

## Understanding Senior Tourists Behavior on Life Course Perspective

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Recent research suggested that a person's early life experiences significantly affect the patterns of behavior in later life, including leisure activities, in which travel is an important part. Applying a life course perspective that emphasizes social context, individual development, and the effect of change over time in senior tourism research would offer new dimensions to our understanding of the issue. Because the theory takes the long-term perspective and considers the interaction of individual and social factors and changes over time, it is viewed as an interdisciplinary thought for investigating various aspects of behavior. This article aims to discuss the possibilities of applying a life course perspective in studying tourists' behavior among seniors. Based on the literature review in the field and the general conceptual components and principles of the life course perspective, the article discussed using this perspective as a guiding research paradigm, conceptual models, and methodological issues in researching seniors' tourism behavior. In the final, the study suggests that investigating individual life experiences in depth can provide a contextualized understanding of senior tourism behavior, and more case studies in different contexts are needed to generalize the theory.

Keywords: life course perspective, senior tourists' behavior, application postulates, senior tourism

### 1. Introduction

The aging population is one of the most profound transformations of this century, which has implied significant changes in all societies (United Nations, 2017). The leisure travel and tourism industry is one specific area where the senior population has a significant impact. It first showed in the increasing numbers and expenditures in the tourism market. In the United States alone, baby boomers and older adults traveled for pleasure five or more times per year (with at least one international trip), spending upwards of \$157 billion on travel a year (INTELITY, 2017). People older than 60 years will likely have made more than 2 billion international trips by 2050 (UNWTO, 2010), far more than the 593 million trips made in the early 2000s (Patterson 2006). To better prepare for the demographic change and effectively adjust existing tourism products to their needs, the tourism industry and policymakers have started to pay more attention to the travel behavior of the elderly.

Compared with the previous generations, today's

seniors are in better conditions regardless of individual or social living aspect. They are healthier, wealthier, more educated, more independent than the previous generation, and free from obligations (Higgs and Quirk, 2007) and increasingly view travel as a higher priority in their later life than previous generations. More importantly, there is great diversity in their individual needs, interests, and lifestyles, which affect the opportunities to participate in tourism activities and their travel behavior. Therefore, understanding this diversity is a crucial issue for the market. The elderly's behavior is complicated. However, the existing research often presumed senior tourists as a homogeneous group and applied static age conception (Patterson, 2006). It is important to go beyond existing concepts when investigating specific senior tourism behaviors' underlying reasons. Sedgley et al. (2006) claimed that it is not possible to study the old people's leisure behavior through "snapshot" research, which isolates one moment in time. It meant that human behaviors could not be understood apart from the

context and the life structure of the individual.

However, there is limited research on the relationship between individual life course and travel behavior. Previous researches generally used chronological age to investigate the changes in senior tourism behaviors. Moreover, those researches going beyond age concepts are often focused on specific periods in life, for example, retirement or migration, but generally neglected these periods' backgrounds—the broader framework of the individual life course. This brought to Nimrod (2008a) to advocate that tourism scholars need to put a stronger focus on contexts and individual life structures.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the possibility of applying the Life Course Perspective (LCP) in senior tourism behavior research and to show the value of more case studies. The LCP emphasizes determining the effects of early life experiences on later life outcomes (Elder and Crosnoe, 2003), and it is customarily applied to address issues of development, stability, and change in thoughts and actions over time (George, 1993). The article argues that LCP can be a valuable research tool for understanding senior tourists' behavior in new ways. The perspective focuses on changing circumstances, especially events that act as turning points in the life course, will offer a specific and real-life-centered investigation of living circumstances as variables; and contribute to identifying factors early in the life course that promotes travel behavior late life.

This article aims to overcome gaps in existing research methods and explores the value of the LCP in this field. The paper's focus is on the methodological and analytical implications that stem from life-course investigation and not on senior tourism behavior research. By the literature summary, the paper described the general conceptual components and principles of the life course perspective and discussed how this approach is applied in tourism studies and the methodological issues in research. It is argued that LCP is helpful to reconstruct social realities from a temporal distance and offers opportunities to contextualize seniors' tourism behavior. However, the

approach has not been exemplified by a study of senior tourism behavior to illustrate the data collection and analysis phases in practice. And it has not discussed much the methodological limitation, such as memory errors and the temporal gap between the lived life of the past and its reconstruction in the present.

There are various possibilities on how to apply the LCP in tourism behavior research, which depends on the research questions and designs. It is suggested that conducting a life-course approach will help reflect the diverse characteristics and experiences of senior travelers and better understand the meanings behind traveling in later years.

The research was conducted mostly based on literature reviews on theoretical studies of LCP and its application in behavioral research. The author investigated major academic journals on tourism studies and also some basic papers on seniors' behaviors in social sciences.

## **2. Literature review on the studies of senior tourists' behavior**

Travel behavior remains one of the most researched areas in the marketing and tourism fields. Understanding the tourists' behavior is key to all the marketing activities carried out to develop, promote, and sell tourism products. Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) applied Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" theory in tourism career, building the theoretical basis for Pearce's (1988) "travel career ladder" and Pearce and Lee's (2005) travel career pattern. Both models presume developmental elements expressed by the cumulated travel experience across the life course. Li et al. (2013) examined the differences between generations of tourists. They found that different generations had different histories of destination visits, exhibit different wishes and preferences for the future, and use different criteria to evaluate destinations. Moreover, they also claimed that different generations use different information sources and have different preferences for activities during the trip. Even though the difference between individuals' behavior is recognized in research, not much exploited the

hidden reason except Mayo and Jarvis. They stated that tourism behavior has a psychological dimension (personality, motives, attitudes, perceptions) and determinants outside of the individual (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981). Therefore, an individual's travel behavior is shaped by external forces and social influences. Nimrod (2008b) had claimed a similar note that tourism scholars need to pay greater attention to the context and the life structure of the individual. The LCP makes it possible to explore changes in human lives over a lifetime (Mayer, 2009) and the behavioral interrelations in different life domains.

Gibson was one of the first researchers to use a life course approach to understand tourism's role in retirement. She suggested that the LCP reflects the dynamics of tourism behavior better than the commonly applied family life cycle approaches (Gibson, 2004). Sedgley et al. (2006) claimed that leisure and tourism's meanings are related to social and personal biography and, therefore, may change in old age through their study on a 79-year-old woman.

Although the research found that the life course impacts leisure in later life (Kelly and Freysinger, 2000), not much has focused on the complexities of life course transitions and their influence on travel behavior in old age. There is a lack of adequate theoretical and methodological perspectives for investigating these tourist behavior issues over the life course. Huber (2015) has applied qualitative, multiple case-study methodologies to demonstrate that life courses of the elderly are complex and heterogeneous, which is reflected in their tourism patterns and preferences. However, the research conducted on a small number of 23 seniors in Germany, and the result needs more room for generalizable inferences.

### 3. The life course perspective : an overview

The LCP, is also known as the life-course approach and life course theory, is based on the idea that human development takes place continually throughout a person's life and emphasizes that "no life stage can be understood in isolation from others" (Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder, 2011). After almost a century

development, the LCP has become one of the leading multi-theoretical frameworks in social and behavioral sciences (Elder et al., 2016) and cross-cultural borders, fields, and disciplinary boundaries.

#### (1) Basic elements of the LCP

Several elements are considered essential to the LCP. These are illustrated in Tabel.1. Initially, four elements were viewed as relevant: The interplay of human lives and historical time; The timing of lives; Linked/independent lives; and Human agency (Elder, 1994; Elder and Giele, 2009). Two additional elements have subsequently been added to the LCP: Diversity in life course trajectories; and Developmental risk and protection (Elder, 1998; Shanahan, 2000). How these elements relate to each other, the principle of the LCP can illustrate their interrelations.

Table 1. Basic elements of the LCP

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
<i>The interplay of human lives and historical time</i>	Individuals born in different years are exposed to differing historical worlds, and their development must be understood within the relevant historical context (Elder, 1994).
<i>Timing of lives</i>	The age at which specific life events and transitions occur in an individual's life course (Hutchison, 2005).
<i>Linked lives</i>	The interdependence and the 'linked' nature of family members' relationships and the interactions between individuals' lives and those of their friends, peers, co-workers, and other people throughout their lives (Elder, 1994). It is the most key element within the LCP (Elder, 1994).
<i>Individual agency</i>	Choices that individuals made and the actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of their historical, cultural, and social context (Elder et al., 2003; Hutchison, 2005).
<i>Diversity in life course trajectories</i>	Individual life course trajectories, as influenced, for example, by the person's relationships and the social, cultural, and historical context in which s/he lives. (Elder, 1986; 1987).

*Developmental risk and protection* | An individual's experience of a transition or event in his/her life will impact successive transitions and events in such a way that may either sustain the individual's life course trajectory or, indeed, disrupt it (Hutchison, 2005).

(Source : Elder, 1994;1986;1987 ; Hutchison, 2005)

(2) Key principles of the LCP

The figure of the elements (Fig.1) meant that all of the elements are coming together through the funnel of life course timing to influence life trajectories. The Figure not only showed the elements of the LCP, but it also illustrated its principles, which was put forward by Elder in 2003.

a. Human development and aging are lifelong processes

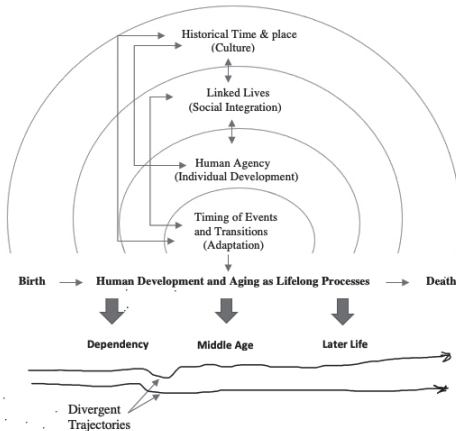


Figure.1. The elements of the life course paradigm (Source : Elder and Giele, 2009)

It means that the human developmental process lasts over the entire life, and aging and later life-pattern are generally affected by the earlier years of life course development.

b. Timing of events and transitions

Timing emphasizes the variance of life transitions, events, and behavioral patterns that changed according to their timing in a person's life. There are norms and norm events in the people's life course, but the same events or experiences may affect individuals differently depending on when they occur in the life

course (George, 1993).

c. Human agency

Individuals make choices and take actions within the opportunities and constraints of social and historical circumstances. However, the decisions and their behavioral expression depend on contexts and their constraints. Social changes do not passively act people; instead, they make choices and compromises based on their perceived opportunities.

d. Linked lives

It focuses on the interdependent and external influences of lives over time. The larger social changes reflecting on people's interpersonal contexts in more micro-level settings impact individuals' lives. For example, the joint activities and shared responsibilities among youth with their families have a positive developmental influence on human development (Elder and Conger, 2000). Because lives are lived interdependently, transitions in one person's life often entail transitions for other people as well.

e. Historical times and places

This principle is that the individuals' life course is embedded and formed by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime as Gieryn (2000) observed that a place possesses three essential features: geographic location, a material form or culture of one kind or another, and investment with meaning and value. For example, The Chinese Cultural Revolution was a political movement in such a place, extending from 1966 to 1976. People who participated in "work in the countryside and went to the mountain area" became older and have set off a new type of travel named back to the countryside and mountain every year in China (Fenghuannews, 2009). Furthermore, the same historical event may differ in substance and meaning across different regions or nations.

These principles represent a theoretical approach to individual lives, as seen in the life course model applications. They confirmed that the LCP is a holistic approach to understanding human behavior linking personal experience with their networks and their specific place, historical time, and society. The

approach enhances that human behavior cannot be adequately understood when removed from their social and historical contexts, the relationships with others, the timing of events, and so on. The technique is useful in reconstructing social realities from a temporal distance and provide opportunities to contextualize seniors' tourism behavior.

#### 4. Applying the life course perspective in the research of senior tourists' behavior

The LCP has been widely applied in recent decades as a research framework in social and behavioral sciences (Mayer and Tuma 1990; Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe, 2003). As discussed above, the key components of the LCP offer an integrative framework for conceptualizing issues related to aging and travel over time and provides a series of options for research design and analysis.

##### (1) As a guiding paradigm

The range of relevant concepts and principles (as illustrated above) provides an interdimensional angle to start and research the relationship between individual life experiences and later life behaviors. First, the LCP is adequate for guiding senior tourism behavior research from the long-term perspective. It allows researchers to explore how individual or group experiences affect their behavior over their lives. Second, the important idea of the perspective is that earlier life experiences and events significantly influence later life lifestyles and behaviors, including leisure life (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe, 2003). It means the different experiences and events across a person's life course determined who he/she as an older adult, and this experience reflects in his/her later life behavior. These experiences and events provide a picture of people's later lives, especially qualitative methodologies used to explore the issue. Third, seniors' travel behavior is very diverse, meaning that the same activities or events also vary among seniors. In particular, travel behavior relates to age, gender, income, family, job, education, etc., and important life events and relationships with others are likely to be complicated and interplay with one another.

The LCP can provide a framework for exploring the homogeneous and heterogeneous Individual life course and how they interact and shape their leisure life and conceptualize them. The LCP contributes to explore such research questions as:

How do the social-psychological changes related to life-course development influence senior tourism behavior?

Do seniors change travel behaviors and patterns when they grow older? When and why?

Are all tourism behavior potentially affected by life experience? Or are some of them influenced by the specific life-course events or transitions?

What are the relationships between previous tourism experiences and current senior tourism motivations and patterns?

The LCP views life as a fluid and integrated cycle, which is "similar" to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Perspective<sup>1)</sup>. This framework has been widely used to inform concepts and theories in tourists' behavior. However, the LCP pays specific attention to how the change in lives will have differing impacts on individual later life. Furthermore, it pays more specific attention to the interaction of individual and social change in individual experiences over time. The LCP is also compatible with other influential theories and thus facilitates researchers drawing on other theories, such as resilience theory and actor-network theory, in analyzing data in the context of this long-term perspective.

By using the LCP as a guiding research paradigm to research the travel behavior of the elderly, we can gain an in-depth understanding of crucial experiences and moments across the life course of senior tourists. They contribute to explore potential influencers of various aspects of changes over time while also enabling to conceptualize the long-term impact of such events and experiences on later life behavior.

##### (2) As a Conceptual model

The life course research in behavior science explores factors early in the life course that provide continuity in behaviors over time or stress the individual's changing circumstances, particularly events. Typical

life events, shown in physical and psychological changes, and social roles in the person's life, serve as turning points and determine their social trajectories (Pulkkinen and Caspi 2002). They are influenced by the timing of events, human agency, and the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which people are embedded (Elder,1998).

These variables were classified into two categories; they collectively constitute the life course paradigm and provide a conceptual model (Figure. 2) that can be used to research senior consumer behavior in tourism to help organize and present relevant data.

As shown in Figure 2, one set of elements includes three main types of variables within the model's shaded area. Significant life events affect an Individual's consumer behavior at a specific stage of time (T1), as the Individual responds and adjusts to new conditions (Hughes et al., 1988). The process is called the socialization perspective (John, 1999), the stress perspective (Heckhausen and Schulz, 1995), the normative perspective, and the human capital perspective in human capital (Bolger et al., 1988). They are the three most widely applied and accepted life course perspectives, viewed as the underlying change mechanisms. Thus, outcomes in the form of changes or patterns of thoughts and behaviors at T2 are the results of previously experienced events, changes, or transitions, adaptation processes, and contextual factors relevant to the specific time frame (T1–T2) in the person's life gradual (Elder, 1998; Mayer &Tuma,1990). These sets of factors produce different outcomes during different time frames in a person's life course.

The second set of elements are contextual factors, shown outside the shaded area (Figure,2) that collectively define the various circumstances in which people are embedded. These contextual factors affect variables and relationships (shown in the shaded area of Figure. 2), including experienced and anticipated events at T1, the adaptation processes triggered by them, and their outcomes (T2) during the T1–T2 time frame. Over time, some structural factors (Ss) can be affected by events and people's actions (Featherman

and Lerner, 1985; Hetherington and Baltes, 1988), prompting reciprocal effects. As shown in Fig.2, Time frame (T1–T2) refers to a period between event or change experienced at T1 and event or change occurred (experienced) at T2. It can be in different time units, such as the number of years, age range, calendar years, specific periods in the person's life span, and stage or state in life.

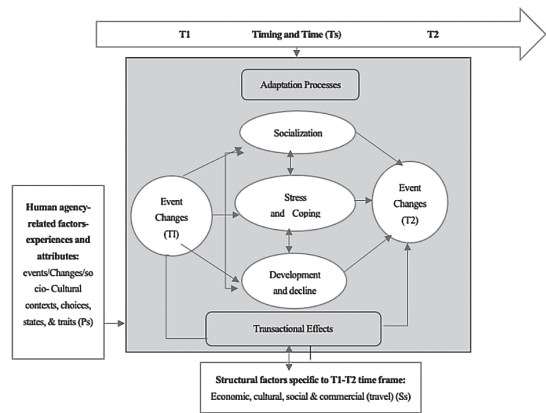


Figure 2. A conceptual life course model (Modified from customer behavior model that has been advanced by Abeles et al. 1980).

This is a general model of consumer behavior advanced by Albeit in 1980 on the LCP. However, little empirical research has been conducted to test these models against actual behavior patterns, especially in the tourism field. It does not represent a rigid set of postulates as an illustration for relationships between variables, but it does represent a step toward such explanations. This model is suggested to apply in the senior tourists' behavior study. It can help determine several causal mechanisms that may relate earlier life experiences to travel behavior in later life. Many variables can be extracted from the model to explain how certain life events in earlier life may affect a senior's tourist behavior.

(3) The methodological issues

Both qualitative and quantitative are appropriate for life course research, depending on the research questions. Several methods can be employed to obtain qualitative data on a person's past, present, and

future life experiences (Giele and Elder, 1998). For instance, autobiography and co-biography are usually used to understand one's behavior concerning more extensive analysis (e.g., family, group) (Lerner et al., 1988). Similarly, social autobiography is used to understand one's own experiences within the more extensive history of one's times (Merton, 1988). Reker and Wong (1988) discuss other interpretive ways that can be applied to explore an individual's experiences, including the life history narrative, the life-drawing technique, and the personal document approach (Reker and Wong, 1988).

The use of life history and biographical narrative approaches to data collection would potentially lead to a rich, in-depth knowledge about senior tourist behavior relating to their life experiences since it is largely absent from existing research. Longitudinal data are ideal for life course research, though retrospective measures can also be used (Mayer and Tuma, 1990). The development of advanced data collection instruments includes the event history calendar and autobiography memory (Axim et al., 1999; Belli, 1998), for retrospective life histories, significantly improve the quality of data based on retrospective questions, especially in reporting the exact dates of events and earlier experienced psychological states subjectively (Henry et al., 1994).

Life-course research has also developed statistical models for analyzing discrete-state, continuous-time stochastic processes. These models are collectively known as event history analysis (EHA) and viewed as an appropriate way of studying multiple social life (Mayer and Tuma, 1990), including leisure life. By relating the transition rate to time and other variables, an EHA addresses both discrete and continuous change dynamics (Campbell and O'Rand, 1988). Applying EHA, researchers must know the existing software used to model mediation and other relationships. Thus, access to and choice of proper EHA software became necessary for researchers.

## 5. Conclusion

The article highlights the importance of using

coherent life-course research designs in achieving rich qualitative temporal data and suggests directions for future research. Research on senior tourist behavior is particularly important because: the senior tourism market is a new opportunity for tourism businesses and local, regional, and national economies (Milne and Ateljevic, 2001); and travel activities can serve as a way for senior well-being and a healthy lifestyle (Silverstein and Parker, 2002).

However, the behavior of elderly tourists has been identified as diverse and complex. Applying the LCP as a research tool examining senior travel behavior is a practical and integrative way to conduct this research. The guiding paradigm, the conceptual model, and methodologies discussed in this paper combined the critical components of the LCP and its application on customer behavior, provide a concise, inclusive, and conceptual map for the research in senior tourist behaviors research. This map makes studies in this field to build upon a more comprehensive cross-disciplinary network that emphasizes the role of their experience associated with time, context, and process. Narrative approaches like longitudinal approach to collect data and EHA analysis are well-suited to the research on LCP, but it asked to capture the detail of participant (tourists) experiences. At the same time, they also need to take account of the immediate and broader social contexts in which their experience occurs (Moen, 2006). Life events follow varying sequences in the life course and differ in how they are experienced. For instance, widowhood in old age might have different meanings and consequences for traveling than losing a spouse in younger years. This means that the results of research on the LCP will provide valuable fresh insights with the potential to inform the market and the policymakers regarding key influence factors on senior seniors tourists' behavior and the longer-term needs of this group.

So far, there are few case studies of senior tourists on the LCP and many more case studies are needed in various cultures and regions for generalization. The LCP is customarily applied to address issues of development, stability, and change in thoughts and

actions over time (George, 1993). The individual life course is shaped from life experiences, such as becoming adults, acquiring education, getting married, having children, changing jobs, or some people getting a divorce, and establishing a new family, moving places, the birth of a grandchild and becoming a grandparent, the onset of disease or disability, retirement from the workforce, and the loss of a spouse. An individual's life course is different from others, which would cause a variety of individual's later lives. For example, when a couple decides to have a child at age 23 or 24, compared to at age 35 or 37. By the age of 65, early childbearing may have time to travel, while a couple who waits to have children may have to pay for their children's higher education. Such experiences and changes shaped the individual's life course, which is embedded with prior life experiences and has long-term effects on later life behavior. And a variety of minor and major life events that may occur one after another or simultaneously in people's life course and with specific sequences have different effects on human behavior. These developmental nature of being mature and aging are rarely reflected in tourism studies, which often revolve around static research designs. The strength of the life course research lies in the historical and individual contextualization of themes that need to be reflected in the analytical process. ■

## Note

1) Ecological systems theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. It offers a framework through which community psychologists examine individuals' relationships within communities and the wider society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

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## ライフコースの視点に基づく高齢観光者の行動理解

アロンゴウワ

今日、高齢者人口の増加は世界的に注目されている問題であり、とりわけ観光産業にとっては、そうした高齢者人口の増加にいかに対応させていくかが重要な課題となっている。個人の晩年にはレジャー活動と接する機会が比較的多く、そうしたレジャー活動の多くが観光と深く結びついているためである。

近年の研究では、高齢観光者による晩年のこのような行動パターンには、個人の人生の初期の経験が大きく関与していることが明らかにされてきている。そこで本論文では、長期的な視点に基づいて個人と社会的要素の相互関係、そしてその時間的变化を扱うことで人間の行動の様々な側面を調査するために導入されてきた学際的な理論・視点としてのライフコースを高齢観光者の行動分析に適用することを試みる。つまり本論文の目的は、社会的状況と個人の成長、そして時間による変化の影響を強調するライフコースの視点を高齢者の観光研究に適用することが、この問題を理解するための新たな次元をいかに切り拓くのか、その可能性を議論することである。

そのために、当該分野の文献調査と一般的な概念要素の整理、そしてライフコースの視点の整理を行う。そして本論文は、この視点を高齢者の観光行動研究の指導的なパラダイムとして、また概念モデルとして利用するうえでの有効性を示したうえで、その方法論的な問題点についても議論する。個人の生活経験を深く調査することは、高齢者の観光行動をその個々人の文脈に即して理解することを可能にすると示された。また最後には、この分野においてはより広範囲のさらなる事例研究の蓄積が必要であることを指摘した。

キーワード：ライフコース、高齢観光者、行動、応用仮説、シニアツーリズム