Typology of Senior Travellers as Users of Tourism Information Technology

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Abstract

The importance of senior travellers as a travel segment for the tourism industry is continuously increasing as the number of pensioners increases in the Western world. These new senior travellers differ from earlier generations in many ways, one of which has to do with the increasing use of information and communication technologies as part of their information search process. This study examines senior travellers as users of tourism information technology. A qualitative approach was adopted to provide insights into the topic, and nine Finnish seniors were interviewed. The results were analysed using content analysis. The results show that senior travellers comprise a quite heterogeneous market with respect to the use of tourism information technology. However, there is no special marketing or website design that senior travellers really need: a good website will cater to both the needs of younger as well as older consumers. The study also presents a tentative typology of three different types of senior travellers based on their use of online travel services: Adventurous Experimenters, Meticulous Researchers and

Fumbling Observers. This typology contributes to our understanding of the heterogeneous use of tourism information technology by senior travellers.

Keywords: senior travellers; information search; website design; elderly; travel websites; pensioners

1 Introduction

Lately, many different stakeholders involved in the tourism industry have emphasised the importance of seniors. For example, the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2006) has identified seniors as one of the main target groups for the Finnish tourism strategy, and Amadeus (2007) regards active seniors (50–75 year olds) as an important tourist segment to focus on in the future. The characteristics of senior travellers have become an important research topic because of the large market size and its potential for growth (Horneman et al., 2002).

Senior travellers are now becoming a mainstream tourism segment and represent a considerable market for many businesses. But what is a senior travel market? There is no common definition for or understanding of what is meant by an older consumer market and at what age a person should be considered a senior citizen. Definitions vary from 50 years old (e.g. Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001) to as much as 65 years old (Norman et al., 2001). Vigolo and Confente (2014) defined prospective seniors as people ranging from 50 to 64 years of age and seniors as people at least 65 years of age. The maturing of the post-war Baby Boomer generation has resulted in a redefinition of the meaning of senior (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007), as Boomers tend to reject products that use the word 'senior' in marketing or that are targeted at the older generation (Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007). Seniorship is also often connected to the age of retirement. Peter Laslett (1987) divides the ageing process into a third and fourth age, which depict different phases of ageing. The third age refers to the active phase of ageing when the person has the possibility for self-fulfilment and extensive leisure time, is in good health and enjoys a secure livelihood as a pensioner. During the fourth age, people start becoming dependent on others as their health deteriorates.

Already the problem of defining a senior citizen demonstrates the heterogeneity of this particular market segment within the tourism industry. However, seniors also differ from younger generations in many ways ((e.g. Reece, 2004; Newbold et al., 2005). One of the major differences has to do with information search behaviour (Javalgi et al., 1992) and especially the use of information and communication technologies. We tend to think of younger people, especially digital natives, as being fluent users of information technology (Manafy & Gautschi, 2011), whereas we regard older people as being more technology aversive. However, there is a new type of senior traveller emerging. People who are retiring now are more and more used to working with computers and interacting with different kinds of information and communication technologies (ICTs), while many even have smart phones and tablets.

This requires us to start thinking about the senior travel market in new ways. Seniors are often neglected, not just as a tourist market but even as a research topic. For example, the segment is often forgotten in hotel marketing and advertising (Hartman & Qu, 2008). We have to acknowledge that the senior travel market is changing and that

knowledge must keep up with the changes. This also means that heterogeneity within the senior traveller market is growing. For example, people living their third age are also much more likely to use ICTs during their travel search process than people already living their fourth age (Dinet et al., 2007). It is likely that the group is itself discerning heterogeneous needs (Sudbury & Simcock, 2009a; Nielsen, 2014). Also, people of the same age can have very different lifestyles (Kohijoki & Marjanen, 2012) and varying needs, and they may value different things (Moschis, 1994). Although chronological age is most commonly used to segment older consumers in marketing research, it can also be regarded as an ineffective segmentation technique (Sudbury & Simcock, 2009b).

This study aims to fill important research gaps in the existing tourism literature by studying tourism information technology through the eyes of senior travellers. The focus is on examining how senior travellers use tourism information technology during various phases of the information search process and assessing the meaning of market heterogeneity with respect to senior travellers as users of tourism information technologies. Additionally, the aim is to provide insights into how tourism information technology correspond to the needs of older travellers and highlight the attributes of an online travel service that they value.

2 Background of the study

2.1 Seniors as technology users and information seekers

This study defines tourism information technology as information technology used in tourism context. According to Daintith (2014), information technology can be defined as 'The use of computers and telecommunications equipment (with their associated microelectronics) to send, receive, store and manipulate data'. Thus, tourism information technology encompasses the websites that travellers use when they are searching for information either before the trip, during the trip or after the trip, their use of tablets and mobile devices, and their contacts with the hospitality provider infrastructure, such as self-service check-in machines.

Elderly consumers are often considered to be anxious about technology and reluctant to adopt new technologies (Niemelä-Nyrhinen, 2007). Older consumers, for example, have not adopted the Internet as much as other consumers and do not use it as often as others, nor are they as active on social media (Statistics Finland, 2012a-d). However, because of the still modest level at which they are adopting new technology, older adults are the fastest growing group of computer users and information seekers (Kurniawan et al., 2006). It is also believed that elderly consumers are less willingness to try new products (Reisenwitz et al., 2007) since they prefer remaining loyal to the same well-known brands rather than adopting novel products (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010). Seniors also tend to consider fewer brands when making their decisions and tend to repeatedly purchase the same brand (Lambert-Pandraud et al., 2005).

Several previous studies (e.g. Dinet et al., 2007) indicate that computer use decreases among older adults as their age increases. Moschis (2003) argues that a consumer-oriented marketing philosophy is critical to creating an effective marketing strategy

for older consumers. Marketers need to know how older people differ from younger people. These differences tend to be the result of two types of factors: either differences in aging processes or differences in the life circumstances they have experienced. For this reason, more information on older consumers really is needed.

The use of tourism information technology is increasing among older people, and many of them have been using the Internet for some time now. For example, Eurostat (2015) data show that the percentage of people older than 55 years of age using the Internet has been growing steadily in almost all European countries. Dinet et al. (2007) found that older Internet users seek out travel and recreation options second only to health-related matters. Moreover, the World Wide Web has become a major information resource for older people. This indeed calls for more information on how this very interesting and important segment of the tourism market uses information technology in their information search processes.

To date, there has only been a limited amount of information on the role of Internet in the senior travel market (Vigolo & Confente, 2014), and extremely little qualitative information. However, it is well known that older people search for information differently than other people. Already in the 1980s, Gitelson and Crompton (1983) reported that older vacationers were more inclined to use travel agents than other vacationers. Javalgi et al. (1992) found that senior travellers engage less in external searches, meaning that they tend to buy more pre-packaged tours than non-seniors. Contrary to earlier findings, Luo et al. (2004) did not find any significant differences in information search behaviour between senior and non-senior tourists; instead, they found that senior tourists seem to use the same information sources as other tourists. However, Luo et al. (2004) did not investigate whether or not there were any differences in how senior tourists used the information sources. Vigolo and Confente (2014) studied past travel behaviour and online experiences as antecedents impacting the intent by older tourists to make online purchases, and they identified online word-of-mouth, previous online travel purchases and education as significant factors. Also, they discovered significant behavioural differences between prospective seniors and seniors.

Thébault, Picard and Ouedraogo (2013) studied senior travellers navigating the web for information on vacation travel by studying the sources of information and the means they use while researching and planning their vacation. They identified a typology of four senior groups based on the ways in which the seniors offer advice to other Internet users and ask for advice from Internet users. Community-minded seniors seek information and exchange it with other like-minded Internet users. Opportunistic seniors use the information provided by other Internet users, but do not contribute information themselves. Disinclined seniors do not seek the advice of unknown Internet users or provide any advice themselves. Altruistic seniors want to help others without asking for anything in return. However, the results presented by Thébault et al. (2013) are limited only to the pre-trip information search phase. A more comprehensive picture of senior travellers is needed in order to understand their behaviour during the whole information search process before the trip, during the trip and after the trip.

Dinet et al. (2007) studied the online information needs and search strategies of older people using mixed methods research. However, they only used qualitative research to measure the number of information searches conducted on the web. Their main findings were that individual characteristics make older people a very heterogeneous group of information seekers, but one major problem that older people encountered was in relocating relevant information with respect to all of the information provided by the search engines. Fodness and Murray (1997) identified household life-cycles as an affective factor in the tourist information search process. Johnson (1990) investigated age differences in the decision-making process and found that older people used less information, spent more time viewing information and re-viewed fewer bits of information than college-age participants in their study. Also, information search patterns differed between age groups. Age was also found to be a significant factor in a study by Klein and Ford (2003), even though their results in part contradict the results presented by Johnson (1990). Czaja et al. (2001) found significant differences between different age groups in terms of how they perform a complex information search and retrieve relevant information. Older people have more difficulties in performing these tasks, but the difficulties can be alleviated by increasing the expertise of the user or by changes in interface design. They suggest that computer-aiding techniques may decrease the load on working memory and increase performance speed.

Our review of the aforementioned literature demonstrates that the use of technology by seniors is a recognised and important research topic. Technology has become nearly ubiquitous in the travel industry. According to Buhalis and Law (2008), ICT developments have direct impacts on the competitiveness of enterprises and thus on tourism destinations. Throughout the world, tourism businesses are encouraged by governments and organisations that manage travel to local destinations to adopt digital technologies. This means that technology is becoming more and more pervasive in the tourism industry. This has also raised concerns that offline senior citizens are becoming increasingly disadvantaged from a socio-ecological point of view (Peacock & Künemund, 2007). This might also lead to disadvantages in tourism if the senior traveller market is not adequately understood and if technologies are adapted to fit the tourism industry without considering seniors. However, seniors are not a homogenous group and should not be considered as such (Faranda & Schmidt, 2000).

2.2 Heterogeneous seniors

The existing literature conclusively demonstrates that senior travellers are an extremely heterogeneous segment of the population, consisting of people with different travel motivations, different demographic backgrounds, different psychographics and different lifestyles as well as at different educational and income levels (Sedgley et al., 2011; Nielsen, 2014). Senior travellers have been studied in many segmentation studies and a large number of senior traveller segments have been identified (Faranda & Schmidt, 2000), establishing the fact that the senior market is extremely heterogeneous. For example, in the USA four older consumer segments have been identified in several studies: 'Healthy Hermits', 'Ailing Outgoers', 'Frail Recluses' and 'Healthy Indulgers' (Moschis, 1994). Moschis (1994) also states that elderly consumers appreciate some specific attributes with respect to products and services, namely conven-

ience, functionality, quality, dependability, personalised service and product development. Kim, Wei and Ruys (2003) segmented West Australian senior tourists, identifying four different kinds of senior tourists: Active Learners, Relaxed Family Bodies, Careful Participants and Elementary Vacation-Goers. In addition to these studies, a large number of other studies have also segmented senior travel markets (e.g. Backman et al., 1999; You & O'Leary, 1999), but none of them focus on senior travellers as users of tourism information technology.

This heterogeneity means that it is quite difficult to make any generalisations about the senior traveller market. This also calls for more qualitative research so that the voices of senior travellers are heard (Sedgley et al., 2011; Nielsen, 2014). More research is also needed on what tourism information technology really means for senior travellers.

Market heterogeneity provides the fundamental background for such studies, as it provides a basis for market segmentation, targeting and positioning, and micro-marketing (Kamakura et al., 1996). These factors in turn provide possibilities for tourism businesses to provide customers with value in marketing and service processes (Pesonen, 2013). This study is not a market segmentation study, as it does not aim to find target markets for tourism products (Kotler & Keller, 2006); rather, it focuses on the heterogeneity of tourism information technology use among senior travellers.

In terms of online shopping and Internet use, literature typologies or classification schemes provide the basis for understanding and targeting different groups of consumers (Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004; Kau, Tang & Ghose, 2003). A typology specific to senior travellers as users of tourism information technology will enable us to identify distinct user groups, thereby enabling tourism businesses to effectively tailor their products to these customer types. These typologies will help us understand the market structure and adequately position the travel products and services for different users.

2.3 Research goals

As the literature review demonstrates, there has been a large amount of research conducted on older people as information seekers and a large number of studies on information search behaviour that included seniors. Seniors are not a homogenous group and should not be treated as such. Businesses need to understand the heterogeneity of senior markets in order to provide customer value in marketing and product development. Especially with respect to the use of information technologies, seniors differ from other demographic groups as well as from each other. However, the differences in information search behaviour within the senior markets are not very well known. The heterogeneity of the senior market suggests that senior tourists as users of tourism information technology differ from each other considerably, and by identifying these differences, it will be possible to better understand the markets and provide customer value through online channels.

The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the use of tourism information technology within the senior traveller market. The aim is to identify heterogeneity within the market and create a tentative typology of senior travellers as users of tourism information technology. This kind of typology will provide structure for a very heterogeneous group of senior travellers (Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004; Moschis, 1994). For this typology, a wide variety of information is needed to understand the use of tourism information technology and the characteristics of various senior travellers.

This study contributes to the existing literature by examining senior travellers as a heterogeneous segment of the tourism market from the perspective of information and communication technologies. This understanding will create a starting point for future research in a significant and growing field. It will provide new information on the emerging senior market and those that are active users of information and communication technologies. This study contributes to the existing body of literature on information searches as well as the information and communication technologies used in tourism by providing ways to understand senior travellers as users of tourism technologies.

For tourism businesses, this study provides information on how they should start thinking about the senior traveller market in the electronic business and take into account the characteristics of different senior traveller segments. Characteristics such as traveller type (Faranda & Schmidt, 2000; Sedgley et al., 2011), consumption behaviour (Javalgi et al., 1992), the purchasing process (Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004), opinions on senior marketing (Topo, 2008), information search behaviour (Fodness & Murray, 1997) and the use of travel websites (Thébault et al., 2013) are critical for an understanding of senior customers and how to market to them. Examination of these characteristics and the underlying heterogeneity within the market was the goal of the data collection in this study. Understanding the market structure will provide ways to create customer value during different phases of the information search and consumption process.

3 Data and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate senior travellers as users of tourism information technology. The seniors analysed in this study all use information and communication technologies in one way or another. The empirical data consist of nine semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, which were conducted with nine retired people. One interview was done with both the husband (M68) and wife (F64b) present. The interviewees were selected in collaboration with an association of retired people located in central Finland. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, and all English translations were done by the authors. A snowball technique was applied when choosing the next interviewee. The interviewees were asked to give the contact details of someone they knew and believed to be an active traveller. All of the respondents reached in this way reported that they take at least one trip abroad and several domestic trips each year. The group of interviewees included five women and four men. In qualitative research, the size of the sample does not matter; rather, what

matters is the saturation level of data from the sample in question (Gummesson, 2000). We also tried to find a representative sample of respondents with different kinds of personalities and different backgrounds. Nevertheless, it must be noted here that, as is common in qualitative research, the aim was not to produce any generalizable or comprehensive information about Finnish seniors as web users, but to increase our understanding of senior travellers as users of tourism information technology. The qualitative approach is concerned with interpretation and understanding (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Hence, the findings will instead provide ideas for further research and not attempt to make generalisations based on the insights gained from this study.

At the beginning of the interviews, the respondents completed a background information questionnaire that asked for their socio-demographic information. The interview method used in this study was a thematic interview. It is typical of thematic interviews that the areas of interest have been defined beforehand, but the questions are not presented in any particular form or order, as in structured interviews (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). The themes that the interviewer discussed with the respondents were based on the literature review and consisted of questions concerning use of information and communication technologies in general, travel and consumption behaviour (Javalgi et al., 1992), including their travel history (Faranda & Schmidt, 2000; Sedgley et al., 2011), the purchasing process (Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004) and their opinions about senior marketing (Topo, 2008), their use of the Internet for travel-related purposes, including their relationship with technology, their information search behaviour, their use of mobile devices and travel websites, and finally, the usability of and their use behaviour with respect to travel websites (Benckendorff et al., 2014).

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The data were analysed via content analysis, which is a tool used to prepare empirical data for the interpretation process by repeatedly reading and organising the data and classifying or thematising the data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Observations were collected in matrix form in order to better understand the differences and similarities between the respondents. Relevant quotations from the interviewees are included in our presentation of the findings in order to better understand the perspectives of the respondents and make their interpretation more transparent.

4 Findings

4.1 Background information and travel history

Background information about the demographics of the respondents as well as their travel preferences is presented in Table 1. Similar tables were created based on all of data, but only the first table is presented here due to limited space. Most of the respondents came from rather modest circumstances, which is common for those in this post-WWII age cohort in Finland. Only one respondent (M78) had a university degree, which had given him the opportunity to learn and use foreign languages. Except for him and F64a, all of the others reported that they do not manage with foreign languages. This is quite common for this age cohort: only generations born after 1960 have had English or some other compulsory foreign language at school starting from the 3rd grade.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Mainly because of their family backgrounds, the respondents did not travel during their childhood or youth. However, as they got married or started living on their own, all of them started to travel abroad and in Finland as well. One respondent (F64a) prefers independent, self-organised trips, while the others reported that they most often book package tours. Some respondents reported that they even book the flights and accommodation separately if the destination is familiar. Only three of the respondents reported having participated in special trips targeted for seniors, and all of them regarded these trips as active and interesting. Most of the others had prejudices against senior trips, which they assumed were meant only for people in poor health. Common opinion seemed to be that 'senior trips' or 'trips for retired people' would not be an attractive marketing brand or slogan:

'"*Senior trips", I don't think that's a good slogan. Not very successful marketing, as people do not think of themselves as seniors but identify themselves through their earlier occupation or hobbies.' (M78)*

4.2 Use of information and communication technologies in general

Regarding the use of information technology (Table 2), the respondents reported that they at least have a computer or a laptop, while some of them also reported that they have a tablet and/or a smartphone. Only one of the respondents (F68b) reportedly does not use the Internet independently, but needs help even with information searches. Two of the male respondents (M62 and M68) stated that they search for information but let their spouses make the bookings. While two of the respondents (M62 and F68a) declared that they would not even consider acquiring any kind of smart technology, others (F64a, F68b, M78) already actively use tablets and/or smartphones.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Except for one respondent (F68a), all of the others stated that they use the Internet and online services regularly or even daily. They use the Internet for information searches, banking, library needs, e-mailing and online shopping. Six respondents also reported that they have a Facebook profile, but not all of them use it actively.

'*(With Facebook) I mostly follow the lives of [my] children and grandchildren, but I very seldom comment on the posts or post anything about myself. Just not my thing. But of course it is nice to go and have a look when they upload pictures of their trips there [on Facebook].' (M78)*

4.3 Use of tourism information technology

All of the respondents claimed that they use the Internet at least to some extend when planning their trips (Table 3). All of them except for F68a and M62 stated that the Internet is their major source of information when planning a trip. All of the respondents told us that they book their trips on the Internet, with six doing so independently and three with the help of a family member. Those persons who said that they buy their trips as package tours also regard them as easy and safe. They reportedly are not that afraid of encountering problems when buying the flights and accommodations over the Internet separately. However, they expressed more concern about the possible problems that might occur at the destination and that, without the help of a travel operator, they would be on their own, without command of a foreign language.

Only one respondent (F64a) reportedly uses the Internet actively during trips abroad. One respondent (F68b) said that she sometimes takes her laptop with her and she has used Skype and chat applications, but not always. M78 told us that he uses his smartphone or tablet mainly to search for maps. The other respondents stated that they have not used the Internet during their trips abroad, not even at Internet cafes or on hotel computers. The respondents expressed concern about the costs of and security with respect to their use of the Internet. Instead, the respondents stated that they prefer using traditional sources of information at their destinations, namely tour operators' hotel books, brochures, television and pre-printed material brought from home. They also stated a preference for relying on tour guides and hotel personnel.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

The senior travellers interviewed for this study differed from each other considerably regarding their use of social media and Web 2.0. Some use the web only to search for information (F68a), some only contribute to it (M68), some do not use it at all (M62) and some both contribute as well as use it (F61, F64a). After the trip, several of those interviewed said they may share their experiences and photos on Facebook (F61, F64, M68, F68b), and if the tour operator sends feedback forms, others reportedly will fill them out and return them (F61, F68b, F64b, M68). Several of the interviewees said that sometimes they might search for more detailed information about the destination again after the trip.

Most of the respondents said that they go to travel websites only when they plan to make a trip and the topic is current. As soon as the intention to travel arouses their interest, most said that they will put more effort into searching for information. Their stated goal in browsing the websites is to purchase a trip, and for that reason alone they search for information. According to the interviewees, they typically do not make a purchase decision during a single browsing session; rather, they consider different options for a certain amount of time, and in the end, they choose the most suitable travel product.

Some of the respondents said that they do actively search for travel offers and last-minute travel deals, even though they have not yet decided on the time for their next holiday. Some of them claimed that they also dream about trips that they do not have the possibility to take at the moment (F64a, F64b, M68).

'I do have some places that I have not visited yet, but have already printed the maps. A little bit of pre-planning, if only my health stays good.' (M78)

As soon as the trip has been booked, the respondents stated that they will visit the tour operators' pages several times. They also visit other travel websites to check up on their own reservation multiple times, search for more information about the destination and plan the details of the trip. They also said that they often use Google and domestic travel websites (Rantapallo.fi, Napsu.fi, Ellit.fi). The information search process increases their travelling spirit and also has a huge impact on what older tourists experience at the destination:

'When you read something online and look at pictures, you always get a certain image [about the place]. Then when you go there, the destination feels completely different than if you had not become familiar with the place at all.' (M62)

Before an international trip, the respondents told us that they search for information about the destination: the history and current state of it, the number of inhabitants and other factual information about the culture and customs, weather, sights, activities, events, local transportation, shopping opportunities, the opening times of stores, seasonality, price levels, restaurants, local specialities, recommended vaccinations and the local currency. Also, various pictures of the destination are quite important for them. Besides finding information about the destination, the respondents also said that they put a lot of time and effort into searching for information about the accommodation they have booked. Pictures are again crucial, as the respondents said they want to have a clear image of both the rooms as well as general areas of the hotel. They read through all of this information thoroughly several times and also examine maps in great detail before the trip.

Regarding the attributes of travel websites, the respondents stated that they value simplicity, clarity, ease of use and trustworthiness. Simplicity and large headings increase clarity, and the presence of distinct colours on the website makes it easier for them to see the text and photos. Also, they prefer black text on a white background. The front page of the website must be designed to make it logical and easy to navigate to different themes. Updating the website frequently increases trustworthiness, as does providing instructions and help for the user. A good website directs the user forward on every page and clearly states what happens when different links are clicked.

'I have now learned that the credit card numbers have to be typed without spaces, even though there are spaces on the card and it is not said anywhere.' (M78)

The respondents stated that they value websites that provide a lot of information and are logically structured. If the information is plentiful and easy to find, the respondents are prone to return to the website. Also, within-site search engines are often used by older travellers. Pop-up advertisements and websites that have too many advertisements disrupt the information search process, but if the advertisements are clearly placed, for example on the right side of the page, then they reportedly do not interfere with the information search process.

Some of the respondents claimed that they know English, German or Swedish in addition to Finnish, but everyone said that they prefer sites in Finnish:

'I do not go to sites that are in another language, as I do not understand them well enough. I prefer Finnish websites.' (F61)

Half of the interviewees said that they prefer familiar and safe brands when using online services, while the other half also uses websites that are not familiar to them to search for information and even book services.

The interviewees regard themselves as sluggish Internet and travel site users. Even though they want the connections and sites to be fast, they are a bit nervous about making decisions too quickly. For example, when they are booking tickets or making a reservation, they regard the reservation system deadlines that discard everything as being too short. On the other hand, the respondents are very patient website users. In their experience, everything works out if you give them enough time, and even though some of them have had bad experiences, in the end everything has ultimately worked out.

The respondents told us that they did not expect or hope that the travel pages will offer them any special experiences, but regarded the Internet as a tool to search for information and make bookings. They regard the Internet in particular as a tool, not as something you use for fun or entertainment. Still, they were open to, for example, receiving an e-mail from the tour operator before the trip to help them prepare for the trip and increase their travel spirit.

4.4 Typology of senior travellers as users of tourism information technology

Based on our analysis of the similarities between and differences in the behaviours and preferences of the interviewees presented above, we can identify three different types of seniors that use tourism information technology (Table 4). The labels reflect first of all the type of Internet user, but the first label in particular also reflects the type of traveller. Adventurous experimenters are avid users of the Internet and the Internet plays a major role in their online information search process. They also prefer new destinations and are independent travellers. Compared to those in the other two groups, they do not choose package holidays and have a higher education, better language skills and a more adventurous mind set. Meticulous researchers are those who use online services especially to search for information. For them, online services are a practical part of the information search process. They prefer package holidays and value safety and certainty and that the online travel services are easy to use. The last group of senior travellers are the fumbling observers. For them, online services are not something that they must use. They have had little experience with computers and need help from other people in order to, for example, book a holiday online. They use websites and services that are familiar to them and focus on package holidays. Foreign languages are a problem for them, and this is also the reason they use Finnish websites and services almost exclusively.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

5 Discussion, conclusions, limitations and further research

5.1 Discussion

This study analysed senior travellers as users of tourism information technology, with the aim of finding out how tourism information technology correspond to the needs of older travellers and the attributes of tourism information technology that they value. The needs within this market are extremely heterogeneous, and different types of senior travellers value different kinds of tourism technologies. This insight makes it possible for tourism businesses to understand older consumers and develop online services that correspond to the needs of this particular customer group.

This study brings forth the voice of older consumers, as called for by Sedgley et al. (2011) and Nielsen (2014), meaning that the findings provide insights that otherwise might be difficult to identify using, for example, a survey methodology. As the results demonstrate, senior tourists are quite different from each other and behave differently for various reasons, making the heterogeneity of this particular market segment difficult to capture with quantitative studies that aim to make generalisations based on the results.

According to earlier studies, elderly consumers are often considered technology anxious and reluctant to adopt new technologies (Niemelä-Nyrhinen, 2007). This assumption is also partly confirmed in this study. Even though elders are adept users of the Internet, they have not widely adopted smartphones and tablets as part of their lives. The interviewees in this study had different levels of knowledge regarding the use of tourism information technology, and yet even those with the least amount experience reported that they use the Internet to purchase holiday trips online.

This means that businesses really should focus more on their websites, as they are often used by this economically important travel segment. While a travel website does not need to be tailored just for older consumers, a good website serves both older and younger consumers. If a company wants to make the information search process easier for older people, they should at least make it easy for them to use a site search engine. Also, some website design elements that younger people take for granted need to be clearly explained to older consumers. However, older people seem to be a travel segment that will not easily abandon their shopping baskets when they have found a holiday or parts of it that they really desire.

We have to be careful about making generalisations about the older consumer market. Even this study demonstrates that older consumers are quite different in terms of how they use tourism information technology. Some are adept users of websites, while others require help from the younger generation. There can also be considerable differences within a particular travel party. For example, the two married seniors interviewed in this study (M68 and F64b) reportedly have very different information search behaviour and use information technologies in quite different ways, with the wife demonstrating considerably more interest in tourism information technologies during the interviews. This is a managerially and also theoretically important insight. A travelling senior couple can have quite different information search behaviour and use tourism information technologies differently.

5.2 Conclusions

This study provides new information on the heterogeneity of the senior travel market. The study in part challenges the view that seniors are reluctant to use information and communication technologies. The typology presented in this study suggests that a new type of senior traveller currently exists, one who is an avid user of technology and a very independent traveller. We can also hypothesise that this market is growing quickly and represents an excellent opportunity for tourism businesses to promote their products especially during off-seasons. However, we also identified the more traditional senior traveller in our study, i.e. the type of traveller interested in package tours who only possesses basic computer skills. It should also be noted that seniors without any computers skills were not included in this study.

The findings presented in this study are in line with those presented by Moschis (1994). Older consumers seem to appreciate convenience, functionality, quality and dependability with respect to tourism information technology. One of the main differences between this study and previous studies has to do with the attitudes of older travellers and the ways they use tourism information technology. Whereas earlier studies identified older consumers as users of traditional information channels, such as travel agents, and as insecure users of information and communication technologies, this study provides an entirely different image. Experienced elderly travellers seem to prefer using the Internet to search for information and book holidays, and they are quite open to using technology in general.

As the post-WWII generation is beginning to retire and the number of older people is growing, tourism businesses should pay attention to and become more familiar with this heterogeneous market segment. This study, as well as previous studies, demonstrates that older travellers do not find tailor-made services necessary. The reason for this can have to do with the fact that, for example, aging is viewed negatively in Western society. Senior travellers do not think of themselves as old or aging, and they do not relate to those terms, for example, in marketing. Marketing should focus more on the activities and motivations of senior travellers instead of on their chronological age (Sudbury & Simcock, 2009b).

Companies do not necessarily need to plan differentiated websites for older tourists. Instead, website developers should adopt a 'design-for-all' philosophy. Making sites work for older tourists does not mean that they will not be just as good for other travellers. The results also suggest that online channels are an efficient way to target independent senior travellers. However, other channels might still be more useful for package tours and other similar tourist products aimed at seniors.

Four of the nine respondents in this study reported that they share their experiences after a trip. This supports the notion that older tourists also use ICTs for information sharing, not just for information seeking (Vigolo & Confente, 2014). It is also possible to identify the typology presented by Kim et al. (2003) by looking at the ways older tourists use Web 2.0. It is interesting to note that the results demonstrate the fact that open-mindedness and the personality of each senior tourist is very much connected to her or his behaviour. The three different travelling typologies reflect the ways in which various travellers use tourism information technology, with independent travellers being the most interested in using tourism technologies. The seniors who prefer package holidays are quite often those with limited computer skills. It also

could be that in the modern tourism world, technological know-how enables people to explore the world in more detail.

This study also contributes to the existing literature by presenting a tentative typology of senior travellers as users of online services. This typology will help us form an understanding of the heterogeneous use of tourism information technology by senior tourists. The three different types of users, adventurous experimenters, meticulous researchers and fumbling observers, represent a new way to examine this extremely heterogeneous market segment from the perspective of information searches. This kind of examination also provides managers of tourism businesses with an additional understanding of older travellers as users of their online services. These users differ from each other regarding the websites and services they use. Adventurous experimenters use tourism technologies considerably more often than fumbling observers. They also benefit the most from the online services provided during the trip, as they are most likely users of smartphones and tablets. Meticulous researchers are an excellent target group for traditional online advertising, one which should also be supported with plenty of available information about the destination or service in question.

5.3 Limitations and further research

Additional research is needed on the topic, especially regarding the typology presented in this study. One of the limitations of this study is the relatively small number of respondents. Even though the nine respondents provide plenty of information, we do not know if a greater number of informants would have led to a greater number of types. Presumably, we could provide more in-depth information on the characteristics of the various types of travellers in the case of more informants. It should also be kept in mind that this typology is not absolute, meaning that the characteristics of the various typology types may vary if we were to collect more data.

Another limitation of this study has to do with the method of sampling, which resulted in rich data but did not adequately reflect the backgrounds of the interviewees. Based on the finding of this study, we argue that a more structured method should be used, one that is able to uncover more differences in the professional backgrounds of the interviewees. The typology presented in this study could be replicated in future studies. A quantitative study is needed to confirm the results and to find out the market structure of the different users. Additional studies are also needed in different countries and cultures to broaden our understanding of senior travellers as users of tourism information technology.

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Table 1. Background information on the interviewees

	M62	F61	F64a	M68	F64b	F68a	F68b	M69	M78
Gender	male	female	female	male	female	female	female	male	male
Age	62	61	64	68	64	68	68	69	78
Occupation	foreman	nurse	technical officer	military prof.	farmer	kitchen maid	housewife	shopkeeper	PhD
Education	vocational	vocational	vocational	military	elementary school	elementary school	vocational	vocational	university
Annual household income (€)	35000	35000	50000	20000	20000	18000	30000	10000	60000
Family	in relationship	in relationship	in relationship	married	married	widow	married	Widow	married
Retired (year)	2013	No	2014	2012	2012	2007	2006	2010	2000
Childhood living conditions	modest	modest	modest	modest	poor	poor	middle class	middle class	well-off
Travel during childhood/youth	none	active international traveller	active domestic traveller	none	none	none	active domestic traveller	active domestic traveller	active international traveller
Travel experiences during working years	limited	regular	regular	limited	limited	regular	regular	Regular	regular
Travel after retirement	seldom	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular	Regular	regular,
Package/self-organised	package	both	self	package	package	package	both	both	both
Preferred destinations	familiar and new	familiar	new	familiar	familiar	familiar	familiar and new	new	new

Has participated in /would consider senior trips	not yet	no	yes	not yet	maybe	no	yes	yes	no

Table 2. Use of information and communication technologies

	M62	F61	F64a	M68	F64b	F68a	F68b	M69	M78
Owns a desktop computer	x	x	x					x	x
Owns a laptop			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Owns a tablet			x				x		x
Owns a smartphone			x						x
Would consider smart tech		x		x	x			x	
Used IT at work	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Used IT during free time	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
IT usage today	regular	daily	daily	regular	regular	rarely	daily	daily	daily
Follows discussion boards	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Searches for online reviews	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Has a Facebook profile		x	x	x			x	x	x

Table 3. Online travel services

	M62	F61	F64a	M68	F64b	F68a	F68b	M69	M78
Books on web without help		x	x		x		x	x	x
Uses web during the trip			x				x		x
Shares experiences after the trip on Facebook		x	x	x			x		
Online reviews affect travel decisions		x	x			x		x	x
Familiar brand influences choices	x		x	x	x		x		

Table 4. Typology of senior travellers as users of tourism information technology

	Adventurous experimenter	**Meticulous researcher**	**Fumbling observer**
Computer skills	Advanced computer skills, open-minded, able to solve problems themselves, owns smart devices, books travel components separately, uses ICTs fluently	Basic computer skills, open to learning new things, needs outside help in difficult situations, books holiday packages, has used ICTs before retiring, interested in smart technologies	Beginner computer skills, does not prefer online services, uncertain about their own skills, no prior experience with computers before retiring, dependant on outsider help in booking travel services, not interested in smart technologies
Preferred travel type Important in travelling	Independent traveller, new destinations Independence, authenticity, ability to make own decisions, flexibility	Package holidays, familiar destinations Easiness, safety, certainty, playing it safe	Package holidays, familiar destinations Easiness, familiarity, needs help from others
Characteristics	High education, good language skills, adventurous, active planner	Low-level language skills, mid-level education, wants to learn new things	Engages only in Finnish, low education level, passive planner
Example respondents	F64a, M78	M62, F61, M68, F64b, F68b, M69	F68a