

# Exploring Senior Tourist Engagement Behaviour in Social Networking Sites Advertising – A Study of Senior Tourist Users on WeChat

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**Abstract.** This study delves into senior tourists' engagement behaviour in social networking site advertisements (SNSA) and the underlying factors influencing their behaviour. Using a qualitative research approach, 19 senior tourists with prior SNSA engagement experience were interviewed. The findings reveal three distinct patterns in senior tourists' SNSA engagement: 1) Proactive Engagement, 2) Passive Engagement, 3) Positive Consciousness Driven Engagement. These insights provide valuable guidance for the hospitality and tourism industry. By understanding the multifaceted nature of senior tourists' engagement with SNSA, industry participants can tailor their marketing strategies to better target and engage this demographic.

## 1 Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) have reshaped tourism advertising through mobile tech advancements [1]. Academic research prioritizes understanding SNS advertising's effectiveness, consumer behavior, and engagement for digital marketing strategies [2].

Studies delve into consumer behavior, attitudes, and intentions towards SNS advertising [3-6]. While younger generations utilize mobile services while traveling [7], surprisingly, seniors are rapidly embracing technology for tourism information [8-9]. Despite their potential impact on global tourism, few studies focus on how the internet affects senior tourists [10].

Quantitative metrics like likes and shares fall short in assessing social media advertising, overlooking nuanced user behavior and psychology [2].

The significance of user experience in social network advertising is often overlooked, as basic metrics like page views may not fully gauge effectiveness [11]. Knoll highlights the necessity for deeper studies, expanding demographic samples beyond college students [12]. There's a critical need to study actual behavior and consider diverse demographics, notably the emerging Chinese senior tourist market with significant purchasing power and tech adoption [13].

This study focuses on Chinese senior tourists, aiming to understand their engagement with SNS advertising in hospitality and tourism. It seeks to fill the gap in research and provide strategic insights for the industry, emphasizing the importance of senior tourist engagement in SNS advertising.

## 2 Literature Review

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## **2.1 WeChat as a Social networking site and senior tourist's using WeChat**

Cocosila and Igonor define Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as platforms enabling user connections and semi-public or public profile sharing [14]. Meanwhile, Zhang et al. describe SNSs as internet-based apps allowing personalized content exchange and feedback [15]. WeChat, a widely used mobile SNS app in China, boasts 983 million monthly users [16], serving as a key platform for potential travelers [17].

Seniors increasingly engage in Mobile Social Networking Sites (MSNS) via mobile devices [18]. China's aging population, projected to reach 39% by 2050, presents significant opportunities for travel industries catering to older demographics [19]. Addressing the digital needs of seniors could enhance tourism quality and industry growth [20].

The study defines the younger-old age range as individuals aged 55 to 75 [10]. Senior tourists share travel experiences through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on open SNSs, shaping their travel behavior [21].

## **2.2 Social network sites advertising**

Gibs and Bruich classify Social Networking Sites Advertising (SNSA) into 'homepage ads' and 'organic impressions'—the former providing a social context, while the latter comprises brand-related stories from friends [22]. SNSA is increasingly acknowledged as an effective advertising avenue [23], exemplified by WeChat's 33% year-on-year growth in online advertising for social and other sectors in 2019 [24].

Understanding SNSA engagement is pivotal, intertwining SNS engagement with advertising evaluations [23]. Users encounter multiple influences on SNSs, spanning marketing communication, peer-generated content, and platform attributes [23], fulfilling diverse needs from information-seeking to sharing moments. Yet, comprehensive research on user experiences with SNSA, including emotional and intuitive responses, remains limited.

## **2.3 Consumer's engagement behaviour in social networking sites advertising**

Consumer engagement online involves interactive experiences between consumers, brands, and the community [23]. Digital consumer engagement, as categorized by Gavilanes et al., spans various social network actions, influencing electronic word of mouth and brand exposure [25]. Positive emotional states drive consumer attachment to social media, fostering engagement and collaboration with service providers [26-27].

In hospitality and tourism, travelers engage actively on tourism-related social platforms during trip planning and vacations, creating value for both travelers and service providers [29-31]. For instance, Lei, Pratt, and Wang explored factors influencing customer engagement with branded content in integrated resorts, highlighting the evolving role of users in shaping communication within social networks [31].

Existing studies analyzed consumer engagement behavior in SNS advertising, but the dynamic role of users as active content creators is reshaping social network communication.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research design**

Based on grounded theory, the purpose to explore the embedded elements of senior tourist engagement behaviour in SNSA. Grounded theory is a research approach that explores social phenomena by looking at what people experience, how individuals go about resolving these issues [32]. The qualitative research approach is adopted due to the exploring nature of this study, qualitative research is an appropriate way to explore 'how' or 'why' [33], it is proper to interpret certain phenomena and exploring comprehensive views and perceptions if applicable [34].

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of senior tourists' engagement with social network sites advertising (SNSA).

Face-to-face and video interviews were conducted in Hangzhou, mainland China. Hangzhou was chosen due to its developed status and popularity as a tourist destination. To ensure the validity of the research, the following criteria were applied in selecting interviewees: 1) Interviewees aged 55 to 70, considering the official retirement age for females in mainland China is 55, and 2) Interviewees with prior engagement with SNSA.

Purposive sampling was employed, focusing on seniors who had engaged with hospitality and tourism-related SNSA on WeChat. The interview protocol included probing questions to explore their engagement behaviors and motivations.

During the interviews, the interviewers explained the concept of engagement in SNSA to the seniors and asked questions such as: 1) Have you ever engaged in hospitality and tourism-related SNSA on WeChat? 2) Can you describe your engagement process and actions? 3) What motivated your engagement?

Two students in Hangzhou were trained to understand the interview's purpose and content. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached, with 19 seniors (10 females and 9 males) providing valid responses. Each interview lasted 40 to 57 minutes, conducted from April 20 to April 27, 2023, and was digitally recorded. The interview protocol was developed based on a review of relevant literature by the author (as described in Table 1).

**Table 1.** Interviewees' Demographic Figures

No.	Code	Gender	Age	Education Background	Retirement Years	Occupation before Retired
1	M1	M	66	College	2 years	Business
2	M2	M	60	College	1 month	Government officer
3	M3	M	61	College	1 year	Primary School Teacher
4	M4	M	57	Postgraduate	Not retire yet	Associate Professor
5	M5	M	57	PhD	Not retire yet	Professor
6	M6	M	63	Vocational High School	3 years	State Enterprise Employee
7	M7	M	67	Secondary School	7 years	State Enterprise Employee
8	M8	M	66	Secondary School	6 years	State Enterprise Employee
9	M9	M	68	College	8 years	Government officer
10	F1	F	67	College	12 years	Government officer
11	F2	F	57	College	2 years	Government officer
12	F3	F	60	Vocational High School	N/A	Housewife
13	F4	F	60	Vocational High School	5 years	Primary School Teacher
14	F5	F	63	College	8 years	State Enterprise Employee
15	F6	F	66	College	11 years	Government Officer
16	F7	F	68	College	13 years	Government Officer
17	F8	F	70	Undergraduate	15 years	High School Teacher
18	F9	F	64	College	9 years	State Enterprise Employee
19	F10	F	65	Primary School	10 years	State Enterprise Employee

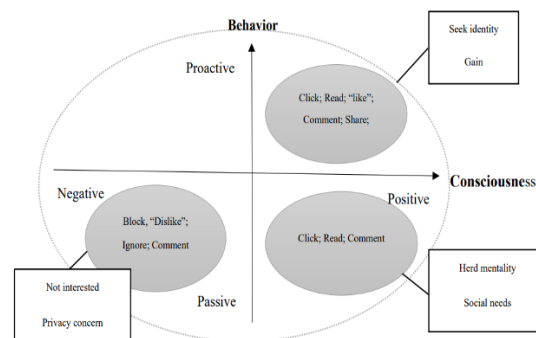
### 3.3 Data Analysis

To ensure data reliability, the author conducted 19 interviews, with two student assistants serving as recorders. After the interviews, all transcripts were translated from digital to written form verbatim and then into English, with some minor adjustments made after

back translation. The author and students collaboratively reviewed and coded the data. Data analysis was performed using MAXQDA 11, a qualitative research data analysis software. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clark's six-phase approach [35], was employed to identify and analyze themes relevant to the research objectives.

## 4. Findings

The interviews revealed that senior tourist engagement behaviour in SNSA is multidimensional. The author categorizes this behaviour based on consciousness (horizontal axis) and behaviour (vertical axis). Interviewees demonstrated engagement in three quadrants: proactive behaviour driven by positive consciousness, passive behaviour influenced by negative consciousness, and passive behaviour influenced by positive consciousness, as depicted in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Senior tourist's engagement behaviour in SNSA

### 4.1 Proactive behaviour under the control of positive consciousness

#### *Proactively engaging in high-quality advertising and seek identity*

During interviews, seniors responded positively to high-quality travel ads on WeChat Moments, often liking and sharing them (M4, M5, F8). Some expressed interest in becoming future customers and sharing these ads within their social circles (F7).

Researchers noted that friend interactions on WeChat Moments were more appealing than ads. Interviews revealed that not just positive comments but also negative feedback or irrelevant comments could engage users with ads.

Interviewees like M5, a tourism industry expert, believed any engagement, even negative feedback, could benefit a product's visibility (M5, M7, F8). They found humor in ads crucial, driving higher attention and communication effectiveness.

Many interviewees enjoyed the entertainment value of humorous ad comments, finding them reminiscent of school days (F3). Some acknowledged that while ads might not always be true, they could discern and engage with them (M1).

#### **4.2 Passive behaviour under the control of negative consciousness**

Some interviewees weren't aware of the 'I'm not interested' button for blocking WeChat stream ads, finding them persistently reappearing despite blocking attempts (F6, F9).

Others felt indifferent to the frequency of ads, considering them part of daily browsing (M9). However, concerns about privacy arose as WeChat Moments ads, camouflaged as friends' posts, felt invasive in a relatively private space (M1, M2, F3, F5, F7).

Several interviewees felt these ads invaded their privacy and expressed strong disapproval (M1, M2, F3, F5, F7, F8).

#### **4.3 Passive behaviour under the control of positive consciousness**

Some interviewees exhibited inconsistent behavior regarding their awareness of WeChat Moments ads. M7 initially expressed strong resistance to ad intrusion but later found validation when friends liked the ad, feeling recognized (M7).

Others refrained from blocking ads they disliked, wanting to understand their children's preferences and stay updated with current trends (F1).

### **5. Discussions**

This article explores senior tourists' engagement behaviour in Social Networking Sites Advertising (SNSA) from a qualitative perspective. Some findings align with prior research, such as Vakratsas and Ambler's description of how consumers process advertising. Senior tourists exhibit both proactive and passive engagement

behaviours in SNSA, often influenced by a complex interplay of consciousness and behaviour [36].

#### **5.1 Proactive Engagement Behaviour**

Senior tourists proactively engage in SNSA to align high-quality brand content with their personal identity, and some aim to showcase their expertise [30]. However, not all proactive engagement is driven by specific company benefits; some seniors share or comment on SNSA for entertainment and peer communication without deeply engaging with advertised content due to the abundance of SNS platform advertisements.

#### **5.2 Passive Engagement Behaviour**

Passive engagement behaviors can convey disinterest effectively, like signaling 'I'm not interested.' Some seniors see WeChat as a private space, avoiding streaming ads, while others accept ads as part of daily life. Privacy concerns negatively impact senior tourist engagement in SNS advertising, leading to preventative behaviors like ad blocking and privacy settings adjustments [23].

Seniors also engage passively under positive consciousness, driven by social needs and family interactions. Friend interactions on WeChat Moments tend to be more engaging than ads, aligning with China's collective nature [37]. Maintaining family bonds and staying updated with social trends drive senior tourists' engagement, often driven by the fear of missing out.

However, passive positive behavior can sometimes lead to ambiguity, as senior tourists might not clearly express their preferences during this engagement.

### **6. Conclusion**

The study aims to uncover psychological factors influencing senior tourists' engagement with social network advertisements. It identifies key components shaping their behavior: 1) Proactive behavior driven by identity seeking, entertainment, and social needs under positive consciousness. 2) Negative consciousness leading to passive behavior due to disinterest, adaptation, and privacy concerns. 3) Positive consciousness driving passive behavior influenced by herd mentality, social needs, and family concerns. Culture shapes their engagement.

Understanding senior tourists' behavior in SNS advertising holds crucial implications for the tourism industry, aiding precision marketing strategies. The study acknowledges the complexity of engagement behavior, distinguishing between valid and invalid proactive behavior and recognizing nuanced negative behavior.

While valuable, the study's limitations include a small, highly educated sample in Hangzhou. Future research should explore various demographics and larger samples. Additionally, the qualitative method limits establishing causal relationships, prompting the need for further research into embedded factors' mediation in senior tourist behaviors.

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