# The effect of social capital and altruism on seniors' revisit intention to social network sites for tourism-related purposes

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- This study explores why seniors use SNSs for tourism products and services.
- Seniors' social capital has significant effects on attachments in SNSs.
- Seniors' altruism has significant effects on common bond and identity attachments.
- Common bond and identity have significant effects on revisit intention to SNSs.
- The effect of common identity on revisit intention is greater than common bond.

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among social capital, altruism, common bond and identity, and revisit intention using social capital, altruism, and attachment theories. A total of 452 responses were generated from consumers 50 years of age and older (seniors), qualified as having used a social network site (SNS) for tourism-related products and services within the past 12 months. Results show that social capital has significant effects on common bond and identity while social capital has a slightly greater effect on common identity than common bond. Altruism has significant effects on common bond and identity whereas altruism has a greater effect on common bond than common identity. Common bond and identity both have significant effects on revisit intention. Noticeably, revisit intention is highly influenced by common identity. Therefore, this study provides new knowledge and recommendations to SNS administrators addressing why seniors use SNSs for tourism-related purposes.

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## 1. Introduction

Census reports confirm that adults 50 years of age and older (seniors) continue to represent a significantly large and rapidly growing segment of the population for many of the world's developed nations (Pew Research Center, 2014). As of 2015, over one third (33.6%) of Korea's total population represents seniors. By 2020, this segment will represent 43.3% of Korea's overall population (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2015). This demographic trend becomes especially important for the tourism industry, because research has documented this senior market as

affluent, and thus having high levels of purchasing power (Alén, Nicolau, Losada, & Domínguez, 2014; Chen & Shoemaker, 2014; Kim, Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2013).

Coincidentally, the use of social network sites (SNSs) by this rapidly growing age segment is also experiencing similar growth trends (Moran, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2014). The use of SNSs by this age segment increased by 49% in just five years; that is, while in 2008, only 2.5% of all U.S. seniors reportedly used SNSs, by 2010, SNS use by seniors grew to 36% and by 2013, a total of 51.5% of all seniors indicated using SNSs for products and services that included those related to travel (Richter, 2013). In terms of creating and implementing marketing strategies, the distinction between the over-50 age segment and the under-50 age segment significantly benefits marketing managers because of the clear differences in their responses to the promotions and advertising of products and services (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Lambert-

Pandraud, Laurent, & Lapersonne, 2005). Moreover, since seniors are defined as being over 50 years of age in the context of the tourism field (Kim et al., 2013; Namkung & Jang, 2009), we apply the definition of seniors as being 50 years of age and over to this research.

Tourism buying behaviors regarding SNS channels are clearly different from those of traditional channels because of the extensive speed by which SNS postings are now able to spread to consumers, which rapidly and significantly impact buying decisions (Rondán-Cataluña, Arenas-Gaitán, & Ramírez-Correa, 2015). According to Moran (2013), seniors using SNSs receive benefits by doing so which include those associated with social (staying in touch with friends and relatives, and reconnecting with lost friends), informational (medical and financial) and personal enrichment (literary publications). As societal life expectancy continues to increase, and compounded by an aging population, research is necessary to better understand SNS use by seniors, and especially as it relates to travel products and services.

Social capital, along with cultural and symbolic capital, is commonly referred to as prestige, reputation, and renown, and is the supported term in which the different forms of economic capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1985). Based on Fukuyama (2001), social capital is an instantiated informal norm that encourages co-operation between two or more people. Also, social capital refers to the powers and resources that derive from networks of relationships (Everett, 2002). While Bourdieu (1985), Everett (2002), and Fukuyama (2001) explain social capital toward similarities and differences from various cultures and histories, little or no attempt was made to apply multi-dimensional measures of social capital. From the tourism perspective, some studies have applied multi-dimensional approaches of social capital theory to senior migration (e.g., Casado-Díaz, Casado-Díaz, & Casado-Díaz, 2014), the airline industry (e.g., Casanueva, Gallego, & Sancho, 2013), and community-based ecotourism (e.g., Liu et al., 2014), but social capital theory has yet to be applied specifically to the area regarding SNSs. Thus, this research focuses on multi-dimensional approaches of social capital (e.g., bonding and bridging) to the context of SNS usage by seniors for tourism purposes.

SNS usage is found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it provides greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction by assessing bonding and bridging related to social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Senior MySpace users tend to have friends from age groups outside their own age and positive emotions when describing themselves on their profile (Pfeil, Arjan, & Zaphiris, 2009). While members with bond-based attachment to an SNS engage in direct altruism, members with common identity attachment engage in indirect altruism (Ren et al., 2012; Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007). SNSs allow users to contribute their tourism experiences actively by providing a very easy way of sharing information and helping unknown people, which indirectly demonstrates general altruistic behavior (i.e., general altruism) (Ma & Chan, 2014; Parra-Lopez, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutierrez-Tano, & Diaz-Armas, 2011). Research demonstrates that altruistic attitudes are prevalent among seniors and that a close relationship exists between seniors' altruistic attitudes and their helping behaviors (Kahana, Bhatta, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Midlarsky, 2013). This research also indicates that social capital and altruism are significant factors for seniors in SNSs. However, little research has been conducted on social capital and altruism as applied to seniors using SNSs within the context specific to tourism products and services.

Regarding SNSs, two dimensions of attachment (i.e., common identity and bonding) enable members of organizations to enhance knowledge sharing (Chung & Koo, 2012). SNS attachment

dimensions are divided into common bond attachment, representing an individual, and identity attachment, representing a group (Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2010; Ren et al., 2007, 2012). Attachment security results in a better life for seniors, which in turn, leads to lower depression and a lower fear of death and dying (Besser & Priel, 2008; Gillath, Johnson, Selcuk, & Teel, 2011). Based upon these recent research findings, behavior related to SNS use may differ for seniors, based upon their personality traits associated specifically with common bond and identity attachment. Although seniors are significant in terms of their numbers, growth, and importance to the travel industry, a research void exists regarding attachment theory and SNS usage by seniors.

Extensive research has been conducted by investigating social capital of SNSs within attachment theory (e.g., Chung & Koo, 2012; Lee, 2013; Lin, 2015; Liu, Shi, Liu, & Sheng, 2013), and the effect of direct, indirect, and general altruism on SNS users' behaviors depending on the attachment dimensions remains in question. Since altruism has been shown to influence behaviors toward online communities (e.g., Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2010; Ma & Chan, 2014; Ren et al., 2007, 2012), we expect this factor to help explain the use of SNSs by seniors for tourism-related activities. Therefore, this study proposes a research question regarding why in particular, seniors visit SNSs for tourism products and services. To answer this research question, this study develops a research model to investigate how social capital (bonding and bridging) and altruism (direct, indirect, and general) are related to common bond and identity; and how these attachment dimensions (common bond and identity) influence seniors' revisit intention to SNSs, using social capital, altruism, and attachment theories.

The present study provides valuable insights into the complex relationships that underlie SNS users' behavior for tourism and yields important implications for SNS practitioners. Specifically, the results can potentially extend our current theoretical knowledge of the relationships between social capital, altruism, common bond, common identity, and revisit intention. A stronger understanding such as this could also offer a new pathway for SNS marketers that could ultimately facilitate the market management for senior users of SNSs in the context of tourism-related activities.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social capital theory

Social capital is defined as the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by implementing coordinated aims (Putnam, 1993). Adler and Kwon (2002) state internal relations as bonding social capital and external relations as bridging social capital. Such diverse networks often yield new information and resources, known as the 'strength of weak ties' argument (Granovetter, 1973). Bonding social capital as strong ties tend to be strong and exclusive, creating social solidarity (Putnam, 1993). According to Ellison et al. (2007), the relationships between the usage level of Facebook users personally can be perceived in terms of bridging social capital and bonding social capital, showing that individuals on Facebook utilize bridging social capital more than bonding social capital. In an aging society, bridging social capital suggests the integration of linkages between heterogeneous individuals (Collom, 2008). With regard to MySpace, while bonding social capital describes seniors' close relationships in which emotional support is exchanged with very close friends or family members, bridging social capital describes seniors' heterogeneous relationships (Pfeil et al., 2009). Seniors with Facebook can keep in touch with family, close friends, and relatives who may help increase bonding social capital as well as with acquaintances, neighbors, and individuals who share common