enjoy at least the same lifestyle as theirs (and usually hopefully better). Universally, their extended family and relatives will be of the same social status and, typically, their parents and generations before them will have been in a similar social and economic position as themselves”. Existing literature regarding the black middle class has explored various industries. Laden (1997, 2001,



2003) focused on media, maintaining that consumer media that are aimed at black markets are a key site in which consumer-citizenship is discursively constructed. Nuttall (2008) focused on youth’s consumption and mall cultures. Ligthelm (2010) explored entrepreneurship opportunities and sustainability of small business in townships, given the rapidly changing environment. Moodley (2010) investigated consumer behaviour of the black middle class within the passenger vehicle market in South Africa and found that a decision-making process was followed and a primary reason for purchasing a vehicle was out of necessity and circumstances. Narunsky-Laden (2010) linked race and consumption, arguing that a cultural economy approach should take both production and consumption into account in any social analysis. Demacon (2010) considered the impact of retail chains in townships on local business. Posel (2010) investigates ways in which race was partially constituted by the apartheid regime, driving race based consumption. Kruger (2010) scrutinises how television fiction on national networks endorsed “individual consumption as the sign of national prosperity”.

Mhlambi (2013) examines African language literature, specifically IsiZulu, and its portrayal of class. Mashaba and Wiese (2016) divide black middle-class township shoppers into to four clusters, according to their attitudes. McEwan, Hughes and Bek (2016) explore the cultural significance of everyday ethical realities in shaping consumption in South Africa’s Western Cape. Iqani (2017) presents a discussion about ways in which the English language media in South Africa labelled the middle class during the first decade of democracy. Although Iqani (2015) presents a study in the tourism context, it is not from the usual perspective, but rather, focused on how poverty is narrated as a natural feature of Langa in Cape Town as a tourist destination, and how western visitors interpret low-income communities and lifestyles as an “authentic” adventure experience.

Simpson and Dore (2008) segment the black middle class following a preference for status quo or having a future focus, describing the status quo segment as individuals who perceive change to be difficult, whereas those who are future focused, perceive change to be an appealing challenge and enjoy taking risks. The four segments are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Black middle-class segments

Black Middle-class Categories	Age	Size	Marital status	Sub-segment	Buying behaviour	Buying power
The Mzansi youth	Fewer than 25 years	18%	Single	Future orientated	3%	4 billion
Start me ups	18-29 years	21%	Single	14% Status Quo 8% Future Focus	19%	28 billion
Young family	Fewer than 35	22%	Single/ married	12% Status Quo 10% Future Focus	20%	25 billion
Established segment	35-49	39%	Married	18% Status Quo 21% Future Focus	58%	75 billion

Source: Adapted from: Simpson & Dore 2008

Even though there are existing black middle-class consumers, they are not categorised in tourism-orientated segments. Perhaps due to a stereotype that the black middle class do not engage in tourism (Parke, 2016). The report released by Unilever in 2016 (BusinessTech, 2016), indicated that there are about 5.81 million in the black middle class in South Africa, furthermore, the number of black middle-class members with a tertiary qualification has grown by more than 2 million since 2004 (see Table 3) .



Table 3: Growing black middle class

Year	Number in millions
2004	1.74
2008	2.67
2012	4.22
2014	5.33
2016	5.61

Source: adapted from BusinessTech (2016)

In a BusinessTech interview, John Simpson, a marketing professor from the University of Cape Town is quoted expressing the sentiment that “The black middle class is keeping the economy alive.” This also implies that there has been an explosion of the black middle class. The UCT-Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing has focused considerable research on understanding black consumers, investigating urban and rural areas, young and old, as well as poor, aspiring and wealthy consumers, but only from a practitioner point of view, without referring to tourism segments. The South African tourism department segmented black tourists into three groups, which were described in the Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy (2012-2020) (NDT, 2012).

Table 4: South African domestic tourist segments

Segment	Description
New Horizon Families	Aged 35 and older, black, coloured and Indian. Have R5,000 to R10,000 disposable income a month Travel is a way to educate their children, and to provide them with the opportunity to broaden their perspectives. It is also seen as quality time for the family to spend together, and a reward for hard work. 46% of New Horizon Families say that special offers on flights would make them travel more, while 45% felt that special offers on hotels would encourage them to travel Message: Spend quality family time and broaden the family's horizons, while being rewarded for hard work
High-Life Enthusiasts	Aged 25-45, black, coloured and Indian. Have R10,000 or more disposable income a month Travel is a way to boost one's social status, and to experience the finer things in life in new and different settings. 78% of High-Life Enthusiasts prefer a weekend holiday filled with activities compared to a quiet weekend getaway Message: Domestic travel is the quickest and easiest way to enjoy invaluable and enviable world-class experiences
Well-to-Do Mzansi Families	25-45, black. Have R10,000 or more disposable income a month Travel is all about escaping the city, and being able to spend time with friends and family in new and different locations. To a certain extent, travel is also about exposing the children to alternative ways of life and activities 53% of Well-to-Do Mzansi Families said that special offers on flights as well as special offers on hotels would encourage them to travel within South Africa Message: Break away from daily pressures, whether relaxing with family or having good times with friends

Source: South African Tourism, Domestic Tourism Marketing Strategy, 2012 - 2020

These segments are targeted through the Sho't Left campaign. This campaign was launched in 2004 and was aimed specifically at domestic marketing to influence domestic travel. Nagroo (2006) investigated the impact of the Sho't Left Tourism Marketing Campaign on Orlando West Residents in Soweto in South Africa. The study found that there was lack of campaign awareness and low booking of holidays as a result of the campaign. One of the suggestions was further research into the defined target market segments to ensure that South African Tourism Board (SATB) promotions target the correct segments in terms of holiday packages.



This brings about a better understanding of consumer behaviour, what drives the behaviour of the black middle class when making a travel decision, and what information sources they value. In his study, Moodley, (2007) found that when purchasing a vehicle, the black middle class were most influenced by family and friends in making their decisions. This suggested that a product specifically tailored for the black middle class would grow influence. In the tourism context, questions can be posed as to what benefits the black middle class seek when making a travel decision. Are they driven by outside aspirations or do they simply wish to bond socially with family and friends? Local marketers have not been able to establish much information on the size, scope or unique character of the black middle-class market in South Africa (BusinessTech, 2016). It is naïve to assume that all members of the black middle class want the same benefits from travelling. Therefore, in pursuing such an investigation, benefit clusters were expected (McCabe, 2009:154). Various scholars (Cooper, 2012:307; Frochot, 2005:338; Haley, 1968:31) have suggested that benefit segmentation is a helpful approach in determining tourists' behaviour, and it is generally far more accurate than other descriptive variables such as demographic and geographic characteristics.

Benefit segmentation in tourism

Segmentation approaches are categorised as being either *a priori* or *a posteriori* (Dolnicar, 2004:209; Dolnicar, 2008:131; Hoek, Gendall & Esslemont, 1996:26). The former refers to a case whereby a segmentation criterion that produces a potentially useful grouping (common sense) is known in advance, before the analysis is undertaken.

The latter refers to a case when an analysis of the data is undertaken to gain insight into the market structure and determines which segmentation base is the most suitable (Dolnicar, 2008:3). The father of benefit segmentation, Haley (1968), introduced this segmentation approach to provide better information on consumer buying behaviour. Haley (1968) notes that benefits sought as main reasons for the existence of true market segments, can be helpful in determining tourists' behaviour more accurately compared to other segmenting methods such as demographic and geographic characteristics. Benefit market segmentation is identified by causal factors rather than descriptive factors (McDonald & Dunbar, 2004:202–204). Marketing managers can capture tourists' psychological benefit outcomes by analysing tourists' motivation to visit a destination using benefit segmentation. Benefit segmentation is based on benefits sought by consumers, from using a particular product or experiencing a specific service; therefore, it is based "on the benefits which consumers are seeking when they buy a product" (Reid & Bojanic, 2009:139). Thus, the tourist's motivations are a significant variable in the decision-making process (Frochot & Morrison 2000:23). Frochot and Morrison (2000) reviewed 14 key benefit segmentation studies in tourism between the 1980s and 1990s.

These two scholars provide benefit items as well as other factors used in tourism studies. Table 5 shows 26 benefits from the comprehensive list provided by Frochot and Morrison (2000:27). These benefits were evaluated against nine benefit segmentation studies to discover which benefits are still effective. The analysis includes the following motivations as the most prominent: to get away from everyday routine, to observe scenic beauty and to experience new cultures, followed by seeking to do something with family, to relax and an interest in history. Benefits excluded from the Frochot and Morrison (2000) review, but investigated by others, were – the cost factor or value for money (Almeida, Correia & Pimpão, 2014; Jang, Morrison & O'Leary, 2002; Molera & Albaladejo, 2007; Rudež Sedmak & Bojnec, 2013); pleasant or beautiful weather (Almeida et al., 2014; Dong, Wang, Morais & Brooks,



2013; Jang et al., 2002); and opportunities for children (Almeida et al., 2014; Jang et al., 2002; Molera & Albaladejo, 2007). Therefore, the most recent benefits investigated can be used to investigate benefits that members of the black middle class seek when travelling to a tourist destination. Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & Piercy (2013:221), state that the issue about targeting is not who is targeted but rather how and for what reason, emphasising that segmenting and targeting should not just serve the interests of management but also the interests of those targeted. Are those targeted realising their expectations? The South African department of tourism has selected tourist segments it intends to target, however, is there a full understanding of benefits they seek, specifically the black middle class?

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Table 5:Benefit segmentation studies

Benefit items used previously in destination choice studies	Rudež et al. (2013)	Almeida et al. (2014)	Dong et al. (2013)	Kim et al. (2011)	Yannopoulos and Rotenberg (2000)	Molera and Albaladejo (2007)	Frochot (2005)	Sarigöllü and Huang (2005)	Jang et al. (2002)	Total count
To get away from everyday routine	X	X	X	X			X		X	6
To be with friends	X	X		X						3
To do something with the family		X	X	X		X			X	5
To relax	X	X				X	X		X	5
To develop my knowledge and abilities	X	X	X						X	4
To experience something new	X	X								2
To engage in physical activities/keep fit	X	X					X	X	X	5
To be with others to enjoy the same thing	X		X	X						3
To release tensions or stress	X		X						X	3
To experience the tranquillity and solitude	X	X				X				3
To be outdoors in nature		X				X			X	3
To do something different										
To have fun	X								X	2
To do exciting things			X	X						2
For an interest in history				X	X	X		X	X	5
To be entertained				X	X				X	3
For social recognition										
To learn about nature or wildlife			X				X			2
To meet new people	X		X			X	X			4
To do nothing	X						X		X	3
To observe scenic beauty	X		X		X	X	X	X		6
To experience new cultures/places		X		X	X	X	X		X	6
To experience something authentic									X	1
For the adventure							X			1
For own self-esteem										0
To satisfy curiosity										0

Source: (Nduna, 2016)



Managerial implications

Investigating the benefits that the South African black middle class seek in opting to travel will bring a deeper understanding of this group's preferences and assist the South African Tourism Board (SATB) management in marketing to this segment. Clear segments will be developed using quantifiable evaluation criteria to determine segment attractiveness and to assist with target market selection (Jang et al., 2002:377). Therefore, this should allow for SATB management to develop and attract the most lucrative markets in the black middle class (Jang et al., 2002:377; Kim, Park, Gazzoli & Sheng, 2011:54; Pesonen, Laukkanen & Komppula, 2011:311), offering it the option to target its market effectively and prioritise its marketing budget more effectively. Benefit segmentation analysis may help identify the uniqueness of black middle-class tourists travelling in South Africa, as clustered groups of tourists may be analysed further using demographic travel behaviour characteristics and activities participated in (Kim et al., 2011:47). By so doing, more applicable information can be offered to marketers, such as effective information sources that can be used by tourists when planning to travel. This type of approach provides useful information for marketing. Benefits discovered can be used in marketing messages to target specific markets in the black middle class, thereby attracting more tourists. In doing so, part of SA Tourism's mission to stimulate the domestic market may be realised with additional benefits for the sector and the national economy.

Conclusions

Understanding black middle-class tourist benefits may very well be a rich basis of competitive advantage and stimulate travel. A careful analysis of benefits may enhance and better South Africa's position as a desirable tourist destination (Dolnicar, 2012:31). A benefit segmentation framework (see Nduna & Van Zyl, 2017) can be implemented to uncover benefits black middle-class tourists seek and target this market. The benefit framework suggests that through demographic differences and clustering, marketing managers can identify how to enhance black middle-class planning processes to optimise satisfaction. Cluster analysis can provide insight into demographic segments. The benefit segmentation framework is suggested as it incorporates information sources consulted when making a travel decision, to target the identified clusters. When benefits are investigated, information regarding demographic identifiers such as age, provincial origin and gender can also be tested to identify benefit sub-segments. Tourists make decisions to travel based on what they will experience, therefore the benefits they believe they will get from visiting a destination are important aspects to consider. For future research, a study investigating benefits black middle class tourists' seek need to be conducted, in order to suggest an empirical operational segment for respective tourist destinations. Such a study could be rolled out per province so as to better understand what benefits tourists seek when travelling to any of the other provinces in South Africa.

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