

Senior travelers' experience and usage in adopting ICTs

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Objectives | This study contributes to understanding the experience and usage of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by senior travelers when travel is taken place in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA) of China. Applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, this study examined what sorts of stimuli triggered senior travelers' ICT adoption before, during, and after their trips. It also shows how the stimuli evoked their experiences and emotions and led to their utilization of ICTs in their future GBA trips.

This study focuses on four research questions:

- (1) What are the stimuli (S) driving the senior travelers to adopt ICTs when traveling to or within the GBA of China?
- (2) What level of usage of ICTs are reflected by senior travelers in their trips?
- (3) What are their internal states (experience and emotion) (O) for adopting ICTs in their trips?
- (4) How do the external stimuli and seniors' internal states affect their intention to adopt ICTs (R) in their future GBA trips?

Methodology | This study adopted an in-depth qualitative interview research method, which focuses on the current study of the seniors' travel experience and usage of ICTs to and within the GBA. Purposive and snowball methods were used in selecting suitable candidates for interviews. Interviewees had to fulfill the following criteria: (1) had reached 60 years of age or above when the travel took place; (2) had traveled to at least three distinct places of the GBA between 2018 and June 2021, where one place had to be a special administrative region (i.e., Hong Kong or Macau), since, as mentioned earlier, the two SARs had their distinct policy and performance of ICTs; and (3) had used or attempted to use some sorts of ICTs or smart applications before, during, or after the travel as an integral part of their travel experience.

The interview notes were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Data analysis was conducted by following the steps given (Creswell, 2009): 1) handle the raw data (i.e., transcribe verbatim from Chinese into English); 2) read through the data line by line carefully; 3) code the data (e.g., easy to use, informative); and 4) identify themes (e.g., usefulness as a stimulus) and subthemes (e.g., illustrate the direction of place) and interpret their meanings. In coding and theming the data, an inductive mode of analysis was adopted which began with open coding; and after that, themes were developed by clustering and combining similar codes (Creswell, 2009). Trustworthiness in qualitative research was achieved through clarifying unclear responses from the interviewees by follow-up contact after the interviews, sample checking of the translation from Chinese to English, and separately conducting the coding by the two principal researchers of the study, with high intercooler agreement between the two researchers (Lune & Berg, 2017). 21 interviews were successfully conducted during the second half of 2021.

Applying the S–O–R framework and consolidating key conceptual insights from existing studies, a conceptual framework is developed (Figure 1). This framework proposes that there are intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli (Stimuli) that drive senior travelers to adopt ICTs, which further evoke their internal states (experiences and emotions toward ICTs) (Organism) and direct their ICT adoption behaviors (Response), including the intention to adopt/not adopt ICTs and usage of ICTs in their future GBA trips.

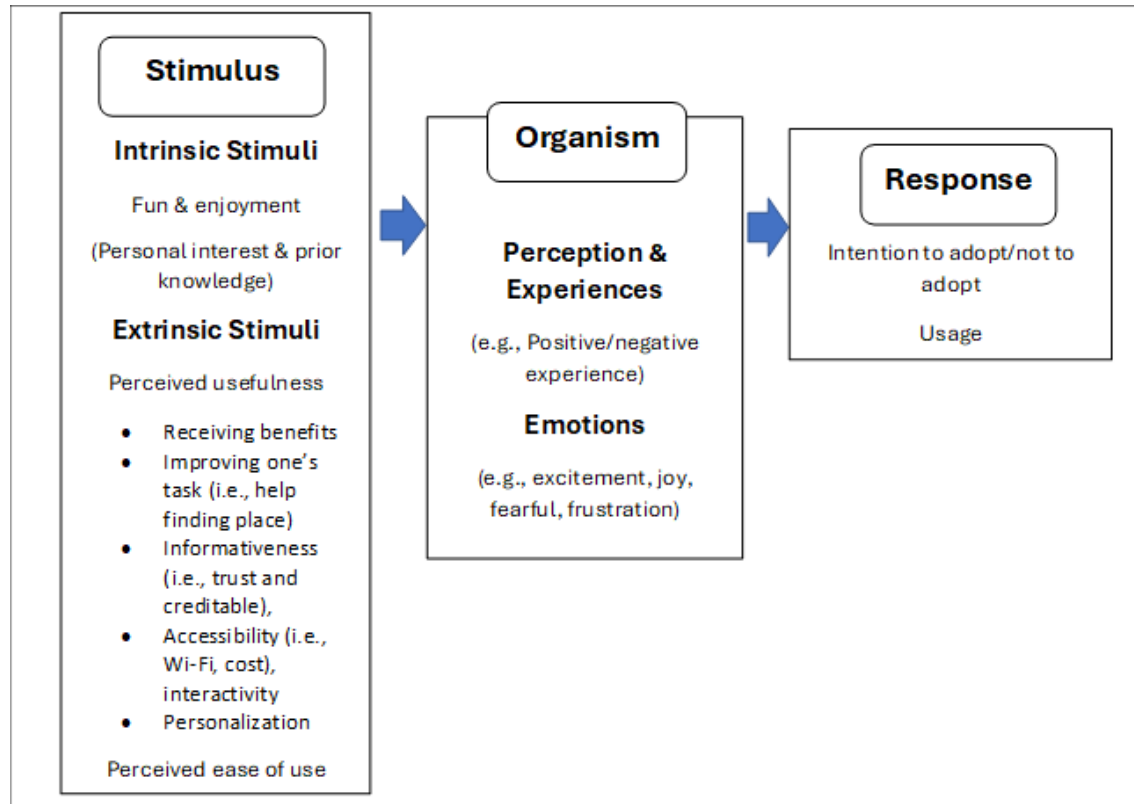


Figure 1 | Senior travelers' experience and usage of ICTs by applying S-O-R model

Main Results and Contributions | This study examines senior travelers' usage and experience of adopting ICTs when traveling to and within the GBA in China through applying the S–O–R model. Particularly, it investigates the sorts of stimuli (S) driving the senior travelers to adopt ICTs, their level of usage, and how the external stimuli evoke seniors' internal states (O) and affect their intention to adopt ICTs (R) in their future GBA trips. The findings of this study are summarized in figure 2.

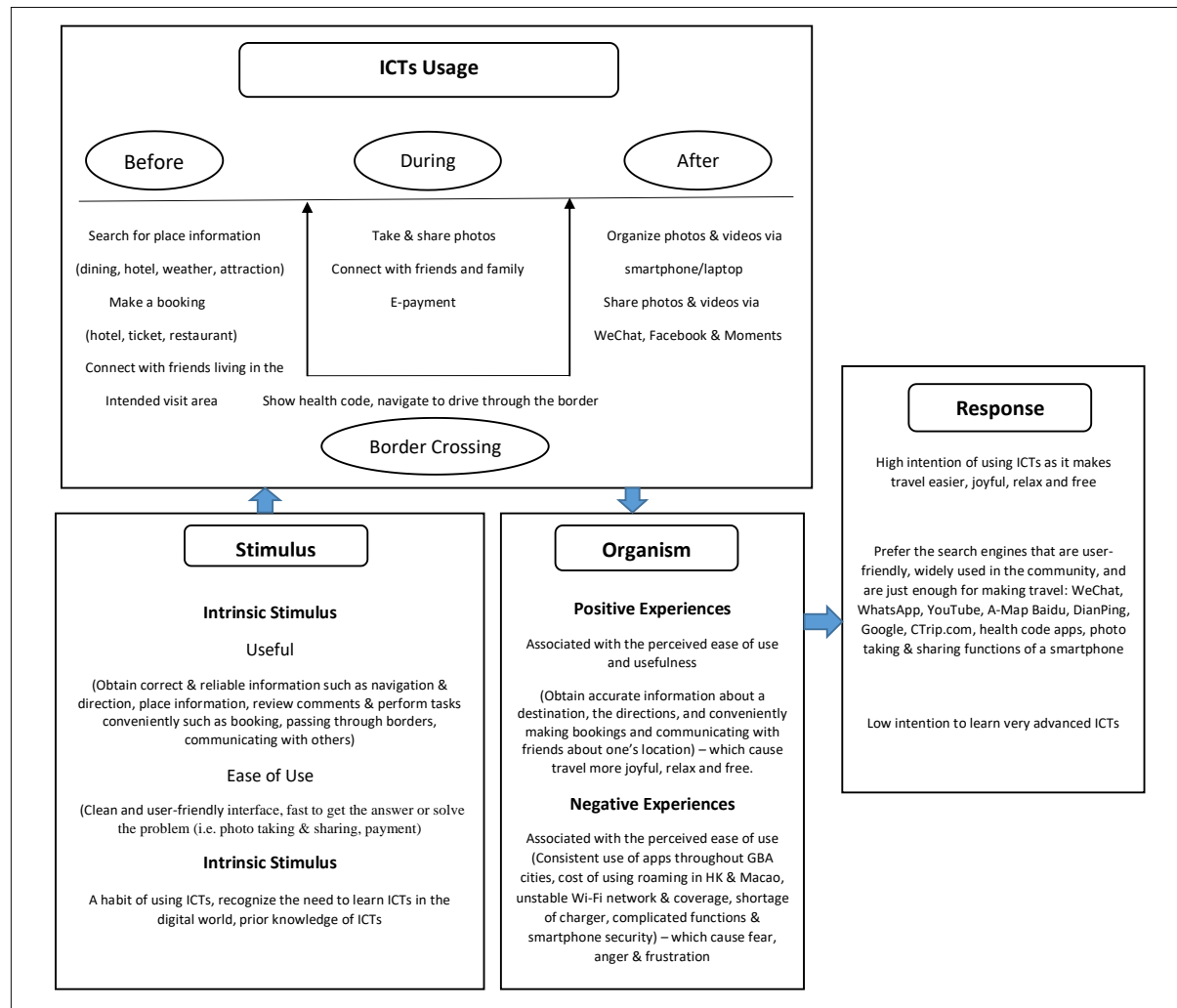


Figure 2 | Summary of findings of senior travelers' experience and usage of ICTs for their travel to GBA

Source: Adapted from figure 1 and interview transcripts from 21 respondents

This is a pioneering study, which utilizes the S–O–R model to understand senior travelers' adoption, usage, and experience of ICTs when traveling to and within the GBA. Results of this study are particularly useful for the development of the GBA, as enhancing the accessibility of traveling within the region through digitalization is a goal set by the Central Government (PRCCG, 2019).

Furthermore, this study adds two intrinsic stimuli to the literature: "having a habit of using ICTs" and "recognizing the need to learn ICTs to cope with the future trend." Results further evidence how positive experience and emotion have led to the high intention of seniors to adopt ICTs in their future GBA trips, while negative experience and emotion have little impact on the matter. This study further provides a good basis for future studies in different contexts.

Limitations | The interviewees were limited to Chinese residents only. Chinese and foreign nationals living outside of the GBA or China, however, are expected to have somewhat different views, as they may require and exhibit higher usage on ICTs in all aspects. However, foreigners may find it difficult to use travel-related apps in the GBA because the English version of travel information within the GBA is not readily available. The GBA should be developed into a tourist destination for visitors coming from the rest of China and beyond.

Conclusions | This study adds knowledge to seniors' usage and experience of ICTs before, during, and after trips. It provides a holistic understanding of the stimuli that trigger senior travelers to adopt ICTs before, during, and after their trip, the sorts of ICTs (e.g., apps, search engines) they use, and their experiences and emotions when using ICTs during their trip, as well as how their internal states affect their future usage and adoption of ICTs. It is also evidenced that in this study the S-O-R model is a useful framework to understand seniors' adoption and experience of ICTs within the context of the GBA.

Moreover, since most of the interviewees of this study were between 60 and 70 years old, future studies could include more elderly participants (aged above 70), because the acceptance level and the ability and willingness to adopt ICTs when traveling may be different (Favricius & Eriksson, 2017). Finally, quantitative studies to obtain views of large samples of senior travelers are also important, so it will be useful to obtain more insights into the issue through that wider lens.

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