The influence of social interactions on senior customers' experience and loneliness

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to understand how elderly consumers' social interactions in hospitality businesses such as restaurants and cafes can enhance their customer experience and alleviate their loneliness.

Design/methodology/approach – The target population of this study included people aged 60+ living at home in Hong Kong. The sampling frame was composed of respondents who visited the local coffee shop (Cha Chaan Teng[1]) more than once a year. In total, 500 questionnaires were distributed and 411 valid responses were collected in 2016. Structural equation modeling was used for data analysis.

Findings – The results show that social interactions with employees (service manner and need identification) and social interactions with customers have a positive effect on elderly customers' experiences while the service manner of employees reduces their loneliness.

Originality/value – The first theoretical contribution of the study is its proposal of a new structural model that postulates the relationship between social interactions, customer experience, and loneliness. Its second contribution is its comparison of how different kinds of social interactions influence customer experience and loneliness. This study offers insights into how small hospitality organizations can facilitate elderly customers' experiences and help to alleviate their loneliness. It also demonstrates that loneliness is a social issue that can be tackled not only by healthcare and psychological interventions, but also with the help of commercial activities oriented toward experiential consumption.

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[1] A "Cha Chaan Teng" is a type of eatery in HK that serves no-frills food and drinks at affordable prices. They are very popular with local residents as a place to eat and socialize.