

Cover Page

Title: Ready to Accommodate Emerging Senior Tourism and Hospitality Market?
Younger Generation's Perceptions about Older Adults and Knowledge of Aging

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Abstract

The study investigates university students' perceptions about senior citizen and knowledge of aging via a mixed method approach. The qualitative evidence in this study suggests that younger generation in Taiwan tends to hold negative perceptions about the older adults and that, men are more likely to show negative perceptions than women. The quantitative evidence in this study indicates that younger generation in Taiwan has low level of aging knowledge. Negative perceptions about the senior citizen and low level of aging knowledge among younger generation present a challenge to accommodate the emerging senior tourist market in Taiwan.

Keywords: Senior tourism and hospitality market, Knowledge of aging, Perceptions about older adult

Introduction

The demographics are changing with increasing aging populations in Taiwan. People aged 65 years or more make up 11.5 percent of Taiwan's population in 2013. The increasing numbers of senior citizens who are becoming targeted by tourism sectors as a growing market and deserves some special attention from the tourism and hospitality service sectors. Lee and Chen (2010) suggest that hoteliers need to develop facilities and train staffs to meet the interests and needs of the increasing elderly population in Taiwan. They also state that not enough research has been directed at developing the hotel service sector for senior citizens.

This study investigates university students' perceptions about older adults and aging knowledge via a mixed method approach. The focus of university student is important in that they are the current part-time tourism and hospitality service providers and may become full-time staffs in tourism and hospitality sectors after they graduate in the near future. Their perceptions about senior citizens, knowledge of aging are more likely to have an immediate impact on their service to senior guests in tourism and hospitality industry.

Literature Review

The proportion of older adults already exceeds that of children and is expected to be doubled than of the birth rate in 2050 in developed countries. By the year 2050, there will be 101 people 60 years or older for every one hundred children 0-14 years in the world (United Nations World Population Aging). The growing number of senior citizens represents the

emerging market for tourism and hospitality industry (Tretheway, M. & Mak, D., 2006).

However, generalized expectations about aging and older adults are tainted by negative perceptions and attitudes (Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989; Kite & Johnson, 1988). Some researchers suggest that senior guests are deserved more attention in tourism and hospitality service sectors (Lee & Chen, 2010).

Previous research investigating the perceptions and attitudes toward the elderly has produced inconsistent results. Several studies confirmed the presence of negative perceptions and attitudes towards older adults (Gellis, Sherman, Lawrance, 2003; Netz & Ben-Sira, 1993), while other studies found that young adults held more positive rather than negative views of older adults (Schwalb & Sedlacek, 1990; Yenerall, 1995). Moreover, some researchers suggest that older students (Guo, Erber, & Szuchman, 1999; Kalavar, 2001; Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000) and females (Hawkins, 1996; Kalavar, 2001; Tan, Hawkins, & Ryan, 2001) exhibit more positive perceptions and attitudes toward older adults. In addition, previous studies suggest that aging knowledge is related to positive views toward elders. Aging knowledge includes physical, psychological, and social facts about old age (Palmore, 1998).

Methodology

The study investigates university students' perceptions about older adults and knowledge of aging via a mixed method approach. First, this study conduct two focus group interviews to explore university students' perceptions about senior citizen. Then the study randomly

sampled 857 university students in Taiwan to participate in an anonymous, self-administered survey. A proportionate stratified sampling technique was employed to obtain a representative sample of the student population, hence, sample in this study was proportionately distributed regarding to year of study within the College of Management, College of Information & Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Social Sciences, and Law School.

A modified version of “Palmore’s Facts on Aging Quiz” (1998) is used to measure younger generation’s knowledge of aging which includes physical, psychological, and social facts about old age. The modified aging quiz consists of 28 true/false items, with a “don’t know” response option added to enhance internal validity (Cowan et al., 2004; Palmore, 1998). One point is given for each correct answer. Score range from 0 to 28, with higher score indicating greater knowledge. The “don’t know” responses are not counted as either correct or incorrect, but are used to distinguish items which subjects simply do not know and those items they would otherwise guess on. This allows for a more accurate indication of correct knowledge.

The English version of quiz underwent the standard procedure (forward-and back-translation, evaluation of the translated version by a panel, pre-testing the translated version, and validating by an expert panel who are bilinguals) to obtain an equivalent version in Chinese.

Findings

For the undergraduates’ perceptions about older adults, the qualitative evidence in this

study is consistent with previous research findings that younger generation tends to hold negative perceptions about the elderly and that, men are more likely to show negative perceptions than women.

The level of aging knowledge in this sample is relatively low. The overall mean correct response rate was 46.66% (SD = 16.35), with highest correct score in the physical domain of aging knowledge (63.09%, SD = 20.39) and lowest in the psychological domain (39.39%, SD = 21.19). The quiz item with the most correct responses was 'all five senses tend to decline in old age', with 83% participants answer correctly. This was followed by item 'physical strength tends to decline in old age' (82%). The Cronbach's α score was .80 for the revised FAQ and the CR value of each item all reach significant level indicating high internal consistency and good discriminatory power of the aging quiz.

Ten high error items were italicized and bold in Table 1. Almost 60% of students answered the item 'More than half of people aged 65 or above are senile (i.e., defective memory, disoriented, or demented, etc.)' incorrectly. This was followed by item 'people aged 65 or above tend to become more religious as they age (59%) and 'in general, the majority of people aged 65 or above tends to be pretty much alike (58%)'.

Also different from previous studies, in this sample of university students had more factual knowledge of psychological aging, followed by physical aging knowledge. Participants score lowest in the myths of aging.

Table 1 Percentage of Correct, Incorrect, and Don't Know Answers on each Item ($N = 857$)

#	Item Content	Correct	Incorrect	Don't Know	CR
Physical Knowledge of Aging (% correct = 63.09, SD = 20.39)					
Q2	All five senses tend to decline in old age.	83.31	12.48	4.21	3.27**
Q6	Physical strength tends to decline in old age.	82.15	16.91	0.94	3.98***
Q14	The reaction time of the majority of people aged 65 or above tends to be slower than the reaction time of younger people.	72.46	17.15	10.39	2.69*
Q4	Lung capacity tends to decline in old age.	72.22	12.48	15.3	6.56***
Q28	The life expectancy of men at age 65 is about the same as the life expectancy of women at age 65.	61.37	21.58	17.05	7.89***
Q3	More than half of people aged 65 or above have no capacity for sexual relations.	38.03	38.03	23.94	13.42***
Q1	More than half of people aged 65 or above are senile (i.e., defective memory, disoriented, or demented, etc.).	32.08	60.21	7.71	11.73***
Psychological Knowledge of Aging (% correct = 39.39, SD = 21.19)					
Q26	People aged 65 or above who reduce their activities tend to be happier than those who remain active.	62.08	21.93	15.99	6.56***
Q21	Depression is more frequent among people aged 65 or above than persons under 65.	38.74	40.72	20.54	13.96***
Q24	The majority of people aged 65 or above say they are seldom angry.	38.39	35.82	25.79	11.60***
Q5	The majority of people aged 65 or above say they feel miserable most of the time.	38.04	45.97	15.99	8.22***
Q16	The majority of people aged 65 or above say they are seldom bored.	37.22	40.14	22.64	13.98***
Q17	The majority of people aged 65 or above say they are lonely.	32.67	49.35	17.98	10.66***
Q27	When the last child leaves home, the majority of parents have serious problems adjusting to their "empty nest".	28.59	58.57	12.84	11.13***
Social Knowledge of Aging (% correct = 41.46, SD = 24.55)					
Q22	The majority of people aged 65 or above is working or would like to have some kind of work to do (including housework or volunteer work).	59.74	19.48	20.78	11.60***

Q10	About 80% of people aged 65 or above say they are healthy enough to carry out their normal activities.	55.77	21.35	22.88	14.07***
Q18	Workers aged 65 or above have fewer accidents than younger workers.	38.73	35.47	25.8	10.56***
Q9	The majority of workers aged 65 or above cannot work as effectively as younger workers.	37.57	50.99	11.44	10.89***
Q11	The majority of people aged 65 or above is unable to adapt to change.	36.17	49.24	14.59	14.59***
Q8	People aged 65 or above have fewer accidents per driver than drivers under the age 65.	35.01	28.93	36.06	7.47***
Q7	At least 10% of people aged 65 or above are living in long-stay institutions (i.e., nursing homes, mental hospitals, homes for the aged, etc.).	27.18	49.70	23.12	12.17***
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Misconception of Aging & the Aged (% correct = 42.72, SD = 20.49)					
Q12	People aged 65 or above usually take longer than young people to learn something new.	78.41	12.71	8.88	4.18***
Q13	It is almost impossible for the majority of people aged 65 or above to learn new thing.	55.77	34.65	9.58	8.14***
Q25	The health and socioeconomic status of older people (compared to younger people) in the year 2020 will probably be about the same as now.	49.70	18.08	32.22	12.62***
Q19	Over 15% of the Taiwan population is now 65 or over.	30.80	49.35	19.85	13.70***
Q20	The majority of medical practitioners give low priority to the aged.	30.57	47.25	22.18	6.79***
Q15	In general, the majority of people aged 65 or above tends to be pretty much alike.	27.18	49.71	23.11	11.28***
Q23	People aged 65 or above tend to become more religious as they age.	24.62	59.39	15.99	6.22***
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Total (% correct = 46.66, SD = 16.35)					

* p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001.

Conclusion

This research indicates that undergraduates in Taiwan lack of accurate aging knowledge and hold negative perceptions about older adults. Negative perceptions about the senior citizen among younger generation may present a challenge to accommodate the emerging

senior tourism and hospitality market.

It is important for the university educators and tourism/hospitality practitioners to incorporate knowledge of aging and older adults in order to nurture younger generation to have positive perceptions and attitudes toward senior guests and, thus to embrace and accommodate the emerging senior tourism and hospitality market. We hope a situation where services in tourism and hospitality sectors that are friendly to the senior citizens in the foreseeable future.

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