



Research on the Impact Mechanism of Travel Information Search Behavioral Intention of the Elderly

Empirical Analysis Based on Structural Equation Model

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Abstract. This paper uses structural equation modeling for quantitative research. By integrating the key elements of the Theory of Reasoned Action, Diffusion of Innovation Theory, and Self-efficacy Theory, this paper constructs a model for the factors influencing the elderly's behavioral intention of online travel information search. SPSS25.0 and AMOS 24.0 were used for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. The results showed that the perceived self-efficacy of the elderly has a significant impact on the perceived comparative advantage and ease of use of online travel information search; subjective norm and perceived ease of use of the search action demonstrates a significant impact on the elderly's attitude toward online travel information search, while intergenerational tech support can significantly influence the elderly's attitude to the online travel information search. This paper also draws conclusions and puts forward some corresponding suggestions.

Keywords: The Elderly · Online Travel Information Search · Behavioral Intention

1 Introduction

Tourism information acquisition is a prerequisite for tourism decision-making behavior. Since the 1990s, with the rapid development of information technology and the wide application of tourism networks, tourism information search behavior has gradually gathered some attention in tourism research. Scholars outside China have done some in-depth research on the motivations and contents of online tourism information search. Terry [22] and Childers divided the motivations of tourism information search into utilitarian motivation and hedonic motivation. According to Moe [18], tourists' motivations for conducting online travel information searches include learning about the basic information, building an information database, and obtaining enjoyment. By comparing the online travel information search behavior of tourists from China and Europe, Vuylsteke [24] discovered that cultural differences, economic and technology differences accounted for various search types, goals, and search engine uses. Pan [3] was among the first scholars to construct a conceptual model for tourism information search. With students from Guangzhou University as their research subjects, Cen Chengde and

Liang Ting [4] found that comprehensive web portals and specialized tourism websites were the students' main sources of tourism information. Liang Mingyingan and Wang Lina [16] statistically concluded that travelers were most concerned about travel consultation and itinerary information. The attention that went to the information of tickets, transportation, travel agency, and hotel accommodations were in descending order. Yang Min [25]. Used screen tracking to study the online travel information search behavior of college students and discovered that in descending order, college students focused on the information of tour, travel, accommodation, food, entertainment, and shopping. In summary, research inside and outside China on tourism travel information search focuses on pre-tour information acquisition. Using research methods like observation, experimentation, and interview, the scholars chose middle-aged and young tourists as their research subjects and studied the motivations, information sources and search channels, etc. of their information search behavior. Generally, the existing research lacks theoretical exploration of the in-depth mechanism under online tourism information search. The majority of research subjects are Internet users, while research on obstacles the elderly face during online tourism information search is rarely seen. Based on the Theory of Reasoned Action, Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, this paper explores the mechanism of the elderly's behavioral intention in times of online tourism information search by constructing a mechanism model, so as to enrich the research of tourism information search behavior and enlarge its scope, and to provide feasible suggestions for expanding the senior tourism market.

2 Research Design and Data Collection

2.1 Hypothesis Formulation and Model Construction

2.1.1 Hypotheses on Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy comes from Social Cognitive Theory [6]. It refers to one's belief in an optimistic estimation of his or her capacity to present valuable information and knowledge to other people. In the Internet context, self-efficacy refers to the extent to which an individual believes they can fulfill Internet tasks. Studies have shown that the elderly have significantly lower self-efficacy than younger adults in terms of Internet use [5]. High self-efficacy promotes Internet use, while low one leads to computer anxiety, which in turn discourages Internet use [1]. In a study, Kulviwat S [21] found that self-efficacy had a significant impact on perceived usefulness and ease of use. Elderly people who have higher self-efficacy exhibit less anxiety about online travel information search and stronger perceived advantage of the search. The author thus formulates the following hypotheses:

H1: Self-efficacy has a significantly positive impact on the perceived comparative advantage of online travel information search;

H2: Self-efficacy has a significant positive impact on the perceived ease of use of online travel information search;

2.1.2 Hypotheses on Comparative Advantage and Ease of Use

Comparative advantage and ease of use are two key variables in Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Comparative advantage refers to the degree of advantage perceived by the users when using the new product compared to the old ones. Ease of use refers to the easiness to understand and use the new, innovative products. In his book *Theories of Mass Communication*, DeFleur [7] proposed that the comparative advantage and ease of use from Diffusion of Innovation Theory should correspond to the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use from the technology acceptance model. According to Davis, improvements in perceived ease of use enhance perceived usefulness and perceived usefulness and ease of use can influence behavioral attitudes and behavioral intention. In terms of Internet use behavior, Chen [20] proposed that perceived usefulness and ease of use have a positive effect on behavioral attitudes and behavioral intention. The Theory of Reasoned Action states that an individual's behavioral intention is determined by his or her behavioral attitudes and subjective norms. As such, the author put forward the following hypotheses:

H3: The comparative advantage of online travel information search perceived by the elderly significantly influences their behavioral attitudes toward online travel information search;

H4: The ease of use of online travel information search perceived by the elderly significantly influences their behavioral attitudes toward online travel information search;

2.1.3 Hypotheses on Intergenerational Tech Support

Intergenerational support [11] refers to the existence of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and support between the elder and younger generations of a family in finance, life, and emotion. It also includes the process of sharing life experiences and emotions among generations. The three major types of intergenerational support include financial support, emotional support, and instrumental support. Instrumental support is proved to have a positive impact on both the body and mental status of the elderly. Liu et al. [17]. Has studied Facebook and discovered that the instrumental support provided by the platform had a significantly positive impact on the elder generation in terms of physical and mental health, self-affirmation, and life satisfaction.

The different accessibility of information technology to elder and younger generations arises from the physical and psychological gaps between the generations, leading to the so-called "digital divide." HJLm [10] suggested that since the Internet was born, due to the massive sizes and complexity of information technology and its operating systems, it gets more difficult for the elderly to access the Internet. Researchers have been shifting their attention to children's IT support for the elderly. Zhou Yuqiong [27] believed that young people are easier to accept new media and pick up related technologies. He then proposed that children should offer help to their parents, i.e., to provide support on Internet technologies to them so they can quickly get used to the new media era. When the elderly search for online travel information, with technical support from their children, they will have a more positive attitude toward this matter and be more willing to do it. Therefore, the author proposed the following hypotheses:

H5: Intergenerational tech support has a significant impact on old people's behavioral attitudes toward online travel information search;

H6: Intergenerational tech support has a significant impact on old people's behavioral intention of online travel information search.

2.1.4 Hypotheses on Subjective Norm

Subjective norm is an important factor in the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior. It refers to the social pressure an individual feels on whether to adopt a particular social behavior. In an organization or social context, individuals are susceptible to the influence of their surroundings, which makes the subjective norm an important variable. As proposed by scholars like Dishaw, Strong, and Legis, the subjective norm should be taken into account since the information system users cannot avoid being influenced by social and organization settings when using the system [26]. Subjective norms and behavioral attitudes are not independent of each other. In fact, the subjective norm has a significant and positive impact on one's behavioral attitude. Theoretically speaking, theories like persuasion and cognitive dissonance theories have confirmed the role subjective norm plays on behavioral attitude [8]. As for subjective norm and behavioral intention, inside the framework of Planned Behavior Theory, subjective norm helps predict and explain behavioral intentions [2]. When doing an online travel information search, the elderly tend to be affected by the organizations, groups, and individuals surrounding them. Therefore, the author proposed the following hypotheses:

H7: Subjective norms have a significant impact on old people's behavioral attitudes toward online travel information search;

H8: Subjective norms have a significant impact on old people's behavioral intention of online travel information search.

2.1.5 Hypotheses on Behavioral Attitude and Behavioral Intention

Behavioral attitude refers to the attitude an individual holds on conducting a particular behavior, either a positive or negative one, as well as how he or she perceives the impact of conducting this specific behavior. Behavioral intention refers to the inclination of an individual to conduct a particular behavior. As pointed out by Davis, behavioral attitude is closely related to and has a direct impact on behavioral intention. Numerous studies have confirmed the significant positive impact of behavioral attitude on behavioral intention. Therefore, the author proposed the following hypothesis:

H9: The elderly's behavioral attitudes toward online travel information search have a significant impact on their behavioral intention.

Based on the above hypotheses, the author integrates the key elements of the Theory of Reasoned Action, Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory and constructs a structural equation model of factors that influence the elderly's behavior and intention of online travel information search, as shown in Fig. 1:

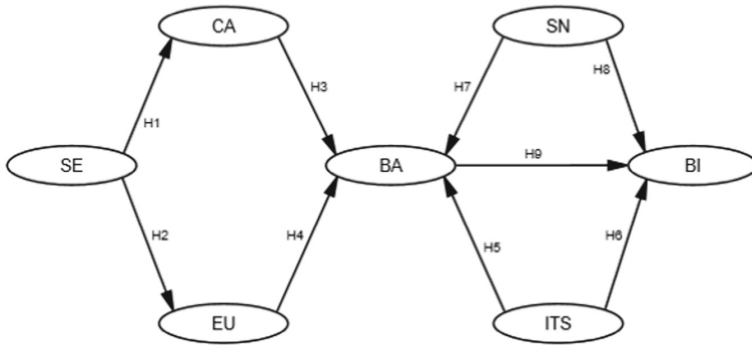


Fig. 1. Factors influencing the elderly’s behavioral intention of online travel information search (The author draws it according to the data)

- CA: Comparative advantage
- SN: Subjective norm; SE: Self-efficacy
- BA: Behavioral attitude
- BI: Behavioral intention
- EU: Ease of use
- ITS: Intergenerational tech support

2.2 Questionnaire Design

The author conducts an empirical study on the factors influencing the elderly’s behavior and intentions of online travel information search, with adults over 55 years old being the study subjects. The research model contains seven factors. To ensure the content validity of the questionnaires, the measurement items of each potential variable were all drawn from existing literature, and the scales for comparative advantage and ease of use were partially referenced from those of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use due to the relative maturity of the scales in technology acceptance mode [13–15, 19, 23]. A 7-point Likert scale was adopted for the measurement of each question item in the model, with 1 indicating strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 mildly disagree, 4 uncertain, 5 mildly agree, 6 agree and 7 strongly agree.

Before the questionnaires survey formally started, a pre-survey of 50 questionnaires was conducted, and the questionnaire was modified and finalized based on the reliability and validity of the results. The finalized questionnaire was divided into two parts: a social background survey, including four-question items on age, gender, level of education, and pre-retirement income, and a survey on the factors influencing search behavior and intention, consisting of seven factors and 32 questions.

2.3 Data Collection

The survey was conducted in two channels, online and offline. A total of 182 online questionnaires and 173 paper questionnaires were collected, excluding those with excessively

short response time (less than 2 min), those filled in by the same persons and incomplete questionnaires, a totally of 318 valid questionnaires, with a response rate of 89.5%, meeting the sample size requirement for structural equation modeling (SEM).

3 Model Testing and Modification

The assessment of SEM is composed of two parts: the assessment of the measurement model and that of the structural model. In this paper, AMOS24.0 is used to evaluate and modify the measurement model and the structural model.

3.1 Measurement Model Testing

3.1.1 Model Fit Testing

Eight indicators, CMIN, DF, CMIN/DF, CFI, NFI, TLI, GFI, and RMSEA were used to evaluate the model fit. The standards and guidelines for modification are as follows: (1) Check modification indices (MI); (2) Modify the models based on the principle of “one parameter at a time” and re-assess the models after the modification (Hair, 1998); (3) Conduct confirmatory factor analysis on seven measurement models based on the principle in (2), and eliminate unsuitable candidates until the model fit reached the standard range.

3.1.2 Convergent Validity Testing

Convergent validity tests whether multiple question items developed from one variable will finally converge in one factor. It is usually measured by composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). The value of CR combines the reliabilities of all measured variables, indicating internal consistency among different constructs. CR is similar to Cronbach’s alpha. A higher CR value indicates stronger internal consistency among the constructs, with 0.7 being the minimum acceptable value [12]. Fornell and Larcker [9] suggested that the value should be higher than 0.6. AVE is used to measure the amount of variance of the measured variables of the latent variables. Higher AVE values mean stronger reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. Ideally, the standard AVE value must be greater than 0.5, with 0.36–0.5 being the acceptable value range. The reliability analysis and convergent validity of the constructs are shown in Table 1.

In terms of individual reliability, the factor loadings for all 22 indicators lie within 0.5–0.95, hence meeting the criteria. The combined reliabilities of the 7 latent variables were 0.907 for ease of use, 0.821 for behavioral attitude, 0.801 for behavioral intention, 0.885 for subjective norm, 0.890 for comparative advantage, 0.886 for intergenerational tech support, and 0.769 for self-efficacy, all of which were greater than 0.7. The AVEs for the latent variables were 0.765, 0.616, 0.585, 0.663, 0.729, 0.721, and 0.573, respectively, all of which were greater than 0.5.

Table 1. Reliability analysis of the constructs.

Construct	Item	Std	SMC	CR	AVE
Ease of use	Q6_3	0.837	0.701	0.907	0.765
	Q6_4	0.899	0.808		
	Q6_5	0.886	0.785		
Behavioral attitude	Q9_3	0.531	0.282	0.821	0.616
	Q9_2	0.884	0.781		
	Q9_1	0.886	0.785		
Behavioral intention	Q11_1	0.819	0.671	0.801	0.585
	Q11_2	0.907	0.823		
	Q11_4	0.512	0.262		
Subjective norm	Q7_1	0.895	0.801	0.885	0.663
	Q7_2	0.862	0.743		
	Q7_3	0.863	0.745		
	Q7_4	0.601	0.361		
Comparative advantage	Q5_6	0.846	0.716	0.89	0.729
	Q5_4	0.892	0.796		
	Q5_3	0.822	0.676		
Intergenerational tech support	Q8_3	0.821	0.674	0.886	0.721
	Q8_2	0.884	0.781		
	Q8_1	0.841	0.707		
Self-efficacy	Q10_3	0.503	0.253	0.769	0.537
	Q10_2	0.836	0.699		
	Q10_1	0.811	0.658		

3.2 Differential Validity Testing

The concept of differential validity suggests that the correlation between question items of different constructs should be weaker between those of the same construct. To find out if differential validity exists among the constructs, we can use the method proposed by Fornell and Larcker. The constructs are considered to have differential validity if the AVEs of all constructs are greater than the square of the correlation coefficient between the construct and the other constructs. In other words, if the minimum value of the square root of all constructs' AVEs are greater than the maximum value of the correlation coefficient between two constructs, differential validity exists among the

Table 2. Differential validity testing.

	AVE	Intergenerational tech support	Subjective norm	Self-efficacy	Comparative advantage	Ease of use	Behavioral attitude	Behavioral intention
Intergenerational tech support	.537	.732						
Subjective norm	.663	.499	.814					
Self-efficacy	.537	.583	.610	.732				
Comparative advantage	.729	.386	.404	.662	.854			
Ease of use	.765	.366	.383	.628	.596	.874		
Behavioral attitude	.616	.398	.466	.493	.493	.474	.785	
Behavioral intention	.585	.559	.466	.462	.383	.336	.455	.765

Note: The bolded values on the diagonal line are the AVE' square root, and the others are the correlation coefficients between constructs

constructs. The correlation coefficients between the latent variables and the square root of AVEs are shown in Table 2:

As seen from Table 2, AVE's square roots for all seven latent variables are greater than the correlation coefficients between that variable with the others, indicating that the measurement model exhibits great differential validity.

3.3 Structural Model Testing

The structural equation model was drawn using AMOS 24.0 before being tested by importing the data that had been screened by empirical factor analysis. Then the structural model was analyzed using maximum likelihood estimation to obtain the model fit, the results of the significance test, and the explained variance. The finalized structural equation model is shown in Fig. 2.

The model fit of the structural model was tested based on the model fit indices. The model fit indices are shown in Table 3.

By comparing the tolerance range of each model fit index, it was found that the NFI was 0.881, and the GFI was 0.858, both of which were close to the reference value 0.9 and within the acceptable range. The remaining six fit indices all met the requirements, indicating that the structural model had a good model fit.

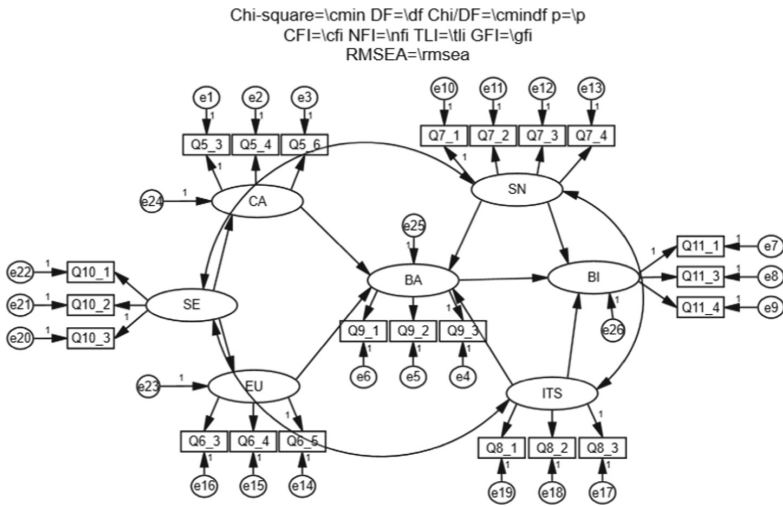


Fig. 2. Results of the structural equation model normalization. (The author draws it according to the data). CA: Comparative advantage; SN: Subjective norm; SE: Self-efficacy; BA: Behavioral attitude; BI: Behavioral intention; EU: Ease of use; ITS: Intergenerational tech support

Table 3. Model fit testing.

Model fit index	chi/df	NFI	CFI	TLI	GFI	RMSEA
Actual value	2.709	0.881	0.921	0.907	0.858	0.073
Reference value	$1 < \chi^2/df < 3$	>0.9	$>0.9e$	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08
Fit or not	Fit	Basically fit	Fit	Fit	Basically fit	Fit

4 Empirical Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

4.1 Sample Individual Characteristics

In this paper, SPSS 25.0 was used to perform descriptive statistical analysis on 318 samples and to obtain their individual characteristics, as shown in Table 4.

In terms of the respondents’ age structure, the largest number 148 goes to the people aged 55–60 years old, accounting for 46.5% of the total respondents. In terms of their gender, 166 (52.2%) are male and 152 are female (47.8%). When it comes to the level of education, people who attended junior high school accounted for the largest number. People who earned 2000–4000 accounted for the largest proportion.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The model in this paper was modified by confirmatory factor analysis several times to obtain the confirmed structural model diagram, as shown in Fig. 3. The results of the hypothesis tests are shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Sample individual characteristics.

Category		Number of persons	Percentage (%)
Age	55–60	148	46.5
	61–65	91	28.6
	66–70	42	13.2
	71–75	27	8.5
	Over 75	10	3.1
Gender	Male	166	52.2
	Female	152	47.8
Level of education	Primary school or below	56	17.6
	Junior high	79	24.8
	High school and vocational school	65	20.4
	Junior college	60	18.9
	Bachelor’s degree or above	58	18.2
Income	Below 2000	60	18.9
	2000–4000	105	33.0
	4000–6000	78	24.5
	6000–8000	42	13.2
	Over 8000	33	10.4

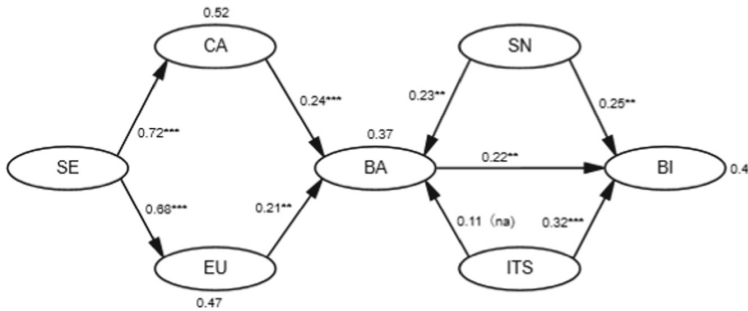


Fig. 3. Path diagram of structural equation model (The author draws according to the data). CA: Comparative advantage; SN: Subjective norm; SE: Self-efficacy; BA: Behavioral attitude; BI: Behavioral intention; EU: Ease of use; ITU: Intergenerational tech support

The structural path and the hypothesis testing results above show that all of the eight hypotheses had passed the tests, except for H5, intergenerational tech support on behavioral attitude, which failed the test. Self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.72, p < 0.001$) was proved to have a significant impact on comparative advantage, verifying H1.

Table 5. Results of the hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Structural path	<i>p</i> -value	Path coefficient	Hypothesis test result
H1	Self-efficacy → comparative advantage	***	0.72	In favor
H2	Self-efficacy → ease of use	***	0.68	In favor
H3	Comparative advantage → behavioral attitude	***	0.24	In favor
H5	Intergenerational tech support → behavioral attitude	0.102	0.11	Not in favor
H6	Intergenerational tech support → behavioral intention	***	0.32	In favor
H7	Subjective norm → behavioral attitude	**	0.23	In favor
H8	Subjective norm → behavioral intention	***	0.25	In favor
H9	Behavioral attitude → behavioral intention	**	0.22	In favor

Note: *** indicates $p < 0.001$, ** indicates $p < 0.01$, and * indicates $p < 0.05$, all of which symbolize significant influence; “na” indicates insignificant influence and invalid hypothesis.

5 Discussions

Based on the results of the research model and hypothesis testing, we discovered significant positive impacts both comparative advantage and ease of use had on behavioral attitude at the technological level. It indicates that the stronger and easier the degree of advantages of the online travel information search is perceived by the elderly, the stronger the willingness is to adopt online travel information search. The results are consistent with the findings concerning perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in the technology acceptance model.

On the individual level, self-efficacy has a significant positive impact on comparative advantage and ease of use. This indicates that confident old people who are more willing to try new technologies tend to find online travel information search helpful and operable, so they are more likely to use online travel information search. The elderly have low self-efficacy when using the Internet. Therefore, information service providers should simplify the search process as much as possible when providing a special service for them. The elderly themselves should cultivate their own skills in using Internet technology and online travel information search and seek help from family members and other relatives when necessary. This can help remove the obstacles of their refusal to accept new things and their perceived lack of ability to use them.

On the society level, both the subjective norm and intergenerational tech support have significant impacts on the behavioral attitude and behavior intention of the elderly when searching for online travel information. Compared to other age groups, elderly visitors

are more likely to be influenced by their relatives, friends, and the society they are in. As the Internet and information technology continue to develop, and online travel services rapidly grow, the elderly's behavioral intention to search online travel information has also been growing due to favorable social and family environments. Seen from the results of hypothesis testing, intergenerational tech support, as an important external variable, has no significant impact on the elderly's behavioral attitude, but it does have a significant impact on their behavioral intention. Intergenerational support from their children, whether it is financial support, daily care, and spiritual assistance, can positively influence the life of the elderly and enhance their subjective well-being.

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