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Improving Elderly Social Well-being through Hospitality: the Interface between Service, Social Interaction, Satisfaction and Quality of Life

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate how elderly customers' social interactions with hospitality services influence their experience and satisfaction and how this affects the quality of life of the elderly. It will employ a mixed method approach in two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data will be collected through structured interviews with 300 elderly people living in the UK. In the second phase, focus group interviews will be conducted with a mixed selection of relevant policy makers, elderly customers and local hospitality business owners/managers in each group to explore the enablers and disablers of elderly social interactions with hospitality service providers and with other customers, and how their consumption experience and satisfaction could be best enriched. This study will make a distinct contribution to knowledge by exploring the social impact of hospitality through evaluating how a societal issue, quality of life of the elderly, can be enhanced through hospitality.

Key Words *hospitality social impact, elderly, social interaction, satisfaction, quality of life, well-being*

Experience Theme *Consumers' experiences*

Focus of Paper *Theoretical/Academic*

Introduction

The wellbeing of the elderly is currently one of the main social issues in the UK with economic and socio-cultural implications (Windle *et al.*, 2014). In the UK, those aged 60 and above currently account for approximately 20 per cent of the population and this proportion is expected to rise to 24 per cent by 2030 (Dickens *et al.*, 2011). While embracing the desire of 'living longer and living better', it is rather heart breaking to face the harsh reality of the poor quality of life (QoL) that so many elderly face, that is caused not by economic or physical constraints but through social isolation – 'a million older people in the UK haven't spoken to anyone for a month' (Age UK, 2014 http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/loneliness/).

Previous research (e.g. Trentini *et al.*, 2012) indicates that lack of emotional and social wellbeing among the elderly results in poor QoL, leading to negative physical and mental health, more stress and eventually increased health and social care service use Given such individual wellbeing, health status, financial and wider community imperatives, there has been a national and international policy consensus that support must be provided to the elderly to encourage their social interactions with the wider society and to enhance their QoL. Previous research investigating the QoL of elderly people has examined this important societal issue from sociological, psychological and healthcare perspectives (Chow, 2012; Hrast *et al*., 2013; Trenti *et al*., 2012), and a range of tailored interventions have been developed to enhance the QoL of the elderly with variable rates of success

(Masi *et al.,* 2011). However, how these societal issues can be tackled through the contribution of hospitality services that offer social space and experiential-oriented consumption opportunity is not yet known. More importantly, how the social-related QoL of the elderly could be enhanced through regular social interactions provided by local small hospitality businesses and with other customers is largely unknown: thus the need for this research. We argue that the elderly's social wellbeing could be enhanced in their familiar environment through the social interaction platform provided by local hospitality businesses such as restaurants, cafes and pubs, etc, that could offer a prolonged feeling of better QoL.

The hospitality industry is frequently being criticised for its dark side such as promoting unhealthy eating, facilitating binge drinking and contributing to social problems. However, the role of local hospitality businesses in addressing social concerns is yet to be investigated. This study therefore intends to provide insights into the impacts of commercial hospitality organisations on community and social wellbeing. It will also offer an alternative perspective to sociology, psychology and healthcare researchers to better understand how to facilitate the social interactions of the elderly through hospitality services by improving their satisfaction and experience in the consumption process, and thus enhance their QoL. Similarly the relationship between the social interaction and the experience and satisfaction constructs has been studied by marketing and consumer behaviour researchers fairly extensively but without taking into consideration how these constructs could lead to social outcomes. The aim of this research is to investigate how elderly customers' social interactions with hospitality services influence their experience and satisfaction, which could positively affect the' quality of life of the elderly.

An investigation into how social interactions influence experience and satisfaction and consequently impact upon the QoL of the elderly will also create a broader socio-economic perspective for marketing scholars in their understanding of social interaction/experience/satisfaction constructs. We argue that elderly's well-being could be enhanced in their daily environment through regular interaction with local hospitality businesses such as restaurants, cafes and pubs etc. and could offer a prolonged feeling of better QoL.

This project is grounded in four key constructs - social interaction, experience, customer satisfaction and quality of life - and seeks to respond to the following research questions:

a) Do social interactions with hospitality service providers affect the consumption experience and satisfaction of elderly customers and impact on their QoL?

b) How can small hospitality businesses facilitate the social interactions of the elderly, and enrich their experience and satisfaction, leading to QoL enhancement?

Research design

This study will adopt a mixed method approach and collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase of the project, quantitative data will be collected through structured interviews with 300 people aged 65+ years living at home in London, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Devon, and Oxford; areas ranked among the ten highest areas on the loneliness index (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7755659.stm). The sampling frame of the study will be drawn from the electoral registers of the councils in these cities. A stratified random sampling technique will be used to select the sample of respondents based on a sample of postal codes. They will then be sent a formal, handwritten letter of invitation, explaining the research and asking whether they would be willing to contribute to the study. In the case of a low response rate, access to the elderly will be facilitated through community centres.

The study will adopt the seven items developed by Westbrook and Oliver (1991) and Oliver (1997). The emotion-based measure (four items) will be adapted from Westbrook and Oliver (1991), whereas the second

'evaluative' set of satisfaction measures (three items) will be adopted from Oliver (1997) for satisfaction measures. The customer experience measure will be borrowed from Schmitt (1999) and also from Srivastava and Kaul (2014). The social interaction items and scale will be borrowed from Brady and Cronin Jr. (2001). In order to measure elderly QoL (subjective well-being), six observed indicators will be adopted from previous gerontology and tourism literature (Kim *et al*., 2015; Sirgy, 2002). Factor analysis and multiple regression analysis will be performed using SPSS to first identify different dimensions of social interactions, experience and satisfaction, and QoL and then to assess the significance of the relationship between these constructs. The results derived from these analyses will inform the second phase of the research process – focus group interviews. Ten focus group interviews are planned for the second phase of the study that will take place in a number of areas of the UK to explore the enablers and disablers of social interactions of the elderly with hospitality service providers and with other customers. The interview findings will also help practitioners and other groups to gain a better understanding of how best consumption experience and satisfaction of elderly customers could be enriched in order to enhance their QoL. A mixed selection of relevant policy makers, elderly customers and local café, pub and restaurant owners/managers in each group interview is also expected to yield insightful data from multiple participants who represent different interest groups as well as allow us to compare and contrast the views held by each participating group. The findings that emerge from this phase of the study will be analysed by using qualitative data analysis software Nvivo.

Conclusion and implications

This study will demonstrate the missing linkage between customer experience, satisfaction and QoL. It will offer recommendations to small hospitality owners on how they could play an influential role in enhancing elderly customers' QoL through improving their consumption experience and satisfaction achieved by facilitating positive social interaction. In addition, it will provide a range of practical recommendations for elderly support organisations and local government to assist the development of good practices.

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