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Seniors' perceptions of service features on outbound group package tours

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to develop scales addressing seniors' perception of group package tour service features (GPTSFs) in Taiwan and China, and thus extend the existing literature regarding the service quality theory. This research used a qualitative method to generate sample items and a quantitative approach to develop and validate GPTSF scales. Findings from a survey with 239/217 experienced senior tourists from Taiwan/China identify five important factors (i.e., tour leader and tour guide, restaurant, hotel, coach, and scenic spot) among seniors in Taiwan and three factors (i.e., pre-tour briefing, restaurant, and optional tour) among seniors in China. Based on our findings, travel agencies can adjust their managerial directions to make them flexible enough to react efficiently to environmental changes and consumer needs.

1. Introduction

The proportion of elderly people to the overall population has become increasingly large in recent years (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). Especially, individuals aged 60 and above have a higher propensity to travel (Sakai, Brown, & Mak, 2000). Seniors, compared to other segments, not only have more financial resources or discretionary time to travel (Marshall, 2004), but also possess great consumption capabilities (Reece, 2004). Examining the senior market, in terms of either academic or business practice, is therefore worthwhile (Shoemaker, 2000).

Seniors are the most likely to take part in organized tours (Quiroga, 1990). In Asia, the most popular type of organized tour is the group package tour (hereafter, GPT). GPT is one of the main modes of outbound travel in East Asia (Wang, Hsieh, Chou, & Lin, 2007). For example, in Taiwan, there were 130.52 million outbound travelers between 1992 and 2010 (Tourism Bureau, 2011). For sightseeing purposes, more than half of those travelers participated in GPTs (Tourism Bureau, 2010). In 2010, the total number of Chinese outbound travelers was 57.39 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). As a subset of this group, Chinese outbound GPT tourists also surged that year, from 10.91 million in 2008 to 12.34 million in 2009—an increase of 13.2% (China National Tourism Administration, 2010).

In terms of travel markets, seniors are the most important and steadily growing group. Moreover, the understanding of consumer perceptions with regard to service factors is imperative during the service-delivery process (Ryan & Cliff, 1997). Nonetheless, few studies touch upon seniors' perception of GPT services *vis-à-vis* the service features offer by an outbound GPT. In our study, we systematically explored two fundamental questions: *What do senior tourists perceive to be key GPTSFs? Are these GPTSFs similar between Taiwan and China?* To address the first question, this study used a qualitative method that generates sample items from multiple sources from Taiwan and China. To answer the second question, the study used these sample items to construct the scales of GPTSFs for senior segments in Taiwan and China. Academically, this study not only fills a potential gap in research into the service quality theory but also promotes an understanding of seniors' travel needs within each of the different travel development phases. In practice, a greater understanding of GPTSFs may help practitioners design more satisfactory GPTs that appeal to this growing segment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Senior tourists' travel needs and preferences

Previous study indicates that tourism stakeholders use the variable of age as an important segmentation base to accurately predict future tourist needs and behavior (Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, & Beaumont, 2009). Indeed, senior tourists have needs and preferences that differ from those of younger groups (Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo, & Howey, 1992). For example, Eby and Molnar (2002) demonstrate that people aged 65 and older more highly value the social component of

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overnight automobile travel more than younger people. Further, they are more concerned about personal safety, both *en route* and at the destination, as well as road conditions. In another study, Javalgi, Thomas, and Rao (1992) find that, compared to non-seniors, seniors are more likely to use travel agents, take a cruise or touring vacation, and travel by bus or airplane. In a study comparing German senior and non-senior tourists, Romsa and Blenman (1989) find that there are significant differences in terms of travelers' preferences for strenuous physical activity. To summarize, despite the fact that the aforementioned research has ascertained the feasibility of exploring seniors' preferences regarding GPTSFs, little research actually systematically links seniors' travel preferences to GPTs. The current study, therefore, can enrich the existing body of knowledge *vis-à-vis* the travel needs and preferences of the senior segment.

2.2. Senior's perception of GPTSFs

Previous study notes that understanding the needs and expectations of customers is a pivotal factor in achieving service design success (Roth & Menor, 2003). However, past no research with which the authors of this study are familiar has adequately explored the seniors' perceptions of GPTSFs. Although four studies seem to touch upon this topic, they have several drawbacks, as will be discussed below.

For example, although the Huang and Tsai (2003) study provides useful information regarding senior travel behavior, it neglects certain service-sector of GPT, such as optional tours and coaches (Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000). Moreover, that study uses only one item to measure the satisfaction degree of the hotel sector in GPT, and fails to explain the process for generating these items.

Heung and Chu (2000) identify 29 service-factor attributes in selecting a travel agency of all-inclusive package tours. However, they exclude some critical factors that are perceived as important features by seniors during a tour, such as safety (Lindqvist & Björk, 2000) and tour leader (Huang & Tsai, 2003). Thus, it is far from comprehensively embodies the service encounters that occur during GPT operation.

van Harssel (1994) identifies seven service features that seniors care about. However, two drawbacks exist in van Harssel's study. First, the researcher obtains information about these features from a single source (i.e., focus groups), which is insufficient to creating an item pool for any marketing research (Gilbert & Churchill, 1979). Second, the travel mode used in this study is not explicit, given that various travel modes – such as GPT and foreign independent tour – involve rather diverse characteristics (Wang et al., 2000). Therefore, it is doubtful that this study can fully explain the GPTSFs about which senior care.

Wang et al. (2007) develop an instrument to measure the GPT service and identify six factors and practical implications; however, they omit the idiosyncratic service needs of senior tourists while conducting item generation and their data collections. The findings of Wang et al. (2007) are therefore insufficient to interpret the seniors' perceptions of GPTSFs.

2.3. Is SERVQUAL sufficient for explaining seniors' perceptions of GPTSFs?

In the literature, the concept that is most similar to service features is service quality. In studies on service quality, scholars most frequently mention and research the scale of SERVQUAL in various industries (Cook & Thompson, 2000; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fick & Ritchie, 1991). Although SERVQUAL can help marketers to understand service dimensions, the results thereof do not offer any insight into what consumers really want (Donnelly, van't Hull, & Will, 2000). A question ultimately arises: *Are the 22 items of SERVQUAL sufficient for explaining seniors' perceptions of GPTSFs?*

Although the GPT is one sector of tourism industries, its services and characteristics are comparatively complex. One of the most distinctive characteristics of the GPT is that it typically involves many travel-related sectors. Tour operators then combine various tourism products into a single, packaged entity (Reimer, 1990). Scholars once liken product quality to a jigsaw puzzle, with many equally important but different-sized pieces that must fit together perfectly to satisfy tourists (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999). Specifically, any measurement of the quality of GPTs must address all the services provided by the travel operator as well as the local service providers. However, travel operators seldom control certain service dimensions directly, although they remain important in the trip perceptions and experiences of tourists (Wang et al., 2000). The complex nature of GPTs makes it difficult to measure service quality; hence, the SERVQUAL items appear to be lacking for assessing GPTs. Though SERVQUAL has been empirically tested in many studies involving pure service settings (Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996), this scale has not been successfully adapted to and validated in environments that are more complex. Apparently SERVQUAL items cannot cover all the related entities of the GPT.

In addition, the development and validation of the SERVQUAL items in previous tourism related studies (e.g., Bigné, Martínez, Miquel, & Andreu, 2003; Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Lee & Hing, 1995) apply mostly to short-term service encounters. However, longer durations of service will increase consumers' opportunities to evaluate and be affected by their environment (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). Taiwan government statistics show that the median length of an overseas stay on a GPT is 6.8 nights (Tourism Bureau, 2010), which implies that a GPT often involves lengthy stays. It is therefore likely that as the duration of a trip increases, the seniors' involvement levels will increase. Further, extended services may create increasingly complex needs. Longer-term GPTs obviously incur needs that are very different from those related to short-term travels.

In conclusion, a more sophisticated and scientific method is indispensible in understanding how senior tourists perceive GPT services. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, the current study can arrive at supplementing existing service quality theory and providing practitioners with specific indicators while managing senior GPTs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative method

This section explains attempts made to generate a sound sample of items by means of a literature review, six focus groups involving seniors, and 10 in-depth interviews with senior travel managers from major travel agencies in Taiwan and China. Since consumers have diverse needs in different phases of tourism development (Chang, Wang, Guo, Su, & Yen, 2007), examinations across Taiwan and China are essential for achieving a better understanding of the potential senior market and seniors' needs with regard to GPTs. The procedures and analytical methods used in the current study follow from the suggestions of Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Gilbert and Churchill (1979), who establish the paradigm for developing a scale.

3.1.1. Procedures

3.1.1.1. Literature review. A thorough search of the literature regarding senior tourists' service features reveals two main parts. First, there are studies on the lodging industry, such as: Shoemaker (1984), Ananth et al. (1992), Callan and Bowman (2000), Wuest, Emenheiser, and Tas (2001), and Marshall (2004). These studies pinpoint 107 service-related attributes that are the chief concerns of senior tourists. Second, for pleasure travel activities, the researchers take several studies into consideration (i.e., Hsu, 2001; Lehto, O'Leary,

& Lee, 2001; Ng, Cassidy, & Brown, 2006; Pennington-Gray & Lane, 2001; van Harssel, 1994) and then obtain 127 relevant service features. From the aforementioned studies, the researchers used 234 service features as sample items.

3.1.1.2. Three focus groups. The researchers use focus groups to explore the variables that most concern senior tourists on an outbound GPT. In this present study, the focus groups comprise 8–12 people as a group base. The researchers conducted three focus groups interview in Taiwan and Beijing, respectively, to characterize experienced senior tourists' viewpoints regarding GPTSFs. Each participant had taken at least one outbound GPT in the preceding two years. In Taiwan, focus group interviews were held in Taipei, Taichung, and Kaohsiung, respectively. In China, the researchers held three focus group interviews in Beijing. The focus-group interviewers asked the respondents open-ended questions with respect to senior tourists' outbound GPT experiences, mainly according to Wang et al.'s (2000) GPT sector suggestions. The following was an example of a question in the GPT *hotel* sector: *According to your personal outbound group package tour experiences, what key service features do you perceive as important in the hotel sector*?

The researchers tape-recorded and then transcribed the dialogs in the focus groups. Afterward this study invited certain judges to determine the appropriate unit of analysis, as suggested by Kassarjian (1977). In Taiwan, the researches invited two doctoral students with certificated travel manager licenses to serve as judges, and these students independently coded the transcriptions into 187 units of analysis. In China, two graduate students from a travel management graduate school acted as judges and independently coded the transcriptions into 125 units of analysis.

3.1.1.3. In-depth interviews. The researchers conducted interviews with senior managers from major travel agencies located in both Taipei and Beijing. In Taiwan, as per Chang et al.'s (2007) recommendation, the researchers invited five travel agencies (Lion Travel Service Co., Ltd., Perfect Travel Agency Ltd., Zion International Co., Ltd., China Times Travel Service Co., Ltd., and Skylark Travel Service Co., Ltd.) to participate in this study. In China, five well-known travel agencies such as China International Travel Service (CITS) Head Office (Beijing), CITIC Travel Co., Ltd., Kuoni Travel Co., Ltd., Panorama tour Co., Ltd., and CTS Travel Co., Ltd., were invited to participate in this study. In each 1-h interview, the interviewers encouraged the respondents to talk, without interruption, except when the researchers required clarification (de Chernatony & Riley, 1999). Prior to data analysis, the researchers conducted member-checking to verify the trustworthiness of the interview data, as suggested by Decrop (1999). Consequently, the study obtains 245/166 units from in-depth interviews in Taiwan/China, respectively.

3.1.1.4. Content validity of items. Through the literature review, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, the researchers obtained a total of 666/525 units from Taiwan/China, respectively. Subsequently, this study categorized the 666/525 units into categories, using a single classification concept for category development, as recommended by Weber (1990). The researchers invited the two doctoral students – who are majors in tourism and marketing – to categorize all the items; they categorized 74 items and 68 items pertaining to the GPT sectors in Taiwan and China, respectively, and they applied a name to each of these GPT sectors and items. To test intrajudge reliability, this study introduced a two-week lag (Davis & Cosenza, 1993). Intrajudge reliability was >.90, and no new GPT sectors or items emerged.

3.2. Quantitative method

This section details how the items derived from the qualitative procedure were further refined in the process of constructing the parsimonious scales. This process mainly divided into two parts. Part one involved data collection and purification measures. Part two involved data collection from other senior tourists to further assess the reliability and validity of items regarding GPTSFs.

3.2.1. Measures

Initially, the researchers rewrote 74/68 items into questionnaires for developing two original five-point Likert-type scales, in which items anchored by *extremely important* to *extremely unimportant*. The researchers also chose a performance-based measure based on the results of previous scale development efforts (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Moreover, social desirability and yea-saying biases can occur and threat the reliability and validity of the other measures (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). Therefore, the researchers included five items from the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (Paulhus, 1984) and five items from the YN-2 scale (Goldsmith, 1987) in the questionnaire. A five-point Likert-type scale – anchored by *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree* – was used to measure both factors. Furthermore, the researchers included several questions that captured the respondents' demographic attributes and GPT experiences. Before the researchers actually conducted the survey, both in Taiwan and China, we invited two doctoral students and two senior lecturers from travel management schools to assess the content and relevance of 74/68 items. Finally, the researchers asked 30 undergraduate students from Taiwan and Beijing respectively to assess the wording and clarity of items, whereupon the authors made adjustments prior to the investigation.

3.2.2. Purification of measures

3.2.2.1. Data collection (sample 1). Senior subjects were selected via on-site intercept sampling. In Taiwan, the survey sites included communiversities, military villages, and the Christian Associations in the northern, middle, and southern metropolitan areas. In China, on-site intercept sampling was conducted mainly in Beijing. The survey sites included the Temple of Heaven and some university campuses. For these surveys, 300 questionnaires each were obtained from Taiwan and China. However, due to missing data and disqualification criteria, only 239 and 213 usable questionnaires were obtained from Taiwan and China, respectively. According to analysis on demographic of these samples, most of the respondents were female (Taiwan: 52.7%; China: 56.8%) in the age of 55–65 group (Taiwan: 53.5%; China: 62.0%).

3.2.2.2. Item reduction and exploratory factor analysis. An iterative scale purification procedure was used to develop a reduced, more parsimonious scale (Gilbert & Churchill, 1979). First, item-to-total correlations were computed for the 74/68 items. Items that produced a substantial or sudden drop in the item-to-total correlations were deleted (Gilbert & Churchill, 1979). After this, 35/28 items remained. Next, a principal component analysis with oblique rotation was applied (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988) for checking a possible overlap of items across factors. After the iterative deletion of a small number of items, 15/12 items remained. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed that there were five factors underlying the GPTSFs in Taiwan including: tour leader/tour guide, restaurant, hotel, coach, and scenic spot. Meantime, three factors were obtained under GPTSFs in China including: pre-tour briefing, restaurant, and optional tour.

3.2.2.3. Confirmatory factor analysis. To verify the reliability and construct the validity of the scale, a confirmatory factor analysis was employed for parameter estimation (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Every single factor was then submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis. All factor loadings were found to be significant at the 0.01 level and all individual item reliabilities were above the required value of 0.4 (Bagozzi & Baumgartner, 1994). An average variance extracted

(AVE) of at least 0.5 and a composite reliability of at least 0.7 was desirable (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and those requirements were met. After having assessed the individual factors, the reduced set of items was subjected, all together, to a confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation. The results indicated that the Chi-square value were both significant (Taiwan, 129.15 with 82 *df*, $p<0.00$; China, 103.51 with 72 *df*, $p<0.00$). Other goodness-of-fit measures indicated good overall fit of the five and three factor model to the data (Taiwan, GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.05, NFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.96, RFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.97; China, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.93, SRMR = 0.03, RMSEA = 0.091, NFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.95, RFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.97). In summary, these criteria suggested that the model fit the data adequately. Finally, the 15 and 12 detailed items were named as seniors' perception of GPTSFs.

3.2.2.4. Construct validity. One way to assess convergent validity was to check if all factor loadings are significant (Bagozzi, Yi, & Singh, 1991). All factor loadings were significantly different from zero as evidenced by consistently large *t*-values. Convergent validity was also supported since the AVE clearly exceeded 0.5 for all dimensions (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant validity of the five and three-dimensional scale was investigated as Fornell and Larcker's (1981) suggest, while taking any pair of constructs, the AVE for each construct should be greater than the squared structural path coefficient between the two constructs. These requirements were met for all pairs of constructs with the AVE ranging from 0.68 to 0.88 in Taiwan, and 0.76 to 0.83 in China (the maximum of the path coefficient is 0.72 in Taiwan and 0.86 in China). Discriminant validity was also assessed through an examination of the correlations of the seven dimensions with the 5 items of the consumer discontent scale (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The correlation coefficients were all significantly negative at the 0.05 level. These results supported the distinction of the constructs included in the scale. Finally, regarding the social desirability and yea-saying measurement, the correlations were small and insignificant at the 0.05 level. This indicated that the result was not contaminated by the social desirability and yea-saying factors. In summary, this study found evidence of convergent, discriminant validity, and any upward bias were apparently unrelated to individual differences.

3.2.3. Scale reexamination

Following the aforementioned procedures and analyses, part one of the process generated refined 15/12-item scales. To confirm if the scales were valid and reliable, the scales for both Taiwan and China were then evaluated again on a separate sample, as suggested by Sweeney and Soutar (2001).

3.2.3.1. Data collection (sample 2). The researchers sent out 1000 questionnaires to each of the Taiwan and Beijing samples who study in the elderly communiversities. The researchers gathered data over a two-month period. A three-wave mailing (survey, follow-up postcard, and second survey) to these respondents generated 500/280 responses from Taiwan and China. After the removal of responses with missing data and cases for disqualification criteria, of which 239/217 were deemed useable. The demographic analysis of respondents showed that most of the respondents were female (Taiwan: 60.7%; China: 56.7%), in the age of 55–65 group (Taiwan: 62.3%; China: 64.0%).

Evaluations of response bias were then conducted by the comparison of early and late responses (first 100 versus last 100). The responses across study variables resulted in no significant differences ($p>0.05$). After a comparison of senior response for cases included in the final data with those excluded because of missing data, the study variables revealed no significant difference ($p>0.05$). Therefore, response bias was not a major concern. The researchers' use of 239/217 cases to purify a 15/12-item scale well surpasses this parameter.

3.2.3.2. Analysis and result. The procedure of analysis was similar to those used for sample 1. Tables 1 and 2 summarized the results of a confirmatory factor analysis of the 15/12 seniors' GPTSF items with 5/3 underlying factors based on sample 2. All of the measures supported the good psychometric properties of the seniors' GPTSF. The overall fit indices of Taiwan and China for sample 2 (Taiwan, Chi-square value of 312.12 with 78 *df*, $p<0.00$, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.05, NFI = 0.90, NNFI = 0.95, RFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.93; China, Chi-square of 120.78 with 51 *df*, $p<0.00$, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.86, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.084, NFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.96, RFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.97) were similar to the indices observed in sample 1 and provided evidence of a desirable fit of the model in this new sample.

Furthermore, convergent validity was evident in sample 2: All factor loadings were highly significant. Table 3 shows discriminant validity test and alternative measures of consumer discontent. In summary, the five/three-factors models have also shown sound psychometric properties in sample 2.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The current study extends the GPTSF literature regarding seniors' perceptions to complete the concept of service quality as a whole. Practically, this study offers greater insight into the improvements to senior service quality in terms of GPTs. The scale development in the current study is a useful tool that travel agencies can use. Travel agents can benefit from this study to design satisfactory services that reinforce their attractiveness and competitiveness. Specifically, there are several noteworthy findings and implications that arise from the scale construction.

4.1. GPTSFs in different travel development phases

Taiwan deregulated outbound travel 20 years earlier than China did. It is possible that China will follow Taiwan's footsteps in outbound GPT operation (Chang et al., 2007). After comparing seniors' perceptions of GPTSF scales between Taiwan and China, this study found that these two areas have more differences than similarities. This finding may echo the argument of Chang et al. (2007), who suggest that consumers in different GPT development phases have different service needs. Since customer needs may be changed and evolved (Mittal & Katrichis, 2000), it is imperative to persistently monitor the senior tourist's service needs between Taiwan and China at the same time. Therefore, an understanding of the similarities and differences between Taiwanese and Chinese seniors' perceptions of GPTSFs are valuable to destination countries that rely heavily on the Chinese markets, and to management teams in relevant travel industries.

4.1.1. Similarities among seniors' GPTSFs

With regard to the common feature on restaurants, senior tourists from Taiwan and China expressed divergent views on service contents. In Taiwan, seniors focus on hot food and warm water; seniors from China, on the other hand, care most about food quantity, washroom locations, and tourist reminders signs telling them not to leave their belongings unattended. These findings are consistent with those of Huang and Tsai (2003), who found that food and beverages are key to seniors' travel satisfaction. In Wang et al.'s (2007) study, although the restaurant sector was removed from the GPT customer comment card, they still recommended that this sector to be evaluated using open-ended questions. The findings of the current study may provide more concrete information regarding the service needs of senior tourists within the restaurant sector.

Besides, this study found that safety issues are present in lots of GPT sectors regardless of the development phase of regional travel. For example, Taiwanese seniors are concerned about problems that they might encounter with the tour leader or guide, or in the hotel or coach. Their focus largely involves safety and emergency-

Table 1
Results of reliability and confirmatory factor analysis of Taiwan-*sample 2.*

Factor	Items	Mean	Individual item reliability	*t*-value of factor loading	Construct reliability	Average variance extracted	Coefficient alpha
●*Tour leader and tour guide*					0.96	0.78	0.83
	The guide should be honest.	4.68	0.75	10.13			
	The tour guide should focus on safety of seniors particularly.	4.79	0.70	9.88			
	The tour guide has the ability to respond to the emergencies.	4.62	0.60	7.24			
	The tour guide should be patient.	4.66	0.53	6.55			
	The tour leader/tour guide reminds traveler of things to bring for each day's itinerary.	4.65	0.67	9.08			
	The tour leader has the ability to respond to the emergencies.	4.80	0.72	9.49			
	The leader should be honest.	4.77	0.70	9.94			
●*Restaurant*					0.71	0.59	0.61
	Hot food should be provided.	3.97	0.45	5.61			
	While eating, warm water and hot tea should be available.	3.90	0.77	11.56			
●*Hotel*					0.75	0.60	0.56
	The tour leader/tour guide informs traveler of safety measures in hotel (emergency stairs, emergency exit).	4.68	0.69	9.27			
	The tour leader must clearly identify the equipment and other things to remember with regards to the hotel room.	4.62	0.58	7.13			
●*Coach*					0.92	0.85	0.77
	The driver is professionally good (careful when the road is slippery, kind and friendly in interaction, no emergency braking, uses the horn sparingly).	4.77	0.78	12.49			
	The driver sticks on the stable driving speed.	4.72	0.82	13.67			
●*Scenic spot*					0.72	0.56	0.56
	While touring, the tour guide must walk in front of the group, and the tour leader should stay at the back. They must walk at the same speed as the group.	4.53	0.65	8.86			
	Travel itinerary must include famous local spots.	4.46	0.60	7.27			

oriented conduct by the tour leader and guide, being reminded of safety measures in the hotel, the driver's profession and steady driving speed. On the other hand, seniors from China are concerned about service encounters that could take place in the sectors of pre-tour briefing and restaurant. With regard to pre-tour briefing, they appreciate being reminded to carry along their medication, and they like GPT personnel to know their existing illnesses in advance, protect their belongings against theft and loss, and provide a safe means to travel overseas.

4.1.2. Differences among seniors' GPTSFs

First, with regards to the pre-tour briefing, Wang et al. (2000) demonstrate that this factor accounts for 3% of GPT's special characteristics in Taiwan. In the current study, 90% of China's senior respondents agreed that the pre-tour briefing is important. However, from the in-depth interview, we found that seniors from China participate less pre-tour briefing than Taiwanese seniors. Again, this may be because Taiwan deregulated outbound travel 20 years earlier than China did. To mitigate traveling risks, we speculate that senior tourists from China may be more apt to join the pre-tour briefing to obtain the most up-to-date destination information in the future. Specifically, the probe and learn of seniors' special requirements at pre-tour briefings allow travel agencies to prepare reminders and take certain precautions in services.

Secondly, prior studies suggest that both tour leaders (Geva & Goldman, 1991) and tour guides (Huang & Tsai, 2003) play important roles in operating outbound GPTs. Especially, Taiwanese seniors put more emphasis on tour leaders and guides than China's seniors do. This implies that seniors from China will possibly put weight on this factor in the future. Because service interactions are more important

Table 2
Results of reliability and confirmatory factor analysis of China-*sample 2.*

Factor	Items	Mean	Individual item reliability	t-value of factor loading	Construct reliability	Average variance extracted	Coefficient alpha
●*Pre-tour briefing*					0.82	0.76	0.81
	Know if the tourists have special requirements, such as medical and food requirements and etc.	4.10	0.62	12.21			
	Remind the tourists of medicine to bring (i.e., motion sickness medicine).	4.02	0.78	14.10			
	Remind the tourists not to pack medicine and other important things in their main luggage (i.e., personal medicine, glasses, hearing aid, and etc.).	4.06	0.70	12.73			
	Investigate if the tourists have diabetes, hypertension, other illnesses and etc.	3.87	0.71	13.01			
	Focus on protection against theft and must have safe means of transportation oversea.	4.36	0.70	12.98			
●*Restaurant*					0.88	0.83	0.87
	Food should be sufficient.	4.00	0.83	15.21			
	Inform the tourists of washroom location at meal time.	3.91	0.65	12.16			
	Remind tourists at meal time not to leave their belongings unattended.	4.18	0.63	12.03			
●*Optional tour*					0.90	0.82	0.80
	Optional tours should not be too extensive at night.	4.11	0.79	14.20			
	The tour guide and tour leader should clarify regarding optional tours.	4.26	0.75	13.36			
	The price of optional tour must be reasonable.	4.26	0.84	15.22			
	Arrange optional tours that are not too physically demanding.	4.19	0.82	15.17			

Table 3
Results of construct validity of Taiwan and China-*sample 2*.

Validity/sector	Pre-tour briefing	T/L & T/G	Restaurant	Hotel	Coach	Scenic spot	Optional tour	Scale
Discriminant								
Taiwan	−0.23*	−0.20*	−0.08 **	−0.19*	−0.07 **	−0.17*	−0.13*	−0.11 *
China	−0.19*	−0.18 *	−0.09 **	−0.16*	−0.05 **	−0.11*	−0.12*	−0.08**

Note: T/L & T/G is the abbreviation of tour leader and tour guide.
* Correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.05 level.
** Correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level.

to older consumers whose physical and cognitive ability are deteriorating (Pettigrew, 2011), service providers from China should address all of these issues in a timely fashion.

Thirdly, in terms of the scenic spot factor, Taiwanese seniors prefer visiting famous local spots and asking for the tour guide to walk in front of the group, while the tour leader stays in the back. This interesting phenomenon suggests that Taiwanese senior tourists may appreciate the feeling of being cared for while visiting place of interest.

Fourthly, senior tourists from China tend to prefer optional tours that do not extend too late into the night, that are not too physically demanding, that have detailed descriptions, and that are reasonably priced. Interestingly, two items reflect the needs of senior tourists: the optional tour should be neither late-running at night nor physically demanding. Generally speaking, seniors have more regular and easy lifestyles than younger consumers; therefore, these two optional tour items should be recognized as being characteristic of the senior segment.

4.2. Managerial implications

From a strategic perspective, greater investments in learning the service needs of senior tourists will help travel agencies adopt assistive measures. These measures will eventually become resources and benefits that travel agencies can then offer their customers effectively. For example, GPT managers can increase senior customers' sense of security by preparing precautionary mechanisms. These mechanisms could be the provision of safety notices in pre-tour briefings and reminders prior to activities, care for tourists suffering from physical impairments, and the provision of tour escorts with medical and nursing expertise.

Because customers evolve over time through their experience with a product (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000), travel agencies should pay heed to the developing phase of GPT for creating a tour with a customer-driven service policy. We believe that age-friendly service strategy, as recommended by Pettigrew (2011), will provide suitable contents for senior tourists. In summary, by incorporating seniors' perceptions of GPTSFs, travel agencies can amend their managerial direction and make managers flexible to react efficiently to environmental changes and senior tourists' needs. Ideally, the findings of this research can contribute to both government and industry policy-making, particularly in travel service development.

4.3. Limitations and future study

This study bears few limitations. First, this study mainly focused on comparisons of seniors' GPTSFs scales between Taiwan and China. Because the collectivist consumers tend to have lower service quality expectations (Donthu & Yoo, 1998), the findings of this study are not likely identical to other culture contexts (e.g., western societies). Future studies should conduct a longitudinal research and employ respondents from diverse countries and areas (or culture contexts), especially those with rich experiences in providing GPT services and thus obtain a lucid picture of travel trends and patterns. Secondly, this study focuses on asking seniors about their perceptions of GPTSFs in an attempt to compare views between Taiwan and China. Further insights can be gained through the use of IPA and conjoint research methods to (1) understand the extent to which various segments of GPTSFs differ, (2) gain insights into each GPTSF's performance with regards to its perceived importance, and (3) provide directions on maintaining or augmenting service quality.

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