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Understanding the Ageing Customer and Designing Services for Ageing in Place

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Review

Understanding the Ageing Customer and Designing Services for Ageing in Place

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Abstract

Many developed countries are experiencing a marked rise in the ageing population, with a growing proportion of adults entering older age groups. Whilst the literature has focused on the design, management, and quality of services within senior living facilities, less attention has been paid to services for ageing in one's home and community. This article seeks to add understanding of the needs of older customers and how services and service processes can be designed to support their independent living and ageing in place. These services can enable older customers who feel challenged by daily tasks to continue to live in the community as opposed to in senior facilities. However, the literature on the designing of services has failed to keep pace with the growing trend of older customers and there is currently a deficiency of literature focusing on services designed for ageing in place. Therefore, this article addresses this lacuna through a thematic review of the literature in the field of service design, gerontology, and hospitality. The article reconceptualises hospitality in both hospitality and non-hospitality services and offers a theoretical and practical perspective into service design through the hospitality and human-design lens to enable older customers to age in place.

Keywords: ageing in place; independent living; hospitality; hospitality-laden services

1. Introduction

There is a global trend of population ageing due to the increasing level of life expectancy and decreasing birth rate around the world. The United Nations' World Population Ageing 2020 report underlines the importance of the ageing phenomenon and the opportunities and challenges it entails. The report highlights four major findings on global population. The first finding is related to the increasing number and proportion of older adults globally. Some 727 million persons aged 65 years or over were accounted for globally in 2020, and it is projected that the number will more than double by 2050. The second finding is related to the disproportionate number of women in the older population due to women living longer than men on average. The third finding is related to the diverse living arrangements of older adults, including living independently (with or without their spouse or partner). Finally, the fourth finding is related to the importance of policies that support older adults' well-being [1].

It is suggested that, globally, around 40 percent of older adults live independently, with or without their spouse or partner [1]. The literature also implies that older adults want to live in their homes independently for as long as possible [2–5]. While ageing in one's home remains the dominant preference of older adults, reviews of residents in assisted-living facilities show that older adults value community and social recreation and resources;

however, preferences depend on age, mobility, and the size of the facility [6]. How older adults are enabled to live independently has important implications for ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. Moreover, facilitating ageing in place for older adults is important to their economic, physical, and psychosocial well-being and life satisfaction.

The ageing phenomenon impacts service industries given that many economies around the world have increasingly become service dominant. From the 1970s onwards, researchers have paid increasing attention to services and important distinctions have been made about designing and delivering services as opposed to goods [7,8]. Within the service innovation and design literature, relatively little attention has been paid to the needs of older customers. The purpose of this article is to understand the needs of older customers and design services, and service processes that can support older adults to live independently and age in place. These services can enable older adults who feel challenged by daily tasks to still live in the community as opposed to in senior facilities.

In this narrative review, we selected the relevant literature through a search of databases such as EBSCO, Sage, and Wiley, and also used the search engine Google Scholar. We identified relevant literature using keywords such as "ageing in place", "independent living", "service design", "older adults", "older customers", and "service industry". The literature on service innovation and design, gerontology, and hospitality was retrieved and reviewed. Titles and abstracts were carefully examined to determine relevance, and the full version of the articles were obtained for further examination. Given the nature of a narrative review, the selected articles were assessed and selected based on the relevance to the topic and their journal publication merit in quality and reputable publications. This approach allows for a broader discussion of the topic that is viewed through a multi-disciplinary lens. The articles were critically analysed to synthesise the state of the art of the literature, identify knowledge gaps, and provide a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of the ageing customer and the design of services to support ageing in place.

The article is structured as follows: firstly, a conceptualisation of ageing in place is provided, followed by insights into the older customers' needs. Then, the article discusses the involvement of older customers in traditional hospitality and leisure contexts, such as hotels, coffee shops, and cinemas, but will also extend and justify the application of hospitality concepts to contexts that are not traditionally viewed as hospitality contexts. In particular, a dearth in the literature of services, specifically supporting ageing in place, is identified, and hospitality-laden services are reconceptualised. Finally, we suggest approaches to designing services to support ageing in place through the hospitality and human-design lens.

2. Conceptualising Ageing in Place

The concept of ageing in place has been defined in quite a wide variety of ways, and there is no consensus on how it should be defined [9], and this, according to ref. [10], has caused confusion. It is not the purpose of the current article to explore the definition of ageing in place in depth, and the interested reader can find detailed discussions of the term elsewhere [10–13]. However, it is appropriate to consider how the discussion of ageing in place has influenced the current paper. Whilst authors such as ref. [10] examine with precision exactly how ageing in place may be used, for instance the distinction between ageing in one's original home and in a small home in the same street or neighbourhood, we use the concept of ageing in place more broadly in order to ground the problem. This view is influenced by the objective of this Special Issue, which makes a distinction between ageing in place and senior facilities. Senior facilities are understood as places dedicated for senior living or retirement communities with a range of housing and care provision, while

ageing in place is understood as living independently in one's home (with or without their spouse, partner, or family) and remaining connected to the community. The importance of ageing in place is related to "societal recognition of the role of ownership and attachment to place, and to the presumed need for the familiar, as adaptive features of ageing" [9] (p. 90). This understanding of ageing in place is consistent with [14]'s definition of ageing in place "as remaining in a community-based dwelling during one's late years in life". In the current paper, ageing in place is understood as enabling an older adult to remain in their home, whether it is their original home or a downsized home in the same neighbourhood, and have the benefit of the service facilities available in that neighbourhood for as long as possible.

3. Understanding the Ageing Customer

A dominant negative perspective of ageing stereotypes suggests that ageing is a process of gradual physiological and cognitive decline and loss, based on a deficit model of ageing [15]. In contrast, this perspective has surpassed with models highlighting resilience and positive aspects of ageing. While generally someone over the age of 65 might be considered an older person, there is no common definition, as people can biologically age at different rates. Oxford University's Institute for Population Ageing provides valuable insights into the ageing population in terms of demographics, biodemography and health, and economy and society [16].

The ageing customer has diverse needs and preferences and, taking these into account, offers opportunities to develop services targeting this specific ageing segment [17–19]. However, the field of new service development and service design for older customers is still underdeveloped. Moreover, given the size of the ageing economy, various sectors need to consider, in their strategic and innovation planning, the different longevity trends and socio-economic factors. In particular, the service sector can consider adapting service processes to meet the requirements of the older customers to age in place rather than living in a senior facility and to promote healthy living in the community. However, older adults, for various reasons, are increasingly challenged to keep living safely and independently. The factors contributing to difficulties surrounding ageing in place are related to in-home mobility barriers, out-of-home mobility barriers, the decline of human-centred services in the local area, and the changing social composition of the locality. There are a wide range of in-home mobility barriers [20]. Some are simple and cheap to overcome, whilst others can require major modification of the home and the associated vulnerability of having strangers working in the home. Out-of-home mobility barriers include issues around access to transport facilities, and the loss of independent transport. Some older adults live in areas where no longer having a car significantly impacts their ability to access the local community, for example, those living in low density communities [21]. Another barrier to ageing in place is the tendency in recent years for the technology to displace human service. Some local services, such as post offices and banks, employ more self-service technology and this reduces the social value of visiting such settings [22], or, indeed, the bricks and mortar facilities are closed due to the shift to online service. Processes such as gentrification can change the social makeup of a neighbourhood, and this can change the retail environment, and older adults may experience a loss of place [23]. Gentrification is just one way in which place can change. Indeed, as ref. [24] points out, "the changing dynamics of the places of ageing have received little systematic attention" [24] (p. 6); yet, they can have an important impact on the meaning of, and desire for, ageing in place by older adults.

The literature suggests that the majority of older adults prefer to age in place and remain in their own homes for as long as possible. One key reason for this preference is

that older adults do not want to relinquish their personal independence, which is essential for independent living. Many scholars argue that central to independent living is the recognition that older adults have control over their life, based on the ability to make free choices [25]. Older adults do not want to be told when to eat, what to eat, what to do, and when to do it. Older adults would rather make their own choices regarding their daily lives. The majority of older adults would refuse to live in senior living facilities, unless they experience declining health and need assisted living and continuous care, which depends on their ability to perform fundamental daily activities. However, despite the growth of an ageing population and the preference of older adults to live in their homes and community for as long as possible, it seems that older adults do not have access to the services they need to enable ageing in place. It also appears that many service providers have limited understanding of the age-related challenges of people over the age of 65, have overlooked the customer journey of this market segment [22,26], and failed to provide services that meet the older customer requirements and needs. Much research into older customers has had a sales and marketing emphasis. For example, the media habits of older customers [27]; the brand loyalty of older customers [28]; and the online purchase behaviour of older customers [29]. Likewise, there is a stream of literature around older customers and their savings/financial behaviour [30]. While businesses might have a self-interest in studying older customers, the current paper is more focused on the older customer's capacity to continue to consume independently for their own welfare benefit rather than on businesses being able to sell more products and services. That is, the paper is more concerned with societal benefit than with commercial advantage.

4. Deficiency of Services for Ageing in Place

Much of the literature focuses on designing services for older adults living in senior living facilities or residential facilities [31]. Another stream of literature has focused on home modifications and adaptations and technology in order to support autonomy and self-sufficiency for living at home. The literature has paid less attention to designing services to support independent living and ageing in place in one's home and community. Several studies outlined that older adults feel younger than their chronological age [32,33]. This perception of cognitive age affects older customer behaviour as the older adults feel younger and they would not be willing to frequent places specifically designed for older customers.

As the proportion of older adults increases year after year, this will influence the service sector, how the sector understands the needs of their older customers, and how services are designed and delivered to meet these needs. The service design choices need to reflect older customer requirements and their physical, emotional, and cognitive needs. Despite the fact that the majority of older adults have reported that they feel younger than their age [34], in reality, the human body changes with age, affecting various systems and functions. These changes include joint stiffness, muscle mass, strengths, and balance decline, and a reduction in senses of taste, smell, vision, and hearing. All these changes are inevitable with age, although these changes vary given the onset of the decline and its severity.

Increasingly older adults seek out-of-home activities, and they are interested in participating in community life. However, the involvement in community activities is determined by how the communities are designed [35]. Similarly, the involvement in out-of-home activities and participating in service co-production depends on the design and the performance in the service required by the older customer. Inseparability is one of the service characteristics alongside intangibility, variability, and perishability [36]. Inseparability entails the simultaneous production and consumption of services. A prime example is

a haircut, where the service (the haircut) is produced (by the stylist) and consumed (by the customer) simultaneously. The customer is increasingly involved in the co-production of services, actively participating in the creation of service rather than merely consuming it [37].

Service industries have seen an increased use of co-production where customers actively participate in the creation of a service. Increasingly, service firms have adopted technology in their service processes alongside the customer co-production from self-checkout and self-ordering kiosks to self-ordering through web applications [38]. While the concept of customer co-production is seen as a valuable co-creation giving it a positive connotation, older customers are generally less engaged in the use of self-service technology (SST) [39].

The adoption of technology has gradually replaced human customer service from the overall service design, often driven by corporate strategic, operational, and performance targets and self-interest [39]. Therefore, certain services and out-of-home activities have become inaccessible to some older customers, given their inability to participate in the service co-production. This has led to sub-par service experience for the older customers as they do not receive a satisfying service experience. According to data from the Institute of Customer Service, more than one million over 65s in the UK have experienced poor customer service because of their age [40]. Some services require certain performance in the service required by the older customer. For example, discount food retailers, driven by operational efficiency, need to operate at a certain speed at check out; as a result, an older customer may feel inadequate or uncomfortable and ultimately their service satisfaction may be negatively affected. The focus of this article is on how service industries understand the needs of their older customers to age in place, and how services can be designed and delivered to meet these needs, so older customers have a comfortable and welcoming experience where they feel valued and cared for. The hospitality sector is known for its customer-focused operations, which is fundamental to the sector's success from the service design and delivery to creating enjoyable and memorable experiences. Given the customer-centred design involved in traditional hospitality, we extend and justify the application of hospitality concepts to contexts that are not traditionally viewed as hospitality contexts.

5. Reconceptualising Hospitality in Services for Ageing in Place

The hospitality sector includes hotels, cafés, restaurants, bars, pubs, themes parks, and other tourism and leisure facilities. The sector relies on repeat customers and creating positive and memorable experiences for their customers is at the core of their business.

The hospitality and tourism literature has paid close attention to older customers. The literature ranges from examining issues such as the travel barriers of older consumers [41], through older customer perceptions of robot service restaurants [42], to the experience of holidaying with ageing parents [43]. Much of the literature covers core hospitality sector industries such as hotels, restaurants, and cafés. Some of the literature covers contexts which are particularly relevant to older customers such as volunteer tourism [44]; medical tourism [45]; nostalgia tourism [46]; 'roots tourism' [47]; and seasonal retirement migration [48]. The relevance of these types of tourism to older customers can be highlighted as follows: volunteer tourism is attractive to older people as they have often recently retired and are keen to use their time and professional skills in an engaging way; medical tourism is particularly applicable to the elderly given the tendency for ailments to increase over lifespans; the desire for nostalgia and roots tourism tend to grow with age as people start to reflect more on their past and their family history; seasonal retirement migration is often attractive to older people due to climate-related health and well-being benefits.

However, the purpose of the current article is not to review the scope of this literature. For the interested reader, there are several reviews of this literature available [49–51]. The scope of such reviews can be illustrated by ref. [50], who employs thematic analysis to identify the following seven themes: (1) seniors' travel motivations and constraints; (2) senior tourism market segmentation; (3) seniors' role in tourism and hospitality employment; (4) seniors' behaviours towards tourism and hospitality service; (5) seniors' tourism and travel experiences; (6) innovative technologies assisting accessible tourism; and (7) needs and wants of seniors towards healthy ageing in tourism and hospitality.

From an older customer perspective, it should be mentioned that the tourism and hospitality literature has recognised how the industry can support healthy ageing. Research has examined areas such as the role of nature in supporting healthy ageing [52]; multi-generational travel as a vehicle for intergenerational bonding [53]; wellness-related leisure and healthy ageing [54]; and the role of technology in supporting older customers access to hospitality and tourism services [55].

The hospitality sector plays an important role in the local community [56]. However, despite the hospitality literature having a substantial body of publications on older customers, there has been less attention paid to the need for reconceptualising the meaning of hospitality in view of the growing numbers of older customers with functional decline but still living independently in the community. Businesses that provide 'hospitality' and 'non-hospitality' services, such as grocery and fashion retailing, should focus more on the meaning of 'hospitality' when they design their services and service processes.

6. Designing Services to Support Ageing in Place

A starting point for the design of service to support ageing in place is to ask the question: In the context of the older customer, what does it mean to keep living at home? As most houses are in a local community, part of the answer for many older adults is not being housebound, i.e., continuing to engage with the services used throughout pre-senior life, such as going shopping and going out for personal services and leisure, become relevant. Out-of-home activities have been found to be both important and significant for older adults [57,58].

The ageing in place literature shows that a major reason for most older customers preferring ageing in place to senior living is that they are living in the community and engaging with services and activities beyond their home. These include traditional hospitality settings, where the main focus is on "providing food, beverages, and/or accommodation" [59], and non-hospitality settings like supermarkets, bookshops, and gyms. Therefore, services which could have previously been primarily utilitarian for many during their working life may, for some older customers, become more hedonistic and hospitality-laden. In terms of designing services for older customers ageing in place, hospitality needs to be understood as a concept rather than as an industry. Accordingly, the boundaries between hospitality settings and non-hospitality settings need to be merged, and all services need to be considered in terms of a hospitality-intensity spectrum. The rest of this section will discuss some examples of non-hospitality service settings where hospitality values are often relevant for older customers. The main focus will be on grocery retailing but the discussion will also include service such as libraries, post offices, and gyms.

Shopping for food and other everyday items by older customers has attracted significant research attention. A common justification for such research is that grocery shopping is a frequent activity by many older customers, and it is one of their largest expenditures. Research has included the following: food and store choice criteria of older grocery shoppers [60]; older customers' attitudes to online grocery shopping [61]; and older customers and in-store technologies [62]. From a hospitality perspective, a number of authors have

highlighted potential differences between the shopping experience of many working age customers and many older customers. These often revolve around the emphasis placed on the social function of shopping and/or the physicality of shopping. For example, ref. [63] found that many of their research respondents discussed their shopping experiences in terms of physical activity and social interaction. The importance that older customers attach to social contact in service settings varies between individuals [64]. Whilst some older customers are not looking for social interaction when they go shopping, various pieces of research suggest that many older customers do view shopping as "a means of being with and interacting with other people" [65] (p. 296).

Gyms and leisure centres have an important role to play in supporting ageing in place. Maintaining physical fitness, mobility, and agility is important for independent living. Research suggests that gyms may benefit from modifying their offering and promotion style to the older user [66]. The provision of social support to older adults, such as exercise classes, has been found to encourage physical activity [66]. Furthermore, research has found that often older adults value opportunities to socialise, e.g., at a café, after exercising at gyms, pools, etc. [67]. Such findings provide evidence that gyms and leisure centres may have important hospitality-laden aspects for older adults.

Some literature includes the use of libraries by older adults. Libraries have long been recognised as places in the community where older adults can experience social contact and access a range of forms of support (e.g., training in digital skills). The literature on third places, from [68] onwards, has frequently discussed the role of libraries as informal public gathering spaces. As such, local libraries have often been portrayed as strongly supportive of ageing in place. Issues that have been addressed by researchers include managing libraries to serve the older adults [69]; ageism and libraries [70]; and older adult experiences in rural libraries [71]. Libraries are an example of a third place for, amongst others, older adults. Literature exists which examines a range of third places (e.g., clubs, churches, cafés, and parks) in an older adult context. Issues that have been addressed by researchers include the walkability of third places [72]; the consequences of closing third places [73]; and the health benefits of third places for older adults [74].

The issue of older adults and their level of social comfort in service facilities is an interesting area. One aspect of this is the tendency for places to change their character and one consequence of this can be for some older long-term residents of neighbourhoods to feel less at home. Ref. [75] provides some revealing examples of this: ". . . if an older person has lived in a neighbourhood for a number of decades, and it's gone through processes of gentrification, perhaps so kind of different age groups and different kinds of cultural groups have moved into the area, they can feel it that maybe the local coffee shop isn't the kind of space that they used to frequent anymore. They might feel like it's not for them, like it's catering for another age group. Or they might feel that when they go into the local post office or supermarket that the service is very fast and very speeded up, and they don't feel that they can kind of linger there and have conversations. They feel that it's very kind of focused on kind of efficiency, etc. So, all these different ways can have more subtle cues that other people can feel that those spaces aren't for them." In other words, an older adult trying to age in place might be in the same place but feel challenged because that place has changed.

Services provided in senior living has received much attention. The literature suggests that services should be tailored to their residents based on their individual preferences, cultural background, routines, and activities. While tailored and personalised experiences might be difficult to implement in out-of-home services and activities, hospitality and non-hospitality services can be designed to meet the needs of older customers to support ageing in place. Service providers have failed older customers as it seems that they do not

understand their needs and requirements. Older customers seem excluded from receiving service provision due to service digitalisation which has seen many service operations converting their services and service process into digital formats and technology-laden service operations. These changes have resulted in removing physical or human elements of the service process valued by many older customers, and introducing services driven by services digitalisation, not particularly valued by most older customers.

Human-centred design principles can be applied to understanding and meeting the needs and preferences of older customers. The key principles of human-centred design are as follows: people-centred—a design that focuses on the customer and developing product and services that are appropriate to them; understand and solve the root problem—this entails solving the right problem, rather than what a company believes is right for their customers; everything is a system—this entails a system-thinking approach and the interconnectedness of the different part of a service process; small and simple interventions—this entails early and continuous prototyping to ensure that the solutions provided meet the needs of the customers that the service development process is focusing on.

The difficulty of older customers continuing to access service facilities outside their home has been widely acknowledged. Research attention has been paid to issues such as public transport inclusion [76]; neighbourhood walkability [77]; technological barriers to service [78]; mobility issues [79]; and social comfort in the local community [23,80].

Research has also considered the physical demands of grocery shopping. This can include ergonomic aspects such as difficulties in reaching high and low shelves [81], the functionality of shopping equipment [82], and the challenges of reading and opening packaging [83].

Human-centred principles can be applied to the development of services and service processes to enhance the experience of older customers and enable them to positively co-produce and perform in the service production and consumption process. For example, an experimental study evaluated the effects of physical design alterations in self-service kiosks, such as adding chairs and side and back partitions, showed that these design features reduced older customers' workload and frustration, and improved task performance at self-service kiosks [84]. Adopting human-centred principles can lead to improved service quality and satisfaction, and older customers can derive enjoyment and pleasure from the service process rather than feeling undervalued, uncomfortable, and that they are underperforming while interacting with the services or the service processes. In 2016, Sainsbury trialled the initiative 'Sainsbury's Slow Shopping' where, during 'slow shopping hours', older customers were assisted by trained staff, and chairs were left at the end of aisles for customers to rest [85]. However, while these attempts are driven by the empathy of the grocery retailer and aimed to meet the needs of the older customers, they were small-scale experiments that were not fully launched across the chain. User-centred design (UCD) in government service provisions is improving, but its application remains incomplete [86]. Research by Age UK reports that many older adults are finding it difficult to access local public services as society becomes more digital [87]. However, the United Kingdom (UK) government has applied user testing with older adults for a live digital service to enable older adults to obtain a state pension forecast online [88].

Service blueprinting is a useful tool to use for the developing of service operations and service delivery processes. Service blueprinting is a process mapping technique that plots the stages of the customer journey and highlights any criticalities of the process from the customer's perspective. This technique is helpful in designing a new service process or improving an existing service process. In particular, the technique can be used to determine fail points within the service process system and can help service developers to identify critical points in their service. The failure points can offer opportunities to

improve customer satisfaction and service quality in the new or existing service process systems. However, service blueprinting needs to be adapted to a blueprint tailored for the older customers, which requires, as a prerequisite, an understanding of their needs and requirements. Understanding the needs of the older customers would enable service developers to design and develop service operations that are more hospitality-laden for the older customers. Some attempts have been made to use service blueprinting for designing services for people with disabilities, especially with blindness and deafness [89]. Similarly, older people can be included in the development of services. There are many ways for designers to gain insights into how older customers experience services.

One way of increasing the understanding (and empathy) of service designers regarding older customers is the use of age simulation suits [90]. Such suits can assist younger designers and employees to comprehend some of the age-related limitations that impact the elderly [91]. However, before adopting such an approach, an organisation should develop a good understanding of the ethical issues that have been raised surrounding the use of age simulation suits. These issues include the following: age simulation suits which tend to make users more aware of the physical aspects of ageing but neglect other important aspects, such as social and emotional ones [92]; the use of age simulation suits may, in some cases, increase the likelihood of negative stereotyping of older people [90]; and the safety implications for users of wearing age simulation suits [93]. Another way is for designers to watch or attend focus groups with older customers. Service designers can also conduct observations of older customers in service settings, either directly or through video observation [94].

Service blueprinting is an important technique in service design that might be further studied and applied through the perspective of inclusivity and accessibility among its classic components of service failure. In this way, service blueprinting can be further developed as a technique to include additional elements and features in order to design services and service experiences for accessibility, inclusivity, interaction, and ageing in place. When designing out-of-home activities, services, and experiences, service providers can ask questions such as the following: How easily can older customers physically get to/access the service facilities? How comfortable are older customers with the new technologies being introduced in service facilities? How comfortable do older customer feel there socially? These questions can be used as a starting point to understand older customers' needs. In addition, utilising service blueprinting techniques and human-centred design principles can keep people independent, mobile, and living at home and in the community. Accessible design of service processes can influence the design of settings that are easily navigated and used by people with mobility issues, hearing, or visual impairments, and not only by older adults.

Servicescapes [95], as the physical environment in which service employees and customers interact in the service process, can be designed to transform the physical settings into age-friendly spaces. Table 1 below has been drawn from different sources studying the grocery shopping and food retail store experiences of older customers (see [81,96–100]). The design elements for an age-friendly supermarket have been implemented, to some extent, in food retail stores, as the studies suggest. However, there is still a lack of consistency between retail environment experiences. These experiences are particularly evident between the discount type of food retailer and mainstream food retailers. The suggested design elements highlight the challenges and barriers of older customers to food retail shopping and can be used to inform service practitioners involved in servicescape design.

Table 1. A comparison of age-friendly vs. non-age-friendly supermarket design elements.

Design Elements (Selected)	Non-Age Friendly Supermarket	Age-Friendly Supermarket
Written communication	Use of small font Unclear signage	Large font print Clear signage
Rest opportunities	Lack of seating No restroom or limited restroom	In-store resting areas and also a café Trolleys with resting seats Highly accessible restroom
Staff	Focus on transaction speed	Friendly staff who are trained to identify and deal with age-related issues
Aisles and general ergonomic environment	Narrow aisles and/or cluttered aisles (e.g., with boxes or excessive additional promotional displays)	Wide and uncluttered Easy to navigate in a wheelchair or other mobility device. Reduced-glare lighting. Slip-proof flooring
Shelving	Difficult for many customers to reach the higher and/or lower shelves	Avoids very high or very low shelving. Ergonomically smart distribution of products

Research provides many insights into how older consumers perceive their interactions with service employees. However, it is important to emphasise that there is a tremendous variation within the older consumer segment. Indeed, this is one of the issues, with some older customers feeling that they are being served in a patronising way [22]. Research has identified a range of employee behaviours that are perceived by some older consumers as ageist. Ref. [101] discusses this using the concept of age-based stereotype threat (ABST) and describe them in terms of (1) perpetuating the invisibility of the older consumer; (2) assuming physical or cognitive deficiencies; (3) conveying a lack of respect; and (4) challenging self-efficacy with technology. They emphasise the importance of "appropriate training to understand the diversity of age identity in older consumers" [101] (p. 62) and the benefits of having a wide age range of frontline employees.

Some older customers experience cognitive decline that affect their memory and the processing of information; as a result, they face barriers to communication, and attention has been paid to dealing with these challenges. Dementia is a challenge that impacts increasing numbers of people, especially those over the age of 65. Ref. [102] pointed out the benefits of a wide range of contact personnel being trained in recognising customers with dementia and interacting with them effectively. Another communication issue that is more prevalent amongst older adults' concerns is hearing disorders. These disorders include being hard of hearing, tinnitus, and hyperacusis. Ref. [103] put forward several managerial solutions to support customers with hearing disorders, one of which relates to training employees to be more alert and responsive to such customers.

Research on employee interaction with older customers is anchored around the concept of loneliness. Certain groups in society are more likely to experience loneliness. It is not only the old who experience loneliness, but research shows late adulthood to be associated with the highest levels of loneliness [104]. The consequences of the coronavirus pandemic have increased researcher focus on customer loneliness and how to alleviate it [105]. Service employees have been identified as having the potential to reduce customers' feelings of loneliness. For example, ref. [106], in their study of café customers aged over 60 years,

found that employee service manner was significant in reducing customer loneliness. With the growth of social media and digital connectivity, loneliness may become less significant as a research issue. Ref. [37] posits that older customers may become "less inclined to view human service interaction, such as shopping, in terms of social interaction rewards" and therefore "attach less importance to the social exchange surrounding face-to-face service encounters" [37] (p. 508).

Servicescapes could act as places for social connection between older adults, contributing to their improved health and well-being and facilitating living in their own communities. The physical design of servicescapes can encourage social interaction between the elderly. For example, ref. [107], report on their ergonomic science-based study to design suitable outdoor seating for the elderly to meet outside their homes in public places, such as parks.

The design of servicescapes in both hospitality industries and hospitality-laden industries require that these have functional, inclusive, accessible characteristics. Servicescapes are functional when they are designed with the intention to meet customer needs. Functional service system decisions allow for older customers to move freely and comfortably within the service settings. Examples include spacious shopping aisles to accommodate wheelchairs and mobility scooters and clear and non-slip surfaces for customers with mobility issues. Other examples include shower grab rails in hotel bathroom designs and the installation of ramps and handrails in retailing. Accessible design improves the usability of servicescapes with considerations for visual, auditory, motor, cognitive impairments. Examples include appropriate lighting, clear, large, and easy-to-read signage, and the availability of large-print materials. Inclusive design aims to create servicescapes that are welcoming and usable by older customers. For example, considerations are paid to providing spaces for social interaction, quiet zones, or rest areas. The interested reader will find two case studies in ref. [99] on how supermarkets were designed for the needs of the mature market. Whilst the 'mature market' was defined as 50+ years, the design features are particularly relevant to the older old.

7. Conclusions

This article discusses the global trend of increasing numbers of older adults and how the ageing phenomenon impacts the service industry. Notably, the service operations literature has paid little attention to the needs of the older customers. Given the cultural differences, preferences, and opportunities of older adults to age in place, the article focuses on ageing and service provision primarily within developed countries. This article, through the narrative review, identifies the deficiency of the literature on service innovation and design literature supporting ageing in place in the context of developed countries. It contributes to the wider field by identifying the needs of older customers and the challenges they experience related to ageing in place and in the community. This article offers a novel conceptualization of hospitality-laden services for non-traditional hospitality service contexts, thus making a conceptual contribution to the service design literature. This article offers a theoretical and practical perspective for supporting older customer to live independently in their home and in the community by drawing on human-centred design principles to design services, services process, and servicescapes. While a thematic literature review allows for a broader discussion of the topic, it also presents limitations compared to systematic reviews. The limitations may be related to selection bias, irreproducibility, and the exclusion of evidence-based synthesis. However, many of the issues raised in this article are worthy of future research. Below, three research areas that seem particularly fruitful for further research are discussed.

The importance of ageing in place for older customers, who must be able to comfortably access and use service settings in the local community, suggests that future research

should focus on mobility and ergonomics. Such research needs to go beyond the more obvious focus on physical accessibility (such as stepping onto a bus) and examine issues such as the rest requirements of older customers whilst shopping. Likewise, there is a need to study service settings, such as airports, which are increasingly being used by older customers but have not received much research attention [108].

Another key area for research is the need for a better understanding of the social comfort of older customers in service settings. This social comfort includes both social comfort with service employees and social comfort with other customers. The literature draws attention to the strong desire of some older customers for social contact during shopping trips, but they also highlight the fact that this is an under-researched area [64]. Future research could address issues such as the following: How do older customers' expectations of social interaction whilst shopping vary between different types of retail setting? How does older customer interaction differ by class and gender? Considering that much customer interaction research has taken place in a Western context, how and to what extent do older customers differ in their social interaction expectations and behaviour around the globe?

Connected to the theme of social comfort is loneliness. Whilst loneliness is something of a taboo subject and can be difficult to research, recent research [109] has underlined both its prevalence amongst some older adults and the role of local service settings in reducing it. The literature highlights the difference between superficial and meaningful interactions [109], and future research could usefully generate insights into this distinction and the value created by different levels of intensity of social encounters in service settings.

Connected to the desire for social contact from service setting visits is the role of SST. SST has been studied from many angles [110]. From the older customer perspective, research has included the issue of SST being resisted, partly on grounds of a preference for human contact during service consumption [111]. However, it has been pointed out that older consumer resistance to SSTs, based on the loss of social contact, may lessen on account of the growing use of social media by older adults [37,112] and the social contact it provides. Future research could usefully investigate issues such as the growth in the use of social media by the elderly; the social contact value of social media; variation in social media by the elderly; and the extent to which social media-based contact is deemed a genuine substitute for human contact.

The authors hope that this article has kindled the reader's interest in the re-conceptualisation of hospitality with regard to older adults living and consuming services within a local community and generated a desire to contribute to the further exploration of this topic.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ABST	Age-Based Stereotype Threat
SST	Self-Service Technology
UCD	User-Centred Design

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