



## Obtaining a better understanding about travel-related purchase intentions among senior users of mobile social network sites



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### ABSTRACT

Although a majority of seniors continue to express interest in using mobile social network sites (MSNSs), research has yet to provide sufficient understanding of this very large market's motivations related to MSNS usage. As a viable consumer business segment, seniors are attractive enough to warrant potential MSNSs to invest necessary capital for developing tourism related MSNS designed to assist with this market's decision making and ultimately with their purchasing behavior. To address this gap, a research model was developed for this study using seniors having used MSNSs for purposes directly related to tourism and travel. Findings revealed intrinsic motivations had stronger effects on flow experience than did extrinsic motivations. Flow experience was found to have the greatest effect on subjective well-being, which in turn highly influenced purchase intention. Results documented that senior MSNS users differed significantly according to levels of anxiety attachment. Findings provide theoretical and practical contributions for tourism research, products, and services regarding senior MSNS consumers.

### 1. Introduction

Seniors continue to represent an important and rapidly growing segment of the population in many developed countries that can potentially assume a more dominant position within the travel and tourism industry given their affluence and purchasing power (Chen & Shoemaker, 2014; Kim, Lee, & Bonn, 2016; Kim, Lee, & Preis, 2016). In line with prior tourism research, this study defines individuals 50 years of age and older as seniors (e.g., Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Kim, Lee, & Bonn, 2016; Kim, Lee, & Preis, 2016). Currently, 55% of senior smartphone owners in America use mobile social network sites (Smith, 2015) and 61% of senior consumers use mobile social network sites (MSNSs) in Korea (Korea Internet Security Agency, 2016). In 2010, adults 50 years of age and older represented round up 30% of South Korea's (hereafter referred to as Korea) total population which is projected to expand to over 43% by 2020 (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2016). A continuous and innovative series of valuable insights on how MSNSs can be used to market products, services, and activities for businesses success through marketing communications, sales enhancement, and relationships with customers and mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets) has given birth to a plethora of MSNSs (Yadav, Joshi, & Rahman, 2015). Moreover, in many travel-dependent nations such as Turkey, the tourism industry is noted

as being merely a rising sector in adapting these new MSNS channels for technological communication and marketing purposes (Gulbahar & Yildirim, 2015).

Seniors frequently use social media, regardless of their geographical location or time zone, to seek support, often resulting in positive consequences that overcome loneliness, relieve stress, raise control, and improve self-efficacy (Leist, 2013). Seniors using social network sites (SNSs) enter into communication with family members so that SNSs have the potential to support seniors' relationships among family members (Nef, Ganea, Müri, & Mosimann, 2013). Seniors' usage of SNSs is directly correlated with their reduced loneliness and increased satisfaction in the social role (Hutto et al., 2015). Through the use of SNSs, seniors can maintain smaller groups that comprise a greater proportion of actual friends and a higher proportion of active friends leading to lower levels of social isolation and loneliness (Chang, Choi, Bazarova, & Löckenhoff, 2015). Flow experience generates a positive emotional state for seniors, which can manifest enjoyment, satisfaction, and meaningful life, and enables flexible and creative thinking leading to a feeling of psychological resilience (Iida & Oguma, 2014). Seniors normally experience the flow state when they are engaged in activities having appropriate levels of challenges and skills (Hirao & Kobayashi, 2013). Seniors' leisure activities are positively related to flow experience and retirement is negatively related to their flow experience (Heo,

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Lee, McCormick, & Pedersen, 2010; Heo, Lee, Pedersen, & McCormick, 2010). Seniors with higher levels of flow experience are associated with a higher arousal emotional state, which is associated with positive effects, such as, being peppier, more enthusiastic, having happier feelings, and being satisfied with life (Collins, Sarkisian, & Winner, 2009). Drawing on the literature review above, this study projects that both MSNS usage and flow experience are highly associated with seniors.

As well, flow experience, or the feeling of being totally immersed, involved, and energized through an activity (Csikszentmihaiyi, 1997), has been found to have a significant influence on individuals through the attractiveness and interactivity when placed within the context of online (website) shopping for travel (Wu, Li, & Chiu, 2014). Adding to this is the fact that flow experience has also been found to stimulate behavioral experiences that positively motivate shopping as an activity for tourists (Chang, 2014). Flow experience is a popular theoretical framework for understanding the motivations of the prolonged use of social media (Kaur, Dhir, Chen, & Rajala, 2016). Despite the growing significance of flow experience in the MSNS consumer segment, a lack of research exists pertaining to our understanding about the use of MSNSs for tourism products, services, and activities when specifically placed within the context of seniors. Based upon earlier behavioral research and conclusions drawn from findings pertaining to seniors' flow experience on video gaming (Hwang, Hong, Hao, & Jong, 2011; Hwang, Hong, Jong, Lee, & Chang, 2009), and also due to the current dearth of knowledge about MSNSs and seniors in today's academic tourism literature, this research specifically focuses on seniors' flow experience in MSNSs for tourism purposes.

Flow experience has also been identified as a significant factor for increasing MSNS user loyalty (Zhou, Li, & Liu, 2010). Flow experience research has been explored in various social science research settings over the past decade or so, and has been applied to numerous contexts related to motivations. In SNSs, users' behaviors are positively changed when flow experience is incorporated with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Kwak, Choi, & Lee, 2014). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play key roles in coupon-sharing on MSNSs (Tang, Zhao, & Liu, 2016). Moreover, flow experience has been significantly influenced by intrinsic motivations of enjoyment (e.g., Keller, Ringelhan, & Blomann, 2011; Sharafi, Hedman, & Montgomery, 2006) and self-efficacy (e.g., Hosseini & Fattahi, 2014; Mesurado et al., 2016). In addition, extrinsic motivations of usefulness (e.g., Lee, 2005; Sharafi et al., 2006) and social interaction (e.g., Huang, Chiu, Sung, & Farn, 2011; Faiola, Newlon, Pfaff, & Smyslova, 2013) have been found to positively influence flow experience. As a result, this study aims to investigate the relationships between intrinsic/extrinsic motivations and flow experience within the context of seniors using MSNSs for activities related to tourism.

Studies on flow experience have also performed outcomes of subjective well-being (e.g., Carpentier, Mageau, & Vallerand, 2012; Vittersø, 2004) and purchase intention (e.g., Hausman & Siekpe, 2009; Zhou et al., 2010). Particularly, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) assert that people's flow experience generates subjective well-being in SNSs. Koufaris (2002) insists the importance of flow experience on purchase behavior in online sites. In addition, Kim, Chung, and Ahn (2014) found that SNS users' subjective well-being had positive impacts on their behavioral intentions. Furthermore, earlier research conducted by Sharafi et al. (2006) attempted to specify dimensions of motivations and personality orientations with respect to flow experience. However, the differentiations between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on flow experience which leads to the subjective well-being and purchase intention for senior MSNS users remains in question.

Another interesting behavioral topic affecting seniors and SNSs is that of anxiety attachment. It is suggested from previous research that adults with various levels (high and low) of anxiety attachment are quite different from each other in SNSs (Lee, 2013; Marshall, Bejanyan, Di Castro, & Lee, 2013; Oldmeadow, Quinn, & Kowitz, 2013) and on

online gaming (Hong, Chiu, Shih, & Lin, 2012). Moreover, Liu, Shi, Liu, and Sheng (2013) and Reed, Tolman, Ward, and Safyer (2016) found anxiety attachment played a significant moderating role within the context of SNSs. In addition, Laguna and Babcock (1997) and Chu and Mastel-Smith (2010) suggest that seniors have higher anxiety with information and communication technology than their counter parts. However, previous studies addressing anxiety attachment in SNSs have never focused upon differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations related to flow experience with respect to senior consumers of MSNSs. In order to compare multiple consumer behavior issues regarding senior use of MSNSs in the context of tourism-related activities, this study attempts to develop a research model that examines the moderating role of anxiety attachment between intrinsic/extrinsic motivations and flow experience.

The existing research on senior MSNS users' intrinsic/extrinsic motivations, flow experience, subjective well-being, and purchase intention lacks critical information necessary to guide MSNS tourism product developers with proper direction to ultimately assist senior MSNS users, who represent one of the tourism industry's most important segment. Taking this into consideration, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on flow experience, which in turn influences subjective well-being and purchase intention in the context of senior MSNS users for tourism products, services, and activities. This study also investigates the moderating role of anxiety attachment between intrinsic/extrinsic motivations and flow experience. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions. First, "how do intrinsic (enjoyment and self-efficacy) and extrinsic motivations (usefulness and social interaction) influence flow experience of senior MSNS users for tourism-related purposes?" Second, "how does flow experience influence subjective well-being and purchase intention?" Third, "how does anxiety attachment moderate between intrinsic/extrinsic motivations and flow experience?" The conceptual framework is presented in Fig. 1.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Theoretical background

#### 2.1.1. Mobile social network sites for seniors

MSNSs are defined as "mobile marketing applications that allow creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan, 2012, p. 131). In the context of tourism businesses, the most significant promotional tool is word of mouth from friends, and MSNSs are extensions of these human networks (Verma, Stock, & McCarthy, 2012). MSNSs are likely to be further integrated into smart tourism to communicate with the users and offer a wide range of information to promote tourism (Park, Lee, Yoo, & Nam, 2016). The smart cultural tourism service delivers smart interactions between the visitors of smart

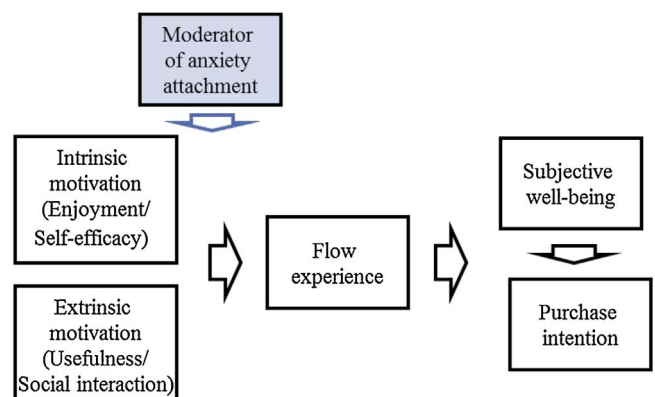


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

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