

An Exploratory Study on Leisure Activities Demand of Elderly in Taiwan

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Abstract

Recent years, due to the aging society, the elderly has more and more free time. In light of this, this study aims at understanding the lifestyle, personality, entertainment, the demands for recreational activities, and dietary habits of the elderly through interview and observation. Based on a two-phase content analysis of data collected from 24 interviews and observations with elderly, the study identified nine aspects of demands in elderly leisure activities. The identification of these aspects will have implications for both researchers and practitioners in this industry.

Keywords: Leisure Activity Demand, Elderly, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, the age group of 65 and above represented more than 7 percent of the total population in Taiwan, qualifying it as an “aging society” defined by the World Health Organization. Until the end of 2009, people over the age of 65 have increased to 10.63% of the total population (Dept of Household Registration, Ministry of the Interior, 2010). On the other hand, the younger population in Taiwan has begun to decrease, that means the society has more tendency to have fewer children, while trending towards an aging population.

As people started to have higher standard of living, they take more serious about arranging their leisure activities. An aging society means the elderly has more free time after retirement, so their leisure life as well as consumer market have become a pressing issue. So far, the elderly focuses on promoting the wellbeing of physical and mental health. Leisure activities is very important to the older population, since such activities could keep the body functioning and promote self-recognition. Once they are into regular recreational activities, they will gain more self-esteem. The activities could calm their moods, increase their physical capability, slow down the aging process, improve the quality of life, and reduce medical expenditure. The advantages for the elderly to participate in these activities include promoting brain function, preventing memory loss, fighting off disease induced disability, and improving nerve

conduction (Lian, 2002). Recreational activities that involve more or less movement, either way, both could be of great advantage to the elderly. This reaffirmed the importance of leisure activities to the elderly population.

The literature review in the past only scraped the surface about elderly people's leisure activities. There are still some parts that needed further discussion. Therefore, this study is focused on leisure demands of the elderly to further understand these leisure activities. In particular, aims at understanding the lifestyle, personality, entertainment, the demands for recreational activities, and dietary habits of the elderly. The study investigates this subject through in-depth interviews and observations with the elderly who has leisure activity. The research findings have implications for both academic researchers and managers in this industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the proportion of older people in populations worldwide has rapidly increased, the number of studies that have focused on this demographic group has also increased (Gorn and Claxton, 1985; Zaff and Devlin, 1998). Past studies have had various definitions regarding recreation, and this research has outlined them as followed: leisure activities means that individuals willingly take up activities that could benefit their mental, physical, and social health during free time. In such activities, individuals could be satisfied, happy, and self-enrichment in a leisure state (Zhan, 2001). Leisure is both objective and subjective. It is objective when participating one or multiple leisure activities, while subjective leisure means individual obtaining inner satisfaction through activities (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). This study review the literature regarding the elderly population's leisure activities can be divided into three general categories: (i) research that related to classification of leisure activities; (ii) research related to motivation of leisure activities; (iii) research related to demand and obstacle issues.

In classification of leisure activities, the type of leisure activities the elderly participates is pretty much the same with other groups. The only difference is the degree of participation and that the elderly tend to do activities that are pure recreational or which require less effort, such as watching TV and making tea.

According to Li (2007) study, moderate exercise could help blood circulation, improve body function, and prevent diseases. This way, the elderly could cope with the daily routines and not see themselves aging, therefore, living a healthy and happy life. This is even more so for chronic patients, where exercise could improve their conditions.

In all of the demands from the elderly, leisure activities is of most importance. Once the elderly get themselves into regular leisure activities, they could gain higher self-esteem, calm their moods, increase their physical capability, slow down the aging process, improve the quality of life, and reduce medical expenditure. The advantages for the elderly to participate these activities, include promoting brain function, preventing memory loss, fighting off disease induced disability, improving nerve conduction, and more (Lian, 2002). A study conducted by Alexandris and Carroll (1997) found that gender does not have an effect on the motives. However, the motive will decrease as the age increases. Especially for the elderly, the older they get, the less motivation they have to participate in leisure activities. On the

other hand, Hong, Kim and Lee (1999) conducted a study on the obstacles stopping the elderly into taking these activities. The reason for men is due to the lack of family encouragement, education degree, age, and poor knowledge. The same results have been found on women as well.

In all, when the elderly participate in leisure activities, they could on one hand ease their mind and let go some steam, while on the other, strengthen their body, prevent disease, and promote body function, achieving a happy and healthy life. When participating, they must consider their health condition, and avoid too much excitement. They should be optimistic, and the activities should be done within the range that time and economy allow.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

In view of the ages of the research subjects, difficulties were envisaged in collecting information through a traditional questionnaire survey. Therefore, this study adopted qualitative research method. Through semi-structured, one-on-one, in-depth interviews and observations would be a more appropriate data-collection methodology. This methodology allowed the interviewees to speak openly and freely, and thus facilitated identification of the demands and preferences of their leisure activities.

Research Subjects and Procedures

This study surveyed the elderly in Taipei aged 55 and above, and those who are financially sustainable as well as having the ability to move around. In all, a total of 24 subjects (20 for in-depth interview and 4 for observation) were invited to participate in this study.

Before the formal interviews were performed, a pilot study was conducted among members of the research team to ensure the appropriateness of the proposed questions in the semi-structured interviews. The final version of the guidelines for the interviews included questions on: (i) interviewees' personal backgrounds; (ii) A whole day's schedule; (iii) Usual leisure activities; (iv) The demands in these activities; (v) The obstacle during these activities; and (vi) Dietary habits. The guidelines for the observations included: (i) People – the elderly aged 55 and above; (ii) Event – the type of activity; (iii) Time – write down the time of activity; (iv) Place – the places they go to the most; (v) Object – carry-on accessories.

Data Analyses

All interviews and observations were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions and observational records were then encoded into manuscript files for content analysis. In accordance with Weber (1990), word analysis, sentence analysis, theme analysis, paragraph analysis, and whole-text analysis were used for this content analysis. In particular, theme analysis is an appropriate approach for analyzing opinions and proportions, especially when discussing values, beliefs, and attitudes (Kassarjian, 1977).

Two phases of content analysis were employed in this study. In the first phase, manuscripts of whole interviews were analyzed into units (themes). These themes were then placed into the appropriate

category of the demand of leisure activities. In the second phase of content analysis, manuscripts of whole observations were analyzed into themes by Five Behavior Models which developed by the Innovative DigiTech-Enabled Applications & Services Institute (2010), which is expressed through drawing and the tool includes interaction, sequence, instrument, cultural, physical, and more. An overall understanding of elderly preferences, type, demands, and obstacles of leisure activities then developed from the results of these two phases of content analysis.

RESULTS

First Phase of Content Analysis

In the first phase of content analysis, 20 interview manuscripts were analyzed into themes. They ware: (i) types of elderly leisure activities; (ii) demands of elderly leisure activities; and (iii) obstacles of elderly leisure activities. Table 1 shows the types of elderly leisure activities.

Table 1 the types of elderly leisure activities

Leisure activities	Motionless	Expanding knowledge	Listen to the radio, appreciate music and movie, and read history books, paper and magazine
		Molding one’s temperament	Play Chinese zither, write calligraphy and Confucian classics, do morning recitation, gardening, and enjoy the scenery
		Stretching	Sit on a massage chair, do yoga, enjoy SPA treatment, take sauna baths, and take hot spring baths
		Networking	Chatting, making tea
		Brainstorming	Study wind energy, play Sudoku
	dynamic	Ball games	Play golf, ping pong ball, tennis, and basketball
		Gymnastics	Soft yoga, folkdance, aerobics, Tai Chi, Yuanji dance, Qigong, gymnastics, body-building, and shadow boxing
		Fitness	Running, walking, walking in a slower pace, strolling
		Spread oneself	Swimming, riding a bicycle, playing chin-up bars, swinging one’s arms
		Entertainment	Fish for shrimps, karaoke, play cards
	Outing	Traveling, hiking	

As shown in table 1, the leisure activities nowadays have become more versatile. The number of options has increased due to a growing aging population. This study classified these leisure activities into motionless and dynamic, and we could understand their preferences from the type of activities they involve into.

This study classified the demands for elderly leisure activities into: environmental, social, mental, healthy, sensory, facility, and economic. These seven types were later divided into fourteen items from the interviewees’ data, shown as Table 2.

Table 2 the demands of leisure activities

Aspects	Content
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Environmental demand	Elegant & good atmosphere, hygienic, spacious, safe
Social demand	Networking, dinner parties
Mental demand	Avoid too much excitement
Health demand	Exercising and stretching
Sensory demand	Beautiful scenery, fresh air, and close to nature
Facility demand	Additional facility that might be of interest
Economic demand	Not too expensive

According to our interview with 20 elderly respondents, there are some problems and trouble they will encounter while participating in these activities. There are also problems related to personal health and food, as well as the things they hope to improve, shown as Table 3.

Table 3 Obstacles of elderly leisure activities

Dietary habits	Regimens	No raw food, or those with high cholesterol, less oil and salt, vegetarian, not picky with food
	Personal preferences	The hardness of food, food preferences, strong-flavored
The important things to notice about leisure activities	Afraid of danger, safety first	
Health problems	Knees, physical strength	

Second Phase of Content Analysis

In the second phase, the study analyzed the participants' observation data including non-participant and participant observations. After analyzing the five behavior models, this study could summarize the elderly people's demand towards leisure activities. The five behavior models are: interaction, sequence, tool and instrument, cultural, and physical. The findings will be shown in the Table 4. Through non-participant observation, this study realized that regarding the leisure activities, the elderly enjoys group living, companionship, expanding interpersonal relationships, and sharing the same hobby and conversation. Then, using the participant observation, this research participated in the elderly people's leisure activities. Summarized the following via the five models: in the interaction model – through observing the interaction between the elderly, volunteers, and friends, the study knows that the interaction decreases when an overly noisy environment affects the course of conversation; in the sequence model – although the elderly follows the activity schedule, there are different sense of participation, because some might enjoy a particular activity they are interested in more than the others; in tool and instrument model – the elderly seeks convenient, eco-friendly, and economic products when purchasing water cups, bowls, chopsticks, bags, and carry-on items; in the cultural model – most elderly would participate in other leisure activities to improve their interpersonal relationship, while passing some time; finally in the physical model – the poor venue has caused the elderly trouble when getting around, problems such as crowded walkway, and sink-to-people ratio is less than desirable.

Table 4 Demand Checklist

Aspects	Category	Content
Construction Aspect	Facility	The design of building and facility should be suitable for the elderly
	Activity area	Larger space is required
Facilitating Aspect	Accessories	Kettle, a walking stick
	Communication	Different languages, avoid using terminology

Summarizing the elderly and their demand for leisure activities

According to interview and observational study, this research has divided elderly demands into nine aspects, shown as in Table 5.

Table 5 summarizing the demands for leisure activities

Aspects	Category	Content
Environmental Aspect	Elegant and good atmosphere. Hygienic. Spacious. Safe.	An environment that keeps the elderly in a good mood; To enjoy a clean space during the activity; A spacious venue, avoid a place with too many cars; Be aware of the health condition.
Social Aspect	Networking. Dinner parties. Assistants to the leisure activities.	To share the things in daily life; Increase human interaction; Help the elderly achieve unreachable demands.
Mental Aspect	Avoid too much excitement. Feeling dizzy. Cannot follow the actions.	Unable to do exercises that are too exciting; Avoid leisure activities that cause dizziness; Slowing down the pace, and make simpler actions.
Health Aspect	Exercising and stretching. Eco-friendly cutlery. Water cup. Food.	Strengthen the body; live and learn; Use natural cleaner; Large capacity, heat-resistant, thermal water cups; The flavor might not be preferred by the elderly.
Sensory Aspect	Beautiful scenery. Fresh air. Getting close to nature.	Feel so at ease that all worries are forgotten; Breathing fresh air is a must during the leisure activities; Getting close to nature, breathe in phytoncides, and enjoy the scenery, making oneself happy.
Facility Aspect	Additional facility that might be of interest. Electronics.	Adding more facilities; attracting the elderly to these activities. Clean more often and purchase new equipment.
Economic Aspect	Not too expensive.	The elderly doesn't like to overspend on leisure activities.

Construction Aspect	Facility. Activity area.	The design of building and facility should be suitable for the elderly. Larger space is required.
Facilitating Aspect	Accessories. Communication.	Kettle, a walking stick. Different languages, avoid using terminology.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays aging society is more and more common. However, regular exercise, balanced diet, and easing pressure are keys to slowing down the aging process. Most elderly still have quite enough strength, making leisure life an important issue. This study uses data obtained from interview and observation, dividing the elderly people's demands into nine aspects, which all responded to the results of our study.

“Environmental demand” – When participating in leisure activities, the elderly will pay attention to the environment. A comfortable surrounding increases willingness to participate and their degree of satisfaction (Li, 2007). “Social demand” – The elderly could blow off some steam during leisure activities and increase interactions between people, improving interpersonal relationship. “Mental demand” - Spiritual attainment as well as a balance of mind and soul could be achieved through leisure activities. Life is thus more interesting. These activities could soothe one's mood, which is important for the elderly people's mental wellbeing (Su, 1996). “Health demand” – Moderate exercise could promote blood circulation, improve body function, prevent diseases, strengthen physical fitness, and improve muscle and heart function, living a healthy life (Huang, 2005). “Sensory demand” – One will look forward to breathing nature's fresh air and appreciating the environment during leisure activities. The outer environment will enrich the activities. The soul is thus purified by beauty (Ragheb & Beard, 1980). “Facility demand” – The equipments need to be updated on a regular basis. Cleaning and maintenance are also required. On one hand, this could induce interest from the elderly, and on the other, make sure it is hygienic and safe to use. “Economic demand” – The amount of income will affect leisure activities. A lack of savings or financial support from their children will make them think twice before spending “extra money” into participating in such activities (Li, 2008). “Construction demand”- Accessories will be used during leisure activities to help smooth things along. Assistants should avoid using the terminologies that the elderly couldn't understand, causing communication issues. Suitable facilitating equipments should also be provided for the elderly with disabilities during activities.

SUGGESTIONS

The elderly nowadays emphasizes on environment, social networking, and economy. That is why current industries should provide a clean and safe environment that is elderly-friendly. These environments should also play a role in releasing stress, increasing human interactions, maintaining a social network, increasing fun in life, and adjusting one's mood. Therefore, body and mind are both very important to the elderly when doing such activities. Most elderly these days are very frugal. They

will try to avoid unnecessary expenditure. So the pragmatic suggestion to the entertainment providers out there is to lower the price as much as they can.

LIMITATIONS

The followings are the problems and limitations we encountered during our study:

1. Due to the time limit, our study could not do a continuous observation on research objects.
2. Due to the limitations on the human power and funding, an in-depth investigation couldn't be conducted throughout Taiwan. Samples were chosen only in Taipei.
3. There are a wide variety of leisure activities for the elderly, our research only observed a selection of such activities.
4. Leisure industry for the elderly is still immature. Related documents are not easy to find.
5. There are communication issues during data collection.
6. It is hard to gain complete trust from the respondents in a short amount of time. So part of the data only scraped the surface.

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