

# Achieving Senior Tourists' Active Aging through Value Co-creation: A Customer-Dominant Logic Perspective

## Abstract

Senior tourists have their own travel behaviors and preferences and require specific resources from the tourism industry and the broader society. This study adopts customer-dominant logic to understand how participating in tourism activities can support seniors to co-create active aging value. Interviews were conducted with 31 senior tourists and 16 tourism and hospitality service providers. Six value themes were identified from the interviews, namely, enjoyment, connectedness, mental vitality, independence, sense of belonging, and self-esteem. The six values were categorized into functional, social, and spiritual dimensions. A value co-creation nexus was developed with continuum- and development-oriented active aging as the two extremes. This nexus highlighted the differentiated efforts exerted by co-creators to create value and identified the value co-creation routines of stakeholders, their corresponding values, and their facilitators. Value co-creation activities were introduced into active aging with tourism as the context. The findings of this study can support the management of tourism services, promote inclusiveness in society, and aid in government policy making.

*Keywords:* active aging, value co-creation, functional value, social value, spiritual value, activity participation.

## 1. Introduction

An aging society is an emerging global challenge (Kabadayi et al., 2020). The global population aged over 60 years is expected to grow from 12% to 22% between 2015 and 2050, amounting to 2 billion individuals (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021). Seniors are at risk of developing psychological and social issues, such as loneliness, social and emotional isolation, discrimination, and poor accessibility (AgeUK, 2019). An aging population not only challenges current medical and healthcare systems but also has implications for the tourism industry (Connell & Page, 2020). The senior population, especially the baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), have become a key element of the tourism market (Stončikaitė, 2022). People aged 60 years and over are expected to make 2 billion international trips by 2050, an increase from 593 million in 1999 (Nicolau et al., 2020). These increases will result in profound change for established tourism regions and emerging economies (Balderas-Cejudo, 2019; Connell & Page, 2020). Baby boomers emphasize active and healthy lifestyles and try to maintain a high quality of life as they age (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2022). Compared with those from other generations, baby boomer travelers are great consumers of tourism activities due to higher discretionary income, disposable time, and a willingness to discover the world in retirement (Balderas-Cejudo, 2019; Stončikaitė, 2022).

Active aging has gained increased attention from academia, government, and the service industry over the past 20 years. The World Health Organisation (2002) defined active aging as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security to enhance quality of life as people age”. However, critics of active aging have argued that a traditional understanding of active aging is often based on youthful activities, which strongly emphasize health and independence (Angus & Reeve, 2006). Activity theorists have proposed the

concept of ‘new ageism’ where dependent older adults may be discriminated against due to their fear of aging with disability (Previtali et al., 2022). For example, Stončikaitė (2022) argued that baby boomers, as a growing tourism market, represent individualism, hedonistic leisure, and self-expression. They may continue the same spending habits and youthful lifestyle preferences into their later years, and the unrealistic ideals of active aging may reinforce social inequalities and the discrimination of seniors.

The present discourse on gerontology advocates a subjective approach to be open to the opinions of seniors about active aging, allowing them to define their own needs and desires, and to reduce their fear of disability (Martinson & Berridge, 2015). Sedgley et al. (2011) argued that senior tourism investigations have focused on market intelligence and ignored the meaning and value perceived by seniors.

The concept of active aging has been founded in gerontology and aging and applied in public policy and psychology studies (Stenner et al., 2011; Vega-Vázquez et al., 2020). However, investigations in the fields of management and service remain scarce, and the benefits of proactive choices by seniors in relation to social activities is yet to be fully explored. In the active aging paradigm, tourism and leisure activities contribute to mental health and quality of life in various ways (Vega-Vázquez et al., 2020; Stončikaitė, 2022). Senior tourism may be included in public health and well-being policies due to its contributions to seniors’ quality of life and social inclusion (Balderas-Cejudo, 2019; Diekmann & McCabe, 2020; McCabe & Johnson, 2013). Further transdisciplinary perspectives around the tourism–aging nexus can help academics and practitioners address the emerging senior tourism market and understand how tourism activities can contribute to seniors’ active aging and quality of life (Connell & Page, 2020; Stončikaitė, 2022).

Gerontological research has stated that the aging paradigms have emphasized the responsibility of individuals maintaining their physical and cognitive functions yet have

underestimated their responsibility and efforts towards society (Martinson & Berridge, 2015). Approximately 52% of seniors agree that service planners do not pay sufficient attention to their needs (The Associated Retirement Community Operators, 2018). A senior-people-centered approach is needed in policy and strategy planning to ensure this age group is given a voice. Active aging depends on various influences and determinants, including their activities, service and support providers, and social and physical environments (Vega-Vázquez et al., 2020). Understanding seniors' active role in the aging process and considering how service providers and the broader society can co-create value with this age group may help seniors to achieve active aging.

The concept of value co-creation emphasizes collaboration between stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The lens of customer-dominant logic (CDL) within value co-creation emphasizes the importance of investigating the roles and activities of senior tourists in the experience-creating process. It should also explore the support they receive from service providers (Fan et al., 2020; Heinonen et al., 2010). Although value co-creation has been examined in the general marketing and management literature, the concept has only been recently applied in the tourism context (Rihova et al., 2018). Few studies have regarded seniors as proactive co-creating participants, and even less have delineated the different co-creation routines of seniors and the corresponding generated values. Given their unique desires in co-creation activities and their resource requirements, the value co-creation of senior tourists toward active aging warrants further investigation.

To address these gaps, this study explores the value co-creation process between senior tourists and other participants towards active aging. The following research questions were proposed to guide this inquiry: (1) How do seniors participate in the active aging value co-creation process? (2) How can various types of values be co-created during this process? and (3) How can service providers and the broader society jointly create value with seniors

through different routines? The objectives of this research are to: (1) identify the different values that emerged during the value co-creation process; (2) establish a value co-creation nexus to describe the different orientations of senior tourists participation in the active aging value co-creation process; and (3) identify the different value co-creation routines of senior tourists with tourism stakeholders. Data were collected from senior tourists and tourism service providers. By investigating the value co-creation process from a CDL perspective, this study is one of the first to illustrate how senior tourists achieve active aging through value co-creation. The work also provides empirical pathways to support social inclusion and active aging by engaging seniors, service providers, communities, and government policymakers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Active aging and tourism

#### 2.1.1 Definition and dimensions of active aging

Being active is about “continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs; not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labor force” (WHO, 2002). Active aging has been discussed in the disciplines of gerontology, sociology, and psychology. Bowling (2005) conceptualized active aging as a series of actions for enhancing one’s quality of life, including continued physical, psychological, and social health, as well as participation, independence, autonomy, and control. Active aging involves empowerment through inclusion and the engagement of seniors within society while aiming to reduce health and social service interventions.

In their concept of active aging, the WHO (2002) emphasized that health, participation, and security are the three pillars of active aging. Activities in active aging are categorized into physical, mental, and social modes. Of these modes, the physical mode is most frequently associated with the term active aging (Stenner et al., 2011). Bowling (2008) concluded that active aging encapsulates physical health and functioning, leisure–social roles and activities, mental functioning and activities, social relationships and contacts, services, neighborhood and local facilities, psychological matters, and finance and independence.

#### 2.1.2 Tourism as a senior active aging practice

Seniors can fulfill their social and psychological needs by maintaining their activity levels and finding new hobbies, roles, and relationships (McDonald, 2011). These roles can increase their life satisfaction as they continue to age (Phelan, 2011). Consistent with activity theory, tourism experience can contribute to the overall quality of life and health of seniors (Kim et al., 2015). Tourism also contributes to active aging in various ways, such as enhancing

cognitive functioning through opportunities for learning, providing feasible exercises while enjoying tourism and a healthy lifestyle, reducing depression and anxiety, enhancing self-esteem and self-concept, strengthening family ties, and expanding social networks to avoid social isolation (Gu et al., 2016; Vega-Vázquez et al., 2020).

Active aging also encourages seniors to participate in tourism activities (Ferrer et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2015). However, seniors face several barriers that prevent their participation in these activities. Schönfelder and Axhausen (2003) argued that the world is designed for younger people, which challenges seniors wishing to engage in meaningful social activities and roles. Angus and Reeve (2006) mentioned that the traditional understanding of active aging is often based on youthful activities (e.g., labor, sports, and care) that strongly emphasize health and independence. Buhalis and Darcy (2011) and Buhalis, Darcy, and Ambrose (2012) discussed tourism accessibility in terms of inclusion, disability, and an aging population and identified accessibility practices, products, and services that promote social inclusion. Other non-aging specific theories, such as effort recovery theory and conservation of resources theory, indicate that tourism participation can boost the wellness of seniors by offering opportunities for relaxation, detachment from work, novel experiences, and greater personal control (Gu et al., 2016).

Active aging can be considered a dynamic and flexible process. Scholars of active aging have criticized an overemphasis by policymakers on physical activities, neglect of the mental capacity of the elderly, and the over-idealization of a productive model (Barrett & McGoldrick 2013). In addition to senior personal factors, support from the government, society, and service providers also need to be valued (Gu et al., 2016; Martinson & Berridge, 2015; Stončikaitė, 2022). Activities, services, and support may help seniors achieve active aging. A nuanced portfolio of specific activities and services, such as tourism, should be delineated to facilitate and engage seniors in the active aging process. An alternative way of

interpreting active aging is to involve seniors to determine the potential role of active aging in their lives (Walker & Foster, 2013). To address this gap, a customer approach toward senior-centered research should be adopted with a focus on seniors' interactions with other resources.

## 2.2 Understanding active aging from a CDL perspective

### 2.2.1 Value co-creation through tourism participation

Value co-creation has been applied in tourism to understand the social behavior of tourists. This concept is “a joint value-realising process that occurs as the organisation and its customers interact” (Payne et al., 2008). Consumers become co-creators of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), and firms provide services as value propositions. Conversely, value realization depends on the participation of customers (Cabiddu et al., 2013). Firms must provide relevant information and the necessary resources to support customers in their co-creation activities (Payne et al., 2008). Rihova et al. (2015; 2018) explored customer-to-customer value co-creation in tourism and emphasized the importance of social practice in constructing value. Lin et al. (2017) focused on tourist-resident value co-creation in destinations and verified the effects of resident life satisfaction and the perceived benefits and costs of tourism development on co-creation behaviors. Customer citizenship behaviors (Assiouras et al., 2019) and sustainable behaviors (Font et al., 2021) have also been assessed through the lens of value co-creation. However, studies on the role of value co-creation in shaping tourist behavior have mostly focused on paired co-creation activity and ignored the co-existence and interrelationships of multiple perspectives (Fan, 2023).

### 2.2.2 CDL lens: A senior-people-centered approach

Compared with goods- and service-dominant logics, which argue that value can only be created through collaboration between service providers and customers (Fan et al., 2020),



CDL explores value co-creation through the co-creation practices and experiences of customers in their own social contexts (Rihova et al., 2018). Instead of relying on specific service providers and interactions, CDL positions the value-creating role to customers by emphasizing what customers do to accomplish their own goals and by acknowledging their roles (Fan et al., 2020). Investigating how consumers think, feel, and act can provide valuable guidance to address marketing challenges (Kim et al., 2019). This approach allows service providers to understand the activities, practices, and experiences of their customers (Heinonen et al., 2010). Although the importance of joint efforts to co-create values has been emphasized in the literature, the majority of the co-creation studies assume that the efforts of various participants are unified or equal. However, there is only limited empirical evidence of the different efforts devoted by varied co-creators. Each co-creation activity has unique determinants and may fulfill different values for co-creators. The efforts of different co-creators to actualize the co-creation process may vary.

The focus of active aging is to encourage participation by seniors in society. This can be achieved by emphasizing their needs, desires, competence, and knowledge application to create meaning and value (Boudiny, 2013; Martinson & Berridge, 2015), with support from activities, services, and environment (Vega-Vázquez et al., 2020). A CDL perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the active roles of senior tourists from a subjective perspective and the corresponding activities, resources, and environment provided by industry (Fan et al., 2020; Heinonen et al., 2010) to help tourists achieve active aging (Fan et al., 2020). Tourism activities bring different groups of people together and enable them to co-create different values through interactions. Social and service encounters empower tourists to actively take a leading role in creating travel experiences and the values they wish to achieve during travel. Taking a senior-people-centered approach and investigating value

co-creation through a CDL perspective is an appropriate approach that places tourists at the center and explores their role in co-creating value with other co-creation participants.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivism paradigm, which assumes that knowledge of reality is gained through social construction and is created based on the interpretation and understanding of individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivists focus on the experiences of individuals to create understandings and interpretations of their social world and its context (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretative research is a distinguished methodological approach within the value co-creation area (Babu et al., 2020). This study applied a senior-centered approach to explore senior tourists' co-creation practices and subjective value perceptions in their own social contexts. In-depth personal interviews were conducted to collect primary data.

Bournemouth, which is located on the southern coast of England, is a well-known, award-winning, seaside destination (Giousmpasoglou & Hua, 2020). Seaside destinations have traditionally attracted the retirement market, which has created additional aging concerns for the region (Page et al., 2015). Bournemouth is dedicated to providing inclusive tourism services and aims to become a well-being tourism market. It has evolved into a popular destination for seniors to retire and spend their holidays (Page et al., 2015; 2017). Bournemouth presents as an ideal setting for exploring the interconnections between tourism and aging (Page et al., 2015) and was selected as the research area. Two studies were conducted, with the first study focusing on the demand side with senior tourists (ST) and the second focusing on the supply side with tourism service providers (SP). By gathering insights from both sides of value co-creation, these two studies provide a holistic perspective of the service aspects of the value co-creation nexus.

The respondents for the demand-side study were selected based on the following criteria: 1) UK residents; 2) aged 60 years or above; and 3) had tourism experience in

Bournemouth over the last six months. Previous studies have applied various age thresholds to define senior tourists (Wen et al., 2020). In the United Kingdom, citizens aged 60 years and above can receive assistance with their health expenses and qualify for public transport concessions (AgeUK, 2023). Accordingly, the minimum age for senior tourists in this study was set to 60 years. The interview protocol was comprised of four parts to address the research objectives (Appendix 1). First, the respondents were asked to recall their recent tourism experience. Second, they were asked to specify any interactions and co-creation activities with service staff or others that they encountered during their tourism experience. Third, they were asked to specify the kind of value they generated from their tourism experience and to provide some examples. Fourth, they were asked to specify the ideal social and physical environment for a tourism experience. The respondents were asked for their demographic information at the end of the interview.

Purposive sampling was used to determine eligible respondents. The respondents were recruited onsite at various tourism spaces, such as parks, restaurants, coffee shops, and beaches. These respondents were then asked to invite other qualified respondents in their networks following a snowball sampling approach. The respondents were selected based on theme development (Saunders et al., 2018). The physical condition, willingness, and abilities of the respondents to socialize and explore new things were considered to obtain a subjective and heterogeneous understanding of value co-creation experiences. The themes and thematic patterns were continuously evaluated until theoretical saturation was achieved, and the researchers stopped inviting new respondents at this point. A total of 31 face-to-face interviews were conducted from July to November 2019. Results of the data analysis show that the dimensions and patterns stabilized after interviewing the 24th respondent. The interviews with the seven other respondents did not result in substantive changes to the

codebook. All interviews lasted between 22 and 60 minutes, with an average length of 40 minutes. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents.

Insert Table 1 Here

Respondents for the supply-side study included tourism service providers, such as managers of hotels, restaurants, attractions, entertainment companies, shopping centers, and regional tourism development officials. The interview protocol comprised of four parts to address the research objectives (Appendix 1). First, the respondents were asked to describe the general service scope of their businesses/organizations and to narrate their service experiences with senior customers. Second, they were encouraged to think of any interactions and value co-creation activities that they or their service staff had with senior customers and to share their input within this process. They were asked to share their opinions on service design in their workplaces and to explain how design facilitates or inhibits co-creation activities with senior customers. Third, they were asked how it may be possible to foster the creation of inclusive and age-friendly service spaces. The respondents also shared their demographic information at the end of the interview. Purposive sampling was conducted to recruit qualified respondents. The researchers stopped inviting new respondents when there were no further new themes emerging from the data (Saunders et al., 2018). A total of 16 interviews were conducted from December 2019 to March 2020, with each interview lasting between 30 to 52 minutes. Table 2 presents the profile of the respondents. Given that the senior tourist respondents were interviewed before the COVID-19 outbreak, the service provider respondents were asked not take into account the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism.

Insert Table 2 Here

Thematic analysis was performed to systematically analyze the textual data, capture underlying meanings, and to identify the main themes for each attribute. The thematic

analysis also categorized the textual data to discover the emerging model (Braun & Clarke 2006). The first phase involved being familiarizing with the data by repeatedly reading and recording initial ideas regarding tourism activities, values, and environments. Preliminary codes and themes were then developed in the second phase. In the third phase, the themes were reviewed, and the potential contributions of different codes to distinct patterns were analyzed. A re-analysis was performed if necessary. Afterward, concrete themes related to the research aim were defined. A reflexive journal was kept throughout data collection and analysis to help the researchers reflect on their positionality and to discover potential codes/themes and patterns. The researchers initially tried to code the activities-values-environments of the senior respondents based on their interaction objects. However, the connection between activities and values was unclear. Specifically, the same activity or environment led to different values or generated different meaning for the respondents. Through continuous immersive reading and the reflection process, the researchers found that the value created by senior respondents could not be determined by the activity they participated in due to differences in their stage of aging and travel motives. Thus, the researchers used the meaning implied by the respondents in their comments to interpret their behavior on value creation (e.g., being able to organize tourism activities based on their will or to maintain social connections). The researchers' original understanding of active was also not be the same as some participants understanding. For example, "just walk" could be considered as active participation for some senior tourists. Some participants were also active only in certain aspects. A continuum framework with three levels (i.e., functional, social, and spiritual) was developed to capture the heterogeneity of the value co-creation process. Table 3 presents an example of the thematic analysis.

Insert Table 3 Here

The trustworthiness of the qualitative study was ensured by following a naturalistic inquiry approach developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of this research has been evaluated. First, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks were conducted to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability. The respondents were recruited from multiple channels and were interviewed on various sites to achieve data triangulation. Investigator triangulation was implemented by regularly conducting intra-team communication between the researchers to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Theoretical triangulation was implemented through the use of multiple theoretical foundations during data analysis, such as active aging and value co-creation. Insights from these theories assisted with an understanding of senior tourists' active participation and to develop the emerging model (Denzin, 1978). Two scholars specializing in senior tourism and value co-creation from the UK were invited to serve as disinterested peers to achieve peer debriefing. They joined the research team discussion during the interview protocol design and codebook structure build-up. Member checks were conducted by randomly selecting five transcripts and their summarized themes and sending them back to the corresponding respondents to ensure that their comments were interpreted appropriately. Research transferability was ensured by filing all research documents, including the interview protocols, respondent information sheets, respondent consent forms, socio-demographic information of the respondents, and coding patterns. This approach also enables future replication of the research in other contexts. A substantial audit trail that included discussion minutes, interview audios and transcripts, process instructions, and the reflexive journals of the researchers were also maintained to confirm the research process and procedures.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Senior tourists' value co-creation through tourism activities

Six themes related to the value of senior tourists' participating in tourism activities were identified from the interview data, namely, enjoyment, connectedness, mental vitality, independence, sense of belonging, and self-esteem. These themes were further categorized into functional, social, and spiritual levels.

#### 4.1.1 Theme 1: Independence - Being able to organize desired activities

Independence emerged as a central value in the lives of the senior respondents. Independence indicates that the respondents can decide and organize their tourism activities without relying on others. The respondents participated in various tourism activities, such as enjoying tea/coffee and food in restaurants, shopping, joining competitive activities (e.g., bowling, cricket, and gambling in casinos), or spending time alone on the beach during their travels.

As some respondents commented:

*“So we can do what we want to do. I don't always go on the organized trips. I can do just what I feel like doing, depending on where I am” (ST 16, female, 80-84, high school).*

*“People are different. You just have to adapt... We give them a list of activities that we can put in place for them, and they can take what they are looking for” (SP 4, female, 25-29, event coordinator).*

As independence frees people from the control or influence of others, the senior respondents were free to choose which tourism activities they wanted to do with others. These activity choices highlighted the autonomy of the respondents, not only in what they chose to do, but also in how they conducted these activities.



#### 4.1.2 Theme 2: Enjoyment - Being able to access and enjoy tourism activities

The respondents reported enjoyment as an essential value derived from tourism activities.

Seniors participated and enjoyed activities or environments based on a service delivery process designed by providers, which leads to physical health and mental awareness. As one respondent commented:

*“We went with my husband last week in a restaurant in town to try Italian cuisine, it was a family restaurant. The whole experience was very good, we had a great time, the food was excellent, the staff were so friendly” (ST 29, female, 60-64, college).*

The enjoyment value generated by the co-creation process represents the seniors' approach to happiness. Seniors may feel pleased and happy during the travel (hedonic happiness) or achieve optimal functioning and meaningful outcomes (eudaimonic happiness) through participating in tourism activities.

Being accessible and helpful were identified as the basic requirements for service providers. One respondent mentioned:

*“I think a lot of the issues are about access, like steep steps. You have to go upstairs to the toilets in some coffee shops, and that’s not possible for me” (ST 14, female, 70-74, secondary high school).*

Most respondents also mentioned a comfortable servicescape and friendly staff were essential conditions that led to their enjoyment of tourism activities. Attitude and respect were also cited as key factors that may influence their independence perception.

#### 4.1.3 Theme 3: Connectedness - Maintaining social connections

Seniors often travel with their family or friends. Most respondents considered spending time with family or friends as a major element of tourism activities. They explained that connectedness was derived from interacting with people. One service provider mentioned that seniors want to maintain their social lives after retirement:

*“They talk because very often they are lonely and they are trying to spend a day. If they come for a coffee, they will talk about the news. They will talk about common topics or they’ll talk about their garden or the weather, but they talk for the sake of the conversation. They want the social aspect of it” (SP 6, male, 40-44, hotel).*

*“I think most people go out with a friend or a partner or a husband or a wife. That’s your main social contact” (ST 14, female, 70-74, secondary high school).*

Providing suitable resources to facilitate socializing through tourism activities is essential. Seniors are keen to make new friends and expand their social networks in addition to maintaining their original social circles. Interactions with friends led to experience sharing and a sense of companionship for seniors and an active social life.

#### 4.1.4 Theme 4: Sense of belonging - Sense of belonging to groups or places

The senior respondents derived a sense of belonging from their social activities, such as meeting their friends or visiting certain places. In addition to maintaining the social aspects of one’s life, a sense of belonging represents one’s identity in a certain group or space. Gaining “lifetime friends” with whom they can share similar experiences brought these respondents a sense of “resonance”. They enjoyed belonging to like-minded groups and sharing similar experiences or memories:

*“We were celebrating together because we don’t see each other very often. We had a good time together here in the weekend... we have common interests. We like to do the same things. Being lifetime friends, we have a history, a background together” (ST 9, male, 60-64, college).*

The senior and service provider respondents both underscored the importance of feeling “like home” or “like family”. Service providers create suitable opportunities by designing appropriate social environments. One respondent mentioned:

*“Places where seniors like us get to live in a nice and friendly environment is a place they can feel like home rather than feel lonely and forgotten. We need environments that are like family, people to interact with, and someone to take care of us when we can’t” (ST 28, male, 80-84, high school).*

Tourism service providers and staff play important roles in supporting interactions with staff and with customers. A supportive environment is required to ensure that service delivery is efficient and that the level of support provided is high.

#### 4.1.5 Theme 5: Mental vitality - Maintaining mental activity and new learning experiences

Tourism activities can promote mental vitality in seniors. Many senior respondents thought that exploring something new during a trip was important. They argued that having the opportunity to learn new things kept them active and engaged. As some respondents mentioned:

*“It’s nice to have some people of your own age group so that you can relate, but if you have a mix of ages, that can also make for some interesting experiences and learning experiences” (ST 30, male, 60-64, high school).*

*“Go cycling to look around and have some opportunity to do the sightseeing” (ST 8, female, 70-74, college).*

Feeling of exploration represents learning “something different”. Some competitive or strategic activities allowed seniors to practice and maintain their intellectual skills.

#### 4.1.6 Theme 6: Self-esteem - Self-efficacy, reflection, and congenial living

Self-esteem represents the spiritual self-perception or meaning of life derived from tourism activities. The senior respondents reported feelings of “freedom” and “being young” when they were making friends and travelling:

*“Socializing with younger people makes me feel young again” (ST 2, male, 60-65, secondary high school).*

Engaging in some activities, especially competitions and hobbies, encouraged seniors to devote their efforts to these activities and feel a sense of self-achievement. Self-esteem is also related to the mental status of seniors, with some respondents mentioning that they were “slowing down” as they age:

*“When I travel, I am overwhelmed by the beauty around me. I had a shoulder operation a year ago. When I went on holiday with a friend and stood on top of the moors, I felt I was free again” (ST 14, female, 70-74, secondary high school).*

*“My hobby is photography. When on holiday, I’m always looking for a nice shop that I can enlarge pictures to A3 size and frame them. The photos I took during my holidays decorate the walls of our living room” (ST 6, male, 80-84, secondary high school).*

Seniors often generate intellectual reflections based on their experiences or observations in their travels. Some senior respondents explained that they care about societal and cultural good:

*“I think a lot of us worked all our life... then suddenly you’re not needed in that role, but we are all human beings and still need to be needed. That’s one of the reasons I dip into the museum regularly and volunteer as a commentator for kids” (ST 14, female, 70-74, secondary high school).*

*“I think we all try to keep our national history going and appreciate the wonderful buildings of the National Trust. When you go there, you meet a lot of other retired people, as well as young visitors, and some of them are from overseas. I’m nearly always there. I love to share the history and culture behind our heritage with them” (ST 13, female, 65-69, college).*

The tourism industry listens to senior customers voice, appreciates their needs, and tries to make them feel wanted by designing welcoming products and services. These products and

services provide seniors with spiritual experiences that can affect their ways of thinking or self-perception. Some service providers shared the following:

*“Senior visitors have to have a voice, and we should give them that voice. It is still not there yet. We need to have feedback from them” (SP 3, female, 20-24, museum).*

*“It just makes them feel wanted. When they come through the door, make them feel special” (SP 11, female, 40-44, hotel).*

The six themes of the active aging process identified from the interview data can be categorized into three levels and involve a combination of continuum- and development-oriented activities (Figure 1). Therefore, the following propositions were proposed:

*Proposition 1:* The six themes of senior tourists’ value co-creation through tourism activities can be categorized into functional, social, and spiritual levels. The functional level refers to seniors being able to organize desired activities or to access and enjoy tourism activities. The social level refers to seniors being able to maintain their social connections or generate a sense of belonging to groups or places. The spiritual level refers to seniors being able to maintain mental activities and learn new experiences or feel self-efficacy, reflection, and congenial living.

*Proposition 2:* The value co-creation process could be led by tourism service providers, which emphasizes seniors can maintain their physical, social, and mental functions by participating in tourism activities. Values can be co-created as seniors participate in the service delivery process designed by service providers. Seniors can obtain enjoyment, connectedness, and mental vitality values through this process.

*Proposition 3:* The value co-creation process could also be determined by senior tourists, which emphasizes the willingness and ability of seniors to organize their own activities and experiences. Seniors can achieve active aging when they personalize their tourism

activities in a way that fulfills their interests. Seniors can create independence, a sense of belonging, and self-esteem values through this process.

Continuum-oriented active aging (as stated in Proposition 2) illustrates that active aging can be achieved when senior tourists make efforts to maintain their physical and mental states and keep themselves connected to others. Tourism service providers led the value co-creation process. Value can be co-created by seniors who are “pulled” to participate in services that are designed and provided by suppliers to fit their contexts, circumstances, needs, and requirements.

Development-oriented active aging (as stated in Proposition 3) emphasizes the willingness and ability of seniors to organize their own activities and experiences. Value co-creation in this context is determined by senior tourists. Seniors’ “push” services and activities toward co-creating value and improving their quality of life. In this case, the value co-creation process between senior tourists and service providers can be characterized as “pull” and “push”.

Insert Figure 1 Here

The findings indicate that co-creation experiences and the practices of senior tourists have functional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Although people may compromise for their declining functional capacities and disengage from certain dimensions of active aging as they age (i.e., functional dimension) (Zaidi & Howse, 2017), they can still keep themselves active and develop new activities in other dimensions (i.e., social and spiritual dimensions) according to their preferences, abilities, competence, and will.

The findings also emphasize the role of spiritual value co-creation in the active aging process, which allows seniors to cope with their functional and social disengagement. Previous studies have shown that spiritual development enables seniors to cope with losses associated with their physical well-being and social interactions and to defend themselves

from age-related aggression (Moal-Ulvoas, 2017). Spirituality can be a resource for improved aging, and understanding the spiritual aspect of seniors may support successful aging (Moal-Ulvoas, 2017).

The findings are also consistent with the arguments of various active aging theories and provide empirical evidence from a tourism perspective. Continuum- and development-orientated active aging values support continuity theory, which suggests that seniors maintain their lifestyle by adopting strategies related to their life experiences to strengthen their physical, social, and spiritual needs (Atchley, 1989). Senior tourists actualize active aging by engaging in various types of value co-creation. This finding echoes the arguments of effort recovery theory and conservation of resources theory. Tourism offers seniors the opportunity to relax, stay away from work, and embrace novel experiences, thereby enhancing wellness in later life (Gu et al., 2016).

The various orientations of active aging also determine the formats of value co-creation. Guided by CDL, Heinonen et al. (2010) argued that customers may proactively create value (auto-creation) rather than passively being invited to co-create value with service providers. Each value requires their participation to accomplish personal goals, and this process may extend the boundaries of service interactions. Frochot and Batat (2013) proposed a continuum ranging from self-organized activities to business-organized activities that reflect the various degrees of effort that customers devote to the value co-creation process.

#### 4.2 Senior tourists' value co-creation with different stakeholders

Active aging can be achieved through different values that senior tourists co-create with various stakeholders. The senior respondents mentioned that they interacted with service staff, fellow tourists, locals, service providers, and policymakers during their trips and jointly created a range of active aging values. Figure 2 illustrates the senior tourists co-created

values with different stakeholders at functional, social, and spiritual levels. These findings can guide tourism service providers and relevant policy makers to facilitate value co-creation.

#### 4.2.1 Service staff

The interaction of senior tourists with service staff during their travel is an important part of their travel experience that enables the co-creation of functional, social, and spiritual values.

Senior tourists can receive personalized services by interacting with service staff and can enhance the efficiency and flexibility of the service process.

*“...check after your well-being, make sure you are getting what you want and just asking and making you feel welcome when you go in” (ST 20, male, 60-64, college).*

Service staff can also help promote a family feeling and sense of intimacy when socializing with senior tourists.

*“I prefer places where you know who is working there, who is cooking, who owns the place etc. and you call them by their names” (ST 29, female, 60-64, college).*

Senior tourists can feel that they are being cared for and respected at a spiritual level when they receive proper services from well-trained staff.

*“People treat us just nice, respectful with customer service. Yes, I'm pleased and happy” (ST 9, male, 60-64, college).*

Both the senior tourist and service provider respondents mentioned that effective staff training is necessary to cultivate co-creation between senior tourists and tourism service staff.

*“Customer service is a big priority of ours, so we want people when they come in to feel welcome. We want them to feel relaxed. We don't want people to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable or that they don't really know what they're doing. Our staff puts people at ease as they come through... They want it to be easy to get into” (SP 10, male, 35-39, museum).*

#### 4.2.2 Peer tourists



Most senior tourists travel together with their peers and companions, such as husbands, wives, partners, friends, children, and other relatives. They accompany one another, cultivate a sense of belonging, catch up with one another, share their experiences and enjoyment, and maintain their social networks, all of which contribute to active aging. One senior tourist participant stated:

*“We're going over the head, we're going to the Purbeck walks with the Highcliffe walkers. We're going to Purbeck Hills today... and off we go there, and it's lovely. We have a meal afterwards, and it's so nice” (ST 12, female, 70-74, high school).*

Tourism service providers can design quiet social venues for senior tourists to facilitate peer co-creation where senior tourists can regularly gather and have a chat.

*“For the elderly, because they are looking for more of a quiet space, we have the conservatory and the garden where they can stay together, enjoy the sun, play cards or domino together, and read the newspaper” (SP 4, female, 25-29, event coordinator).*

#### 4.2.3 Other tourists/customers

Customer-to-customer value co-creation plays an important role in shaping the tourism experience of senior tourists and encouraging them to stay active. Tourism acts as a natural social platform that provides plenty of encounter opportunities for tourists. Senior tourists find company by interacting or socializing with other tourists, making friends, and sharing their excitement in their travel. As one participant stated:

*“In that way, you get to know other people from the social circles of your friends, which is a good thing... Social life is what you make it. It's not sitting around all the time. Once you get out there, you enjoy yourself” (ST 24, male, 70-74, high school).*

Senior tourists can also obtain updated information and exchange new knowledge through conversations. Immersing themselves in a broader social bubble can help with a feeling of inclusion, energized, and confident about themselves and life.

*“When I meet younger people, they keep me energetic, and I prefer it rather than going to places where everyone is quiet and just eat or drink” (ST 28, male, 80-84, high school).*

Although customer-to-customer value co-creation is mainly determined by tourists themselves, service providers can still provide suitable and facilitating social spaces and host social events that can encourage tourists to gather and talk to one another.

*“Then we have a social space, the lounge, where everybody meets everyone, and I think it’s a very good idea... In this social space, they get the idea of what kind of events we put in place and make new friends. They will be able to find out and see more of what we had put in place for them” (SP 4, female, 25-29, event coordinator).*

#### 4.2.4 Locals

Similar to tourists from other age groups, senior tourists meet locals in different locations and destinations, fostering active aging values. Exchanging stories, having fun together, and making new friends can make seniors feel socially active. Knowing people from other cultures and backgrounds can also build up their confidence and self-esteem.

*“We were camping. The local man next to us said, ‘I am going up to Scafell Pike, and I want to be there at dawn. Do you want to come with us?’ We said, ‘Yes please!’ It was a long way, and he knew the way. He was an expert. We stood on Eskdale and saw the sun come out over the mountains” (ST 13, female, 65-69, college).*

Destinations can develop conducive leisure spaces to promote positive tourist–resident social contact that can accommodate the needs of both locals and tourists.

*“It’s great to meet the locals. We are all different but also the same. Whether I know I am gay, she is lesbian, she is Hindu, the other one is Muslim, I am Christian. We should all come together and interact. There should be no boundary in between here” (ST 11, male, 80-84, high school).*

Promoting tourism development and an inclusive community can also educate the locals about the importance of being open and welcoming towards tourists. Engaging residents through various participation programs, such as volunteer schemes and decision-making processes, can also encourage additional co-creation opportunities between tourists and locals.

#### 4.2.5 Service providers

Although service providers can co-create value with senior tourists through their employees, other active aging values can be co-created through non-social approaches, such as service environments. Senior tourists can feel relaxed, comfortable, reminisce, and achieve inner peace when interacting in well-designed tourism service environments.

*“It’s really nice to get away from digital experiences and be in a physical space where all your senses are being engaged and where you are being asked to look at all these wonderful things, use your brain to engage in emotions, and all those kinds of things... They want an educational learning experience” (SP 10, male, 35-39, museum).*

Accessibility, including its information and physical aspects, is another important value that can be co-created in tourism services.

*“One of the most important things for the elderly is mobility. If you could set up things that are accessible, they can retain their mobility. If they can get to those accessible things for a longer time, then they’ll partake in it” (SP 5, male, 55-59, retirement village).*

*“We are trying to approach them in a friendly way and to personalize our services every time. For example, we have created special discounts for them, and we are offering them special foods that are gluten free or low in cholesterol... We make great efforts to create desirable services for this group, and we expect more governmental and policy support through different schemes” (SP 9, male, 30-34, food and beverage).*

The industry also called for more governmental support, such as facilitating schemes, in order for them to improve their services for this tourist age group.

#### 4.2.6 Policymakers

As they continue to age, senior tourists may require various support conditions for travel. For this tourist group, health and safety are top priorities in their travel decision making. These functional values can be co-created by senior tourists with the relevant policymakers at both their point of origin and desired destinations.

*“One big issue for the tourism and hospitality sector for senior customers is if the older customer comes into town, whether it’s on holiday whatever, feeling safe and secure. That’s one of the key issues. In order for the tourism and hospitality people to attract it, obviously there’s a price and convenience too, but a lot of it is about feeling safe and secure” (SP 12, male, 55-59, private sector economic and city development).*

Destinations can also co-create the travel confidence of senior tourists by promoting accessible and socially inclusive destinations.

*“This is true of any customer, but certainly true for seniors. It’s almost creating a home away from home, and if they don’t feel as if they’re at home or as if people care about them or are interested in them or whatever, that will be a real inhibitor” (SP 12, male, 55-59, private sector economic and city development).*

Insert Figure 2 Here

This study delineated value co-creation routines between senior tourists and other participants in tourism. The findings show that senior tourists can interact with service staff, peer tourists, other tourists, locals, service providers, and tourism policymakers in their travel, thus jointly creating a wide variety of active aging values. Although previous studies have generated insights regarding the application of value co-creation in tourist behavior, very few have considered the concurrent and multiple value co-creation activities of tourists

with other tourism participants (Fan et al., 2020). This study also specified the various routines through which values were co-created.

The findings of this work echo those of previous studies, which stated that tourists' social contact with residents, service staff (Fan et al., 2019; 2020), and other customers (Rihova et al., 2015) can lead to positive travel attitudes and beneficial outcomes. This study also responds to the contact hypothesis of Allport (1979), which proposed that social contact can lead to positive outcomes only if certain conditions are satisfied, such as equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from authorities. In gerontology, it has been advocated that it is the responsibility of society to value seniors' physical and cognitive functions (Martinson & Berridge, 2015). Factors such as neighborhood environment, social support, community-based services, and policymakers should play a role to effectively support the senior aging process (Bigonnesse & Chaudhury, 2020). As a result, the values co-created with tourism service providers and the broader society, through policymakers, act as conditional factors that allow active aging positive values to occur in tourism.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has explored how seniors' co-create value through tourism to achieve active aging. First, six value themes were identified, namely, enjoyment, connectedness, mental vitality, independence, a sense of belonging, and self-esteem, which were further classified into functional, social, and spiritual levels. Second, a value co-creation nexus was established to describe continuum- (service provider led) and development- (senior tourist led) oriented active aging values that highlight the differentiated efforts made by senior tourists to achieve active aging. Third, this study also identified the different value co-creation routines of senior tourists with various tourism stakeholders, their corresponding values, and the required co-creation conditions. Senior tourists interact with service staff, fellow tourists, locals, service providers, and policymakers in their trips and jointly create a wide variety of values that support active aging.

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to aging transdisciplinary research by incorporating knowledge from marketing and management into the field of gerontology. From a CDL perspective, this study looked at gerontology for theoretical support to understand value co-creation and its significance for senior travel, thus contributing to the literature on value co-creation and active aging theories. First, by capturing the values of senior tourists through their participation in tourism activities and then linking these values to different actors and processes, this study is the first to integrate the value co-creation paradigm into active aging theories in the tourism context. Findings proposed an integrated interpretation of the interplay between activity theory and disengagement theory. Active aging supports a continuous process of disengagement and re-engagement. People can proactively remain active and develop new activities to facilitate functional, social, and spiritual value co-creation as they

age. A close connection between different activities and values also offers diverse solutions to achieve social inclusion for seniors.

Second, although the co-creation continuum has been proposed in general experience studies (Durrande-Moreau et al., 2012), the majority of the co-creation studies assume that various participants exert homogenous or equal effort in value co-creation. By proposing the value co-creation nexus, this study illustrated that value co-creation in tourism can be led by service providers and senior tourists. The concepts of continuum and development-oriented active aging and the push and pull of active aging supplement senior motivation theories to enhance activity and boost quality of life (Kim et al., 2015). This nexus challenges the unified and homogenous assumption regarding stakeholder co-creation and considers value co-creation in a dynamic and interactive way. The value co-creation nexus further offers an innovative view to understand the efforts of co-creators in the actualization of a joint value creation process (Frochot & Batat, 2013).

Third, this study conceptualizes the active aging process through tourism participation. The six themes of values derived from this study enriched the value typologies for senior tourism activities. Seniors can achieve active aging through specific value types based on their own preferences, abilities, and personal conditions. Moreover, fulfilling spiritual values is highlighted as an effective approach to cope with losses associated with physical or social aspects (Moal-Ulvoas, 2017). Identifying the different values, co-creation processes, and co-creation efforts of stakeholders extends CDL research to the senior tourism service field. Values co-created in leisure and tourism activities are not only framed to their activity duration or service process but also contribute to the continuous well-being of seniors and eventually lead to meaningful aging.

## 5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study also provide rich practical implications for tourism service providers, society, and governments. An aging society is one of the biggest challenges identified in the UK government's industrial strategy (GOV.UK, 2019). This study provides empirical pathways to support social inclusion and active aging. The findings encourage seniors to seek a meaningful life proactively by participating in different tourism activities according to their own competences and preferences.

Many tourism and leisure services are embedded in communities and are reachable for seniors who require easy access and a feel-at-home environment. Certain services, such as recreation areas (e.g., parks and beaches), coffee shops, afternoon tea outlets in hotels, and service sectors in public leisure spaces, should address these needs through innovative design, special promotions, and targeted products. A quiet chatting corner is favored by seniors as they physically cannot communicate well with their social groups in noisy spaces. Set menus for seniors can also be a great promotion during quiet times to generate further business from this market. Having well-trained staff who can show empathy to senior customers and their needs (e.g., inclusion, respect, recognition, warm welcome, autonomy, and soft approaches) is even more important than delivering tangible services. Accommodating the needs of seniors in the tourism context can unlock great market potential and value add to society.

Given that different types of value require different degrees of effort from service providers to actualize the co-creation process, practitioners can design different servicescapes and social spaces to lead or facilitate the value co-creation process according to their own features. For example, clear instructions and ready-to-help, well-trained staff may help senior tourists organize their own activities and agendas. The availability of various activities, well-planned itineraries, and sufficient choices can also encourage participation and create a personalized experience for these tourists.



Governments can also encourage senior tourism practices by facilitating and promoting inclusive policies, tax reductions, start-up funding, and professional training to encourage suitable services or products for seniors. An in-depth understanding of the needs of seniors enables stakeholders to co-create values while ensuring that seniors are reachable and informed about the suitable services, events, and activities. The concept of active aging is critical for seniors but may also help other generations to foster an age-friendly environment. Thus, the continuous education and promotion efforts initiated by community and aging organizations, such as AgeUK and the Centre for Ageing Better, may help raise awareness about active aging within society. Active aging is an effective approach to achieve social inclusion. Participating in tourism activities engages seniors in social inclusion across all functional, social, and spiritual aspects. Communities should value the role of tourism activities in establishing an inclusive and supportive environment for active aging. This study also offers timely implications for aging organizations and government officials to formulate active aging strategies when seniors are limited by physical exercise/quarantine policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. When functional activities and social interactions are restricted, seniors may be encouraged to focus on developing spiritual values to maintain active aging.

### 5.3 Limitations and future suggestions

Some limitations of this study should be noted. First, as a qualitative study, the conclusions generated from UK seniors may require further examination in other cultural contexts. Second, data were collected from the senior respondents before the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas service provider data were collected before and during the pandemic. Although no significant differences induced by the pandemic were identified during the analysis, the stability of the conceptual model could be validated in a post-pandemic period. Second, using the perspectives of seniors and service providers limited the findings of this study. Future

research could consider the perspectives of other actors within this service ecosystem, such as governments and communities, to design effective and desirable activities and policies for seniors. Third, this study focuses on those seniors who have participated in various activities in their later years. Given that a less active senior group may have low satisfaction with their well-being, both their well-being and the barriers they face to engage in active aging should be evaluated separately.

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Table 1. Demand side (Senior tourists) interviewee profiles

Interviewee	Gender	Age range	Marital status	Education
1	Female	85+	Married with children	High school
2	Male	60-64	Divorced	Secondary high school
3	Female	85+	Widowed	College
4	Female	85+	Single	Secondary high school
5	Male	70-74	Married with children	College
6	Male	80-84	Widowed	Secondary high school
7	Female	70-74	Married with children	Bachelor's degree
8	Female	70-74	Married with children	College
9	Male	60-64	Married with children	College
10	Female	85+	Married with children	High school
11	Male	80-84	Widowed	High school
12	Female	70-74	Married with children	High school
13	Female	65-69	Married with children	College
14	Female	70-74	Single	Secondary high school
15	Female	65-69	Married with children	High school
16	Female	80-84	Divorced	High school
17	Male	80-84	Divorced	Bachelor's degree
18	Female	80-84	Married with children	Bachelor's degree
19	Male	60-64	Married with children	Secondary high school
20	Male	60-64	Married with children	College
21	Female	80-84	Married with children	High school
22	Female	65-69	Married with children	College
23	Male	85+	Married with children	Bachelor's degree
24	Male	70-74	Divorced	High school
25	Male	70-74	Widowed	Secondary high school
26	Female	70-74	Married with children	High school
27	Male	60-64	Single	Secondary high school
28	Male	80-84	Widowed	High school
29	Female	60-64	Married with children	College
30	Male	60-64	Married with children	High school
31	Male	60-64	Married with children	Secondary high school

Table 2. Supply side interviewee profiles

Interviewee	Gender	Age range	Sector of work	Education
1	Male	30-34	Food and beverage	Bachelor's degree
2	Female	25-29	Hotel	Master's degree
3	Female	20-24	Museum	Bachelor's degree
4	Female	25-29	Event coordinator	Bachelor's degree
5	Male	55-59	Retirement vacation village	High school diploma
6	Male	40-44	Hotel	Bachelor's degree
7	Male	25-29	Hotel	Bachelor's degree
8	Female	20-24	Food and beverage	Master's degree
9	Male	30-34	Food and beverage	Bachelor's degree
10	Male	35-39	Museum	Bachelor's degree
11	Female	40-44	Hotel	College
12	Male	55-59	Chief operating officer (Private sector economic and city development)	College
13	Female	30-34	Museums	Bachelor's degree
14	Female	30-34	Tourism management official	Master's degree
15	Female	20-24	Tourism management official	Bachelor's degree
16	Female	40-44	Retirement vacation village	High school diploma

Table 3. An example for thematic analysis

Values	Themes	Value level	Active aging type
Maintaining social bond New social connections Sharing Exchanging Company	Connectedness	Social value	Continuum-oriented
Similar minds Being cared Home feeling Feel comfortable Security	Sense of belonging	Social value	Development-oriented

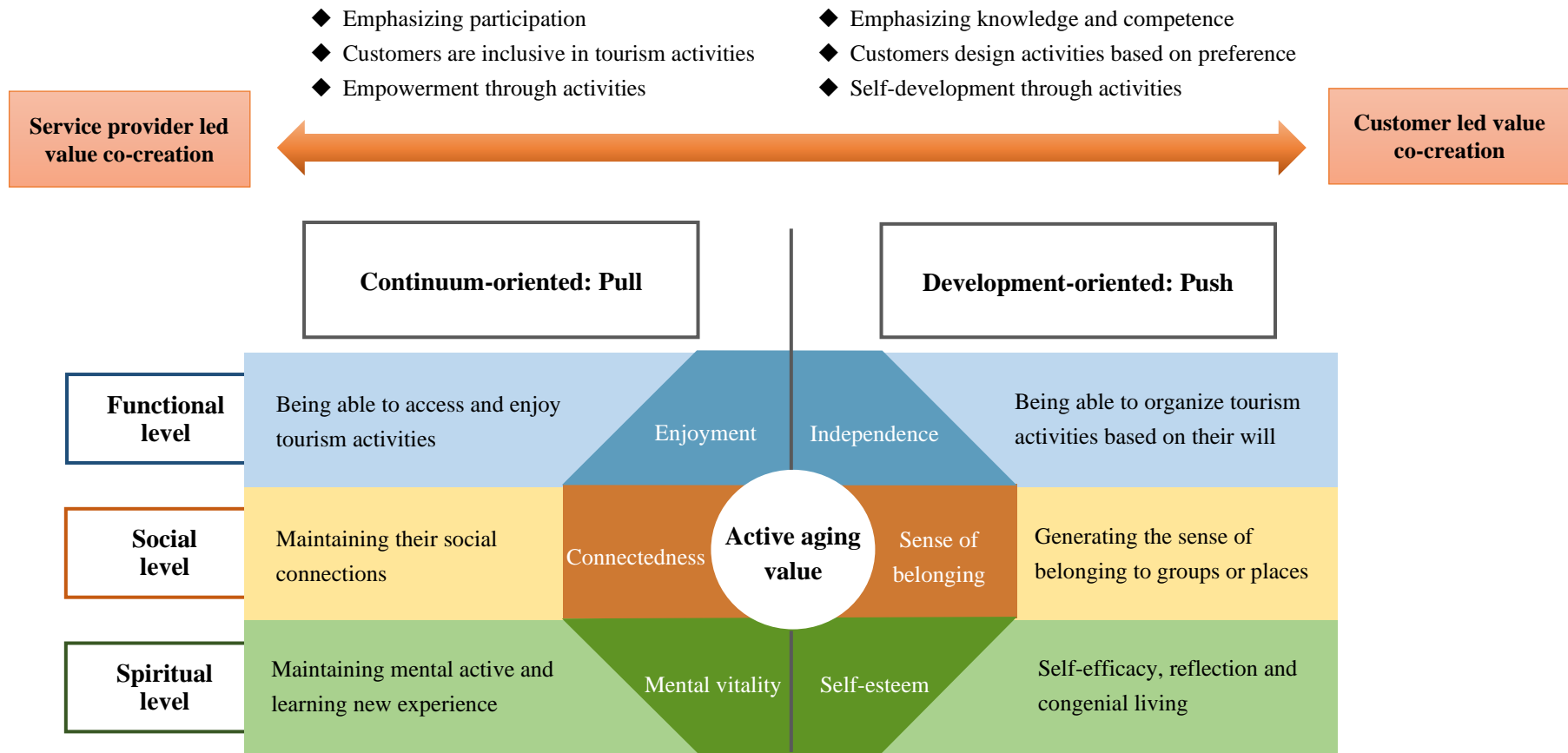


Figure 1 Value co-creation nexus towards active aging

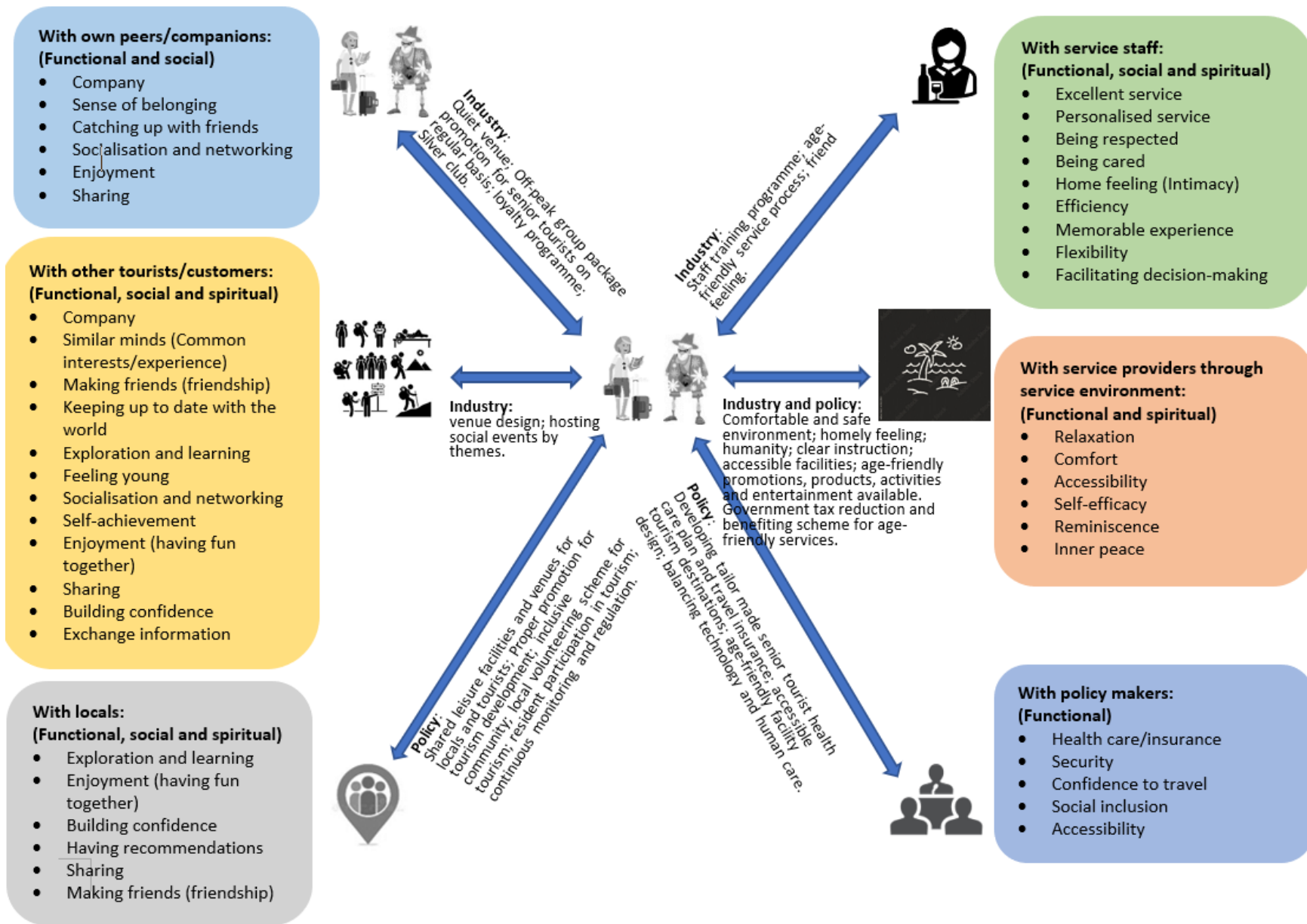


Figure 2 Presentation of examples of senior tourists' value co-creation routines

Note: Points listed in each co-creation category are only examples to illustrate the values and are not intended to be comprehensive.

Appendix 1.

Section	Interview questions for active elderly	Interview questions for service provider
Tourism experience	Could you describe your tourism experience in Bournemouth?	Do you have any senior customers in your outlets? How's your service experience with them?
Co-creation activities/interaction	Have you interacted with service staffs or the others? Could you describe the process?  What activities did you participate? What kinds of efforts or skills did you perform during the activity? Did you collaborate with service staffs or the others?	Could you describe interactions between the senior customers and your service staff?  Could you identify any co-creation activities between the senior customers and your service staff?
Value co-created	What kinds of value do you think have been co-created/created through tourism activities?  Did you physically/socially/mentally engage in any tourism activity? How did you feel?	What kinds of value do you want to provide to seniors?  Please explain the value co-created and the effort that seniors perform in the active elderly's service experience.
Environment factors	Could you identify any factors that facilitate or inhibit the value co-creation in your experience?  What kinds of social/physical environment do you desire in your tourism experience?	Could you name any factors that could facilitate or inhibit the co-creation activities in your workplace? How might services be designed?  Do you have any suggestions regarding building up an age-friendly social space for the active elderly in tourism service industry? Any difficulties?

