Aging stereotypes and the customer orientations of older hospitality employees

Abstract

While the older population generally and the older workforce in particular has been growing in most countries, scholars have not explored how the work performance of this group is affected by stereotypical views towards them. This study aims to explore older service employee (OSE) perceptions of aging stereotypes that are attributed to them by their colleagues and customers and to investigate their impact on OSE customer orientations. Methodologically, this study adopts a quantitative approach and establishes a structural equation model that applies partial least squares. The findings show that OSE customer orientations are negatively impacted by the aging stereotypes of their colleagues. However, no significant relationship is evident between OSE customer orientations and the aging stereotypes attributed by customers. This study is one of the first to explore aging stereotypes in hospitality work settings and to model a relationship between aging stereotypes and OSE work performance. Practical contributions concerning the creation and maintenance of an inclusive work environment are also discussed.

Keywords: aging stereotypes; older service employees; service orientation; customer orientation; hospitality; China

1. Introduction

There has been wide scholarly acceptance that satisfying customer needs is a key success factor for service organizations (Deshpandé, Farley, & Webster Jr, 1993). It is widely held that the personal component of service provision is the primary determinant of overall customer satisfaction, particularly when it is delivered by front-line service employees (Rust, Anthony, & Timothy, 1996). This presents service managers with a constant responsibility to recruit and retain a professional workforce that understands and can satisfy customer needs. One of the various challenges for management is the employment of certain social groups who are subjected to stereotyping.

The older population generally, and the workforce in particular is one such stereotypical social group. Age based stereotyping arises quickly and automatically (Brewer and Lui, 1989). The deployment of an older workforce is accompanied by various stereotypical connotations (Saluja, Adaval, & Wyer, 2017; Vrugt & Schabracq, 1996). Studies have shown that while on the negative side, people perceive older people in the workforce as "low in capability", on the positive side, they are perceived as "high in warmth" (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005). Given that the older population is growing rapidly in various countries (e.g., China), it constitutes an important human resource for service providers. Furthermore, in contributing to an inclusive society, it is both ethical, and also a legal requirement in many countries to provide equal opportunities to a diversity of social groups. This leads to a key question, namely whether stereotypical perceptions attributed to elder service employees (OSEs) impact on their work performance.

This study measures work performance in hospitality settings using the customer orientation (CO) construct. The expression customer orientation is commonly

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attributed to an employee's tendency or willingness to satisfy customer needs in front-line service settings (Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002). It involves two main aspects. The needs dimension refers to the self-confidence of an employee to fulfill customer needs; and the enjoyment dimension is the extent to which employees enjoy interacting with customers (Brown et al., 2002). The importance of CO for service organizations is undisputed; the CO of service employees can influence customer attitudes towards organizational performance (Brady & Cronin, 2001), satisfaction with service experiences (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003), and emotional commitment to the service firm (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Front-line employees are indispensable to delivering CO in service organizations.

As the pace of change has accelerated in contemporary societies, older people have suffered a loss of status and stereotyping has become increasingly widespread (Bal, Kooij, & Rousseau, 2015). For example, in times of financial and economic disruption, there may be an expectation that able people should "fend for themselves" by establishing new entrepreneurial ventures. In contrast to the popular belief or stereotype that the young are more creative and entrepreneurial, the incidence of entrepreneurship is relatively higher amongst older workers and such entrepreneurs also tend to be more successful.

These circumstances may act as a disincentive to older people who are contemplating entering the job market. Stereotypes describe judgments that are made by attributing individual characteristics of people to their group memberships (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). Aging stereotypes are generally characterized by the view that "what is aged is less good" (Perlini, Bertolissi, & Lind, 1999). Studies have, however, shown that aging stereotypes are not always negative. As previously mentioned, older people are perceived as having greater "warmth" that their younger

counterparts (Cuddy et al., 2015). There are, however, many negative stereotypical associations for older people in work environments. For example, studies have shown that older people are perceived as relatively less active and effective, and as more dependent and powerless (Braithwaite, Gibson, & Holman, 1986). Cuddy et al. (2015) further confirmed that older people are stereotyped as having low capability, even when their work performance is not necessarily low. Notably, aging stereotypes of service employees can originate from both customers and colleagues.

When encountering unfamiliar services, customers tend to form impressions and to form judgments (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972). The latter have been shown to influence service interactions (Lockwood & Jones, 1989). Consequently, customers who are served by younger-looking servers tend to perceive the service quality as better than when their servers have a more middle-aged appearance (Luoh & Tsaur, 2011). Meanwhile and compared with their younger counterparts, employers perceive older workers as being less adaptable to change (Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001) and as being less capable of performing well in learning and development activities (Wrenn & Maurer, 2004). Such stereotypes have an indirect impact by reducing the financial support that is provided to train older employees and the opportunities for promotion to positions that require creativity and innovation (Rosen & Jerdee, 1976).

Though several scholars have examined aging stereotypes, the topic has rarely been discussed in the hospitality and tourism context and literature. Few researchers have examined how stereotypes influence older employees in service roles such as in hospitality. A small number of scholars have investigated related topics such as the types of aging stereotype (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Cowart & Brady, 2014; Whitley & Kite, 2006), attitudes towards older workers by consumers (Luoh & Tsaur, 2011, 2014) and by hotel employers (Rosen & Jerdee, 1977; Gordon & Arvey, 2004; Wrenn

& Maurer, 2004; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005), and how aging stereotypes influence managerial practice (Rosen & Jerdee, 1976; Knowlton & Mitchell, 1980; Larson, 1984; Dedrick & Dobbins, 1991). However, the impacts of aging stereotypes on OSEs have only been examined in a single case (i.e. Buyens, Van Dijk, Dewilde, & De Vos, 2009); and this example made only indirect observations. There is a research gap in the understanding of how OSE perceptions of the stereotypes that are attributed to them affect their CO. The current researchers note the lack of meaningful insight and approach the aforementioned research gap by addressing the impact of aging stereotypes from both customers and employers, focusing on two dimensions of CO, namely enjoyment and needs. The authors will address the following two research questions:

(1) How are OSE COs affected by aging stereotypes as perceived by consumers?

(2) How are OSE COs affected by aging stereotypes as perceived by colleagues?

Providing an answer to the aforementioned questions is potentially significant for theory building, because it offers the prospect of a link between aging stereotypes and OSE work performance. It is also of potential practical significance. There is an urgency to accommodate the rising older population in the workforce. Similarly, and based on the capacity of the hospitality industry to employ a substantial labor force, this may offer a mutually-beneficial option for both employers and older employees. On these grounds, it is of crucial importance for practitioners to understand how aging stereotypes influence OSEs work performance.

 First, the authors of this paper present an in-depth review of the respective literatures on CO and on aging stereotypes. Second, the research design and measurement instrument are introduced. The results are then presented, followed by a discussion and series of conclusions.

2. Literature review

2.1 The customer orientation of service employees

There have been many empirical investigations of the CO of service employees, subsequent to Saxe and Weitz's influential selling orientation-customer orientation scale (SOCO scale) (1982). Though the core meaning of CO has remained relatively consistent (Schwepker, 2003), two major perspectives have emerged from the research: behavioral and psychological (Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). The behavioral perspective derives from Saxe and Weitz (1982), and defines CO as the practice of identifying and satisfying customer needs at the level of employee-customer interactions. Customer oriented servers are those whose service delivery is constantly modified to meet customer needs (Susskind, Kacmar & Borchgrevink, 2003). For example, a responsive customer-oriented service provider responds effectively to the needs expressed by customers, and a proactive customer-oriented server constantly considers the latent needs of customers and proposes ideas that exceed their expectations (Blocker, Flint, Myers, & Slater, 2010). The behavioral perspective, which has investigated psychological traits and the nature of CO, is based on Brown et al.'s (2002) study that described CO as the tendency or predisposition of an employee to satisfy customer needs in on-the-job settings. Zablah et al. (2012) drew upon Brown et al.'s (2002) conceptualization of employee CO as an "aspect of workers' psychology that guides their on-the-job perceptions, attitudes and behaviors" (p. 34) The literature has not, however, provided a compelling determination about whether CO is a behavioral or psychological construct (Zablah et al., 2012). The current authors have adopted the psychological perspective to examine CO, because of its focus on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of employees can provide potentially rich insights.

Donavan, Brown, and Mowen (2004) adopted a psychological perspective in developing their model on how service employee CO affects important job responses, including perceived job fit, job satisfaction, commitment to the firm, and organizational citizenship behaviors. The aforementioned authors conducted three studies across two service industries, namely financial services and food service. They concluded that service employees with higher CO respond more favorably on-the-job than those with comparatively lower levels, and that the positive impact of CO on service employees who have more consumer contact is greater than those who have less. Scholars who have approached the subject from the psychological perspective have concluded that CO is a predictor of job outcomes such as performance and turnover intentions.

Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill (2009) studied the direct and moderating effect of CO on burnout amongst service employees. They found that CO has a significant negative relationship with burnout and a significant positive relationship with job performance. Regarding the moderating effect, high levels of CO weaken the detrimental effects of job demands on employee burnout, job performance, and turnover intentions. Similarly, Rod and Ashill (2010) posited that CO is an antecedent to various job outcomes. They applied structural-equation-modeling (SEM) to analyze questionnaires completed by frontline employees. The results indicated a "significant influence of CO on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn influence service recovery performance and turnover intentions" (p. 600). Based on meta-analytic data, Zablah et al. (2012) found that CO influences employee job outcomes through its effects on stress and engagement. The influence on job outcomes grows as employee customer workloads increase and weaken when the need for customer persuasion increases. Customer workload refers to how the attention of a

service employee is divided amongst customers during their work (Bakker, Van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010). Customer persuasion is the extent to which service employees apply influence tactics to trigger customer responses that fulfil their job goals (McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani 2006).

Research has also shown that service employee COs are substantial determinants of customer outcomes, such as sales performance, perceptions of service quality, customer satisfaction, and return intention (Nguyen, Groth, Walsh, & Hennig-Thurau, 2014). The CO of a salesperson has a positive influence on his or her performance (Boles, Babin, Brashear, & Brooks, 2001). CO relates to both enhanced self-rating and to supervisor ratings of server performance (Brown, 2002). Customer perceptions of service performance, the physical goods provided to customers, and the firm's physical environment (i.e. the servicescape) all relate directly to CO (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Customer-oriented attitudes drive behaviors, which, in turn, contribute to customer satisfaction (Stock & Hoyer, 2005). Higher COs reduce the negative effects of service scripts on customer intentions to return (Nguyen et al., 2014).

2.2 Determinants of customer orientation

Several conceptual frameworks have been proposed as determinants of CO. Kelley's (1992) study of service employee CO entailed empirical testing of a framework that considers the relationship between CO and service employee perceptions of organizational constructs (organizational climate and socialization) and of personal constructs (motivational effort, direction, and organizational commitment). The authors concluded that favorable perceptions of organizational climate for service, and higher levels of motivation and organizational commitment contribute to higher CO. Brown et al. (2002) proposed that CO in service settings consists of two dimensions: needs and enjoyment. The needs dimension refers to the belief amongst

employees that they can fulfill customer needs, while the enjoyment dimension represents the extent to which employees enjoy interacting with and serving customers.

Hennig-Thurau & Thurau (2003) conceptualized a three-dimensional construct for service employee CO, where the dimensions are an employee's customer-oriented skills, his or her motivation to fulfill customer needs, and his or her perceived decision-making authority. In contrast to Brown et al. (2002), Donavan et al. (2004) argued that CO consists of four dimensions: the need to pamper, to read customer's needs, to deliver, and for personal relationship. The study deployed Brown et al's. (2002) two dimensions (needs and enjoyment). The authors believe that these two components explain the ability and motivation of a service worker to satisfy customer needs.

2.3 Definition of older service employees

While the terms old, older or older employees have been used liberally across the previous literature, this study opts for the term "older employees". Defining older workers has also been a longstanding challenge, since there is no universally accepted international criterion for age related groupings (McGregor & Gray, 2001). The most common definitions of "old" rely on chronology. This is arguably the most objective measurement, since alternatives may define someone as old because they have the attributes of an old person "without actually being old" (Poulston & Jenkins, 2013, p. 3).

What qualifies as "old" varies according to the context within which research occurs. Kornadt and Rothermud (2011) proposed 60 as "old" in the work context. Van Dalen, Henkens, and Wang (2014) used 50 as the boundary to study age-based strategies that apply to European employees. Kooij et al. (2014) considered 50 plus as old when studying human resource practices for aging workers. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2017) defined the older as those

aged 65 or above. In China, which is the focus on the present study, the retirement ages for female and male employees are 55 and 60 respectively. Given this China context and the imminent prospect of retirement for respondents, the present researchers use 50 as the definition for OSEs.

2.4 Stereotypes

A stereotype is a set of associations that is unintentionally activated in the presence of characteristics within a target group (Devine, 1989). The stereotyping process attributes characteristics to people based on their group memberships (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). Stereotypes can be descriptive and/or prescriptive (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). They describe the believed characteristics of groups members (a descriptive component), as well as the characteristics that they should have (a prescriptive component) (Cowart & Brady, 2014). For example, because most elementary school teachers are female (a descriptive stereotype), some people believe that all elementary school teachers must be female (a prescriptive component) (Whitley & Kite, 2006). In many cases, stereotypes are based on observable facts in the social world. These facts are then exaggerated and applied to all group members. Expressed differently, a stereotype might accurately describe a group, but be inaccurate when applied to an individual (Whitley & Kite, 2006). Citing an example of inaccurate stereotyping, Crites, Dickson, and Lorenz (2015), found that female leaders are stereotyped as having a higher level of concern for people than for production; however, the female leaders who participated in the study reported higher concern for production than for people.

2.5 Aging stereotypes

Some commentators have reported that societal changes have reduced the social status and competitiveness of older people (Cuddy et al., 2005). Many stereotypes

attribute negative characteristics to older employees (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). According to traditional stereotypes and relative to their older counterparts, younger people are valued as more socially desirable (Perlini et al., 1999). Older people are perceived as relatively less active and effective, and as more dependent and powerless (Braithwaite et al., 1986). Bassili and Reil (1981) revealed that aging stereotypes consist primarily of attributes such as conservative, traditional, present-oriented, and moral.

2.5.1. The Aging Stereotypes of Colleagues

Several papers have examined age-based negative stereotypes towards older employees in the workplace. It is a widespread stereotype that older workers produce inferior performance than their younger counterparts, since age reduces attractiveness, competence (Kite et al., 2005), and potential for development (Gordon & Arvey, 2004). Furthermore, stereotypes imply that older employees are less capable of responding to job demands with creativity, passionate, and efficiency (Rosen & Jerdee, 1977).

Various studies have found that older people are perceived as having lower adaptability and lower learning capacity, thereby rendering training more difficult. For example, the belief that older workers are less adaptable to change than their younger counterparts is evident in both the United Kingdom and in Hong Kong (Chiu et al., 2001). Similarly, Rosen and Jerdee (1977) addressed how age-based stereotypes depict older workers as being less interested in change and less capable of coping with future challenges. Older workers in work environments are perceived as having lower performance in learning and development activities and as less willing to join such activities than their younger counterparts (Wrenn & Maurer, 2004). This background has prompted the current authors to propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Colleagues' aging stereotypes, as perceived by OSEs, have a significant negative influence on the CO of OSEs.

2.5.2 Customers' aging stereotypes

Scholars have given increasing attention to the aging stereotypes of consumers towards service employees. The effects of stereotyping depend on the sector under examination. Luoh and Tsaur (2014) showed that participants perceived tour leaders with a middle-aged appearance as being better than those with a young appearance in the case of both short- and long-distance trips. Moreover, the aging stereotype of the tour leader could impact on participant perceptions of the care, interaction and communication components of a tour leader's roles. More specifically, care refers to the provision of individualized attention to tourists, interaction relates to the representation and organization of the tour, and communication refers to correct introductions to attractions. However, studies of the services sector have generated inconsistent results. Luoh and Tsaur (2011) conducted a factorial experiment to evaluate whether study participants believe that younger or middle-aged servers provide better service. The results indicated an explicit link between age stereotyping and perceived service quality. They showed that consumers attributed better service quality as emanating from younger servers than from those with a middle-aged appearance in the case of tangibles and reliability. This was equally the case for favorable and unfavorable service quality conditions. Based on the preceding observations, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2. Customers' aging stereotypes, as perceived by OSEs, have a significantly negative influence on the CO of OSEs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

To measure the impact of aging stereotypes on the CO of *OSEs*, the authors present quantitative data collected from questionnaires completed by 173 service employees aged 50 or above. The respondents were employed in food service roles in the hospitality sector within mainland China or in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The reasons for selecting China and Hong Kong as the fieldwork locations are the declining number of younger people in both settings who are willing and able to join the industry, and the endemically high labour turnover. This has prompted interest amongst the authorities across both settings in the aging workforce for both its challenges and its potential.

The researchers considered that it would be appropriate to adopt a quantitative approach since previous exploratory studies have been undertaken on aging stereotypes and because they would enjoy access to a variety of applicable research constructs. A questionnaire was developed with 40 questions that were organized into four sections. The questionnaire was translated into both traditional and simplified Chinese to facilitate comprehension amongst older local respondents and hence more accurate reporting across the study locations. Simplified Chinese is used widely in mainland China, whereas traditional Chinese prevails in Hong Kong. A pilot study was first administered to ten part-time hotel banquet servers aged 50 or above. Following the return of completed questionnaires, the researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with each respondent to assess their understanding of the questionnaire items. These conversations informed revisions about any awkward or inconsistent wordings which were amended accordingly. The revised questionnaires were then

distributed to prospective respondents on the mainland and Hong Kong sides of the border.

The researchers deployed three data collection methods: a questionnaire distribution service from WJX.com, invitation emails sent out to the human resources managers in hotels, and personal visits to restaurants. WJX.com is a Chinese data collection service company that allows researchers to create online questionnaires and then assists their distribution to participants in a database that matches the research requirements. Returns were directed through Google Forms in the case of the questionnaires that were dispatched to hotel managers inviting participation by their older operational staff. Finally, the researchers collected questionnaires from servers who were able to complete the survey during working hours on-site at the restaurants where they were employed.

A total of 173 valid data responses were collected, of which 52% were obtained from Mainland China and 48% from Hong Kong. As presented in Table 1, most respondents were between 50–55 years old (74.14%), with the others between 56–60 years old (24.86%). There was a slightly higher proportion of female respondents (54.34%) than of males (45.66%). Almost a quarter of the employees work in restaurants (43.93%), a third work in hotels ranging from mid-scale to luxury (35.84%), approximately one-fifth work in economy hotels (19.08), and the remainder work in clubs (0.58%) or in other service organizations (0.58%). Approximately three-quarters of the respondents (77.46%) are employed full-time.

Insert table 1 about here

3.2 Measurement instrument

Figure 1 presents a model of the hypothesized relationship between the three proposed variables. The measurement of OSE perceptions of their colleagues' aging stereotypes was adapted from Chiu et al.'s (2001) scale covering two dimensions: adaptability and working effectiveness. Parasuraman and Berry's (1988) SERVQUAL model was used with its five dimensions (tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, reliability and assurance) to assess OSE perceptions of the aging stereotypes of their customers. The CO of OSEs was assessed using Brown et al.'s (2002) two-dimensional scale: enjoyment and needs.

Insert Figure 1about here

3.2.1 How colleagues' aging stereotypes are perceived

The first part of the questionnaire assessed whether OSEs felt that they were the target of stereotyping by their colleagues. Two dimensions of age stereotype were applied: Chiu et al.'s (2001) adaptability and working effectiveness. Chiu et al. (2001) drew from Hassel and Perrewe's (1995) questionnaire and developed six items to measure adaptability and four others to measure working effectiveness. In measuring the existence of aging stereotypes from the perspective of OSEs, the items were adapted by switching the viewing angle from colleagues to employees. For example, the item "Old workers are not interested in learning new skills," was changed to "My colleagues think old workers are not interested in learning new skills." Participants were asked to rate all items according to a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "1" ("Strongly disagree") to "5" ("Strongly agree").

3.2.2 Perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes

The second part of the questionnaire assessed the perceptions of OSEs towards aging stereotypes of their customers. As was previously discussed, there is an explicit link between the aging stereotypes and customer perceptions of server quality of service (Luoh and Tsaur, 2011). Therefore, the perceptions of OSEs regarding customer perceptions of service quality may form a basis for assessing stereotyping amongst customers. The measurement of OSE perceptions regarding the aging stereotypes of their customers was adapted to include 14 of the 22 items in Parasuraman and Berry's (1988) SERVQUAL instrument. This was originally designed to assess customer perceptions of quality in service organizations and includes five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These concepts represent the service quality of both the service organization and of the personnel in the original version of Parasuraman and Berry's (1988) model. The present study focuses exclusively on the personnel aspect. The following list provides a concise definition of the five dimensions that have been adopted by the researchers:

Tangibles: Appearance and attractiveness of personnel.

Reliability: Ability of employees to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness: Willingness of employees to help customers and provide prompt service.

Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy: Caring and individualized attention provided by employees to the customers.

As was the case in the earlier measurements, the original Parasuraman and Berry (1988) items were adapted by switching the viewing angle from the customer to the employee. For example, the item, "Employees of XYZ are not always willing to help customers" was changed to "I feel that my customers think older workers are not always willing to help customers." A five-point Likert-type scale was applied, with "1" representing "Strongly disagree" and "5" representing "Strongly agree."

3.3.3 CO of service employees

The measures for the CO of OSEs that appeared in the third section were identical to those used by Brown et al. (2002). As was mentioned previously, Brown et al. (2002) conceptualized CO as having a needs and an enjoyment dimension, and the present researchers adapted a twelve-item Likert-type scale to measure CO that drew from Saxe and Weitz (1982). The needs dimension indicates employee beliefs about their capacity to satisfy customer needs, while the enjoyment dimension represents the degree to which service workers enjoy providing customers with service. Six questionnaire items were developed to measure the two dimensions. Participants were asked to rate all items according to a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "1" being "Strongly agree" to "5" being "Strongly disagree." Consequently, lower scores indicate a higher level of CO of OSEs.

3.3.4 Demographic variables

Demographic information was collected in the final section, including gender, age, occupation, monthly income, and type of contract.

4. Results

The partial least squares (PLS) method was deployed using SmartPLS to perform the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). PLS is particularly applicable for conducting SEM in applied research projects, especially when the number of participants is limited

and the data distribution is skewed (Wong, 2011). A structural equation model with two arrows pointing at a latent variable should have a minimum sample of 52 (Marcoulides & Saunderes, 2006). Previous researchers have suggested that a sample size of 100 to 200 is a good starting point for conducting path modeling (Hoyle, 1995; Wong, 2013). The researchers considered PLS as suitable for the purposes of the present study, based on both our research model as a path modeling and the sample of 173 valid responses.

4.1 Measurement model

4.1.1 Indicator reliability

The outer loadings of the indicators for each latent variable were squared to find the indicator reliability value (Wong, 2013). Normally, an indicator reliability of 0.70 or higher is preferred; however, 0.4 or higher is acceptable in exploratory research (Hulland, 1999). As is shown in Table 2, the indicator reliability values of needs (0.846), adaptability (0.836), working effectiveness (0.832), assurance (0.842), empathy (0.808), reliability (0.849), and responsiveness (0.885) are all greater than or equal to 0.70. The indicator reliability of enjoyment (0.491) and tangibles (0.482) are also greater than the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.4. This result suggests a reasonably good indicator for reliability using this model.

4.1.2 Internal consistency reliability

Cronbach's alpha is the most commonly used method to measure internal consistency reliability in social science research. However, this method tends to provide a conservative measurement in PLS-SEM (Wong, 2013). The use of composite reliability has been recommended as an alternative to Cronbach's alpha for PLS-SEM studies (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012). As is indicated in Table 2, the composite reliability values of all latent variables are larger

than 0.6 for the current investigation; therefore, there are high levels of internally consistent reliability among all the latent variables.

4.2.3 Convergent validity

The average variance extracted (AVE) is assessed to evaluate convergent validity. As outlined in Table 2, the AVE values are higher than the acceptable level of 0.5 for the CO of OSEs (0.604), OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes (0.696), and of customers' aging stereotypes (0.909); therefore, high levels of convergent validity have been demonstrated.

4.2.4 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity is considered to be proven if the square root of the AVE for each latent variable exceeds the correlation values among the latent variables (Fornell & Larker, 1981). Table 3 examines discriminant validity by applying Fornell and Larker's (1981) criterion analysis. The bold numbers that are noted in the diagonal of the table are the square roots of AVE, while the remaining numbers are the correlations between latent variables. Since the AVE square root values of all three latent variables are larger than the correlation values, reasonably good discriminant validity is established.

The above results of the measurement model are satisfactory and provided the researchers with confidence that they should proceed with an evaluation of the structural model.

Insert table 2 and 3 about here

4.3 The structural model and testing of hypotheses

4.3.1 Structural path significance

The bootstrapping function of SmartPLS is used to test the statistical significance of both inner and outer models. Table 4 presents the bootstrapping results for the inner model. The result shows that the linkage between the OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes and the CO of OSEs is statistically significant ($t = 1.972$, $p = 0.049$). However, no statistical significance was found for the linkage between perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes and the CO of OSEs ($t = 0.336$, $p = 0.737$).

Insert table 4 about here

The results for the outer model are shown in Table 5. These indicate that all of the outer model loadings are statistically significant with a confidence level of 99%.

Insert table 5 about here

4.3.2 Target endogenous variable variance

As is presented in Figure 2, the coefficient of determination, R^2, for the endogenous latent variable is 0.105, which indicates that the two variables, namely perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes and perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes explain 10.5% of the variance for the CO of OSEs.

4.3.3 Inner model path coefficient significance

Figure 2 presents the results of the PLS result that was generated by SmartPLS. The inner model suggests that the hypothesized relationship path between OSE perceptions of their colleagues' aging stereotypes and the CO of OSEs is statistically significant (path coefficient = -0.287), thereby supporting hypothesis 1. This suggests

that OSE perceptions of their colleagues' aging stereotypes is a moderately strong predictor of CO of OSEs. However, the hypothesized relationship path between the OSE perceptions of their customers' aging stereotypes and the CO of OSEs (path coefficient = -0.050) is not statistically significant. Hypothesis 2 is not supported. OSE perceptions of their customers' aging stereotypes does not predict CO of OSEs.

Insert figure 2 about here
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5. Discussion and conclusions

This investigation set out to identify how OSEs are affected by the aging stereotypes of their colleagues and customers. The authors developed a structural equation model to test the relationships between the variables. A SmartPLS analysis demonstrated the indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the model. The program's bootstrapping calculation established the significance of all the outer model loadings and the relationship between the OSE perceptions of their colleagues' aging stereotypes and the CO of those OSEs. However, no significance was found between OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes and their COs. The inner model path coefficient suggested that OSE perceptions of their colleagues' aging stereotypes were a predictor of service employees' CO, though OSE perceptions of their customers' aging stereotypes are not predictors of service employee COs. The current study can contribute to the growing literature on aging stereotypes and adds an important connection with the CO concept.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this investigation contribute to the literature in several ways. Previous studies have investigated the aging stereotypes of customers and hotel

employers (Luoh & Tsaur, 2011, 2014; Rosen & Jerdee, 1977; Gordon & Arvey, 2004; Wrenn & Maurer, 2004; Kite et al., 2005). However, only one managed to identify the negative impact of aging stereotypes on older employees and did so indirectly (Buyens et al., 2009). The present study provides the first empirical evidence about the impact of aging stereotypes of both colleagues and customers on the CO of OSEs. More specifically, the study contributes to the literature by establishing a structural equation model that connects the aging stereotypes of both customers and colleagues with the CO of OSEs, and explores the theoretical relationships between the relevant variables.

The findings from the SEM have shown that aging stereotypes of their colleagues are predictors of the COs of OSEs. As they are perceived by OSEs, COs are negatively influenced by colleagues' aging stereotypes. This suggests that when OSEs sense stereotyping of their adaptability or effectiveness, they tend to question their ability to satisfy customer needs, thereby diminishing their pleasure from interactions with customers. This supports previous findings that displaying negative attitudes towards the abilities of OSEs makes them doubt their own capabilities, resulting in a higher propensity to quit (Buyens et al., 2009). Furthermore, this finding links to the concept of self-stereotyping that forms a part of the theory of self-categorization (Turner, 1987). Self-stereotyping is a process of depersonalization, whereby one tends to perceive him- or herself as an interchangeable example of a social category, instead of as a unique individual (Hogg & Turner, 1987). In the current study, self-stereotyping prompts OSEs to question their service capacity.

Surprisingly, the current researchers found no relationship between OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes and the CO of OSEs. Evidently, perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes cannot predict the CO of OSEs. One possible explanation may be that some service personnel act in a friendly manner while

serving, even though their emotional labor produces negative attitudes (Monterrubio, 2018). Emotional labor has been defined as "the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transaction" (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987).

5.2 Implications for practice

From the human capital perspective, the study results are relevant for organizations that are seeking to attract, retain, and motivate OSEs in the context of aging societies that are characterized by falling birthrates. The findings indicate that OSE COs can be negatively impacted by a perception of aging stereotypes by colleagues. Based on this evidence, human resource managers can seek to minimize stereotyping by colleagues to demonstrate that the organization cares about the mental wellbeing and health of OSEs. The organizational culture should embrace an ethos of equity and diversity and should apply standard and consistent appraisal criteria towards younger employees and OSEs as a tangible form of evidence, supported by equal promotion opportunities. Additionally, customized training to eliminate stereotyping could be provided for all employees. The concept of diversity training could be introduced or extended, focusing on social inclusion and the elimination of prejudice. Targeted diversity training can raise employee awareness of problems associated with the misunderstanding or mishandling of diversity using a personalized and participatory approach. It can also promote the benefits of harmonious and diversity-friendly behaviors (Paluck, 2006). The implementation of such practices across hospitality organizations can support destinations that are seeking to embrace inclusivity.

Though no significant relationship was found in this study regarding OSE perceptions of customer aging stereotypes and their COs, the findings have potential

implications for marketing practitioners. It cannot be discounted that customers' aging stereotypes may influence customer perceptions of service quality (Luoh and Tsaur, 2011). Furthermore the findings of the present study may have been influenced by reluctance on the part of service personal to show their true feelings when performing emotional labor, thereby causing potential emotional stress and decreased motivation (as cited in Monterrubio, 2018). Service organizations that encounter such conditions an minimize customer ageing stereotypes and benefit the mental health of OSEs by advancing their perceptions of service quality. Hospitality ventures may organize, support, and/or participate in marketing events that educate the public about equality across different age cohorts.

The study findings provide potential insights for public authorities that are establishing policies to address labour shortages by protecting and retaining OSEs. It has been noted that the aging stereotypes of colleagues may impact negatively on service employee COs, potentially leading to biased employment-related decisions (Taylor, 2001). In this context, hospitality firms may establish policies to prevent discriminatory managerial decisions and to ensure equal rights and opportunities for OSE career development.

5.4 Limitations and future research

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the external environment of the investigation was not highly controlled. Participants completed the questionnaire in different settings – some via an online link at a time and location that suited them, while others participated during their working hours. External conditions, such as noise, management pressure, or the existence of customers in the workplace, may have distracted the participants or influenced their feelings during the survey. Secondly, nearly half of the questionnaires were collected in Hong Kong. This sample

might restrict the generalizability of the results to the whole of China, given different workplace cultures prevalent across the 'one country, two systems' governance system.

Analysis also showed that the R^2 value (0.105) for this study is relatively low, which means that perceptions of aging stereotypes from colleagues and customers could only explain 10.5% of the variance in the CO of OSEs. Consequently, future researchers are encouraged to develop a more comprehensive model by considering factors such as organizational culture and managerial approaches to OSEs. Future studies may also consider investigating the relationship between age, and perceived or actual experience and expertise in the services sector. Finally it is noted that the current investigation has mainly examined starting level positions and experience acquired in the services sector has not been considered. There is a potential and self-evident connection between seniority in years and professional experience.

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Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Age	50–55	130	75.14
	56–60	43	24.86
	61 or above	0	0
Gender	Male	79	45.66
	Female	94	54.34
Job	Economic hotels	33	19.08
	Mid-scale to luxury hotels	62	35.84
	Restaurants (non-hotel)	76	43.93
	Clubs	1	0.58
	Other	1	0.58
Type of Contract	Full-time	134	77.46
	Part-time	39	22.54

Table 2: Summary Results for Reflective Outer Models

Latent Variable	Indicators	Loadings	Indicator Reliability (i.e. loadings²)	Composite Reliability	AVE
CO of OSEs	Enjoyment	0.701	0.491	0.751	0.604
	Needs	0.846	0.716		
OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes	Adaptability	0.836	0.700	0.821	0.696
	Working Effectiveness	0.832	0.692		
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes	Assurance	0.842	0.708	0.909	0.669
	Empathy	0.808	0.652		
	Reliability	0.849	0.720		
	Responsiveness	0.885	0.783		
	Tangibles	0.694	0.482		

Table 3: Correlation Between Variables

	CO of OSEs	OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes	OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes
CO of OSEs	**0.777**		
OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes	-0.323	**0.834**	
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes	-0.270	0.773	**0.818**

Table 4: T-Statistics and P-Values of Path Coefficients (Inner Model)

	T-Statistics	P Values
OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes → CO of OSEs	1.972	0.049
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes → CO of OSEs	0.336	0.737

Table 5: T-Statistics and P-Values of Outer Loadings

|	T-Statistics	P-Values
OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes → Adaptability	11.538	<0.001
OSE perceptions of colleagues' aging stereotypes → Working effectiveness	11.780	<0.001
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes → Assurance	10.346	<0.001
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes → Empathy	10.503	<0.001
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes → Reliability	13.668	<0.001
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes → Responsiveness	19.737	<0.001
OSE perceptions of customers' aging stereotypes → Tangibles	8.301	<0.001
CO of OSEs → Enjoyment	4.113	<0.001
CO of OSEs → Needs	5.078	<0.001
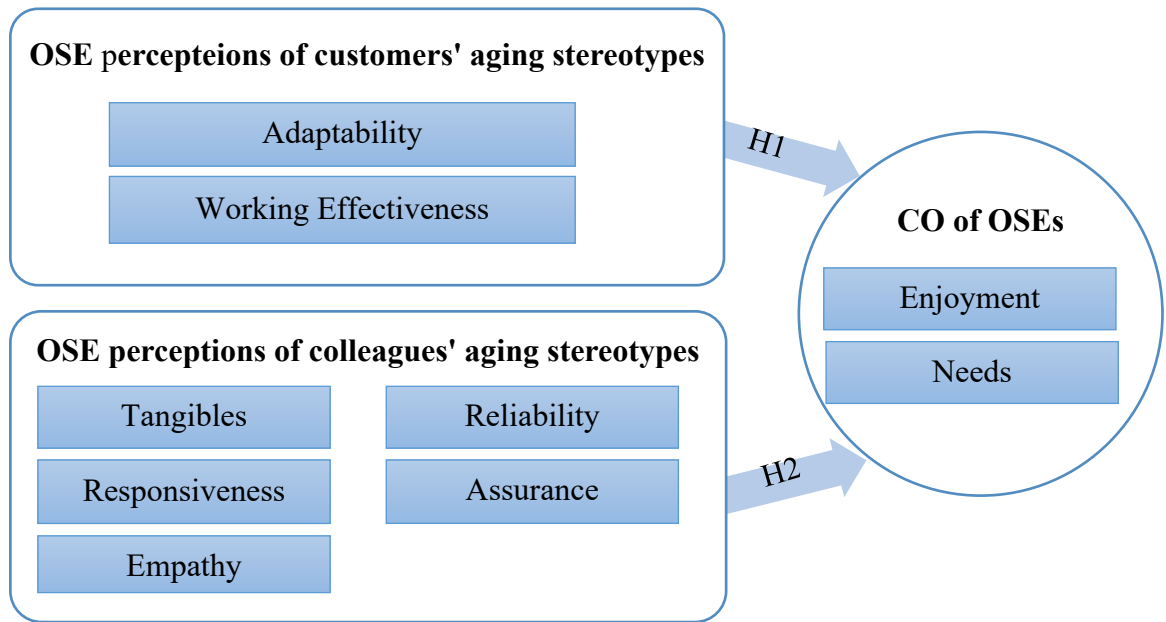
Figure 1: Proposed research model

Figure 2: PLS Results