



Tourism experience and quality of life among elderly tourists



Hyelin Kim, Eunju Woo*, Muzaffer Uysal

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, United States

HIGHLIGHTS

- The study examines travel behaviors of elderly tourists.
- The level of involvement and perceived value increases satisfaction.
- Travel experience plays an important role affecting leisure and overall quality of life.
- Leisure life satisfaction and overall quality of life are the predictors of revisit intention.

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between the travel behavior of elderly tourists and overall quality of life. Specifically, the study examines the interrelationships between six main constructs: involvement, perceived value, satisfaction with trip experience, leisure life satisfaction, overall quality of life, and revisit intention. Using a sample drawn from elderly tourists in South Korea, the research model investigates nine hypotheses using a structural equation modeling approach. The results show that all nine of the hypotheses are supported.

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1. Introduction

Forecasts estimate that the number of people over 65 will more than double, consisting 26% of the world's population by 2050 (Haub, 2011). This means that the percentage of elderly tourists, who already make up a significant segment of the hospitality and tourism market (with their substantial population portion as well as their purchasing power), will increase (Bai, Jang, Cai, & O'Leary, 2001; Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001; Schröder & Widmann, 2007). The size of the elderly tourists has great market potential and economic significance for the hospitality and tourism industry (Bai et al., 2001). The tourism industry has recognized this market potential for a number of years, and tourism policy makers as well as industry practitioners have been focusing on developing competitive business and marketing strategies to target elderly tourists (Bai et al., 2001; Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2011).

Accordingly, the scholarly literature has examined elderly tourists and their travel behavior, especially travel-related activities, socio-demographic characteristics, preferences, and tourist motivation (e.g., Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Bai et al., 2001; Guinn, 1980; Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009; Javalgi, Thomas, & Rao, 1992; Norman, Daniels, McGuire, & Norman, 2001; Shoemaker, 1989). For instance, Hsu, Cai, and Wong (2007) examined elderly tourist motivation from Beijing and Shanghai. Based on a qualitative survey and review of motivation theories, the study proposed a conceptual model of tourism motivation for China's elderly tourist. Another example is a study conducted by Shoemaker (1989), who explored the segmentation of the elderly tourist pleasure travel market. The study found that the elderly tourist market is not one large homogenous group but rather that it can be segmented into smaller homogenous groups based on reasons for pleasure travel.

In order to understand the elderly's behavior, major psychosocial theories such as disengagement theory, activity theory, and gerotranscendence theory have been developed and applied. Cumming and Henry (1961) proposed disengagement theory. They mentioned that since a reduction in activity is a consequence of the aging process, elderly tourists gradually choose to withdraw from

* Corresponding author. 342 Wallace Hall (0429), Blacksburg, Virginia, 24061. Tel.: +1 540 838 5289; fax: +1 540 231 8313.

E-mail addresses: linakim@vt.edu (H. Kim), eunjuw3@vt.edu (E. Woo), samil@vt.edu (M. Uysal).

active life and focus on inner fulfillment. That is, ceasing participation in leisure activities and social roles lead to more life satisfaction in older adulthood (e.g., [Ananian & Janke, 2010](#)). On the other hand, activity theory was introduced in response to the critique of the disengagement theory, and has played a central role in gerontology ([Nimrod, 2007](#)). Activity theory explains that the increased discretionary or free time available to retired individuals provides the opportunity for maintaining high activity levels or roles that are essential for life satisfaction and enrichment ([Lefrancois, Leclerc, & Polin, 1997](#)). That is, engagement in meaningful activity is linked to life satisfaction. Based on this theory, we hypothesized that “vacation experience” itself can contribute to elderly people’s overall quality of life. In this study “vacation experience” is considered a classificatory term used by elderly people to describe their (re)construction of a recent vacation experience, which may include one or several types of activities. In other words, “vacation experience” may be a culmination of a number of activities, types of activities, and strength of those activities.

In the leisure industry, many studies have supported activity theory and demonstrated that elderly people’s high level of involvement and activity contributes to their quality of life ([Fernandez-Ballesteros, Zamarron, & Ruiz, 2001](#); [Iso-Ahola, Jackson, & Dunn, 1994](#); [Menec & Chipperfield, 1997](#); [Palmore, 1979](#); [Riddick & Stewart, 1994](#); [Silverstein & Parker, 2002](#)). For instance, [Silverstein and Parker \(2002\)](#) examined whether changes in leisure activities were related to quality of life among elderly in Sweden. The results suggested that those people increasing their participation across different activities tended to perceive an improvement in their life satisfaction. Another example conducted by [Menec and Chipperfield \(1997\)](#) examined the potential mediating role of participation in leisure activities between perceived control and well-being in the elderly. They found that an internal locus of control was related to participation in leisure activities, which in turn affected the elderly’s increased life satisfaction.

However, the effects may not apply in all contexts to all sub-groups and all activities ([Iwasaki & Smale, 1998](#); [Nimrod, 2007](#)). For instance, [Nimrod \(2007\)](#) examined the structure of leisure activities, benefits of leisure, and well-being of old people, revealing that not all types of activities had a positive impact on retirees’ well-being. Only a few types of activities, such as cultural activities and enrichment activities, affect retiree’s well-being; TV and radio, meanwhile, had a negative impact on their well-being.

In the tourism industry, limited studies have focused on how the elderly’s travel experiences or activities affect their overall quality of life or well-being ([Lee & Tideswell, 2005](#); [Milman, 1998](#); [Wei & Milman, 2002](#)). [Wei and Milman \(2002\)](#), for example, investigated the interrelationships between elderly tourist participation in activities, overall satisfaction with travel experiences, and quality of life. The results showed that elderly tourists’ activity levels are significantly related to their quality of life. A study conducted by [Lee and Tideswell \(2005\)](#) also tried to understand the specific travel behavior of elderly Koreans. They found that vacation experiences improve their quality of life and creates new interests in their lives.

Even though several studies have investigated how tourism experiences of elderly affect their quality of life, there is still limited research on the link between tourism experience and the overall quality of life of elderly tourists, especially the relationship between the level of travel involvement and quality of life. [Milman \(1998\)](#) examined how tourism activity affects elderly tourists’ quality of life. The study found that travel by itself may not be a change agent for level of happiness, but there might be other intervening variables, such as level of the travel activity, that could contribute to changes in travelers’ quality of life.

Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to understand elderly tourists’ travel behavior and its relationship to their quality of life. Specifically, the current study investigates the interrelationships between six major constructs: level of involvement, perceived value, satisfaction with trip experience, leisure life satisfaction, Quality of Life (QOL), and revisit intention. The following sections attempt to establish the theoretical interrelationships between the constructs.

Also, the term ‘elderly’ has to be clearly defined. The elderly age group has included a range of different ages, from 50 to 55 to 60–65 years, depending on the specific tourism study ([Patterson, 2006](#)). However, literature in gerontology has been reasonably consistent in defining the ‘elderly’ according to their retirement age of 65 and older. Thus, our study defines ‘the elderly’ as individuals aged 65 or over.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Involvement

Researchers and marketers are interested in understanding and predicting the complex behavior of consumers. Involvement is a widely used concept in consumer behavior and one of the important psychographic constructs because of its potential effect on both people’s attitudes towards an activity and their behavior with respect to decision making ([Arora, 1985](#); [Josiam, Smeaton, & Clements, 1999](#)).

Many researchers have attempted to define involvement; however, there is lack of consistent definition. One definition of involvement is “a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” ([Zaichkowsky, 1985](#), p.342). Also, involvement is defined as an individual’s level of interest, the importance of an object to an individual, or the centrality of an object to an individuals’ ego structure ([Zaichkowsky, 1994](#)). [Selin and Howard \(1988\)](#) defined involvement as “the state of identification existing between an individual and a recreational activity, at one point in time, characterized by some level of enjoyment and self-expression being achieved through the activity” (p. 237). In this study, involvement is defined as the degree of interest in an activity and the affective response associated with that interest ([Manfredo, 1989](#)).

[Clements and Josiam \(1995\)](#) examined the role of involvement in travel decision-making. They tried to assess respondents’ levels of involvement in their decision to travel over spring break not only to assess the ability of the involvement construct to predict the decision to travel, but also to analyze involvement and destination selection. The research findings indicated both that individuals with high levels of involvement are more likely to travel than those with low involvement and those respondents with high levels of involvement are more likely to travel abroad. Moreover, involvement is a significant predictor of some aspects of the decision to travel.

The study by [Prebensen, Woo, and Uysal \(2013\)](#) indicated that in tourist experience, involvement is a core antecedent since the tourist has already decided to go on holiday and to participate in certain tourism activities while staying at the destination. That is, the level of involvement affects the level of participation in co-creating experience value positively. Similarly, [Chen and Tsai \(2008\)](#) examined the interrelationship between perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty of TV travel product shopping, while considering the moderator effect of involvement. The results showed that perceived value has positive influences on satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, the moderating effects of involvement significantly affect the perceived levels of value, satisfaction, and loyalty models. Specifically, the higher the level of involvement, the

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