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.

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 (Álén, 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-
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, Seluk, & 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’ use of 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
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