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**Analysing service quality for senior travellers: A  
mixed research approach investigating the  
perceptions of satisfaction in this growing  
tourism market**

**Thesis submitted by**

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**in October 2010**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**In the School of Business**

**James Cook University**

## STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

I recognise James Cook University for providing a PhD Scholarship which provided financial support throughout my degree. I also recognise that the university provided grants to attend conferences that aided in the progress and completion of the PhD thesis.

I recognise the support received from the School of Business in the form of financial and physical resources provided during the course of the PhD thesis.

I recognise the contribution of my supervisor Professor Gianna Moscardo for her support and guidance during my PhD.

I recognise the support of the many employers who participated in my survey, their employees who also assisted in my research, and the many senior travellers who participated in the studies.

I recognise the JCU Ethics Committee for ensuring that all research conducted for this PhD thesis met ethical standards and received approval.

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Alfons Kuilboer

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Date

## DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)*, the *Joint NHRMC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997)*, the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines (2001)*, and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001)*. The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (H 1849, H 2185).

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Alfons Kuilboer

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Date

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## ABSTRACT

Australia, like most developed countries, has an ageing population resulting from people living longer and declining fertility and mortality rates. This trend is exemplified in the demographics of Australia's ageing population with predictions that by 2050 the number of people aged over 65 years will increase to 35.9 million (Swan, 2010) constituting approximately 25% of the population. The shift from a younger population to an older population will have an impact on the economy, health priorities, environment, urban planning, housing, transportation, recreation, employment, tourism and business service providers. Tourism researchers in Australia have of recent years been aware of the growing importance of senior travellers to the travel and tourism industry. While there have been many articles written about service quality and customer service in general, to date no studies have been identified exploring the perceptions of customer service from both a senior traveller and manager perspective for an ageing population within an Australian context.

The overall aim of this thesis was to identify service quality gaps from the perspective of both the customer and service provider using the SERVQUAL model. The thesis incorporated three components:

- Evaluating perceptions of customer service encounters by senior travellers
- Interviews with managers about their perceptions of customer service
- A Service provider survey questionnaire with employees and employer

The first study in this thesis had three broad aims. The first aim was to identify a broad range of respondent generated service incidents by senior travellers using the critical incident technique. The second aim was to evaluate the importance of respondent's perceptions of customer service. The third aim was to identify pertinent gaps between the service provider and customer and relate those gaps to the SERVQUAL model. The study (n=45) asked respondents to record details of their six best and six worst service encounters in a travel diary. Open-ended descriptive encounters (376) were then themed into the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model and the frequency of occurrence was compared across the different service locations identified. Both best and worst service incidents

confirmed the importance senior travellers place on staff attitudes which were reflected throughout the dimensions of Responsiveness and Assurance. During the coding process, several additional themes emerged from the critical incidents. Further analysis indicated that the theories of ageism (Palmore, 2003) were worthy of further research attention.

The results from the first study provided support for the further exploration of the perceptions of customer service and satisfaction from the perspective of service provider employers. A series of semi-structured interview questions were developed to analyse employers' (n=59) perspectives on Australia's ageing population and customer service. The aims were to identify employer's perspective on Australia's ageing population, perceived impacts of an ageing population on service providers, identify gaps in the downward flow of ageing population information to service providers, evaluate employer's views on good customer service, and explore employers' perceptions of senior travellers applying discourse analysis. The results suggested that employers did not have a detailed understanding of the concept of an ageing population but had a vague notion that a trend existed. More negative implications for business were recognised revealing several negative ageist stereotypes. Employers had limited awareness of government policies/strategies concerning population ageing. Their most important ingredient for good customer service was staff attitudes, but 64% would not change their customer service approach for senior customers. The application of discourse analysis identified several negative ageist stereotypes with reference to senior customers from the perspective of employers.

The third and final study used the results from study two to develop a more focussed and structured employee and employer self administered questionnaire. The aims of this study incorporated knowledge about the ageing population, perceptions of customer service to the senior market, identifying underlying perceptions of ageism and examining the differences of ageism perceptions according to demographic characteristics and customer service training. The results showed that both respondent groups recognised and

identified the importance of customer service, however minimal training was identified. In providing excellent customer service to senior customers, employees described staff attitudes and behaviour to be the most important. Yet in describing senior customers, one third of employees were negative in their responses which mostly reflected typical ageist stereotypes. Employers had slightly above average awareness than employees' concerning knowledge of Australia's ageing population but in both instances this information came from media programs and articles and not from credible government or industry sources.

Overall these studies have shown that there are gaps in service providers understanding of, and emphasis on, appropriate service provision to senior customers. Several contributing factors include: lack of customer service training with an emphasis on senior customers, limited knowledge and understanding of Australia's ageing population, and the influence and impact of negative ageist stereotypes. Application of the SERVQUAL model was considered to be a useful framework for identifying and measuring service quality gaps with the proposal of an additional gap identifying the need for external communications to managers to be added to the model.

Parts of this thesis have been published in refereed journals and proceedings.

References for these are:

Kuilboer, A. B. (2005). The use of travel diaries in evaluating the perceptions of customer service encounters by Australian senior travellers. *Fourth Asia Pacific Forum for Graduate Student Research in Tourism, Honolulu, University of Hawaii*

Kuilboer, A.B. (2010). Managers' perceptions of customer service for an ageing population. *The Business Review, Cambridge*, Vol.15, (2), 158-163.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement on the Contribution of Others .....	ii
Declaration on Ethics .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents .....	viii
List of Tables.....	xiii
List of Figures.....	xv
List of Appendices .....	xvi
Glossary of Terms .....	xvii

## Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Ageing in Australia .....	2
1.3 Senior Tourism .....	6
1.3.1 Motivation.....	8
1.3.2 Travel Behaviour .....	10
1.3.3 Market Segments .....	11
1.3.4 Satisfaction.....	14
1.4 Ageism .....	16
1.4.1 Ageist Stereotypes .....	19
1.4.2 Ageism in Humour.....	23
1.4.3 Ageism in the Medical Profession .....	24
1.4.4 Ageism in the Workplace .....	25
1.5 Tourist Satisfaction and Service Quality .....	30
1.5.1 SERVQUAL.....	32
1.5.1.1 Weakness/Criticisms .....	34

1.5.1.1 Strengths/Advantages.....	34
1.6 Tourism System Model.....	38
1.7 Overall Research Goal and Aims .....	42
1.7.1 Research Aims.....	44
1.7.2 Study One .....	44
1.7.3 Study Two .....	44
1.7.4 Study Three.....	45

## **Chapter 2: Evaluating the Perceptions of Customer Service Encounters by Australian Senior Travellers**

2.1 Introduction .....	47
2.2 Methodology .....	49
2.2.1 Survey Procedure .....	49
2.2.2 Participants .....	51
2.3 Instruments .....	53
2.3.1 Travel Diaries.....	53
2.3.1.1 Advantages and Strengths .....	55
2.3.1.2 Drawbacks and Limitations.....	55
2.3.2 The Service Encounter.....	56
2.3.3 Critical Incident Technique.....	58
2.3.3.1 Strengths and Advantages .....	61
2.3.3.2 Drawbacks and Limitations.....	62
2.3.4 Effectiveness of Travel Diaries to Record Critical Incidents.....	63
2.3.4.1 Classification/Coding/Themes .....	64
2.3.4.2 Dimensions of SERVQUAL .....	67
2.4 Results and Discussion .....	69
2.4.1 Best Service Incident - SERVQUAL Dimensions .....	69
2.4.2 Worst Service Incident – SERVQUAL Dimensions .....	76
2.4.3 Comparison of Best and Worst Incidents.....	81
2.4.4 Other Themes from Critical Incidents.....	84
2.4.4.1 Value for Money .....	84
2.4.4.2 Concern about Status as Tourists .....	86

2.4.4.3 Opportunities to Socialise with other Travellers.....	89
2.4.4.4 Availability of Information.....	91
2.4.4.5 Amenities.....	93
2.4.5 Impact of Encounters on Decisions and Recommendations .....	94
2.4.6 Impact of Word of Mouth Experiences on Planning Decisions .....	96
2.5 Conclusions and Implications .....	101
2.6 Directions for Further Study .....	105

### **Chapter 3: Evaluations of Customer Service by Service Providers Interviews with Managers/Employers**

3.1 Introduction .....	107
3.2 Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis.....	108
3.2.1 Discourse Analysis within Tourism Research.....	110
3.3 Methodology.....	113
3.3.1 Survey Procedure .....	113
3.2.2 Participants .....	114
3.2.3 Instruments .....	115
3.3 Results and Discussion .....	118
3.3.1 Perspectives on Australia’s Ageing Population .....	119
3.3.2. Perceived Implications of an Ageing Population .....	133
3.4 Conclusions and Implications .....	136
3.4.1 Trend in Australia’s ageing population .....	137
3.4.2 Implications for your organisation/business .....	137
3.4.3 Awareness of government policies/strategies .....	137
3.4.4 Anticipated positive or negative economic impacts.....	138
3.4.5 What do you believe is good customer service .....	138
3.4.6 Ingredients of good customer service for senior customers .....	138
3.4.7 Ageist stereotype .....	139
3.5 Directions for Further Study .....	140

## **Chapter 4: Survey Questionnaire for Employees & Employers**

4.1 Introduction .....	142
4.2 Survey Locations.....	143
4.2.1 Survey Procedure .....	143
4.2.2 Participant Employees .....	144
4.2.3 Participant Employers .....	146
4.2.4 Instruments .....	146
4.3 Results and Discussion .....	148
4.3.1 Description of Employee Responses .....	148
4.3.1.1 Section A – Service and Training .....	148
4.3.1.2 Section B – Seniors as Customers .....	149
4.3.1.3 Section C - Questions on Ageing.....	154
4.3.2 Employer Survey.....	157
4.3.2.1 Section A – Service and Training .....	157
4.3.2.2 Section B – Seniors as Customers .....	157
4.3.2.3 Section C - Questions on Ageing.....	159
4.3.2.4 Section D: Ageing and Business .....	165
4.3.3 Comparison of Employer and Employee Responses .....	168
4.3.4 Factor Analysis.....	171
4.3.4.1 Gender.....	173
4.3.4.2 Knowledge of Australia’s Ageing Population .....	174
4.4 Summary and Conclusions .....	175
4.4.1 Service and Training .....	177
4.4.2 Seniors as Customers.....	179
4.4.3 Ageing Population & Implications for Business .....	180
4.4.4 Attitudes Towards Ageing .....	181

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

5.1 Introduction .....	183
5.2 Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions.....	187
5.2.1 Chapter 1 .....	187

5.2.2 Chapter 2 .....	188
5.2.3 Chapter 3 .....	190
5.2.4 Chapter 4 .....	191
5.3 Limitations of the Studies .....	192
5.4 The Main Thesis Aims.....	193
5.4.1 Aim 1 .....	193
5.4.2 Aim 2.....	197
5.4.3 Aim 3.....	203
5.5 Future Research Directions.....	215

## LIST OF TABLES

### Chapter 1

<i>Table 1.1</i>	<i>Studies on Motivation</i> .....	8
<i>Table 1.2</i>	<i>Travel Behaviour</i> .....	10
<i>Table 1.3</i>	<i>Studies on Market Segments</i> .....	12

### Chapter 2

<i>Table 2.1</i>	<i>Age of Respondents</i> .....	52
<i>Table 2.2</i>	<i>Usual Place of Residence</i> .....	52
<i>Table 2.3</i>	<i>Examples of Research Using Diaries</i> .....	54
<i>Table 2.4</i>	<i>CIT Articles</i> .....	59
<i>Table 2.5</i>	<i>Best Service Incident – SERVQUAL Dimensions</i> .....	71
<i>Table 2.6</i>	<i>Worst Service Incident - SERVQUAL Dimensions</i> .....	81
<i>Table 2.7</i>	<i>Value for Money</i> .....	85
<i>Table 2.8</i>	<i>Concern about Status as Tourist</i> .....	86
<i>Table 2.9</i>	<i>Opportunities to Socialise with other Travellers</i> .....	89
<i>Table 2.10</i>	<i>Availability of Information</i> .....	92
<i>Table 2.11</i>	<i>Amenities</i> .....	93
<i>Table 2.12</i>	<i>Customer Service Encounter Impact on Travel Decisions</i> .....	95
<i>Table 2.13</i>	<i>Word of Mouth Experiences Impact on Planning Decisions</i> .....	98

### Chapter 3

<i>Table 3.1</i>	<i>Service Providers</i> .....	115
<i>Table 3.2</i>	<i>Location of Service Provider</i> .....	115
<i>Table 3.3</i>	<i>Semi Structured Interview Questions</i> .....	117
<i>Table 3.4</i>	<i>Trend in Australia’s Ageing population?</i> .....	121
<i>Table 3.5</i>	<i>What do you think if any are the implications for your business?</i> .....	124
<i>Table 3.6</i>	<i>Awareness of government population policies</i> .....	127
<i>Table 3.7</i>	<i>Economic impacts</i> .....	132

Table 3.8	<i>What do you believe is your recipe for good customer service?..</i>	134
Table 3.9	<i>Would you change the ingredients for senior customers?.....</i>	135

## **Chapter 4**

Table 4.1	<i>Profile of Employee and Employer Samples .....</i>	145
Table 4.2	<i>Employed Front Counter Staff .....</i>	146
Table 4.3	<i>Employee Training in Customer Service .....</i>	149
Table 4.4	<i>Customer service training addressing senior customers .....</i>	150
Table 4.5	<i>If yes, did it address senior customers? .....</i>	150
Table 4.6	<i>Different Services Required by Senior Customers .....</i>	151
Table 4.7	<i>How would you best describe senior customers?.....</i>	153
Table 4.8	<i>How much do you know about Australia's ageing population?....</i>	154
Table 4.9	<i>Where did you learn about Australia's ageing population?.....</i>	155
Table 4.10	<i>Common Perceptions of Ageism .....</i>	156
Table 4.11	<i>What type of organisation/business is this?.....</i>	157
Table 4.12	<i>What percentage of your customers are seniors?.....</i>	158
Table 4.13	<i>Percentage of training specifically addressing senior customers</i>	158
Table 4.14	<i>How much do you know about Australia's ageing population?....</i>	159
Table 4.15	<i>Where did you learn about Australia's ageing population?.....</i>	164
Table 4.16	<i>Common Perceptions of Ageism .....</i>	165
Table 4.17	<i>Likely impact of population ageing on your org/business .....</i>	166
Table 4.18	<i>Integration of older person issues into your business plan? .....</i>	167
Table 4.19	<i>What inputs would assist your org/business in responding to population ageing?.....</i>	168
Table 4.20	<i>T-Test Ageism Statements .....</i>	170
Table 4.21	<i>Rotated Component Matrix.....</i>	172
Table 4.22	<i>Results of t-tests on gender and ageing stereotypes .....</i>	174
Table 4.23	<i>Knowledge of Australia's Ageing Population .....</i>	175

## **Chapter 5**

Table 5.1	<i>Ageist Stereotypes .....</i>	188
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# LIST OF FIGURES

## Chapter 1

<i>Figure 1.1</i>	<i>Changing age structure of Australian population, 1925-2045.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Figure 1.2</i>	<i>Ageing affects all Australian States and TerritoriesChange 2002-03 to 2044-2045 .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Figure 1.3</i>	<i>Discrimination in Britain.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Figure 1.4</i>	<i>Negative Expressions of Ageism.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Figure 1.5</i>	<i>Ageist Perceptions in Road Signage.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Figure 1.6</i>	<i>SERVQUAL Model .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Figure 1.7</i>	<i>Demand and Supply Model .....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Figure 1.8</i>	<i>Functioning Tourism System .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Figure 1.9</i>	<i>Plan of Research.....</i>	<i>46</i>

## Chapter 2

<i>Figure 2.1</i>	<i>CIT Coding Scheme.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Figure 2.2a</i>	<i>NT/SA Border Rest Stop.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 2.2b</i>	<i>Limestone Free Rest Stop.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 2.2c</i>	<i>Yaamba Free Rest Stop.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 2.2d</i>	<i>Rollingstone Free Rest Stop .....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 2.2e</i>	<i>Bluewater Free Rest Stop with Signage.....</i>	<i>75</i>

## Chapter 3 & 4

*No figures*

## Chapter 5

<i>Figure: 5.1</i>	<i>Overview of Research.....</i>	<i>186</i>
<i>Figure 5.2</i>	<i>SERVQUAL Model.....</i>	<i>213</i>



## LIST OF APPENDICES

<i>Appendix A</i>	<i>Travel Diary.....</i>	<i>260</i>
<i>Appendix B</i>	<i>SERVQUAL Original Ten Dimensions .....</i>	<i>273</i>
<i>Appendix C</i>	<i>SERVQUAL Five Dimensions with definitions .....</i>	<i>274</i>
<i>Appendix D</i>	<i>Visitor Information Centre Signage.....</i>	<i>275</i>
<i>Appendix E</i>	<i>Service Provider Interview Invitation Letter.....</i>	<i>276</i>
<i>Appendix F</i>	<i>Manager/Employer Informed Consent Form .....</i>	<i>277</i>
<i>Appendix G</i>	<i>Semi-Structured Interview Questions .....</i>	<i>278</i>
<i>Appendix H</i>	<i>Employee Survey (Modified Version).....</i>	<i>280</i>
<i>Appendix I</i>	<i>Employer Survey (Modified Version).....</i>	<i>282</i>
<i>Appendix J</i>	<i>Employee Informed Consent Form.....</i>	<i>285</i>

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADVENTUREQUAL	Outdoor Adventure Centres
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
ANOVA	Analysis of Variation
CEM	Customer Experience Management
CIT	Critical Incident Technique
CPA Australia	Certified Practising Accountants Australia
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
D & S Model	Demand and Supply Model
DINESERV	Restaurant Service Quality
ECOSERV	Service Quality Expectations of Ecotourists
HISTOQUAL	Quality of Heritage Attractions
LibQUAL	Library Service Quality
LODGQUAL	Lodging Quality
LODGSERV	Hotel and Motel Services
NSAA	National Strategy for an Ageing Australia
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
QLD	Queensland
RACQ	Royal Automobile Club Queensland
REQUAL	Quality of Recreational Services
RTO	Regional Tourism Organisation
RV	Recreation Vehicles
SA	South Australia
SERVQUAL	Service Quality
TAS	Tasmania

TEAMQUAL	Professional Team Sports
TQ	Tourism Queensland
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WOM	Word of Mouth
VIC	Victoria
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
WA	Western Australia
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council
Xers	Generation X – born between 1965 and 1979
Y's	Generation Y – born between 1980 and 1994

# Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

## 1.1 Introduction

There is an awakening interest amongst researchers and marketers in studying the senior traveller as our population ages and baby boomers are fast approaching retirement age. The importance of these changes has also been identified in a wide range of academic disciplines, industry service providers and various government departments. An indication of these significant increases in one particular discipline – tourism, can be found in the growing number of studies relating to senior travellers including research into seniors on motorcoach tours (Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001), self drive (Pearce, 1999; Prideaux, Wei, & Ruys, 2001), caravan, motor home, campervan and converted bus (Onyx & Leonard, 2005), travel agents (Huang & Tsai, 2003), grey nomad impacts (Stoeckl, Greiner, & Mayocchi, 2006), destination advertising (MacKay & Smith, 2006), senior travel motivation (Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Jang & Wu, 2006), and the profiling and segmentation of senior travellers (Horneman, Carter, Wei, & Ruys, 2002; Kim, Wei, & Ruys, 2003) . This mounting interest is a reflection of the global phenomenon of an increasing ageing population.

The United Nations (2005) projects that the world population will reach 6.5 billion people and will continue on this growth path reaching 7 billion people by 2012, 8 billion people by 2028, and 9.1 billion people by 2050. This equates to a 29 percent increase in world population from 2005 to 2050. Within this global population, the number of older persons (aged 60 years and over) will nearly triple in size, increasing from 700 million in 2006 to 2 billion in 2050 (United

Nations, 2007), a significant increase of 21 percent. This is in contrast to an 8 percent decrease over the same period for children (persons aged 0 – 14 years) from 28 percent of the total population to 20 percent (United Nations, 2007).

In layman's terms, globally the population of older persons is growing at a rate of 2.6 percent each year, at least until 2050, and this group is expected to continue growing more rapidly than any other age group (United Nations, 2007). These changes will have unprecedented effects on the age structure of all societies, with a reversal in the proportion of younger and older persons, and will require far reaching economic and social adjustments in many countries. At the heart of this unparalleled change is the decline in fertility reinforced by increasing longevity, presenting opportunities as well as challenges for all society.

No more challenging is this change in population growth than within the tourism industry. Tourism straddles an enormous range of industry diversity and could be at the forefront of providing genuine and efficient service in meeting the needs of an ageing population. This thesis will study these challenges within the tourism industry in Australia with a particular focus on service provision to an ageing population.

## **1.2 Ageing in Australia**

Australia, like most developed countries, has an ageing population. According to the Productivity Commission Research Report on the Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia (2005, p. xii), "Australia faces a pronounced ageing of its

population over the next forty years. One-quarter of Australians will be aged 65 years or more by 2044-45, roughly double the present proportion". The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia (NSAA) (Andrews, 2002a), has stated that by 2050 one quarter of the population or 6.6 million people, could be aged 65 years and over. According to Andrews, "Australians now have one of the longest life expectancies in the world with girls born between 1997 – 1999 expected to live on average 82 years, and boys for the same period expected to live to 76 years" (2002a, p. 6). Australia's ageing population is attributed to a sustained decline in the birth rate following the Second World War, immigration of working age people, declining fertility rates since the end of the baby boom period in 1965 (Andrews, 2002a), a growing awareness and implementation of numerous health education programs (Bonder & Wagner, 2001), and significant improvements and advances in medical technology have made it possible for seniors to achieve greater longevity resulting in a high growth rate within the senior population. The shift from a young population to an older one will affect our economy, our health priorities, urban planning, housing, the nature of recreation ... the list goes on. This shift will change the kind of society that Australia is (Santoro, 2006).

As seen in Figure 1.1 below, Australia's age distribution is being squeezed into a different shape by these demographic pressures. The classic pyramid shape in 1925 has already shifted to its present beehive shape, and with current trends will continue its inversion to resemble the shape of a coffin by 2045.

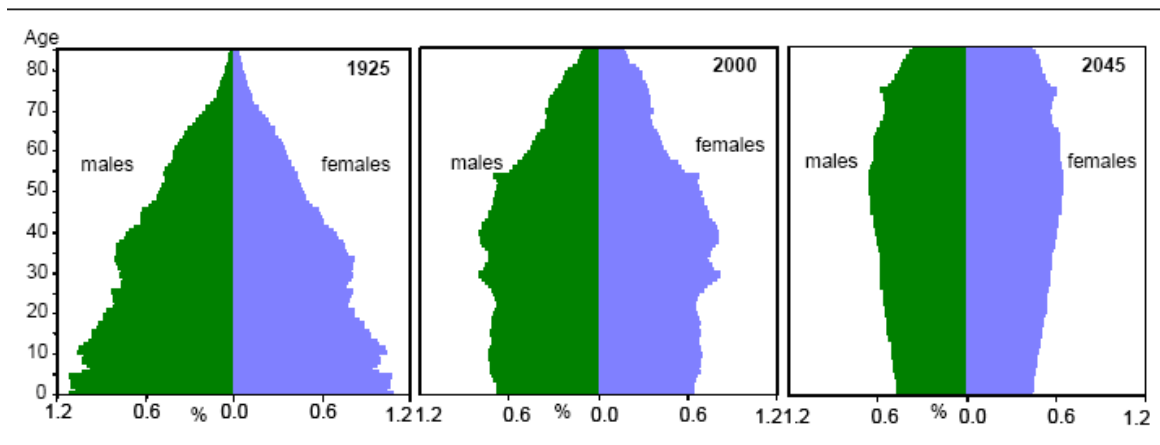


Figure 1.1: Changing age structure of Australian population, 1925-2045.  
(Costello, 2005, p. xiv)

At the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid, Spain, the Australian Minister for Ageing – Mr Kevin Andrews reported that:

*“In common with many nations, we are on the threshold of a major population change. In the 20 years since the First World Assembly on Ageing, the proportion of the Australian population over 65 has increased from 9.6 percent to 12 percent. In the next 20 years, it will grow to 18 percent and by 2051, it will exceed one quarter of the population” (Andrews, 2002b).*

This phenomenon is also addressed by Costello in the 2007 Intergenerational Report:

*“Australia, like other OECD countries, is experiencing an ageing of its population, driven by declining fertility and mortality rates. Since the mid 1970’s the total fertility rate has been well below the rate needed for population replacement. Over the same period, life*

*expectancy has increased, partly due to high standards of public health. By 2047, Australia's population is projected to increase by around 38 percent, to over 28.5 million people. The number of people aged over 65 will constitute over 25 percent of the population by 2047"* (pp. 11-16).

Each of Australia's States and Territories are experiencing this significant shift in their age structure as identified in Figure 1.2. The Productivity Commission Research Report stresses that, "Australia's ageing population is sometimes seen as a baby boomer 'problem'. However, it is a mistake to see population ageing as just about the number of old people. It is about the age structure of the population – the ratio of the older groups to other ages. Much of the projected change in the age structure reflects slow growth in the population of younger ages in the coming decades. Therefore, this is not a symptom of the baby boom, but its opposite, the long run decline of fertility in Australia since the 1960's" (Costello, 2005, pp. xxiv-xv).



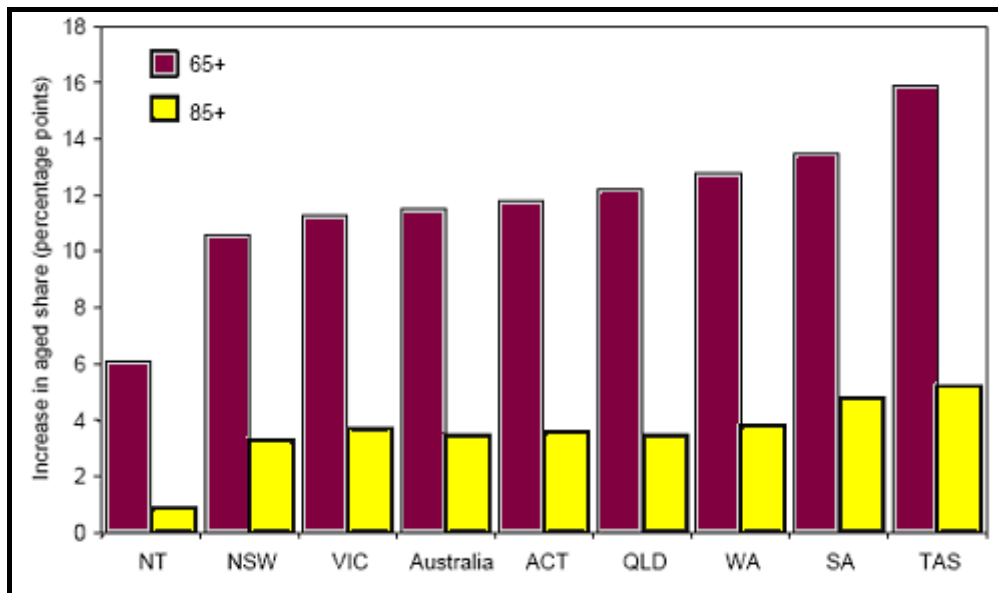


Figure 1.2: Ageing affects all Australian States and Territories Change 2002-03 to 2044-2045. (Costello, 2005, p. xv)

### **1.3 Senior Tourism**

Senior travellers constitute a significant and growing segment of Australia's domestic tourism market. According to Hossain (2003), senior travellers in 2001 spent a total of \$10 billion on domestic tourism. In 2002 this expenditure increased to \$10.8 billion accounting for 21 per cent of the total expenditure on domestic tourism in that year. A snapshot of domestic mature-aged travellers in Australia (aged 55+) for 2007, provided by Tourism Research Australia (2008b), indicated that these travellers spent a total of \$11.6 billion accounting for 21.3 per cent of all domestic tourism spending (Hossain, Bailey, & Lubulwa, 2003). It is forecast that this figure will increase to \$19.8 billion by 2012 and \$24.6 billion by 2022 (Tourism Australia, 2007). This significant contribution to Australia's

domestic tourism market indicates that the senior travel sector is an important tourism market segment.

Several factors have contributed to the development of this significant and often neglected market. With the abolition of the compulsory retirement age of 65, it is suggested that seniors will stay in the workforce longer with many more taking on part-time employment. As a result of this, seniors could have more discretionary income, minimal commitments, and most will own their own home (Bishop, 2001b). It has been argued that seniors have more time to travel and spend a large portion of their discretionary income on travel and leisure activities (Horneman et al., 2002; Teaff & Turpin, 1996). Increased mobility and longevity of senior Australians and the financial boost of pay-outs from compulsory superannuation, all combine to make the nation's retirees an important travel sector (Hossain et al., 2003). Golik (1999, p. 65) concludes that, "one of the outcomes of this increase in life expectancy is that it will allow seniors to travel more, travel longer and travel later in life".

To date there has been a limited amount of research concerning senior tourism, which is surprising considering most developing countries in the world are experiencing a significant growth in an ageing population (United Nations, 2007). The following tables present a summary of research into senior tourism organised by the key themes of motivation, travel behaviour, market segments and satisfaction.

### 1.3.1 Motivation

Motivation has been an important topic in the leisure and tourism literature since the inception of these fields of study (Veal, 2006). According to Wahab (as cited in Pearce & Lee, 2005) the whole area of travel motivation is basic and indispensable in tourism studies and fundamental to tourism development itself.

Understanding seniors' travel motivations is a critical issue to travel marketers who compete for this important market (Crompton, 1979). As Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) argued, traveller behaviour can be predicted by underlying motivations. Identifying the variables that influence seniors' travel motivation, allows travel marketers to more effectively understand the motivations and better tailor tourism products and services for the senior market segment (Jang & Wu, 2006). Table 1.1 summarises the key studies published in this area. In examining these studies several major themes have appeared. In particular seniors stress the importance of health, family and nostalgia, and there is less emphasis given to novelty and escape, which are often important in more general studies of tourist motivation.

Table 1.1

#### Studies on Motivation

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Hsu, Cai and Wong (2007)	A model of senior tourism motivations: Anecdotes from Beijing and Shanghai	China, a developing country witnessing the fastest rate of aging in the world sees seniors as a viable tourism segment in China. Using qualitative surveys and applying motivation theories, the authors proposed a conceptual model of tourism motivation for China's seniors. Results identified several propositions are uniquely Chinese while others bear similarities known to western constructs.
Jang and Wu (2006)	Seniors' travel motivation and the influential factors: An	In examining travel motivations of Taiwanese senior travellers, the authors identified five

	examination of Taiwanese seniors.	push and three pull motivation factors. Push factors include; self-esteem, relaxation and socialising. Pull factors include cleanliness & safety, friendliness & cost, and natural & historic sight. Further analysis identified health and positive & negative affect were significantly related to motivations of Taiwanese senior travellers.
Lee and Tideswell (2005)	Understanding attitudes toward leisure travel and the constraints faced by senior Koreans	Lee and Tideswell in this study of 200 urban based respondents identified senior Koreans motives for travel include: experience natural attractions, visit new places and experience new things, to rest and relax, and to stay healthy in their senior years. These Koreans generally have the time and money to travel. However, the impact of traditional Confucian philosophy represents a constraint and may deter travelling for leisure purposes.
Sellick (2004)	Discovery, connection, nostalgia: Key travel motives within the senior market.	986 respondents, all members of the National Seniors Association in Australia, participated in this study to identify key travel motives within the senior market. A 48 item battery was applied, factor analysed and cluster analysed to identify the segments of senior travellers – discovery, connection and nostalgia.
Bieger and Laesser (2002)	Market segmentation by motivation: The case of Switzerland	This study describes the segmentation of mature travel markets as a result of clustering motivations. Four motivation clusters were identified: compulsory travel, cultural hedonism, family travel, and personality marketing. The results reveal the attraction of a certain destination is what determines Swiss travel behaviour.
Chou, Wang, and Mao (2002)	Motivation of senior group package tour tourists	This study examines the motivation of senior tourists participating in a group package tour. 18 tourism motivation questions were asked of 306 participants resulting in three identifiable clusters: easy traveller, passive tourist and active participant. Understanding these clusters suggests implications for marketing strategies.
Cleaver, Muller, Ruys, and Wei (1999)	Tourism product development for the senior market, based on travel-motive research	365 retirees in SE Queensland were interviewed in the hope of discovering underlying travel motives and values unique to the senior tourism market for the purpose of new product development. Seven travel-motive segments were identified, resulting in an interesting twist to segmentation based marketing strategy for a demographically homogeneous senior market
Guinn (1980)	Elderly recreational vehicle tourists: Motivations for leisure	Guinn explores the relationship between motivations for leisure and participation in types of activities, demographic and socioeconomic variables in 1089 elderly recreational vehicle tourists. Significant relationships between motivations and selected active and sedentary leisure activities, age, occupation and income, and

		perceived health were identified. An appreciation of these motivations provides a better understanding of this market's lifestyle.
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### 1.3.2 Travel Behaviour

Early research suggested that the primary travel motive for the senior tourist was rest and relaxation and this was reflected in the activities and behaviours they engaged in (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Guinn, 1980; Romsa & Blenman, 1989). However, in more recent studies, these motives appear to be broadening resulting in a wider range of behaviours (Chou et al., 2002; Kuilboer, 2002; Shoemaker, 2000). This is reflected in the studies reported in Table 1.2 where a common theme is the identification of different activity or behaviour based on travel segment within the senior tourist population. A second theme that can be identified is that of significant differences between seniors and non-seniors in travel behaviours.

Table 1.2

#### Travel Behaviour

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Littrell, Paige, and Song (2004)	Senior travellers: Tourism activities and shopping behaviours	This study has a twofold purpose: (1) develop profiles on senior travellers based on travel activities and (2) augment the profiles by comparing and contrasting tourists on shopping variables. Three profiles emerged – active outdoor/cultural tourists, cultural tourists, and moderate tourist. When applied to shopping behaviours, profiles differed on the importance attached to shopping during travel.
Reece (2004)	Are senior leisure travellers different?	This article tests the hypotheses that demand for household leisure travel behaviour to South Carolina is the same for senior and non-senior households. The travel behaviour of the two groups is different in that seniors travel further than

		non-senior households and a greater percentage of seniors who own their home can travel more. Therefore the hypothesis was rejected.
Huang and Tsai (2003)	The study of senior traveller behaviour in Taiwan	In gaining a better understanding of senior travel-related behaviours, variables explored were: travel motivations, patterns, destination choices, barriers, and satisfaction. Significant outcomes of this study identify a demand for quality service and tour content, and seniors want to buy travel from travel agents that understand their needs.
Lohmann and Danielsson (2001)	Predicting travel patterns of senior citizens: How the past may provide a key to the future	This paper reports on the re-analysis of results of the German annual travel survey 1971-99. It suggests the assumption – that there will be a close relationship between the travel behaviour of today's senior and those of the future, is misleading. The authors have argued that travel behaviour is not necessarily determined by age but by generation and that the travel behaviour of senior citizens in ten or 20 years will be different from the present seniors.
Backman, Backman, and Silverberg (1999)	An investigation into the psychographics of senior nature-based travellers	The purpose of this study was to identify differences and similarities in the senior nature-based traveller market including travel behaviour. The study revealed there are distinct segments within the senior market that are very useful to marketers of nature-based travellers
Moscardo and Green (1999)	Age and activity participation on the Great Barrier Reef	This paper reports on a study of the travel behaviours and activity participation rates of nearly 3000 tourists to the Great Barrier Reef regions of Australia. The study found that while age was associated with lower rates of participation in tourism activities in general and in outdoor physical activities in particular, age was not a major contributor to variance in participation rates. The results suggest caution in arguing that senior travellers will be a lucrative market for tourism.

### 1.3.3 Market Segments

The findings reported in the previous sections indicate that tourism researchers should not treat senior travellers as a single tourism group. Table 1.3 provides a summary of research specifically examining segments within the senior traveller market. Assuming what is known about the travel behaviours of today's seniors

will apply to those who are just now approaching their golden years (Huang & Tsai, 2003), researchers and the travel and tourism industry should pay close attention to this segment of the population (Zimmer, Brayley, & Searle, 1995). Further studies that better our understanding of senior travel-related behaviour can be attributed to Tongren (1980), Capella (1987), McGuire, Uysal, & McDonald (1988), Romsa & Blenman (1989), Vincent & De Los Santos (1990), Milman (1998), and Oh, Parks, & DeMicco (2002). The studies have highlighted the fact that the seniors market is not a uniform market but a heterogeneous and dynamic segment of the population. Several authors have noted the implications for marketing when considering the consumption behaviours, needs and wants of seniors.

Table 1.3

Studies on Market Segments

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Kim, Wei, and Ruys (2003)	Segmenting the market of West Australian senior tourists using an artificial neural network	Data for this research were obtained from a syndicated market research service randomly selecting 2400 customers of 50 years and older. A 30% response rate was achieved, but due to funding constraints only 200 valid questionnaires were used to segment the motivations and concerns of the travellers based on senior's traveller attributes or characteristics. Applying Kohonen's SOM four segments have been identified: active learner, relax family body, careful participant, and elementary vacationer. The findings of this research should be of interest to travel planners, travel agent and organisations which promote leisure activities for seniors in understanding senior travellers' needs.
Horneman et al.(2002)	Profiling the senior traveller: An Australian perspective	This is a study profiling senior travellers according to their demographic and psychographic characteristics. The six market segments – conservative, pioneer, Aussie, big spender, indulger & enthusiast were used to highlight the differences that

		exist in terms of holiday attractions, travel motivations, and information sources used in planning holiday. Results indicate that the senior traveller is not a uniform market and can be divided into three distinctive market segments based on preferred holiday type.
Hsu & Lee (2002)	Segmentation of senior motorcoach travelers	This study segmented the senior motorcoach tour market into three groups based on the identification of thirteen tour selection attributes and four demographic characteristics. The results suggest appropriate marketing strategies for tour operators to target each segment effectively.
Muller and O'Cass (2001)	Targeting the young at heart: Seeing senior vacationers the way they see themselves	In this study 365 people in the 55 plus age group revealed how old they felt, how healthy they felt, travel motives, personal values, travel risk perceptions, travel patterns and holiday destination preferences. The seniors were divided into two groups – the young at heart (felt 10 years or more younger) and not so young at heart (felt up to nine years younger). The findings suggest that segmenting seniors by how old they feel – rather than by how old they are, offer some valuable insights into their leisure and recreational behaviour.
Shoemaker (2000)	Segmenting the mature market: 10 years later	The study presented in this article adds to the prior literature on the mature market by examining how this market has changed over 10 years. The methodology selected matched the research design used in the author's 1986 study. Surprisingly the results appear to have remained relatively stable over the past 10 years.
Faranda and Schmidt (1999a)	Segmentation and the senior traveller: Implications for today's and tomorrow's aging consumer	This paper examines key factors that impact the consumption decision-making attitudes, and behaviour of the mature consumer with particular attention to the travel service sector. With strong present growth, the senior market presents tremendous opportunities for the tourism industry. Marketers must recognise (1) the ageing process and its effects on senior consumption behaviour, (2) acknowledge the heterogeneity and dynamic nature of the mature segment of the population, and (3) the necessity for sound segmentation methods.
Shoemaker (1989)	Segmentation of the senior pleasure travel market	One of the earliest market segmentation studies was conducted by Shoemaker. He investigated the travel benefits sought among elderly Pennsylvanians. Using cluster analysis he identified three segments – family travellers, active resters, and older set. In short,



		Shoemaker's study revealed, the senior market, like other broad market segments, can be segmented based on the members' needs and wants.
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In the past, several methods have been applied in segmenting the senior traveller market. Studies of seniors have tried to identify these segments by demographics (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982), benefits sought (Browne, 1984; Shoemaker, 1989), health status (Blazey, 1987; Zimmer et al., 1995), income (Horneman et al., 2002), occupation (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; LaForge, 1984), education (LaForge, 1984), travel constraints (Shoemaker, 2000), holiday type (Horneman et al., 2002), product preference (O'Leary & Lee, 2001), motives (Bieger & Laesser, 2002; Sellick, 2004; Shoemaker, 2000) and travel preference (Pennington-Gray & Lane, 2001). These studies all suggest that there is considerable diversity in the characteristics of senior travellers.

#### **1.3.4 Satisfaction**

A table has not been provided for this theme as no studies were found with a specific examination of satisfaction and senior tourism. However a sample of research addressing satisfaction in general is provided. Numerous research studies have been conducted to measure tourist satisfaction in different areas of the tourism and travel industry. Researchers have measured tourist satisfaction with dining experiences (Chadee & Mattsson, 1995, 1996), day or package tours (Akama & Kieti, 2003; Hughs, 1991; Pizam & Milman, 1993), shopping (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2006), cross cultural perspectives (Bowen & Clarke, 2002; Kozak, 2001; Yu & Goulden, 2005), hotels (Barksy, 1992; Bojanic, 1996; Foster, 2000; Saleh & Ryan, 1992), travel agencies (LeBlanc, 1992; Macintosh, 2002) and satisfaction

with destinations (Bramwell, 1998; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Foster, 2000; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). These studies suggest that researchers should pay attention to dimensions of perceived service quality.

Arguably the main findings identified in the reviewed research into senior tourism, whether it is motivation, travel behaviour, segmentation or satisfactions are:

- ✚ Senior travellers should not be seen as one large homogeneous group but as making up many smaller sub-markets.
- ✚ It is a growing market segment both in numbers and expenditure.
- ✚ This growing market segment has implications for tourism and travel marketers, product development, and promotion and advertising specialists.

However, a surprising gap in the literature on senior tourism is a lack of research pertaining to the satisfaction of senior tourists. Not only is this a limit in Australian research but also internationally, showing that little is known about this important component of this growing market segment. Therefore this thesis will concentrate on understanding the satisfaction of senior tourists in Australia.

## 1.4 Ageism

*If a young or middle-aged man, when leaving company, does not recollect where he has laid his hat, it is nothing; but if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug their shoulders and say, "His memory is going".*

Samuel Johnson

What do we mean by old age? Who is elderly? How do we interact with the elderly? Why do many people approach old age with dread? These questions are important to understanding the experiences and satisfaction of senior travellers.

An understanding of ageism is central to comprehend what it is to be old in society. In one sense ageism is like two other ideologies to which it is often compared, sexism and racism (Butler, 1995; Gearing, 1995; Minichiello & Coulson, 2005; Palmore, 2003). Gearing (1995, p. 9) argues that, "all three ideologies depend on prejudice, which serves to justify forms of inequality". However, according to Woodward (1991), there are also ways in which ageism differs from the forms of oppression associated with gender and race – we all have an interest in representations of ageing and the ageing body: age necessarily cuts across all our lives in the way other differences do not, so the analysis of age must be different from the analysis of race or gender.

The definition of old age has not been static over time. Katz (1996, p. 1) states that, "Ageing and old age are intrinsic to every form of knowledge and cultural practice, spiritual, ritual, mythical, symbolic, artistic, metaphorical and architectural". He continues on to state that, "ageing and old age have been so

diversely and richly understood that no single knowledge of them is universal. Nor should it be. The meanings of ageing and old age are scattered, plural, contradictory and enigmatic” (p. 1).

There appears to be no universal definition to define “older persons”. Age *per se* is only one of the criteria to use (You & O’Leary, 1999). Age is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in the sense that people can age biographically, psychologically, socially (Macneil, 1987; Minichiello, Alexander, & Jones, 1992), chronologically (Bonder & Wagner, 2001), and spiritually (Bevan & Jeeawody, 1998; Moschis, 1996). It is widely acknowledged that Robert Butler in 1969 coined the term “Ageism” that is used throughout numerous disciplines including gerontology, psychology, sociology and communication (Bytheway, 1995; Intrieri, von Eye, & Kelly, 1995; Kite & Wagner, 2002; McConatha, Hayta, Danner, & McConatha, 2004; Ory, Hoffman, Hawkins, Scanner, & Mockenhaupt, 2003; Palmore, 1999, 2003; Ragan & Bowen, 2001; Woolfe, 1998). After having coined the ageism term, Butler (1975) adds, “ageism reflects a deep-seated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle-aged; a personal revulsion to and distaste for growing old, disease, disability and a fear of powerlessness, uselessness and death”. Twenty years later, in 1995, Butler gives a similar summary of ageism, “Ageism has been called the ultimate prejudice, the last discrimination, the cruellest rejection. I believe it is the third great ‘ism’ in our society after racism and sexism. Like racism and sexism, it is prejudice or discrimination against a category of people – in this case, against older people” (p. 38).

Several other important aspects that directly impact upon ageism include economics (Productivity Commission, 2005), public policy (Gething et al., 2003; Russell & Kendig, 1999), legislation (Andrews, 2002a), geriatrics (Battersby, 1998; Blaikie, 1999), social work and religion (Palmore, 2003), health policy (World Health Organisation, 2008) and employment (Benjamin & Wilson, 2005). A few of the most prevalent outcomes of ageism for people are isolation from the community, inadequate housing and income, unnecessary institutionalization, untreated mental and physical illness, and suicide (Healey, 1993; Palmore, 1999). The definition of ageism that has become most widely accepted in more recent literature is, "prejudice and discrimination against older people based on the belief that ageing makes people less attractive, intelligent, sexual, and productive (Atchley, 1997). In addition to this definition, Sargeant (2003, p. 2) has defined ageism as," when the age of a person is used to define them and either through words, gestures or actions, imply that this makes the person less worthy, of less value". With this understanding of ageism, Bytheway (1995, p. 14), offers some insight into the consequences of ageism:

*"Ageism generates and reinforces a fear and denigration of the ageing process, and stereotyping presumptions regarding competence and the need for protection. In particular, ageism legitimates the use of chronological age to mark out classes of people who are systematically denied resources and opportunities that others enjoy, and who suffer the consequences of such denigration, ranging from well-meaning patronage to unambiguous vilification".*

In 2004, the Director General of Age Concern in Britain, commissioned a study in which several aspects of ageism such as, what is old, how age related stereotypes affect attitudes toward older people, and the seriousness of the problem were investigated. As Figure 1.3 identifies, this study found that age was the most prevalent form of discrimination in Britain (Lishman, 2005).

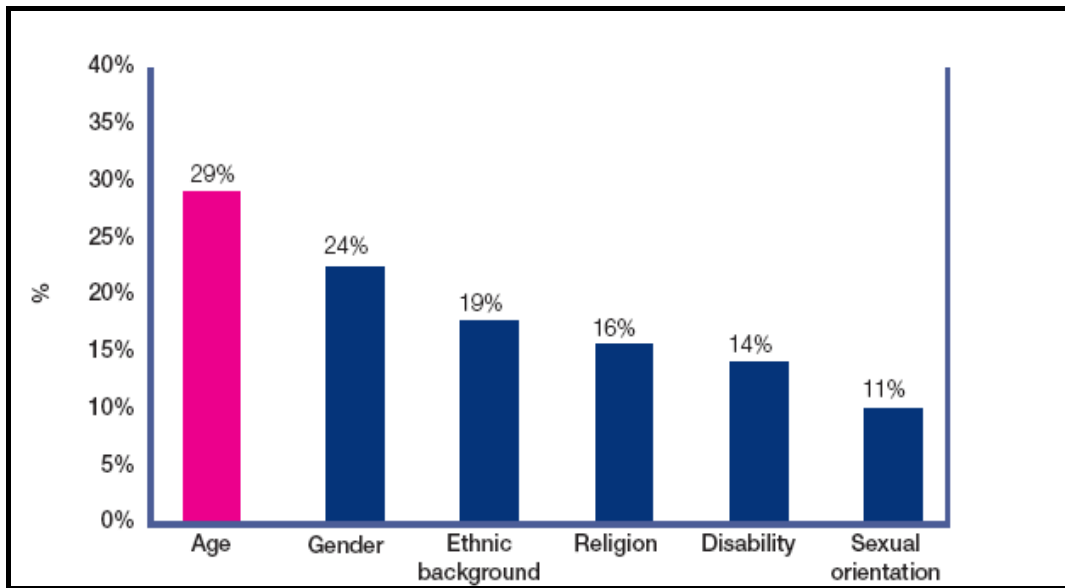


Figure 1.3: Discrimination in Britain (Lishman, 2005, p. 14)

#### 1.4.1 Ageist Stereotypes

Stereotypes may be defined as, “person perception schemas based on a particular categorisation principle (e.g. gender, ethnicity, national origin, age) and may be either positive or negative” (Bowd, 2003, p. 22). The literature suggests that there are widespread negative attitudes to older people based upon the negative stereotypes perpetuated in language, media, humour, advertisements, images and books (Thornton, 2002). Influences from these sources often affect perceptions and work related attitudes towards older people.

Old age has a wide range of meanings in our society from precise, carefully defined concepts to imprecise and undefined myths (Minichiello et al., 1992).

Features that are commonly accepted as part of stereotypes defining old people include:

- ✚ All older people are sick
- ✚ Most live in institutions
- ✚ Old age is a time of helplessness and hopelessness
- ✚ Older people behave like children
- ✚ Older people offer little to society
- ✚ All older people are depressed
- ✚ Majority of older people are poor
- ✚ If we live long enough we will all become senile
- ✚ Spending on old people is a waste of resources
- ✚ The experience of older people has little relevance in modern society
- ✚ Being old means being dependent upon others
- ✚ Older people are largely lonely, isolated and miserable
- ✚ Older people aren't adaptable, or able to learn new ways
- ✚ Certain areas of life, such as learning new things, fashion, physical activities, sex, don't matter when you are old

(Beissner, 1990; Crowley & Carroll, 2005; Nelson-Carr, 2008; Palmore, 1999; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; World Health Organisation, 2008).

In their book *Successful Aging*, Rowe and Hahn (1998) have listed six of the most familiar ageing myths:

1. To be old is to be sick

2. You can't teach an old dog new tricks
3. The horse is out of the barn
4. The secret to successful ageing is to choose your parents wisely
5. The lights may be on, but the voltage is low
6. The elderly don't pull their own weight

The vocabulary used to describe someone/something is often an accurate indication of attitudes concerning the object of description (Macneil, 1987). Figure 1.4 provides a list of words indicating the pervasive pessimism and Figure 1.5 identifies road signage, both supporting the negative perceptions of ageism. Most if not all of these expressions have negative connotations in relation to the elderly and often promote negative social constructs and perceptions.

ancient	decrepit	fossil	moth-eaten	pop
antiquated	disorientated	feeble	moldy	rusty
codger	frail	hag	obsolete	trot
crone	fading	infirm	old timer	waning
confused	fogey	incontinent	old salt	wrinkles
coot	geezer	sexless	senile	boring
grouchy	lonely	unproductive	disabled	ill

Figure 1.4: Negative Expressions of Ageism (Palmore, 1999; Thornton, 2002)



Figure 1.5 below identifies several types of road signage which also subtly reinforces the negative perceptions of the elderly.



Figure 1.5: Ageist Perceptions in Road Signage

### 1.4.2 Ageism in Humour

Ageist stereotypes have also found their way into jokes, birthday cards and other forms of humour that make fun of older people and are often not recognised as negative stereotypes. While this practise may seem harmless, these actions perpetuate negative stereotypes of older people (Palmore, 2002; Smith, 2002). Studies conducted by (Davis, 1997; Demos & Jache, 1981; Dillon & Jones, 1981; Nahemow, McClusky-Fawcett, & McGhee, 1986; Richman & Tallmer, 1977), of jokes, cartoons, and birthday cards about ageing, all reveal similar conclusions: that most of this humour reflects or supports negative attitudes to ageing, and that positive humour about ageing is rare.

Examples include sayings such as:

"OLD" IS WHEN..... Your sweetie says, "Let's go upstairs and, make love" and you answer, "Honey, I can't do both!"

"OLD" IS WHEN..... Your friends compliment you on your new alligator shoes and you're barefoot.

"OLD" IS WHEN..... A sexy babe catches your fancy and your pacemaker opens the garage door.

"OLD" IS WHEN..... Going bra-less pulls all the wrinkles out of your face.

"OLD" IS WHEN..... "Getting lucky" means you find your car in the parking lot.

"OLD" IS WHEN..... An "all nighter" means not getting up to pee.

(Suddenly Senior, 2007)

Senior Party Games examples:

- Pin the toupee on the bald guy.
- Spin the bottle of Mylanta.
- Musical recliners

(Mamarocks, 2007)

Palmore (1999), presents further examples of ageist humour:

- ✚ Time is a great healer, but he certainly is no beauty specialist.
- ✚ There's a similarity between babies and old men: both fall asleep over their bottles.
- ✚ Kidnappers ignore you.
- ✚ Your secrets are now safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.
- ✚ In a hostage situation, you're likely to be released first.

### **1.4.3 Ageism in the Medical Profession**

Research investigating the existence of negative attitudes towards older people within the medical profession and in particular among nursing students, suggests that there is a lack of understanding of the ageing process and attitudes are typically based on the myths and stereotypes of the elderly. For example, ageism can result in a tendency to assume incorrectly that some conditions are inevitable with ageing and therefore do not need treatment (Gething et al., 2003). Further to this, misconceptions about older people and ageing have been reported to affect professional decision making and lead to a failure to attend to treatable symptoms. According to Jacelon (2002), the quality of care provided for older people is directly related to the attitudes of health care professionals.

Many health workers/practitioners see elderly people as an increasing burden on society because they are unproductive, increasingly frail, and vulnerable with their decreasing ability to perform activities of daily living and frequently poor mobility (Parsons, 1993). According to Stevens and Herbert (1997), ageism has many expressions in the health care industry in Australia. They argue that the

priorities of the health care industry are predicated on the value of obtaining a “cure” and on the high status of working with “high tech” equipment. Therefore older people are seen as “bed blockers” because they require longer hospital stays and so reduce a hospital’s efficiency (Stevens & Herbert, 1997, pp. 17-18). Attitudes towards the elderly by nurses often focus on ageist perceptions creating reluctance to care for elderly patients. According to Herdman (2002), studies as far back as the 1950’s argue that nurses have negative attitudes towards elderly patients. In a recent study conducted by Gething et al, (2003), concerning measures of misconceptions and stereotyping of older people by nurses in Australia and the United Kingdom, they identified clear patterns of misconception in regard to ageing and older people. Most stereotypes were negative, indicating that nurses in these samples devalued and underestimated the capabilities of older people. In research conducted by Ryan, Bourhis, & Knops (1991) and Ryan, Hummert, & Boich (1995), nursing staff treat the elderly as infants and patronize the elderly by using ‘baby talk’ which not only reproduces ageist stereotypes but also hastens ageing. This in turn paves the way for the routinization of ageist discrimination in intergenerational communication (Ng, 2007).

#### **1.4.4 Ageism in the Workplace**

Older workers also face significant barriers with regard to staying in and re-entering the workforce. Contrary to recent trends towards early retirement, labour force participation in Australia among those aged 55-64 years is only 51.3% and attitudes towards older workers are still very negative (Muir & Slack-Smith, 2004; Steinberg, Donald, & Najman, 1996). Numerous studies have been

conducted and found that a range of negative attitudes and stereotypes amongst employers and employees (Andrews, 2002a) that affect older workers still persist:

- ✚ Older workers take more absences
- ✚ Are more prone to accidents
- ✚ Have memory problems
- ✚ Declining intelligence
- ✚ Performance declines with age
- ✚ Less creative
- ✚ Less adaptable to new technology
- ✚ Cost more in training
- ✚ Do not fit the culture of a younger workforce
- ✚ Are simply biding their time until retirement
- ✚ Less productive than younger workers

(Bennington & Tharenou, 2002; Gringart & Helmes, 2001; Healey, 2008)

This has major implications for older individuals attempting to enter or stay in the workforce. This is despite research showing that mature age workers are valuable employees. It has been argued that it is in the interest of businesses to recruit and retain mature aged employees for the following reasons:

- ✚ Productivity and skills increase as individuals age;
- ✚ Mature aged workers are more loyal to organisations and have a strong work ethic. They are five times less likely to change jobs than their younger counterparts, saving businesses money on recruitment;

- ✚ Retaining mature aged workers also benefits organisations because corporate knowledge, the way in which the organisation's systems work and training investments remain with the business;
- ✚ Mature aged workers are less likely to be absent and have fewer accidents.

(Andrews, 2002a; Bishop, 2001a)

Research has shown that ignorance about ageing and older people has reinforced false beliefs that ageing causes inevitable and irreversible changes. For example, according to Walker and Minichiello (1996) the media perpetuates stereotypes, which reinforce prejudice, discrimination and aged-based segregation of older people, and this ageism results in economic arrangements which devalue the social position of older people. Westh (2001), an Australian documentary film maker, attacks the media, "Nowhere is this scenario more evident than in the popular media where ageing is represented by an insidious plethora of patronising stereotypes and misinformation". Ultimately, these negative perceptions of ageism can diminish older people's self-esteem and reduce their participation in society. This unfortunately can result in a restriction in the types and quality of services that are available to them.

But the stereotype of older persons that accompany these phenomena is contradictory. Katz (1996, p. 6) states, "that at one and the same time they [seniors] are characterised as a financially secure, healthy, homogeneous, powerful interest group, and as a massive dependent burden on welfare, health programs, and the tax base generated by the currently shrinking work force".

Palmore (1999), has drawn attention to the potentially damaging effects of ageism in that people subjected to negative stereotyping may adopt the negative views and act accordingly with detrimental effects to their own self-image, confidence, and abilities. Regardless of response-acceptance, denial, or avoidance, stereotypes devalue a person's basic worth and dignity and can have potentially negative consequences. Levy (1996), directly examined the consequences of negative stereotypes and self-perceptions of ageing on older people's physiologic responses, functioning and longevity and found that those exposed to negative stereotypes had reduced memory performance, self-efficacy, and the will to live. Building on these studies, Levy et al. (2002), found that those individuals with more positive attitudes reported better functional health with this relationship being partially mediated by improvements in perceived control.

At the Federal Government level in Australia, the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia has recognised that Australia will experience an unprecedented ageing of the population in the first half of the twenty-first century. The sheer magnitude of the demographic change requires a pro-active approach to ensure positive quality of life for older people, harmony between generations and positive outcomes for the whole population. Included in a wide range of issues to be addressed is the need for positive individual and community attitudes to the ageing (Andrews, 2002a). Current community negative perceptions of older people still suffer from stereotypes formed in earlier times and can act as barriers to people's lifestyles, capacity to participate in society, and in their quality of life and health.

Several of Australia's states and territories have acknowledged the negative perceptions towards seniors and are working towards replacing the negative stereotypes with more positive perceptions of seniors (Jackson, 1999; Jennings, 2003; Refshauge & Lo Po, 1998; Spence, 2003; Stanthorpe & MacKinlay, 2003). The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) representing the interests of Local government nationally, also acknowledge the social implications of an ageing Australia. In ALGA's Discussion Paper (2004), one of the key challenges for local government is the changing of negative stereotypical images and attitudes towards older people. As a result of the discussion paper, ALGA has subsequently produced a Population Ageing Action Plan 2004-2008 (2004), to assist Australia's 700 Local government authorities to meet the specific opportunities and challenges of population ageing in a diverse and multi-faceted approach.

The literature on ageing suggests that there may be unique dimensions to the travel experiences of senior travellers and that exploring the perceptions of those that provide services for senior travellers could be important in understanding satisfaction of senior travellers.

The overall objective of this thesis is therefore to:

**Analysing service quality for senior travellers: A mixed  
research approach investigating the perceptions of  
satisfaction in this growing tourism market**

In order to accomplish this, an understanding of tourist satisfaction and service quality, and critical discourse theory will be applied.



## **1.5 Tourist Satisfaction and Service Quality**

Customer satisfaction is a critical issue in most service industries. According to Yu and Goulden (2005), customer satisfaction has been extensively studied by scholars and marketing professionals aiming at quality improvement and repurchase analysis. Foster (2000), argues, however, that only a few academic studies have focused directly on customer satisfaction amongst tourists, and of these an even more limited number have been undertaken in Australia. The major studies include Ryan (1995), Crompton and Love (1995), Reisinger and Waryszak (1994), Arnould and Price (1993), Fick and Ritchie (1991), Geva and Goldman (1991), and Maddox (1985). An extensive search of the literature did not reveal any studies with a specific examination of satisfaction and senior tourism in Australia.

Gerson (1994, p. 13) provides a simple definition of customer satisfaction - "a customer is satisfied whenever his or her needs, real or perceived are met or exceeded". Although there are numerous variations to this definition, satisfaction is generally recognised as a post-purchase construct that is related to how much a consumer likes or dislikes a service or product after experiencing it (Kotler, Adam, Brown, & Armstrong, 2006; Woodside, Frey, & Daly, 1989; Yu & Goulden, 2005). Customer satisfaction plays an important role in planning tourism products and services.

Service quality is a concept that is both connected to customer satisfaction and has aroused considerable debate in research literature because of the difficulties

in both defining it and measuring it, with no overall consensus emerging on either. However, according to Gerson (1994, p. 9), “when it comes to providing quality products and services, and satisfying customers, we must know exactly how we are doing. Measurement and appropriate follow-up are essential to success in today’s business climate.” Empirical research in both service quality and customer service satisfaction, affirms the importance of the quality of the customer/employees interactions in the assessment of overall quality and/or satisfaction with services (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). Additionally, Backman and Veldkamp (1995, p. 315) have stated that, “quality of service is an essential factor involved in a service provider’s ability to attract more customers”. It is generally recognised that perceived service quality is a key component and impacts on satisfaction directly, hence, if service quality is improved, satisfaction will be improved (Truong & Foster, 2006). Within tourism, the quality of service plays an important role in the process of delivery (Wyllie, 2000). Although service quality is an intangible but crucial area of interest within tourism, it is a standard that could be used to assess the effectiveness of tourism service sector (Yu, Morais, & Chick, 2005).

There are several marketing and management approaches used to measure service quality. These include the “marketing concept” (Kotler, 2000), “customer relationship management (CRM)” (Temporal & Trott, 2001), “customer experience management (CEM)” (Schmitt, 2003) and “SERVQUAL” (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990b). It is acknowledged that service industries have developed other concepts and tools to evaluate service quality, but this thesis will

only focus on issues relating directly to SERVQUAL as it is the framework most commonly discussed in the tourism literature.

### **1.5.1 SERVQUAL**

SERVQUAL is a generic instrument for measuring perceived service quality that defines service quality as the degree and direction of discrepancy between consumers' perceptions and expectation. Thus, service quality as perceived by consumers, stems from a comparison of what they feel service providers should offer with their perceptions of the performance of service actually provided by service providers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The SERVQUAL approach to the measurement of service quality has attracted considerable attention since it was first introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry (1985) and further developed in 1988 (Donnelly & Dalrymple, 1996), in 1991 (Ekinci, Riley, & Fife-Schaw, 1998) and in 1994 (Greenland, Coshall, & Combe, 2006).

This approach starts from the assumption that the level of service quality experienced by customers is determined by the gap between their expectations of the service and their perceptions of what they actually receive from a specific service provider (Donnelly & Dalrymple, 1996). This gap is usually measured across 22 items/attributes based on five dimensions used by customers to evaluate service quality (Hudson, Hudson, & Miller, 2004). The five distinct dimensions for evaluating service quality are: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) argue that these five distinct dimensions are generic and therefore valid and reliable for any service organisation. Although SERVQUAL was designed to

measure service quality, it provides only a framework or skeleton and therefore can be adapted and modified to evaluate specific services (Beckman & Veldkamp, 1995; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1991).

The SERVQUAL instrument has been selected as the departure point for assessing service quality in many different service industries including hospitality and tourism. This has resulted in various modifications to the SERVQUAL model reflecting the distinctive feature of the particular service provider. Knutson, Stevens, Wallaert, Patton and Yokoyama, (1991) produced LODGSERV, which has measurement items similar to SERVQUAL but reflects distinctive characteristics of hotel and motel services. A further variation was produced by Getty & Thompson (1994), producing LODGQUAL a procedure for scaling perceptions of lodging quality. In 1995, Knutson et al, adapted and refined SERVQUAL and LODGSERV and produced an instrument called DINESERV assessing customers' perceptions of a restaurant's service quality. McDonald, Sutton, & Milne (1995) adapted the model and produced TEAMQUAL to enable them to measure service quality in professional team sports. Another variant HISTOQUAL (Frochot & Hughes, 2000) has been developed for use in heritage visitor attractions. Khan (2003) modified the SERVQUAL scale now named ECOSERV. MacKay & Crompton (1990) using SERVQUAL as a basis, developed REQUAL which is used to evaluate the quality of recreational services. Two most recent variations to SERVQUAL are LibQUAL, a suite of services that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality (ARL, 2006) and ADVENTUREQUAL (Donne, 2009)

evaluating service quality and customer satisfaction at outdoor adventure centres.

SERVQUAL and many of its above variations have been applied within the tourism industry. Researchers such as Moutinho (1987), Chon and Olsen (1991), Pizam, Jafari, and Milman (1991), Vogt & Fesenmaier (1995), Chadee and Mattsson (1996), Danaher and Arweiler (1996), Qu and Li (1997), Knutson, Stevens, and Patton (1995), and Kozak and Rimmington (2000) have applied this approach to measuring satisfaction with the delivery of individual services associated with a destination. Other examples of the application of SERVQUAL in tourism research include: travel agencies (Bigne, Marinez, Miquel, & Andreu, 2003; LeBlanc, 1992; Ryan & Cliff, 1997), tour operating (Hudson et al., 2004), wine tourism (O'Neill & Palmer, 2004), the hotel sector (Kang, Okamoto, & Donovan, 2004), nature based tourism (Akama & Kieti, 2003), and the tourism industry more generally (Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Reimer & Reichel, 2000).

#### **1.5.1.1 Weakness/Criticisms**

SERVQUAL is often described as easy to use and is based on an empirically derived, well-validated approach (Greenland et al., 2006). However, there have been numerous criticisms of the approach particularly in terms of the relevance of the SERVQUAL dimensions to different industry and geographical contexts. Some examples of weaknesses/criticisms of the SERVQUAL model include:

- ✚ The service attributes that are used to measure service quality may not represent exact levels of service quality and/or may not measure all the

important characteristics of a particular service (Babakus & Boller, 1992; Carman, 1990; Fick & Ritchie, 1991).

- ✚ Limitations relating to interviewing respondents before and after consumption of a given service; the so called 'gap measure'. The service quality score of the gap measure of perceived and expected attributes may not be reliable (Akama & Kieti, 2003).
- ✚ Cronin and Taylor (1992), argued that the mere fact of asking a respondent to mark his or her perceptions of performance, has already led them to mentally compare perceptions and expectations. In other words, the estimation of perceptions might already include a perception minus expectation mental process.
- ✚ A major criticism is that information about importance is not gathered and integrated in the calculation of the quality scores (Carman, 1990; Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Hudson et al., 2004; Llosa, Chandon, & Orsingher, 1998; McDougall & Levesque, 1994).
- ✚ The complex nature of service quality means that it is unlikely that any single approach can fully capture and explain it (Greenland et al., 2006).
- ✚ Not all the dimensions are relevant for all service industries (Johns & Howard, 1998).

#### **1.5.1.2 Strengths/Advantages**

In response to the above weaknesses/criticisms, researchers acknowledge the SERVQUAL model has numerous strengths/advantages:

- ✚ Practitioners like SERVQUAL because the gap analysis approach seems a logical and straight forward concept. In addition, once data has been

analysed, it can be visually presented so that it is easy to identify strengths and weaknesses relative to competition (Greenland et al., 2006).

- ✚ Both Dorfman (1979) and Crompton and Love (1995), conclude that there is no single best way to measure recreational satisfaction, acknowledging that the diagnostic potential of the SERVQUAL format has emerged as the rationale for preferring its use over the simple perceptions format.
- ✚ SERVQUAL is a concise scale, easy to use by managers, and is now referred to as a standard by other service researchers (Llosa et al., 1998).
- ✚ A major strength of the SERVQUAL model has been in its flexibility and adaptability in measuring service quality across a broad range of service industries (Albretch, 1992; Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Hudson et al., 2004; LeBlanc, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Saleh & Ryan, 1992).

The SERVQUAL model has not only generated a significant amount of literature, but has also been used in many practical situations by management consultants and despite its weaknesses, it does provide a useful framework for both research and management. It is certainly an approach that holds promise for analysing aspects relating to the tourism experience and industrial sector of the tourism industry (Ryan, 1995).

In analysing service quality, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) identified and applied five gaps in the model to identify service quality shortfalls. The five gaps in the SERVQUAL model are shown in Figure 1.6.

- Gap 1:** Customer's expectation – Management perceptions of customer expectation
- Gap 2:** Between management's perceptions of customers' expectations and service quality specifications
- Gap 3:** Between service quality specifications and service delivery
- Gap 4:** Service delivery and external communications to customers about service delivery
- Gap 5:** Between customers' expectations and perceived service

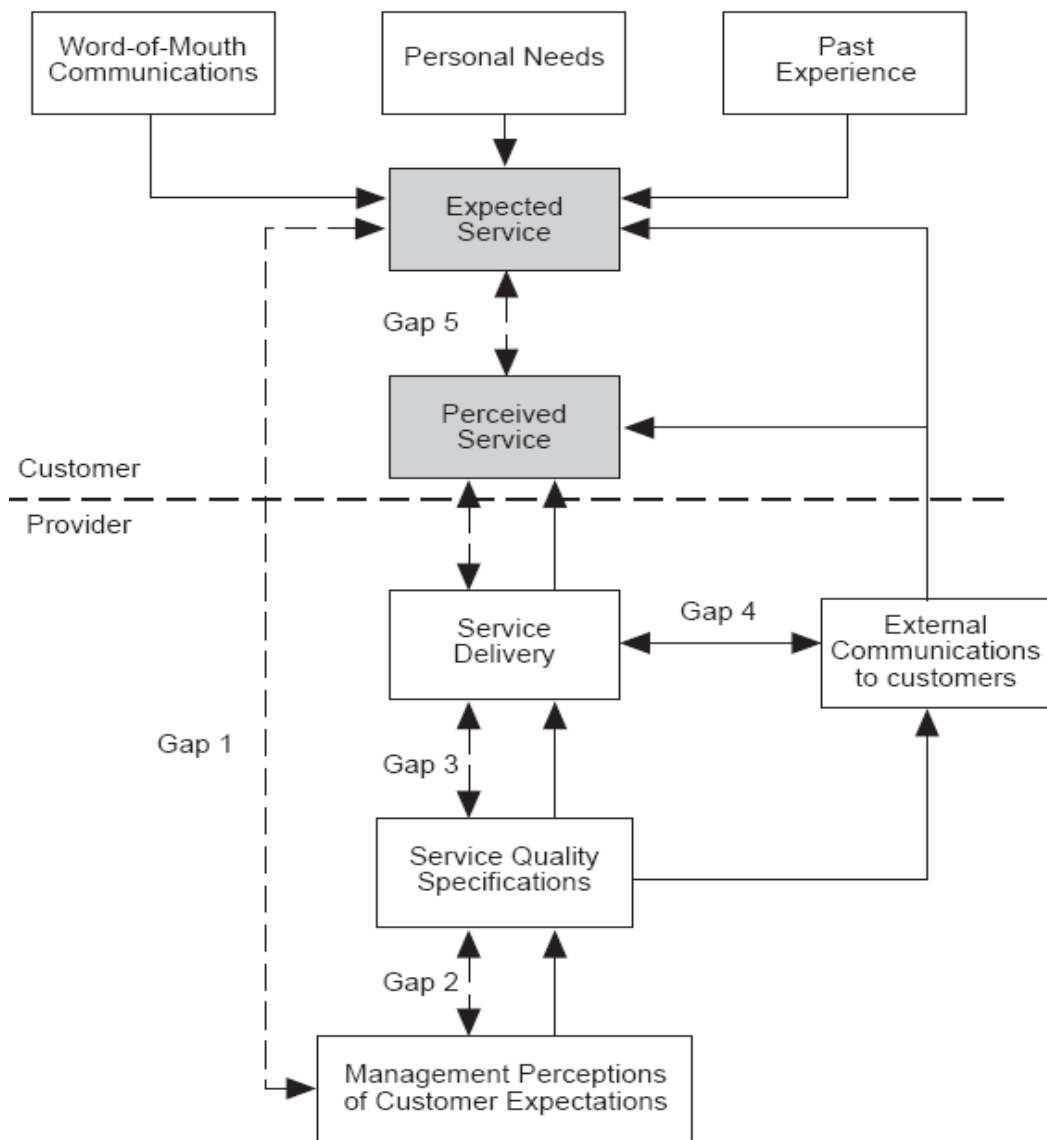


Figure 1.6: SERVQUAL Model (Zeithaml et al., 1990b)



According to Parasuraman et al (1985), gaps 1 through 4 identify the service quality shortfalls within the service provider's organisation and gap 5 denotes the service quality shortfall perceived by the customers. However, on analysing the SERVQUAL model it can be noted that the model does not identify external factors such as government policies, which can shape both service provider and customer perceptions of good quality customer service.

This thesis will apply the five distinct dimensions of the SERVQUAL model in an attempt to identify and understand service gaps for senior travellers in Australia.

### **1.6 Tourism System Model**

A number of tourism models have been developed that have tried to simplify and explain how tourism functions (Goeldner, Ritchie, & McIntosh, 2000). Prominent tourism researchers agree that most tourism models recognise the complex nature of tourism and the inter-relatedness of the different components of tourism (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2005; Goeldner et al., 2000; Gunn & Var, 2002; Hall, 1998, 2005; Laws, 2004; Leiper, 2004; Mill & Morrison, 2006; Page, 2003), resulting in an open systems approach. This approach is based on the general systems theory which emphasises interdependency – several interrelated parts working together to achieve a common purpose (Cole, 2010; Daft, 2008; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Hall, 2000; Leiper, 2004).

The idea of a tourism system model complements the above approach in that it acknowledges externalities, such as social structure, government policies,

economic and physical environments that impinge on the functioning of the tourism system and notes that tourism in turn has effects on these externalities (Leiper, 2004). Tourism has been evolving throughout the centuries across its diverse dimensions and has developed into a complex network of transportation, food services, accommodation providers, attractions, information brokers, travel agencies and tour operators. According to Gunn and Var (2002), the reasons for travel are vast and various, including leisure, trade, health, work, family, sport and religion. All these characteristics have been captured in Gunn's Functioning Tourism System model, arguably the model most widely used in the tourism literature. Figure 1.7 presents the Demand and Supply model which underpins Figure 1.8, Functioning Tourism System Model.

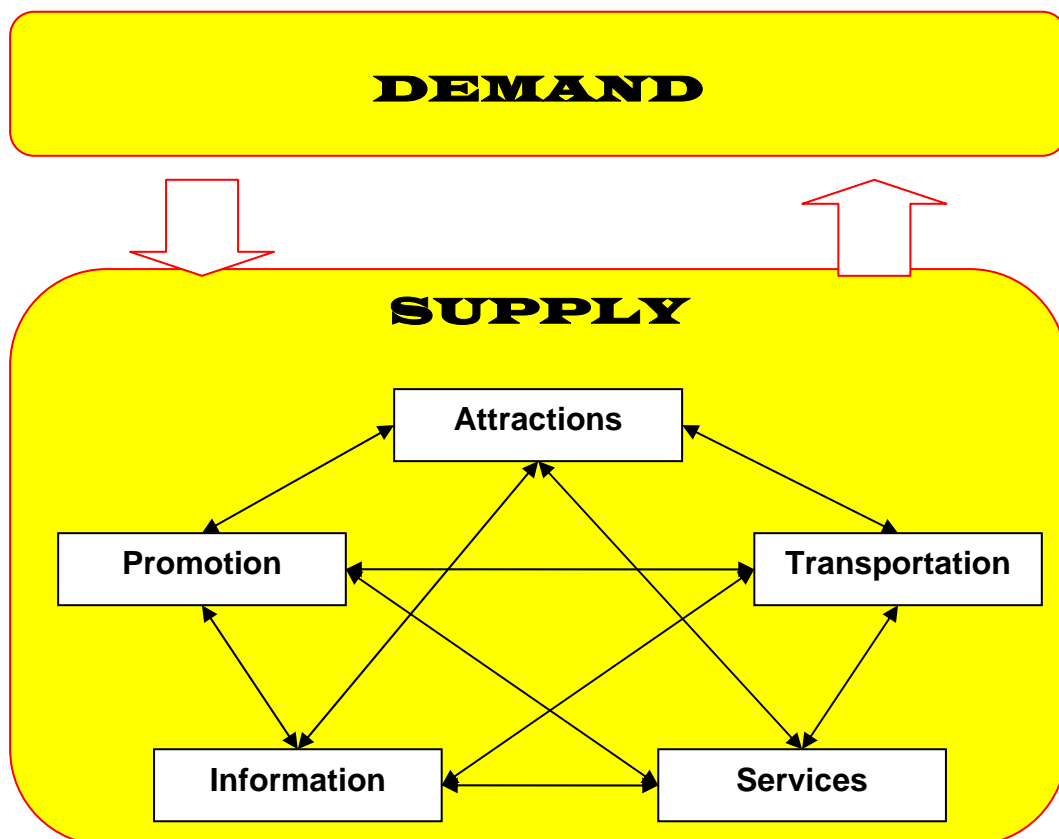


Figure 1.7: Demand and Supply Model (Gunn & Var, 2002, p. 35)

Virtually all the elements of tourism can be modelled as an interrelated demand and supply side. The five supply side components are interdependent and require planning that relates to market trends as well as physical characteristics of land and resources. In order to satisfy the market demand, a nation, region, or community must be able to provide a variety of development and services – the supply side. How well this side matches the market is the key to reaching the ultimate in correct tourism development (Gunn & Var, 2002).

Gunn and Var (2002) recognise that the tourism system does not operate in an isolated manner, but is influenced by a variety of external factors. Factors such as the quality of the natural environment and cultural resources, strength of social structures, including organisation and leadership, attitudes of communities, availability of finance and entrepreneurs, competition, and government policies on the functioning of the tourism system. As Mill and Morrison (2006, p. 3) point out, “The tourism system is like a spider’s web – touch one part and reverberations are felt throughout the system”. The external factors influencing the functioning tourism system are presented in Figure 1.8 below.

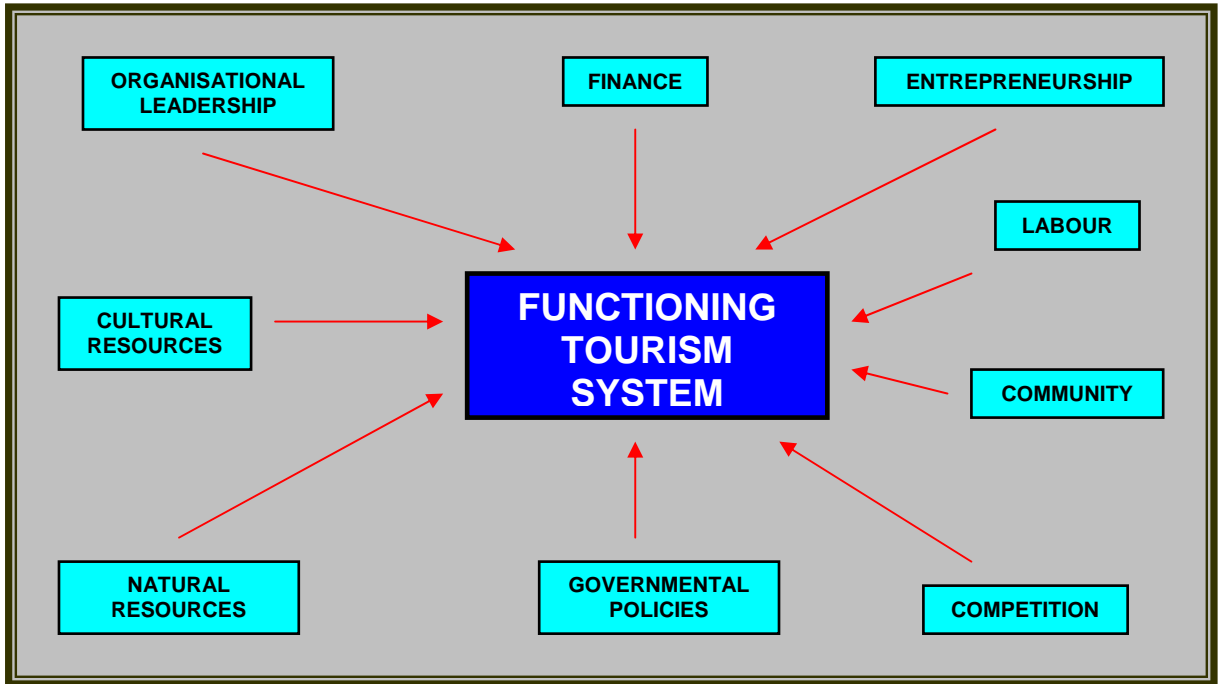


Figure 1.8: Functioning Tourism System (Gunn & Var, 2002, p. 59)

Of particular importance to the present research are the external factors of Governmental Policies and organisational leadership. The Tourism White Paper (2004, p. 34) also acknowledge the importance of external factors, “Regional and local tourism associations, local government and State and Territory organisations provide most of the support and infrastructure for regional tourism development, including leadership and management”. An important role within all levels of government and governing tourism bodies is to enact and administer legislation and regulations on tourism. Tourism and related legislation provide the legal basis for the development, management and operation of tourism (Inskeep, 1991). According to the President of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Jean-Claude Baumgarten (2003), acknowledging several external factors identified in Figure 1.8, have played a major role in the

development of the WTTC Blueprint for the New Tourism document. Australia's Tourism White Paper (Hockey, 2004) has engaged all of the external factors of the functioning tourism system in its medium to long term strategy for tourism in Australia. At a local level, in a partnership between the Queensland Government and Queensland Tourism Industry, the Queensland Tourism Strategy has been developed. In presenting this strategy, Keech & Smith (2006) have acknowledged a range of external influences/trends that have impacted on the tourism industry at state wide and regional levels. These influences/trends include: political/legal, technology, social and cultural, competitive, industry, natural environment, and economic.

This thesis will use the Functioning Tourism System as a broad framework for designing the methodology and interpreting research results.

### **1.7 Overall Research Goal and Aims**

Based on the literature review, it is evident that the unprecedented ageing of the population in Australia has brought with it significant changes that need to be addressed within the senior tourism market. In developing the overall goal of this thesis, consideration was drawn from evidence of previous studies in the literature and from theories related to the topic. Overall there is a substantial lack of information in relation to the growing senior tourism market in Australia that:

- ✚ addresses satisfaction in an Australian context,
- ✚ has a relevant theoretical basis, and a

✚ general lack of research into senior tourism.

Given the importance placed on understanding the complexities of an ageing population and the effects this will have within the tourism industry in Australia, it is hoped that this thesis will make an original contribution to the state of knowledge and understanding of senior tourists and satisfaction in this growing market.

The overall objective of this thesis therefore is:

**Analysing service quality for senior travellers: A mixed research approach investigating the perceptions of satisfaction in this growing tourism market**

Various literature pertaining to studies conducted on the senior travel market has identified 50 as the lower age limit (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Blazey, 1992; Hawes, 1988; Kim et al., 2003; Lehto, O'Leary, & Lee, 2001; Milman, 1998; Wang, Chen, & Chou, 2007; You & O'Leary, 1999). Based on this and for practical purposes, this study will operationalise the senior traveller as 50 years of age and above.

The label 'senior traveller' predominantly used in study one will be interchanged with 'senior customer' and 'senior' in studies two and three. The rationale being that study one is from the perspective of the senior traveller, study two from the service provider employer and study three from both employee and employer.

### **1.7.1 Research Aims**

In relation to this thesis, the following aims have been developed:

1. To explore senior travellers' perceptions of tourist customer service and satisfaction.
2. To identify and understand service gaps within the senior traveller market.
3. To investigate service providers' perceptions of service gaps and issues for senior tourists with a focus on identifying factors that may contribute to an understanding of these gaps.

The fulfilment of these aims is dependent on a number of sub-aims, which can be grouped according to the following three research studies.

### **1.7.2 Study One**

1. To identify a broad range of respondent generated service incidents by senior travellers.
2. To evaluate the importance of respondents perceptions of customer service.
3. To identify pertinent gaps between service provider and customer and relate those gaps to the SERVQUAL Model.

### **1.7.3 Study Two**

1. To identify perspectives of Australia's ageing population by employers.
2. Examine perceived impacts of an ageing population on service providers.

3. To identify gaps in the downward flow of information to service providers concerning local/state/federal government policies/strategies for an ageing population.
4. Evaluate employer's recipe for good customer service.
5. Identifying underlying perceptions of ageism by employers.

#### **1.7.4 Study Three**

1. To evaluate perceptions of customer service from the perspective of the service provider to the senior market and assess both employee's and employer's knowledge of Australia's ageing population.
2. To identify gaps in the perceptions of customer service between the service provider employee and employer to the senior market.
3. To examine the service providers' perceptions of ageism.
4. To examine the differences of ageism perceptions according to demographic characteristics and customer service training.

The model presented in Figure 1.9, provides a summary of the proposed research, with each of the studies clearly identified.



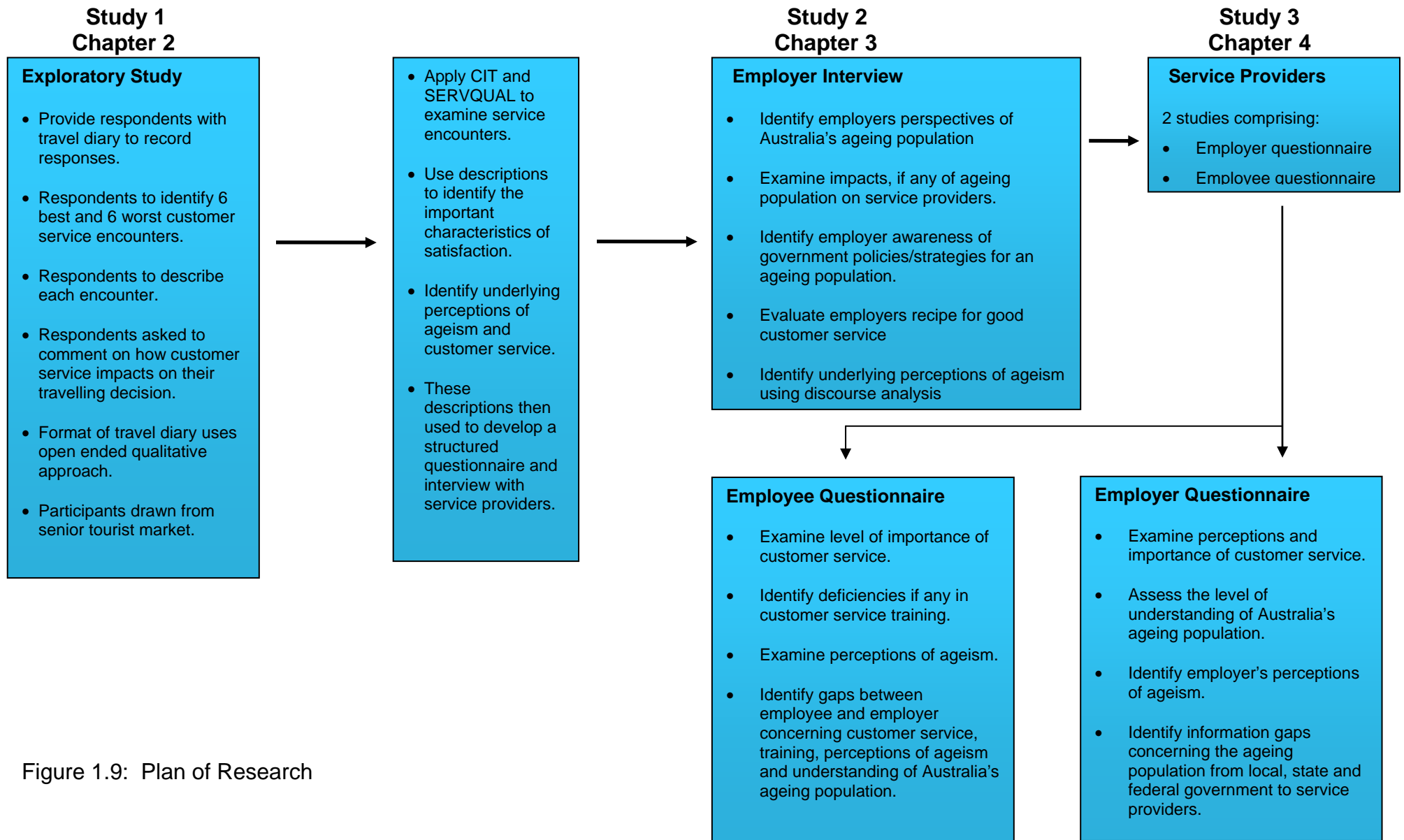


Figure 1.9: Plan of Research

## **Chapter 2: Evaluating the Perceptions of Customer Service Encounters by Australian Senior Travellers**

### **2.1 Introduction**

It has been established in the previous chapter that the world is experiencing a major shift in the structure and profile of its population. Within this global population, it is projected that the numbers of older persons (aged 60 and over) will nearly triple in size to 2 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2007; Venne, 2005). How then does this phenomena affect the tourist sector and in particular the senior traveller market? Within Australia the senior traveller market has been identified as a significant and growing segment of Australia's domestic tourism market (Golik, 1999; Horneman et al., 2002; Hossain et al., 2003; Prideaux et al., 2001). Increasing numbers of senior travellers will place greater demand on customer service within the services industry, which would suggest that service providers within the industry place a greater emphasis on courting this growing market. However, previous research and personal interviews (Kuilboer, 2002) with senior travellers strongly suggest dissatisfaction with customer service by service providers. A review of the literature on senior travellers and satisfaction indicated that there was very little research conducted with senior travellers in general. Therefore this study has the specific aims of:

1. To identify a broad range of respondent generated service incidents by senior travellers.
2. To evaluate the importance of respondents perceptions of customer service.

3. To identify pertinent gaps between service provider and customer and relate those gaps to the SERVQUAL Model.

In understanding senior travellers' perceptions of tourist customer service and satisfaction, this study generated a broad range of customer service experiences that senior travellers considered to be memorable. To achieve this, a travel diary was provided and in it the respondents were asked to describe in their own words their best and worst customer service experience.

A second element of this study involved applying the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to identify the respondent's best and worst experiences. Using this qualitative approach enabled the identification of recurring themes which developed a platform upon which further research could be based. This qualitative research approach tends to collect a great deal of 'rich' information and based on the belief that people personally involved in a particular situation are best placed to analyse and describe their experiences or feelings in their own words (Veal, 2006).

A third component of this study was to classify the service encounters by applying the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. Use of this technique helps to identify pertinent service gaps between service provider and customer. Literature abounds concerning the SERVQUAL model. It has been the recipient of numerous criticisms and strengths, and has been applied to many practical situations reflecting its flexibility and adaptability in measuring service quality in a

broad range of service industries (Albretch, 1992; Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Hudson et al., 2004; LeBlanc, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Saleh & Ryan, 1992).

Finally, this study explored the comments provided by respondents concerning how much their best and worst customer service encounters impacted on their decisions in choosing where they shopped, accommodation, and attractions they planned to visit. No studies have been identified addressing this particular issue, although, some general literature on senior's travel motivation and satisfaction do touch upon these issues (Jang & Wu, 2006).

## **2.2 Methodology**

### **2.2.1 Survey Procedure**

In this study, the perceptions of customer service encounters by senior travellers were collected through the use of travel diaries (See Appendix 1). The first section of the travel diary recorded information on the respondent's age, gender, marital status, employment details, and travel experience. Section two, the core of the diary, was in open-ended format requiring each participant to record their six best and six worst customer service encounters over a period of three consecutive weeks. With each encounter respondents were required to record; the service location, town, time of day, day of the week, and provide a description of the service encounter (See Appendix A). This format was selected so that the respondents' observations would provide a rich source of varied information (Veal, 1998), with freedom in expression and spontaneity (Oppenheim, 1972), minimal researcher bias (Pizam, 1987), and reduction of reliance on memory (Elliott, 1997a).

In total, 80 travel diaries were distributed to senior travellers at three key locations within the Townsville region during the months of August to November 2004. This period coincided with the high tourism season of North Queensland. Diaries were distributed by the researcher as this approach proved most effective in allowing respondents to clarify any areas of doubt or apprehension. Unfortunately this method can be very time consuming as travellers often feel the need to relate their travelling experiences (Belasco, 1981). The three locations used in distributing the diaries were:

- ✚ Magnetic Gateway Caravan Park located on the Bruce Highway southern entrance to Townsville.
- ✚ Townsville Tourist Information Centre located on the Bruce Highway southern entrance to Townsville.
- ✚ Third location the Frosty Mango rest stop located 70klms north of Townsville on the Bruce Highway.

Participants had three weeks to complete the travel diary and then return it to the researcher using the stamped self addressed envelope provided. After five weeks a reminder was sent to those participants who had not returned the diary. Those who returned the travel diary received a thank-you postcard.

The method of sampling selected for the senior traveller sample was non-probability purposive sampling (Sekaran, 2000). The senior travellers were selected on the basis of their special characteristics, namely their age; currently travelling, and can provide the desired information, which is pertinent to the aim of this study. Each possible respondent was approached and asked by the

researcher if they would like to participate in this research. If the response was positive, it was then established if they met the requirements of the special characteristics. Again if the response was positive, the respondent was provided with a travel diary and further explanations were given. In total only four senior travellers who were approached refused to participate citing the following reasons: “did not have the time”, “others can do it”, and “no give it a miss”.

### **2.2.2 Participants**

Various literature pertaining to studies conducted on the senior travel market has identified 50 as the lower age limit (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Blazey, 1992; Hawes, 1988; Kim et al., 2003; Milman, 1998; You & O'Leary, 1999). Based on this precedent, the present study defined senior travellers as 50 years of age and above.

The method described in the previous section resulted in a total sample of 50 returned travel diaries out of 80 diaries that were distributed. Of the returned diaries, five were unusable due to respondent's ill health, gaining full-time employment, or the diary was misplaced. The total useable sample was 45 diaries representing a 56 percent response rate.

The sample consisted of 51 % males and 33% female, and combined responses from male and female travellers 16%. The average respondent age was 62.8 years and the breakdown of ages is provided in Table 2.1. The usual place of residence is identified by the diversity of Australian States shown in Table 2.2. Only two respondents were recorded as overseas visitors.

Table 2.1

Age of Respondents

<b>Age</b>	<b>Percent of Sample (n=32)</b>
50-55	18.7
56-60	25.1
61-65	21.8
77-70	18.8
70 and over	15.5

Table 2.2

Usual Place of Residence

<b>State</b>	<b>Percent of Sample (n=45)</b>
Queensland	26.7
New South Wales	17.8
Victoria	26.7
South Australia	13.3
Western Australia	11.1
Overseas Visitors	4.4

The marital status of respondents was identified as 93.3% married, 4.4% defacto and 2% widowed. Respondents were asked to record the length of this trip with results varying from 5 days to 1825 days. Several respondents recorded that they were continuously travelling and that they have been on the “road” for up to five years. A median of 84 days was determined with most respondents (84.4%) reported that they had taken a trip like this before. In addition, 84.4% reported being retired.

## **2.3 Instruments**

### **2.3.1 Travel Diaries**

Diaries are an attractive method of collecting information and have long been considered of major importance for telling history. Plummer in his book 'Documents of Life' (2001, p. 51), states that, "the idea of using personal documents is to construct pictures of social reality from the actor's perspective". According to Bailey (1990, p. 215), "A diary study is a first-person account, documented through regular, candid entries, in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events".

Diaries can be used as research instruments to collect detailed information about behaviour, events and actions that occur in the course of everyday life. Allport (1943) identifies three distinct models of diary familiar in everyday life: the intimate journal, in which private thoughts and opinion are recorded, uncensored; the memoir – an impersonal diary, often written with an eye to publication; and the log, which is a kind of listing of events, with relatively little commentary. Elliott (1997b) had recognised that diaries have been relatively neglected as a research method, and according to Thornton, Shaw and Williams (2000), diary surveys are difficult to operationalise and have seen little use in tourism research. Diary studies fulfil most of the requirements of valid research and can thus be seen as an acceptable introspective research method (Chaudron, 1988). Examples of research using diaries is presented in Table 2.3.



Table 2.3

Examples of Research Using Diaries

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Major Focus</b>
Swindells (1995)	Use of Autobiography	Feminist Research
Butcher & Eldridge (1990)	Use of Diaries in Data Collection	National Travel Survey
Johnson & Bytheway (2001)	An Evaluation of the use of diaries in a Study of Medication in Later Life	Management of medication
Elliott (1997b)	The use of Diaries in Sociological Research on Health Experience	Demand for primary health care
Todd (1997)	Needs and Constraints: The Diary of a Course Designer	Designing education courses
Thornton, Shaw & Williams (2000)	Tourist Group Holiday Decision-Making and Behaviour: The Influence of Children	The influence of children on holiday behaviour
Coxon, Davies, & McManus (1990)	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual behaviour of homosexual males under the impact of AIDS
Gregory (1990)	The Adult Dietary Survey	Diet and Nutrition
Douglas, Lawson, Cooper, & Cooper (1968)	Family Interaction and the activities of Young Children	Child Psychology
Hilton(1989)	A Comparison of a Prospective Diary and two Summary recall Techniques for recording Alcohol Consumption	Alcohol consumption
Pearce (1988)	Tourist Time-Budgets	Produce a systematic record of a person's use of time over a given period

Depending on the field of research, diaries are also known as self-completion diary (Corti, 1993b), travel log or field diary (Burgess, 1984b; Collis & Hussey, 2003), time-use diaries (Crook & Light in Woolgar, 2002) and space-time diary (Thornton et al., 2000). For the purpose of this study, the diary will be identified as a Travel Diary.

### **2.3.1.1 Advantages and Strengths**

Diaries have a number of advantages over other more traditional data collections methods. Diaries can provide a reliable alternative to the traditional interview method for events that are difficult to recall accurately or that are easily forgotten (Corti, 1993b) and therefore reduces the reliance upon the diarist's memory (Elliott, 1997b). Further to this diaries are often used to supplement interview data (Bell, 1999; Burgess, 1984a; Collis & Hussey, 2003; Corti, 1993b; Elliott, 1997b; Thornton et al., 2000) enabling the researcher to further explore the meanings of statements, phrases and terms within the diary. A considerable strength of the diary method is that the diary provides first-hand accounts of situations in settings where the researcher does not have direct access (Burgess, 1984b; Elliott, 1997b). The researcher can also experience the opportunity to "be with" an individual as he learns about his environment, to check his anticipated behaviour, motivation, cues and chance events (Murphy & Rosenblood, 1974). Obtaining valuable information (Bell, 1999), the depth of richness provided in diaries is produced by the level of raised consciousness which participants find particularly rewarding (Johnson & Bytheway, 2001), which may explain why Sheridan (1994) suggests that diaries give a sense of importance. One final advantage/strength is that the use of diaries can help overcome problems associated with sensitive information (Corti, 1993b; Lee & Renzetti, 1993).

### **2.3.1.2 Drawbacks and Limitations**

A number of factors contribute to the drawbacks/limitations of this research method. Oppenheim (1966) and Kemsley (1979) record that respondents may alter their behaviour in order to make a record or entry and in doing so, reduce

the validity of the data. Predominantly, diaries are often completed over a number of days or weeks and it has been found that more entries are made at the beginning of the diary period and fewer towards the end (Bryman, 2008; Corti, 1993b; Johnson & Bytheway, 2001). Another limitation recognised by Thornton, Shaw, and Williams (2000) is that the contents of a diary can be difficult to operationalise. As in all diary research activities, people will be required to give up some of their time in participation, and so for the busy person having to make entries on diary forms may be both irritating and time consuming (Bell, 1999). Moss (1979, p. 163) gives this advice, "The wider the area covered, the greater the danger of confusion, whilst the more limited the area, the more tightly bounded it can be, the higher the possibility of getting a better record".

In an important sense, diary keeping and the wider research of which it forms part, serves to bring to the foreground issues regarding how senior travellers perceive customer service and satisfaction.

### **2.3.2 The Service Encounter**

Since the 1960's, Western economies have experienced a rapid increase in the services sector and as a result a major emphasis has been directed toward service quality. The importance of service quality has been expressed by Johns and Mattsson (2003, p. 173), "At the heart of service marketing and management lies the notion of the service encounter, the "core" of the service process". Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990), recognised the growth of service industries but further emphasised that at the same time service quality was generally perceived to be declining. Callan (1998) also identified this trend and supports

Johns and Mattsson that the service encounter is the central consideration when evaluating the quality of service. Over the past years, several definitions of service encounters have emerged around the central concept of a, 'face-to-face' interaction between a buyer and a seller in a service setting (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). Carlzon (1987) believes that as each customer and service provider behaves differently in each encounter, the customer's perception of this 'moment of truth' is the central consideration when evaluating the quality of service. Expanding on earlier work, Surprenant and Solomon (1987, p. 88) defined the service encounter as: "the dyadic interaction between a customer and service provider suggesting that service encounters are role performances, in which both customers and providers have roles to enact".

Although these characteristics are salient within customer service, more comprehensive definitions have also emerged. Lockwood (1994), for example, does not restrict the service encounter to the interpersonal interaction between customer and service provider, but instead see it as encompassing all aspects of the service provision including service personnel, physical features, and other tangible and intangible elements. Schmidt (2003), agrees that the service encounter is the entire experience with a product or company. Building on this definition, Shaw and Ivens (2002), expand the service encounter to include the emotions evoked across all moments of contact. In order to present a consistency in identifying service quality and in particular the service encounter, the definitions provided by Lockwood (1994), Schmitt (2003), and Shaw and Ivens (2002), will be used in this thesis when applying the Critical Incident Technique.

### **2.3.3 Critical Incident Technique**

A common methodological tool for studying service encounters is the Critical Incident Technique or CIT as it is commonly known (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Johns & Mattson, 2003). This technique was first developed by John C. Flanagan in 1941 during World War 2 as the head of the Aviation Psychology Program for the United States Army Air Force. The Program established procedures for the selection and classification of aircrews. However, an unacceptably high rate of pilot failure during training failed to identify psychological or personality traits as the cause. As an alternative, Flanagan then analysed the actual incidents of success and failure in training and specific behaviours that led to positive and negative results. A review of the program established new procedures and in 1947 after further refinement of the procedure by the American Institute of Research, the CIT was given its present name (Callan, 1998; Fountain, 1999). In 1954, Flanagan first presented his paper in the Psychological Bulletin and the penetration of this article which describes the details of the technique, has been more widely cited than any other article in industrial and organisational psychology during the past forty years (Fountain, 1999).

According to Flanagan (1954, p. 327), the CIT consists of a, “set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles”. One of the advantages of the critical incident technique is in its versatility. Providing account is taken of the objectives of the research, the philosophical assumptions of the research are considered and the

technique is adapted accordingly, the CIT may comfortably be used in any type of research (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). This is shown in a study of CIT research topics presented by Gremler (2004) who identified the following: service quality, customer satisfaction, service encounters, service failure and recovery, service delivery, service employees, the use of CIT method in service research, word of mouth communication, channel conflict, fairness, customer delight, and salesperson knowledge – just to name a few.

Twelker (2004) suggests that CIT is best thought of as a flexible set of guidelines which can be modified and adapted to meet a specific situation one is currently addressing. Since its introduction, CIT method has been used in a wide range of fields such as; education, management, nursing, food retailing, hospitality, tourism, health care and banking. A sample of CIT articles are presented in Table 2.4

Table 2.4

CIT Articles

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Major Focus</b>
Andersson & Nilsson (1964)	Superiors, store managers, assistants and customers	Determine job and training requirements of store managers
Bitner et al (1990)	Customers point of view of airlines, hotels and restaurants	Identified major groups of employee related behaviours that contribute to the outcome of service encounters
Bitner et al (1994)	Critical service encounters for the employees view point	Applied role, script and attribution theories to analyse incidents
Byrne (2001)	Nursing students	Identify factors, conditions and opportunities to improve learning
Chell & Pittaway (1998)	Café and restaurant business owners	Revealed actions associated with successful entrepreneurial

		activity in the restaurant and café industry
Callan (1998)	Lodge customers in UK accommodation	Categorise incident themes to operational sections
Edvardsson (1992)	Airline passengers and front counter staff	Grouped negative incidents comparing passenger and front counter staff responses to service breakdowns
Edvardsson & Strandvik (2000)	Hotel guests	Examine outcomes of critical incidents in hotels
Fountain (1999)	Upper level public government managers	CIT identified effects on public managers of an administrative state in transition
Gabbott & Hogg (1996)	Consumer perceptions of service product dimensions	Identify relationships between core and peripheral aspects of service in the primary healthcare context
Harris, Harris, & Baron (2003)	Retail employees	Identifying and coding negative incidents in developing drama scripts
Heckman & Guskey (1998)	Information technology help desk customers	Identified and classified incident themes to improve IT service
Hoffman, Kelley, & Chung (2003)	Customers of hospitality related businesses	Identified and classified incident themes to service and recovery failure
Johnson (2002a)	Gamblers	Used themes in critical incidents to propose service quality factors for gaming establishments
Kamann & Bakker (2004)	Purchasing managers in supplier relations	What effects do critical incidents have on purchasing managers existing frame of reference
Lewis & Spyropoulos (2001)	Bank customers	CIT identified types of service failures and recovery strategies
Radford (1996)	Library user's point of view of human interface with librarians	Evaluating librarian performance in applying communication theory



According to Flanagan (1954, p. 327), an incident could be defined as “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit influences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act”. He further states that “to be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its

consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects” (ibid). Before data can be collected, the researcher must have a firm understanding of the meaning of the two words “critical” and “incident”. What makes an incident critical has been clearly established, “for an incident to be critical, the requirement is that it deviates significantly, either positively or negatively from what is normal or expected” (Bitner et al., 1990; Edvardsson, 1992; Grove & Fisk, 1997).

The collection of critical incidents can be generated through individual and or group interviews (Lockwood, 1994), focus groups (Edvardsson, 1992), or direct or participatory observation (Twelker, 2004) and stories (Gremier, 2004). Whichever approach is used, respondents are usually asked to describe a best or worst incident or an incident they believe was critical to the overall outcome of the experience.

### **2.3.3.1 Strengths and Advantages**

Given the widespread use of CIT in academic studies, a number of strengths and advantages have been identified.

-  The data collected are from the respondents perspectives and is in his or her own words (Edvardsson, 1992).
-  Provides a rich source of data by allowing respondents to determine which incidents are the most relevant to them for the phenomenon being investigated (Gremier, 2004).



- ✚ Allows respondents a free range of responses as possible within an overall research framework (Gabbott & Hogg, 1996).
- ✚ CIT is especially useful as an exploratory method to increase knowledge about a little-known phenomenon or when a thorough understanding is needed (Bitner et al., 1990).
- ✚ Categories and themes of critical incidents emerge from collected data (Chell, 1998).
- ✚ CIT data can be used both quantitatively and qualitatively (Bitner et al., 1990; Chell & Pittaway, 1998).
- ✚ There is no need for direct observation by researchers themselves.
- ✚ First hand experience of the encounter produces a richness and depth of data (Callan, 1998).

### **2.3.3.2 Drawbacks and Limitations**

Although the benefits of using the CIT method are considerable, the method has also received some criticism.

- ✚ Relies on observers to accurately recognise, remember and report the critical incident (Callan, 1998; Edvardsson, 1992).
- ✚ CIT method has been criticized on issues of reliability and validity as a result of ambiguity of word meanings, category labels, and coding rules (Bitner et al., 1990; Callan, 1998; Chell & Pittaway, 1998).

- ✚ Respondent stories reported in incidents can be misinterpreted or misunderstood (Callan, 1998; Edvardsson, 1992; Gabbott & Hogg, 1996).
- ✚ CIT is a naturally retrospective research method and may be flawed by recall bias (Michel, 2001).
- ✚ Due to time and effort to describe situations, low response rates are possible (Gremler, 2004).

By and large, the CIT has demonstrated to be a sound research method since first presented by Flanagan in 1954. Few modifications have been suggested to the method in the 55 years since it was introduced and minimal changes have been made to Flanagan's proposed approach.

#### **2.3.4 Effectiveness of Travel Diaries to Record Critical Incidents**

After reviewing the literature, it is evident that the use of diaries as a tool for recording critical incidents is a method that has seen limited use, especially within tourism research. The benefits of using diaries to record critical incidents are numerous.

- ✚ Observers may be anyone experienced in interpreting the behaviour that is under study (Twelker, 2004). This study reports that the median length of this trip by senior travellers was 84 days, hence, qualifying them as diarists.
- ✚ First-hand experience of the encounter produces a richness and depth of data (Callan, 1998), which can be useful at the

qualitative level to identify problems that might not otherwise be evident (Lockwood, 1994).

- ✚ The ability to help the researcher focus on specific issues and situations (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). Within a broad heading Chell and Pittaway believe that the researcher is able to narrow the type of incidents down while at the same time involving the respondent in the selection of incidents which they think are important. An approach of this nature allows much of the important data to emerge based on the values of the respondent rather than the values of the researcher.
- ✚ Interview and survey approaches require respondents to recall retrospectively the critical incident (Chell, 1998), and so all the information is recalled possibly due to forgetfulness and time constraints.
- ✚ Recording the incident in a diary can generate a detailed process of description of the incident in the respondent's own words (Edvardsson, 1992). Further to this Callan (1998), believes that the CIT identifies non-routine incidents, which are perceived to be important but would not be identified in standard service procedures.

#### **2.3.4.1 Classification/Coding/Themes**

In the classification and coding of the data, Flanagan (1954, p. 346), maintains that "it is not the collecting of data which is most problematic, but interpreting them and developing systems of classification". He further stated that, "there are

countless ways in which a given set of incidents can be classified and the principle consideration should usually be that of the uses to be made of the data. Considerations are: ease and accuracy of classifying the data, relation to previously developed definitions or classification systems, and considerations of interpretation and reporting". Figure 2.1 presents the CIT coding scheme to be used for this study.

According to Callan (1998), classifying data can be done on a continuous basis as incidents are collected, resulting in the appearance of themes. As this study was concerned evaluating the perceptions of customer service encounters, the incidents were firstly divided into two major categories: best encounter indicating the service location and worst encounter indicating the service location.

Callan (1998) also recognises that the manner in which themes arise can be subjective. Therefore the researcher has chosen to apply the five distinct dimensions of the SERVQUAL model as the subcategories, optimising the reliability of the results. The five subcategories applicable to each major category include: Tangible, Reliability, Responsibility, Assurance, and Empathy.

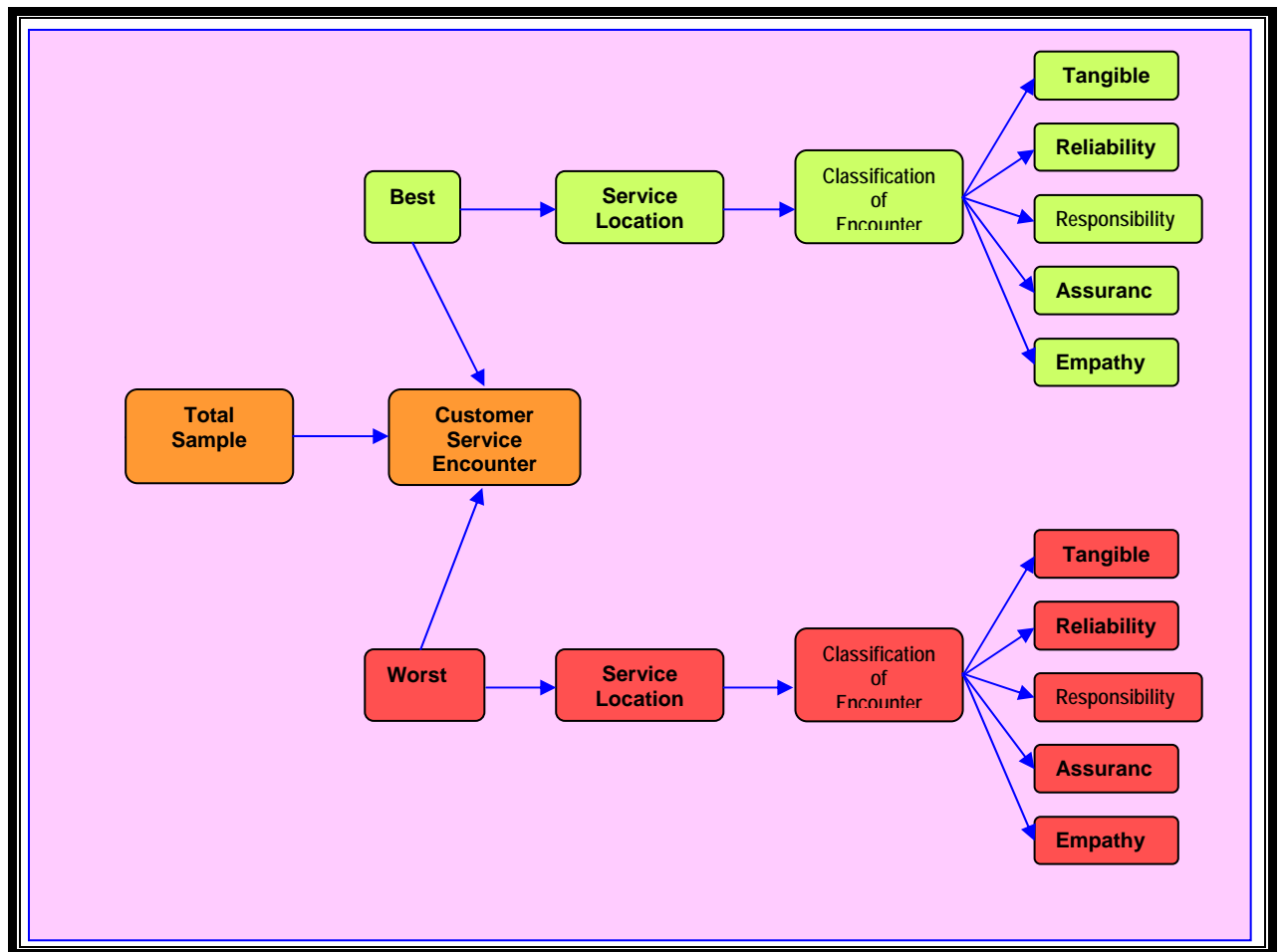


Figure 2.1 CIT Coding Scheme

The 45 travel diaries yielded 376 critical incidents, identifying a total of 220 best and 156 worst customer service encounters, which were then content analysed according to the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model outlined by Zeithaml et al (1990a). This phase of analysis involved reading through the best and worst encounters and classifying these incidents according to the SERVQUAL dimensions of Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Each incident was scrutinised to correctly identify these words and phrases which matched those used in the definitions of the SERVQUAL dimension. The coding process was repeated by another coder and inter-coder reliability was

checked. Agreement occurred in 95 percent of the cases. Coding discrepancies were then reviewed and reconciled through consensus. This same process was then applied when coding the service locations.

#### **2.3.4.2 Dimensions of SERVQUAL**

Since its inception in 1985, SERVQUAL has become the most widely used approach to understanding service quality. The SERVQUAL model was developed Parasuraman et al (1990b) and focuses on the notion of perceived quality based on the difference between consumers' expectations and perceptions of service (Bitner et al., 1990; Hudson et al., 2004). In its original form, the SERVQUAL instrument consisted of ten dimensions, consisting of Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence, Courtesy, Credibility, Security, Access, Communication, and Understanding/Knowing the Customer (Parasuraman et al., 1985). A specific criterion for the ten dimensions can be found in Appendix B. In refining these ten dimensions to five, Competence, Courtesy, Credibility and Security have been consolidated under the dimension of Assurance. The remaining three dimensions of Access, Communication and Understanding/Knowing the Customer have been categorised as the Empathy dimension (Zeithaml et al., 1990b). The five key dimensions and descriptions have captured all the facets of the original ten dimensions and can be found in Appendix C.

As identified in the previous chapter, the SERVQUAL model is a generic instrument for measuring perceived service quality and therefore can be adapted and modified to evaluate specific services (Beckman & Veldkamp, 1995;

Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991). In analysing the appropriateness of the SERVQUAL instrument for this research, it was found to be suitable with only minor changes in the dimension definitions.

- ✚ Tangibles – appearance of physical facilities, equipment and personnel.
- ✚ Reliability – ability to perform the promised service dependable and accurately.
- ✚ Responsiveness – willingness to help customers and provide prompt service in a timely manner.
- ✚ Assurance – Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence through politeness, respect, consideration, friendliness, trustworthiness, and safety.
- ✚ Empathy – Caring, individualised attention to customers provided by appropriate access, good communication both verbal and literature and making the effort to understand the customers' needs.

According to Zeithaml et al (1990b), service quality as perceived by customers, can be defined as the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desires and their perceptions. This involves measuring both customer perceptions and expectations of service along key service quality dimensions and in doing so, examining differences or gaps between the desired level of service and that actually delivered (Greenland et al., 2006). SERVQUAL is a concise scale, easy to use by managers and is now referred to as a standard by other researchers (Llosa et al., 1998). Despite the number of service industries applying SERVQUAL to identify service quality gaps, research applying

SERVQUAL to senior travellers and customer service in tourism could not be found.

The ageing of the world's population is bringing with it an increase in the number of senior travellers, resulting in greater demand on customer service by service providers. It is an aim of this study to examine customer service perceptions of senior travellers in detail to identify various service gaps within the service industry.

## **2.4 Results and Discussion**

In total, 59 different service providers were identified and these were categorised into nine major groups as identified in Tables 2.5 & 2.6. After the initial sorting of incidents into best and worst encounters, each encounter was then themed into the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, as shown in Figure 2.1. The frequency of occurrence of each SERVQUAL dimension was compared across different service locations for both best and worst encounters (Tables 2.5 & 2.6).

### **2.4.1 Best Service Incident - SERVQUAL Dimensions**

On initial examination of Table 2.5, the most commonly reported dimensions are those relating to Assurance (n=743) and Responsiveness (n=647) which together accounted for more than half of all the themes coded. This is an important finding as these dimensions were consistently common for all service locations, suggesting that senior traveller's placed great emphasis on the attitude of the service provider. This finding is consistent with other studies in the tourism and hospitality sector. In a study conducted by Lee & Hing (1995), for example,



patrons of a French restaurant rated Assurance as most important. Customer perceptions of travel agencies researched by Ryan and Cliff (1997) also identified Assurance as the most significant dimension of customer service. Gilbert and Wong (2003), conducted a Hong Kong based study on passenger expectation and airline services and found that Assurance was rated as significantly most important across different ethnic groups/nationality travellers. In a study conducted by Pettigrew, Mizerski, & Donovan (2005), older supermarket shoppers rated Assurance (staff are courteous, friendly and efficient) as the most important issue (98.7%) in supermarkets.

Responsiveness was reported by Pakdil & Aydin (2007), as the most important SERVQUAL dimension in researching customer satisfaction with an international Turkish airline. Customers in Lockwood's (1994) pilot study highlighted the importance in the unprompted service extras of responsiveness. Khan (2003), studied ecotourists' quality expectations and applied factor analysis which reported that after the modified SERVQUAL dimensions of Ecotangibles (mean 6.30 on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), Assurance (mean 6.07) were rated as very important. O'Neill and Palmer (2004), conducted a performance analysis in wine production and tourism across several wineries and found that both Assurance and Responsiveness were most important to visitors. Callan (1998, p. 97), sums up these findings which also reflect his study into hospitality research from the UK lodge sector, "In many cases, it is the attitude and behaviour of the service provider, rather than the core service which can be the critical consideration". It is important to note that the age range in these

studies is from teenage years to over 65 years of age, indicating that these findings are not specific to senior travellers.

Table 2.5

Best Service Incident – SERVQUAL Dimensions

<b>Service Location</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Tangible</b> <i>n=400</i> (16%)	<b>Reliability</b> <i>n=343</i> (14%)	<b>Responsiveness</b> <i>n=647</i> (26%)	<b>Assurance</b> <i>n=743</i> (30%)	<b>Empathy</b> <i>n=361</i> (14%)
<b>Caravan Park</b>	699 (28%)	16%	14%	27%	29%	14%
<b>Tourist Attraction</b>	466 (19%)	18%	15%	22%	27%	17%
<b>Retail Store</b>	341 (14%)	12%	13%	28%	33%	15%
<b>Information Centre</b>	191 (8%)	13%	12%	25%	31%	19%
<b>Food Outlet</b>	184 (7%)	13%	16%	28%	33%	10%
<b>Shopping Centre</b>	163 (6.5%)	12%	13%	29%	35%	12%
<b>Free Rest Stops</b>	162 (6%)	30%	11%	25%	27%	7%
<b>Accommodation</b>	162 (6%)	20%	14%	24%	24%	18%
<b>Essential Service</b>	126 (5%)	10%	14%	29%	31%	15%

Note: Percentages in each row correspond to the service location

The largest number of responses identified within the SERVQUAL dimensions in

Table 2.5 was Assurance (n=743). Examples of this response include:

*“This is our fifth visit to this caravan park and we always get the same friendly service each time we arrive”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Lady at the newsagency gives service with a smile and lots of information about the town - very unusual these days”. (Female, QLD)*

*“This park was recommended by a tourist information centre and they were correct. The owner/manager greeted us with a smile and made you feel at home. We’ll go back for sure”. (Male, QLD)*

*“This lady had an excellent knowledge of the items in the gardens and escorted us on a lengthy and educated walk. Her knowledge and empathy with visitors was outstanding” (Female SA)*

*“The volunteers were helpful and know all of the best things to see and go to – a lovely friendly town”. (Male, SA)*

The second largest number of responses was Responsiveness. Examples of this response include:

*“Owner/manager of ..... Caravan Park are generosity and helpfulness itself”. (Female, VIC)*

*“..... information office ladies were very welcoming – BIG smiles and enthusiastic”. (Female, NSW)*

*“Girls behind the desk could not do enough for us, the trouble they went to was unreal”. (Male, NSW)*

*“WOW” Absolutely the best. The service started in the car park with an umbrella for the rain”. (Male & Female, QLD)*

It can be seen that both Empathy and Reliability in Table 2.5 had the lowest rate of inclusion in this table. Similar findings for Empathy were cited in Edvardsson (1992), where poor communication by staff was noted as an element of airline breakdowns. Lockwood (1994), identified dissatisfaction amongst hotel customers as a result of inattentive hotel staff. In analysing passenger expectations and airline services at Hong Kong International airport, Gilbert and Wong (2003) noted that passengers rated empathy as least important. In O’Neill and Palmer’s (2004) research into wine production and tourism, it was found that

empathy rated second lowest when set against the other SERVQUAL dimensions.

In analysing the Reliability dimension in service quality and satisfaction literature, there does not appear to be a consistency in the findings. This may suggest that there are various levels of importance that service providers place on providing the promised service dependably and accurately. However, there does appear to be some correlation between Empathy and Reliability. In a number of studies (Khan, 2003; Lee & Hing, 1995; O'Neill & Palmer, 2004; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1995), it appears that the components of the Reliability dimension, if they are deficient or poorly implemented can have a detrimental impact on the evaluations of the Empathy dimension within customer service. In an attempt to rectify this situation, the following suggestions have been made by researchers: more resources to be put into recruitment and training (Lee & Hing, 1995), some form of education and practical training (Edvardsson, 1992), perspicacious staff selection and service procedure training (Callan, 1998), and empowering frontline employees (Bitner et al., 1994; Bitner et al., 1990). This would encourage staff to be more caring, willing to help patrons and offer more prompt and individualised attention.

Further analysis of Table 2.5 reveals a consistent pattern of responses across each of the dimensions with the exception of the service location – Free Rest Stops. For Free Rest Stops, the Tangibles dimension was markedly more frequent, while the Empathy dimension was less common. Free Rest Stops within Australia mainly consist of limited physical facilities such as public rest

rooms, possibly a covered area, and some have overnight camping facilities. Figures 2.2a to 2.2e depict Free Rest Stops. As these locations do not involve personal individualised attention by the provider, with the exception of regular maintenance, it is not surprising that Empathy dimension was not often mentioned. Free Rest Stops are a common incident location for senior travellers. An explanation for this may be found in a study commissioned by the Camper and Motorhome Club of Australia (Balfour Consulting, 2003). In the report it states, *“The use of rest areas by campervan and motorhome travellers is simply not an economic decision, but heavily involves life style and their sense of freedom that comes from travelling on the road. Other factors include convenience and location of the rest areas compared to the quality, location, cost and occupancy levels of nearby caravan parks”* (p. ii). Campervan and motorhome travellers infrastructure needs are also minimal and therefore the tangibles provided at rest stops appear to adequately meet the senior traveller’s needs.



Figure 2.2a: NT / SA Border Rest Stop



Figure 2.2b: Limestone Free Rest Stop



Figure 2.2c: Yaamba Free Rest Stop



Figure 2.2d: Rollingstone Free Rest Stop



Figure 2.2e: Bluewater Free Rest Stop with Signage

#### **2.4.2 Worst Service Incident – SERVQUAL Dimensions**

Table 2.6 provides details of the worst service incidents and in many ways is a mirror image of Table 2.5. Again, both the dimensions of Responsiveness and Assurance were reported more often than the other dimensions signifying the importance of staff attitude towards senior travellers. However, Responsiveness was especially common for retail stores and shopping centres, indicating that there was perceived a lack of willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. As in Table 2.5, the frequency of incidents at caravan parks (RV or Trailer parks) is considerably higher than other service locations indicating the popularity of these venues for the senior traveller.

Table 2.6 however reports a greater variation of percentages across the service locations for the dimensions. For example, seniors reported numerous accommodation incidents with both Tangible and Reliability elements signifying that the appearance of facilities, equipment and personnel, and the staff ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately was seen as being a poor standard. Moscardo (2006), also identified the Tangibles dimension as having the highest number of negative incidents of service quality in tourist accommodation. In measuring service quality and customer satisfaction of Malaysian hotels, Mey, Akbar and Fie (2006), reported that the tangibility factor received the lowest mean score. Presbury, Fitzgerald and Chapman (2005), identified that reliability issues such as training and development of employees are important investments which their research found to be lacking in luxury Sydney hotels. Although these results support the thesis findings for Tangible and Reliability as reported in Table 2.6, in general the literature identifies a

diversity of outcomes for these dimensions. The demographics of these findings cover the ages from 18 – 80 years of age with 49 percent male and 51 percent female. Again these results do not appear to reflect a pattern unique to seniors, but to the travelling public in general.

Examples of comments indicating unsatisfactory levels of customer service in the Tangible and Reliability dimensions include:

*“Prepayment of booking lost. One bedroom cabin in place of a two bedroom cabin. Badly designed facilities, rattling fridge, loud clock, had to turn the fridge off, and hide the clock under a pillow to be able to get to sleep”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Parking was a dust portion piece of paddock. Queen bed was hard and lumpy and small toilet/shower – 1 metre square”. (Male, VIC)*

*Small expensive cabin. Noisy, difficult access, and rules prohibiting drying of washing on other than lines”. (Female, SA)*

*“Springs poking through the mattress, air-conditioning sounds like a tractor. Poor kitchen amenities. Had to use a block of wood to lock the screen door”. (Male, NSW)*

*“Haphazard booking arrangement which reflected office staff. Queen bed with hard lumpy mattress”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Advertised as the best kept secret in Queensland. Should be kept a secret”. (Female, VIC)*

Similarly, high numbers of responses for the other three dimensions reflect this same sentiment. The service locations of Retail Store and Shopping Centre



recorded 43% and 38% respectively for responsiveness, suggesting that there was perceived a lack of willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. Again this dimension falls into the overall category of the attitude of the service provider. In analysing these results, both service locations will be considered together as shopping centres predominantly comprise retail stores. Gagliano and Hathcote (1994), found that personal attention (sales service) factors such as responsiveness, product knowledge and prompt individualised service were the factors most often identified by retail store managers as having the greatest gap scores indicating disparity between what customers expected and perceived in service quality. The attitude of sales persons identified in research conducted by Naylor and Frank (2000), established that being offensive and providing slow service resulted in lower customer value perceptions of the retail experience and overall value. Similarly, Allred and Addams (2000), report that customers reported employees of banks and credit unions were unfriendly, snobby, rude, and pompous and that these shoppers also reported intentions never to return to a particular store due to the employee attitude. From the perspective of waiting time and its influence on satisfaction-loyalty relationships in services, Bielen and Demoulin (2007) found that attentiveness, helpfulness and responsiveness appear to be the most prevalent satisfying determinants. Furthermore, they found that with respect to customer loyalty, waiting time satisfaction is almost as important as service satisfaction. Examples of comments from senior travellers expressing their dissatisfaction of customer service in the Responsiveness dimension:

*“Woman in office was savage and few people would come back for information.” (Female, VIC)*

*“Caravan sales centre staff did not acknowledge our presence, no one came near us, we left and no one ever asked us if we needed anything.” (Male, QLD)*

*“Owners of this facility are extremely mean. Refused to lend us a rake to find a lost item saying we might damage or steal the rake. Only one example of their stinginess.” (Female, WA)*

*“We were the only customers for a counter lunch and were greeted by a very rude publican who told us he hated caravans and that they should be banned from the road. The publican may hate us but he still took our money.” (Female, VIC)*

Another notable finding lies within the Information Centre locations where Empathy was recorded in 31% of the incidents. This result was surprising considering the purpose and nature of information centres in assisting travellers by providing information both verbally and with literature. Visitor information centres play an important role in Queensland's tourism industry. These centres make a significant economic contribution to tourism, particularly in regional areas, by providing information to visitors that encourages them to stay longer, spend more money, experience more attractions and revisit a region (Tourism Queensland, 2007c). Tourism Queensland (TQ) has developed the Queensland Visitor Information Centre Signage Policy. Only those visitor information centres that meet the eligibility criteria and standards of the policy are authorised to use the italicised 'i' symbol (see Appendix D). The branding assures visitors of high quality information and professional standards from these centres and staff. To attain accreditation with Queensland Visitor Information Centre (VIC), all sections of the signage policy must be addressed in the centre's business plan

which involves: staff induction, training and professional development, and customer service. To date approximately 119 VIC's have met the agreed standards of the VIC Signage Policy (Tourism Queensland, 2007b).

The negative incidents identified for Information Centres were diverse in nature including poor access, communicating a lack of knowledge and information outside of the immediate location, lack of information in literature, not given individual attention, felt we were not important, assistants too busy talking to each other ignoring us, and communicating a negative attitude towards certain towns. There did not appear to be any correlation between gender and the incidents in that ten were male and six female. These respondents were travelling from South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. The commonality of these incidents is that they all occurred in Queensland. Three in the capital city of Brisbane, seven in regional centre towns and seven in country towns.

Table 2.6

Worst Service Incident - SERVQUAL Dimensions

<b>Service Location</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Tangible</b> <i>n=155</i> (15%)	<b>Reliability</b> <i>n=192</i> (19%)	<b>Responsiveness</b> <i>n=265</i> (26%)	<b>Assurance</b> <i>n=264</i> (26%)	<b>Empathy</b> <i>n=159</i> (15%)
<b>Caravan Park</b>	228 (22%)	19%	21%	18%	25%	17%
<b>Tourist Attraction</b>	170 (16%)	18%	24%	17%	26%	15%
<b>Retail Store</b>	142 (14%)	6%	9%	43%	30%	11%
<b>Shopping Centre</b>	129 (12%)	9%	11%	38%	30%	12%
<b>Accommodation</b>	97 (9%)	26%	34%	10%	12%	18%
<b>Food Outlet</b>	94 (9%)	14%	20%	28%	31%	7%
<b>Essential Service</b>	81 (8%)	16%	19%	30%	17%	19%
<b>Information Centre</b>	71 (7%)	8%	7%	28%	25%	31%
<b>Free Rest Stops</b>	23 (2%)	13%	13%	26%	30%	17%

Note: Percentages in each row correspond to the service location

### 2.4.3 Comparison of Best and Worst Incidents

In comparing Table 2.5 Best Service Incident and Table 2.6 Worst Service Incident, it can be seen that in many instances these tables are a mirror image of each other. The overall percentages of the SERVQUAL dimensions for both tables are very similar, reflecting the emphasis respondents placed on each dimension. Significantly, both tables confirmed the importance seniors place on staff attitudes which are reflected throughout the dimensions of Responsiveness and Assurance contained within the majority of service locations. This finding is comparable to results reported within hospitality and hotel industry research using CIT analysis (Bitner et al., 1990; Johnson, 2002b).

A surprise finding in Table 2.6 identifies Information Centre staff as greatly lacking in Empathy. It appears that this customer service driven service was

seen as lacking in caring, individualised attention. Generally, these staff are volunteers and the training provided seems to have produced good results on the dimensions of Reliability. A challenge for managers is how to train volunteers in the area of empathy. This suggests a need for further research into the motivations, expectations, and requirements of senior travellers and volunteers.

The first three service locations in both tables were included in the same order of frequency. This may be as a result of the average length of 'this trip' by senior travellers being 84 days, which may explain the high usage of affordable caravan parks over other types of more expensive accommodation. Secondly, whilst travelling throughout the country over such a long period of time, it appears that seniors take the opportunity to visit many tourist attractions. Eighty five percent of senior travellers have travelled before reflecting the fact that after caravan parks the second most frequented service location is the Tourist Attraction. Thirdly, retail stores such as; hairdressers, repair shops, hardware, fish and tackle stores, and retail outlets, are also very important service locations for senior travellers to; stock up supplies, repair and replace equipment, servicing vehicle, conduct necessary financial business, relax, purchase clothing, and souvenirs. The frequency of the remaining service locations, although not in the exact same order, are similar with the exception of Free Rest Stops, where only a small percentage is recorded in the worst incidents. Those travellers who did avail themselves of Free Rest Stops appear to be very satisfied with the Tangible elements provided at these locations.

Shopping centres and retail stores are twice as likely to be a setting for negative incidents particularly with regard to not providing assurance and responsiveness to its senior customers. The high frequency of responses for these dimensions in both best and worst incidents reflects once again the importance seniors place on the attitude of the service provider.

Reliability percentages varied little across all service locations for Best Service Incidents. However, compared to Worst Service Incidents there are a number of differences. The most notable is accommodation emphasising seniors do pay particular attention to ensuring the service provider's ability to perform the promised service both dependably and accurately. Similarly, this trend can also be seen with Caravan Parks and Tourist Attractions. A possible explanation for this is the level of satisfaction received when having to pay for these services, ensuring seniors get value for their money.

In Table 2.6, Retail Stores scored very high in Responsiveness (43%). As the respondents for this study are senior travellers, it is quite possible that one of the reasons for this is society's negative perceptions towards seniors (Beissner, 1990; Bennington & Tharenou, 2002; Crowley & Carroll, 2005; Muir & Slack-Smith, 2004). Perceptions such as: all old people are sick, older people offer little to society, most older people live in institutions, and if we live long enough we will all become senile (Beissner, 1990; Palmore, 2003; Rowe & Kahn, 1998). The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia (Andrews, 2002a), has recognised these negative stereotype myths as one of the wide range of issues to be

addressed, by promoting the need for positive individual and community attitudes to ageing.

#### **2.4.4 Other Themes from Critical Incidents**

During the initial coding process where 376 critical incidents were identified and content analysed according to the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, several other important themes emerged from the critical incidents. These additional themes were further investigated as a second approach to the content analysis targeting phrases and words that were specific to the themes identified. The five additional themes were: value for money, concern about status as tourists, opportunities to socialise with other travellers, availability of information, and amenities.

##### **2.4.4.1 Value for Money**

It has been suggested that seniors are particularly demanding of value for money (Lehto et al., 2001). This is a niche market looking for discounts, value added travel benefits, and they are price sensitive and value conscious. Regardless of the selection process for accommodation, vacation destination, and attractions, senior travellers place value for money high on their priority list. According to Vieregge, Phetkaew, Beldona, Lumsden, & DeMicco (2007, p. 167), "mature travellers are value conscious, price sensitive and like discounts". In the accommodation sector Marvel (1999) has identified that numerous hotel chains such as Best Western, Comfort Inns, Hilton Hotels, Sheraton Hotels, and Travelodge to name just a few, offer discounted rates between 10-50% for seniors over the age of 50. Of the 42 value for money comments identified, 64%

were related to best incidents and 36% to worst incidents. Table 2.7 provides a sample of these comments.

Table 2.7

Value for Money

<b>Diary</b>	<b>Best Incident Comment</b>
1	All the extras. Extremely reasonable price we stayed for lunch.
9	Internet café, helpful/informative and reasonable rates
11	Good service and gave a good discount.
12	Discount given to repair damaged tyre.
13	Wife served Devonshire tea at no cost on a Friday in the caravan park.
14	Dinosaur display and movie at the information centre was very good, and did not cost a lot of money, unlike many other museums we have visited.
27	Stockman's Hall of Fame – good value for money.
34	Helpful, polite and willing to negotiate with price.
40	Friendly service, cheerful staff and large discount on goods purchased.
43	Budget meals were excellent – good value for money.
<b>Diary</b>	<b>Worst Incident Comment</b>
10	Overpriced for poor accommodation – sub standard.
12	Houseboat hot water system broken and lost a day having it repaired. We paid for seven days but only got six.
14	Overcharged entry price and also little to see.
16	Expensive and prohibitive, poor access, noisy and small cabin.
19	Tourist attraction very expensive.
39	Disappointed the museum charges an admission fee. We did not visit it.
41	Accommodation very poor for 4 star, definitely not up to standard.



This is a finding that is consistent with other literature on Senior Travellers (Acton, 2000; Lehto et al., 2001; Pennington-Gray & Lane, 2001; Vieregge et al., 2007; Wuest, Emenheiser, & Tas, 1998) identifying the growing mature traveller population is placing a greater emphasis and demand on value for money. Similarly this trend has also been identified within the backpacker market where budgeting is high on the priority list concerning accommodation, travel and activities (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; O'Reilly, 2006; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Sorensen, 2003).

#### **2.4.4.2 Concern about Status as Tourists**

A second additional theme that emerged from the CIT analysis identified a concern about status as tourists. In total 21 comments were identified, associated with positive incidents (57%) and focused on negative incidents (42%). One-third (33%) of positive responses reflected comments focussed on the availability and status of overnight rest areas and comfort stations used by senior travellers. Table 2.8 presents a sample of these comments.

Table 2.8

#### Concern about Status as Tourist

<b>Diary</b>	<b>Positive Incident Comment</b>
2	The Chamber of Commerce have worked out that travellers shopping for 2 days spend money on food, tyres, minor mechanical repairs etc.
5	Homehill comfort station provided by the council has very good amenities, parking and good relations by council staff.
12	Injune Shire caravan park provides the first two nights free and then \$5 per night to encourage people to stay and spend money in the town.
21	Thuringowa Shire very helpful with provision of rest areas.

29	Information Centre Townsville made us feel very welcome to the area.
33	Caravan repair company provided friendly and punctual service.
38	Congratulations to Thuringowa for great rest areas.
<b>Diary</b>	<b>Negative Incident Comment</b>
2	It's a very off-hand, indifferent attitude towards the spending travelling public.
5	Bowen Shire Council has a negative attitude to the travelling public.
9	A very uncooperative town and not ready for tourists.
21	Signs showing overnight stops closed in Bowen and Proserpine Shires.
45	Hotel publican abused us as caravanners, fed us and took our money.

Senior travellers, commonly labelled grey nomads, grey wanderers or geriatric gypsies, have often been portrayed as not being high value tourists with frugality a key part of the mainstream media stereotype (Anon, 2002; Baker, 2002; Chadwick, 2006; Ingram, 2003). This portrayal had been challenged at both the macro and micro level. At the macro level, Tourism Australia (2005) recorded domestic mature aged travellers in Australia spent a total of \$12 billion in 2004, a direct contribution of 35% of the total Tourism GDP (Tourism Research Australia, 2007a). According to a Roy Morgan Research report (2007) the greatest opportunities for growth in the tourism industry for the next ten years is the grey nomads (53%) market. In Queensland alone, O'Reilly (2007, p. 11), reports "Queensland Tourism estimated that approximately 551,000 caravan and campervan travellers stayed in North Queensland last year. The caravan industry is worth an approximate \$6.8 billion", with an estimated 200,000 grey nomads on the road at any given time (Townsville Bulletin, 2007). Similarly, the backpacker market has also been portrayed as not being high value tourists but

as budget tourists on extended vacation (Binder, 2004; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; McCulloch, 1992; Riley, 1988). Contrary to this, the most recent figures from Tourism Research Australia (2008a), report on average in 2007, that backpackers spent \$6202 on their trip in Australia, a total spend of \$3.4 billion. The average length of stay in 2007 was 71 nights and Tropical North Queensland attracted 63% (226,400) of backpackers to the state (Tourism Queensland, 2007a). Townsville Enterprise Limited recorded that in 2006, 80,600 backpackers visited Townsville for up to seven days (Chadwick, 2007), which equates to 36% of all backpackers to Tropical North Queensland.

At the micro level, numerous councils and shires have identified the economic benefits to the local communities and have recognised the senior traveller as valuable tourists. According to the Caravan Parks Association of Queensland Townsville and North Queensland President Rob James states, "We are seeing increased high occupancy rates in June, July and August. We believe the numbers are up by 10%. Just the income to the parks alone would be over \$5 million a year" (Chadwick, 2005, p. 5). In a report prepared for The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia Ltd, Balfour Consulting (2003) commented on the success of providing free rest stops in the Thuringowa Shire which are predominantly used by senior travellers. The report identifies these travellers spend on average \$400 per week supporting local business and sporting clubs. But not all councils capitalise on the senior traveller. Townsville City Council, for example, had a low priority on the needs of the grey nomads and shifted the responsibility to those organisations looking to enhance the city's tourism repertoire (Townsville Bulletin, 2006). Recent debates between ratepayers and

Burdekin Shire Council, have identified the Burdekin council-owned caravan rest stops, commonly known as a 'comfort stop' are a drain on the shire's resources and have been the cause for increased rates and a drop in occupancy at local caravan parks (Chadwick, 2006). Concerns about travellers abusing the privilege of free rest stop sites, has highlighted a change in tourism revenue patterns. Local council initiatives in installing and maintaining these sites may increase tourist numbers to these areas, anticipating a growth in the profile of the region and a rise in tourist income. There is no doubt that many grey nomads do not usually spend a lot of money, but the sheer increase in numbers is having a significant impact on local economies in regional, rural and outback communities (McKinnon, 2003; Raggatt, 2005).

#### **2.4.4.3 Opportunities to Socialise with other Travellers**

A number of respondents identified opportunities to socialise with other travellers. Predominantly this was the case within caravan parks initiated by park managers. Activities included free barbeque, happy hour, morning tea, and various forms of entertainment. No negative comments were recorded by respondents in this category. Table 2.9 presents these comments.

Table 2.9

#### Opportunities to Socialise with other Travellers

<b>Diary</b>	<b>Positive Incident Comment</b>
3	This park has a 'dinner' in the camp kitchen on Tuesday evenings where visitors get talking to each other and enjoy an evening socialising and swapping experiences/yarns.
9	Happy hour at the resort from 5pm – 6.30pm where you get to meet everyone.

12	On Friday night you can buy a BBQ meal and have a sing along under their roof. A wonderful friendly attitude.
30	Manager of the caravan park organised a barbeque and led the singing – everyone had a fun night.
30	Very good and hospitable managers. Free barbeque on Wednesday's meat and bread provided.
31	Friendly and helpful staff who provide a beautiful morning tea of scones and jam, homemade sausage rolls and fruit cake. A good way of meeting other campers.
32	Helpful and friendly staff treat you like a family member. Bus trip organised on Tuesday nights to a local restaurant and on Thursday night the staff cook the camper's goodies to perfection.
37	Friendly welcome at Matilda Country Caravan Park. We were assisted to our site. Country poet entertained park residents at campfire tea.
37	Magnetic Gateway Holiday Park holds sausage sizzle for \$2 with country and western entertainer.
44	The caravan park was a good one and the owners put on a barbeque every Friday night so everyone could get to know each other.

Providing opportunities for senior travellers to socialise with each other has reflected the positive attitude of managers towards their customers. Meeting new people is an important part of travelling and necessary for gathering information such as: road conditions, weather, best fishing spots, camp sites and fuel prices (Yabsley, 2005). Pearce (1999), found that 'road talk' amongst senior travellers revolved around the quality and safety of routes in a region and often involved detailed notes on the paths taken. Onyx and Leonard (2005) identified that through these social networks, word of mouth information is passed on concerning best places to stay, free camping sites and just meeting other people, some who became lifelong friends. Similarly, the exchange of information about

experiences, social interaction and meeting others is an integral part of the communal nature of hostel accommodation provided for backpackers (Murphy, 2001). Like caravan parks, backpacker hostels provide a social avenue to meet people (Pearce, 1990), where everybody is talking to everybody, everybody is giving advice, groups are formed to share fun, costs, risks and experiences (Binder, 2004).

#### **2.4.4.4 Availability of Information**

Senior travellers obtain information from a variety of sources depending on the type of travel undertaken. Adding to the very effective 'word of mouth' approach of collecting information (Shoemaker, Lewis, & Yesawich, 2000), travel guides, brochures, travel magazines, tourist publications, road maps, radio and television advertising, loyalty or reward programs, internet, and holiday information presentations provided by travel agents are all forms of information available and made use of by the senior traveller (Balfour Consulting, 2003; Faranda & Schmidt, 1999b; Horneman et al., 2002; Kuilboer, 2002; Littrell et al., 2004; Prideaux et al., 2001; Shoemaker, 2000). This additional theme – availability of information, appears to be an important facet to the travelling senior. In total 20 statements were identified, of which 90% were positive and 10% negative. Table 2.10 presents a sample of these statements.

Table 2.10

Availability of Information

<b>Diary</b>	<b>Positive Incident Comment</b>
7	We got very good information for our travel. The woman who gave us the literature spoke very good and understandable English. She was very friendly.
9	Very friendly and caring. Make every effort to make you welcome and very informative.
10	Very helpful staff who listen to you and understand your requirements. They hand you maps, brochures and suggestions for day trips, ferries etc, which fit into your requirements and time you spend in the area.
11	Friendly, helpful council employees giving information of other free camping places in the shire.
23	In Port Douglas and Cairns any brochure about trips gave full details and costs involved.
27	The facilities and help to make the stay here good are very good, and information provided to make the best use of our time for sightseeing are very helpful.
29	Lady at newsagency give service with a smile and lots of information about the town which is very unusual these days.
31	Both volunteer women went out of their way to be helpful and provided not only the information I requested but other information they thought we may be interested in.
<b>Diary</b>	<b>Negative Incident Comment</b>
5	Information centre very lacking in support of information – vague.
23	The travel agent we used to book our stay on Heron Island did not tell us that snorkelling trips and equipment were not included in the cost.

Various sources of information are used by senior travellers to assist them in their travel plans. According to (Kuilboer, 2005; Littrell et al., 2004; Prideaux et al., 2001; Yabsley, 2005), the two most important sources used by senior travellers are word of mouth and brochures. Information sources used by

specific visitor segments are an important consideration for suppliers when determining which media should be used for targeted marketing campaigns (Prideaux et al., 2001).

#### 2.4.4.5 Amenities

A final additional theme identified within the critical incidents related to the level of satisfaction of amenities which senior travellers felt was an important factor in their travel needs. In total 19 comments were identified, reflecting 68% positive and 32% negative. Table 2.11 contains a sample of these comments.

Table 2.11

#### Amenities

<b>Diary</b>	<b>Positive Incident Comment</b>
2	The council caravan park is not flash but has a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. The amenities are basic and spotless.
3	Office encounter was very welcoming and friendly. The amenities were spotless and the park was very clean.
5	Comfort station has very good amenities.
6	Arrived to a friendly acceptance at the office. A very clean park with great showers and laundry.
20	Very friendly staff and very clean toilets.
26	Friendly, generous, good amenities and clean resort.
41	Hospital facilities were clean and well maintained.
<b>Diary</b>	<b>Negative Incident Comment</b>
3	Disappointed at the crowded and grubby state of the van park that is supposed to be RACQ 4 Star rating.
12	Caravan sites on the river but you need to get into your car and drive to the toilets and showers.



31	Probably one of the worst parks we have encountered, especially the condition of the ablution block.
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This final additional theme addressing the level of satisfaction of amenities by senior travellers has not been previously addressed in the academic literature. The importance of identifying the positive and negative perceptions concerning the standard of amenities within the accommodation sector has been clearly established (Albacete-Saez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Llorens-Montes, 2007; Chung & Hoffman, 1998; Lockyer, 2004; Mohsin & Ryan, 2005; Moscardo, 2006; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1995).

#### **2.4.5 Impact of Encounters on Decisions and Recommendations**

Despite the wide range of responses described by senior travellers, 40 respondents (88%) reported that the customer service encounters did have an impact on their decisions in choosing where they shop and stay and the attractions they planned to visit. These responses were grouped into four generic categories – greatly impacts, impacts, minimal impacts, and no impact. The four categories and basic distribution of responses are listed in Table 2.12. The most significant outcome from this table is that a combined total of 77.7% of participants stated that customer service encounters did influence their travel decisions.

Table 2.12

Customer Service Encounter Impact on Travel Decisions

Categories		Frequency n=45	Percent
1	Greatly Impacts	11	24.4
2	Impacts	24	53.3
3	Minimal Impacts	3	6.7
4	No Impact	2	4.4
	Total	40	88.9
	Missing	5	11.1

One advantage to opened-ended questions is the richness of the response. The following quotes are examples of categories 1 and 2, and categories 3 and 4 responses:

Greatly Impacts and Impacts

*“It has everything to do with where we stay as it decides if we return to a place or whether we choose somewhere new for the next time.” (Male, QLD)*

*“Friendly caravan park managers, shady sites, and clean amenities are most important.” (Male, VIC)*

*“The best – always go back and recommend to others. The worst – tell others and won’t go back.” (Female, WA)*

*“A big impact which depends on the attitude and how staff treat you.” (Male, VIC)*

*“Best encounters are very important for return visits and recommending to other travellers and visa versa.” (Male, VIC)*

*“It has everything to do with where we stay as it decides if we return to a place or whether we choose somewhere new for the next time.” (Female, QLD)*

*“A huge impact. Good places will be recommended”. (Female, NSW)*

*“Stay longer in places we like and spend lots of money.” (Male & Female, QLD)*

#### Minimal Impacts/No Impacts

*“We generally try to adopt the attitude that everyone is different and try to see for ourselves – however it does have some input.” (Female, WA)*

*“Not too much as they are isolated situations and one rarely covers the same ground.” (Male, VIC)*

*“Probably not a lot.” (Male & Female, VIC)*

Overall these results highlight the importance of service encounters in influencing travel behaviours. It is also likely that these service encounters also influence recommendations made to other travellers. Given the importance of word of mouth to this travelling group, it is worth examining this phenomenon in more detail.

#### **2.4.6 Impact of Word of Mouth Experiences on Planning Decisions**

The impact of word of mouth communication on shaping consumers attitudes and behaviours in the decision making process has been researched for several

decades. As early as 1955, Katz and Lazarsfeld found word of mouth (WOM) to be seven times more effective than newspaper and magazine advertising, four times more effective than personal selling, and twice as effective as radio advertising in influencing consumers to switch brands (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Since this time, numerous studies have shown that the influence of WOM has both positive (Anderson, 1998; Day, 1971; Kiel & Layton, 1981; Prideaux et al., 2001; Swan & Oliver, 1989) and negative (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Lutz, 1975; Singh, 1990; Solvang, 2008; Wright, 1974) communication outcomes.

According to Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008, p. 458), "Interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth are ranked the most important information source when a consumer is making a purchase decision. These influences are especially important in the hospitality and tourism industry, where intangible products are difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption". Recent tourism research has demonstrated the role of WOM in the areas of destination image (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002), antagonism towards tourists (Crick, 2003), positive wine tourism recommendations (O'Neill, Palmer, & Charters, 2002), travel decisions (Shanka, Ali-Knight, & Pope, 2002), accommodation (Kang et al., 2004), the senior drive tour market in Australia (Prideaux et al., 2001) and the levels of traveller expectations (Diaz-Martin, Iglesias, Vazquez, & Ruiz, 2000). According to Gremler (1994, p. 64), "In many instances, WOM appears to be the major source of information that people use in making purchase decisions about products and services". It is important to note that the age range in these

studies is from teenage years to over 65 years of age, indicating again that these findings are not specific to senior travellers.

In the present study respondents were asked, “How much impact do fellow travellers’ experiences have on your decisions when planning your trip itinerary?” Table 2.13 provides a summary of the four categories of responses to this question. Category 1 – greatly impacts made up 37.8% of all responses. This combined with category 2 (impacts) totals 57.8% indicating the importance of word of mouth experiences has when planning an itinerary. Responses in Category 3 – minimal impact suggested that 31.1% of senior travellers listen to word of mouth experiences but are not entirely convinced by them and prefer to decide for themselves. Only 8.9% of respondents felt that word of mouth experiences did not impact on them at all.

Table 2.13

Word of Mouth Experiences Impact on Planning Decisions

<b>Categories</b>		<b>Frequency n=45</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	Greatly Impacts	17	37.8
2	Impacts	9	20.0
3	Minimal Impacts	14	31.1
4	No Impact	4	8.9
	Total	44	97.8
	Missing	1	2.2

The following quotes are examples of responses in both the greatly impacts/impacts and minimal impacts/no impact responses.

### Greatly Impacts and Impacts

*“We very much tend to listen to others’ experiences.” (Female, VIC)*

*“Good experiences – if possible is a must. Laundry gossip is a great source of information.” (Male, NSW)*

*“I would say fellow experiences affect the planning of our holiday greatly, eg: cost, access, pleasantness, and cleanliness.” (Female, WA)*

*“Laundry gossip is a great source of information as it was a timely warning for us when planning a trip to Kununurra”. (Male, NSW)*

*“A great deal. Fellow travellers can give you the latest to date information and quite often we change our travel plans because we have been told of a good place to go or stay.” (Female, SA)*

*“Quite a bit. Word of mouth is very important.” (Male & Female, VIC)*

### Minimal Impacts/No Impacts

*“Not a lot as one has to see for yourself to know exactly whether it be good or bad.” (Male, NSW)*

*“They have some influence. I often make plans on recommendations of people I know.” (Male, QLD)*

*“Not at all. Everyone has to experience it for themselves. What some people don’t like, others do.” (Male, QLD)*

*“Don’t worry – travelling for ones self but it is enjoyable when you meet friendly helpful people”. (Female, WA)*

*“Very little, as what may well suit them is not necessarily what would interest you.” (Male, SA)*

The results in Table 2.13 clearly indicate the importance of (Kotler et al., 2006) word of mouth information on trip planning decisions. Shoemaker, Lewis, & Yesawich (2000, p. 422), echo numerous tourism and hospitality authors when they state, “The most powerful form of communication, especially in the hospitality industry, is word of mouth. According to Shimp (2000, p. 210), “research has shown that the more favourable information a potential product adopter has received from peers, the more likely that individual is to adopt the new product or service”. Pearce (1999) identified the word of mouth travel experiences amongst senior travellers as, ‘road talk’ which also related to the quality and safety of the routes in a region and often involved detailed notes on the paths taken. According to Balfour (2003), word of mouth is the strongest form of communication medium which takes place during ‘happy hour’ where travellers get information on rest areas, caravan parks that are not considered ‘friendly’, local government areas that are not considered ‘welcoming’, the best places to buy, the good and the bad of tourist experiences are all discussed over drinks during stopovers. Balfour (2003, p. 13), also states that, “The importance of friends and acquaintances (and word of mouth in general) as the major sources of information should not be underestimated. This is often information that goes unchallenged and be embellished or exaggerated with the telling”. In a recent study conducted by Onyx & Leonard (2005, p. 66), they found that, “it is

largely through these traveller networks that word of mouth information is passed on. For example, this is the best source of information concerning the best places to stay, and in particular the location of good free camping places, often not advertised in any way whatsoever". According to Morrison (1996), he suggests that providing a consistent quality of service and associated facilities is a key ingredient in getting good word of mouth.

## **2.5 Conclusions and Implications**

The use of travel diaries in collecting and evaluating the perceptions of customer service encounters by senior travellers has proven to be a useful approach in identifying best and worst customer service encounters. Categorising the qualitative responses into the five dimensions of SERVQUAL and comparing them to the different service locations produced several significant findings.

The first finding was the importance respondents placed on both Assurance and Responsiveness dimensions, which both relate to staff attitudes. Although this finding was not unexpected, it did identify that these two dimensions rated significantly higher than the other three dimensions. This result clearly suggests that senior travellers place a strong emphasis on the behaviour of the service provider rather than the actual activity provided by the organisation.

The major overall concerns respondents highlighted in the worst service incidents also related to the attitude of staff towards senior travellers as reflected in the Assurance and Responsiveness dimensions. This is not an isolated



outcome but echoes similar findings by Gilbert and Wong (2003), Pakdil and Aydin (2007), and Ryan and Cliff (1997). The implication for managers is the importance of customer service training again reflecting Callan's (1998, p. 97) comment, "In many cases, it is the attitude and behaviour of the service provider, rather than the core service which can be the critical consideration".

The most notable aspect of the worst service incidents was the high level of dissatisfaction respondents experienced in retail stores regarding the willingness of staff to help customers and providing prompt service – Responsiveness dimension. Service providers continually face challenges from increased competition and changing socio-variable demographics. Sharma (2001) argues that as customer demands grow and target markets become more fragmented, retailers will increasingly need to provide customised services to strengthen and maintain relationships. Various suggestions from the literature have been made in addressing managerial implications concerning deficiencies identified in the Responsiveness dimension directed predominantly at the retail sector. These include:

- ✚ Invest more resources into improving employee communication and information (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007).
- ✚ An important management strategy is to understand service expectations of retail customers (Ma & Niehm, 2006).
- ✚ Recognising the design, management of control and support systems, and staff training are all important internal factors that need to be addressed as they have a direct bearing on the level of service provision (Walker, Johnson, & Leonard, 2006).

- ✚ Problems can be eliminated or prevented by having quality controls in place (Hoffman et al., 2003).
- ✚ Adequately staff the sales floor, employees initiate contact and use appropriate initial contact phrases (Naylor & Frank, 2000).
- ✚ Management should consider appropriate gender of front-counter staff in service establishments (McKechnie, Grant, & Bagaria, 2007).
- ✚ Adopt rigorous recruitment procedures and select employees with the appropriate attitude and skills (Presbury et al., 2005).

The Tangible and Reliability dimensions for accommodation are another common area respondents identified in the worst service incidents. Similar incidents have also been identified in tourist accommodation research literature conducted by Mey et al (2006), Moscardo (2006), Presbury et al (2005), and Vieregge et al (2007). Comments that were provided by respondents suggest that if the appearance of the facilities and serviceability of equipment were of a poor standard, then this could also imply that managers were not providing staff with the necessary training and tools to provide the promised service dependably and accurately. One approach to minimise these negative incidents identified by Presbury et al (2005) is for managers to recognise that training and development are important investments in their business and adopt rigorous recruitment procedures and select employees with the appropriate attitude and skills. Mey et al (2006) suggest that managers spend more resources on improving tangible elements and also promote the quality of their facilities and room services to potential customers.

The final service location that scored highest in the worst service incident was information centres and the dimension of empathy. This outcome has not been previously reported in the academic literature. Incidents were diverse in nature and demographics, with only one commonality in that they all occurred in the state of Queensland.

Results have provided support for the suggestion that the travel decisions senior travellers make are very much influenced by the standard of customer service they encounter from service providers. Whether these encounters are positive or negative, feelings associated with the experience create inner emotions, motivating the consumer to share the experience with others (Neelamegham & Jain, 1999; Nyer, 1997; Westbrook, 1987). According to Litvin et al (2008, p. 459), "many people simply enjoy sharing their travel experiences and expertise with post-trip sharing often one of the joys of travel". Recent research in the tourism and hospitality literature has drawn an unsurprisingly overarching conclusion that has remained unchanged for several decades that favourable or positive WOM increases the probability of purchase, while negative WOM has the opposite effect (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown, 2001; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2005; Laczniak et al., 2001; Ozcan & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In today's environment, service providers face heightened challenges from increased competition and an ageing population. Beyond recruitment, training employees, initiating policies and procedures, and addressing service systems

failures, this study reveals that service provider managers should be more proactive in equipping their employees in order to achieve higher customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and ultimately customer relationship profitability.

The findings in this study identified several links and similarities to the backpacker market with research into this group. Both groups are budget conscious and place a high priority on value for money. Each have been portrayed as not being high value tourists, but together in 2007 contributed approximately \$15 billion in tourism spending (Tourism Research Australia, 2008a, 2008b). Socialising and meeting others is an integral part of their travel experience and WOM appears to be a major source of travel information. These similarities suggest that age may not be as important a variable but rather life-style stage.

The critical incidents recorded by respondents did not identify any direct comments about age either in terms of being subjected to ageist stereotypes or as an element of the service encounter. However the importance of staff attitudes does suggest it could be there.

## **2.6 Directions for Further Study**

This study has illustrated and provided support for the idea that senior travellers place a great deal of emphasis on the attitudes of staff as reflected in both the best and worst service incidents. This study also highlighted the importance placed on the SERVQUAL dimensions of assurance and responsiveness which respondents identified as the most significant encounters when applying the

critical incident technique. It also identified several pertinent service quality gaps between the customer and the service provider. The next step in the research process will be to use the results from the present study to develop more structured questions examining employees and employers perceptions of customer service and satisfaction in this growing tourism market. Using self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will be useful in standardising responses, providing information pertinent to both employee and employer and enabling a more rigorous statistical analysis of results. Investigations will focus more directly on investigating service provider's perceptions of service gaps and issues for senior tourists with a focus on identifying factors that may contribute to an understanding of these gaps. Other areas for further investigation are to examine the impacts of an ageing population on service providers and identify gaps in the downward flow of information to service providers concerning local/state/federal government strategies for an ageing population. Perceptions of customer service in general and specifically towards senior tourists will continue to be included in the questionnaires. However, a focus on service providers' perceptions of ageism will also be explored applying discourse analysis. Overall, the present study provided a respondent generated list of service encounters that were important to senior tourists. The findings of these service encounters will be used to guide the development of further questionnaires examining customer service from a service provider's perspective.

## **Chapter 3: Evaluations of Customer Service by Service Providers Interviews with Managers/Employers**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The results from the diary study in Chapter 2 provided support for the further exploration of the perceptions of customer service and satisfaction from the perspective of service provider employers. In analysing the SERVQUAL dimensions across both best and worst service encounters, it can be seen that senior travellers who participated in the first study placed a great deal of emphasis on both assurance and responsiveness reflecting the importance of the attitudes of staff. Several additional themes, independent of the five SERVQUAL dimensions, were identified from the best and worst critical incidents. These themes highlight the importance senior tourists place on customer service in addition to the five SERVQUAL dimensions. The present study used the results gained from Chapter 2 to develop a series of semi-structured interview questions to analyse employers' perspectives on Australia's ageing population and customer service.

The aims of study two were:

1. To identify perspectives of Australia's ageing population by employers.
2. Examine perceived impacts of an ageing population on service providers.
3. To identify gaps in the downward flow of information to service providers concerning local/state/federal government policies/strategies for an ageing population.

4. Evaluate employer's recipe for good customer service.
5. Identifying underlying perceptions of ageism by employers.

A qualitative approach will be used in addressing the aims of this study through the application of critical discourse analysis to evaluate the perceptions of customer service by managers/employers of service providers.

### **3.2 Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis**

The constructs of ageism are often subtle and implicit rather than explicit, and are characterised in general terms often found in social and political practices, which can be exposed by applying the theory of critical discourse. The origins of discourse analysis are found in linguistics, linguistic philosophy, social anthropology and theoretical sociology. Today discourse is a core concept across the humanities and social sciences and well beyond the disciplines of linguistics and semiotics themselves (Coupland & Jaworski, 2001; Mills, 2004; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Discourse theory draws its inspiration from the interpretive sciences enabling the construction and deconstruction of the ageism stereotype to be explored. The essence of 'deconstructionism' is the belief that all identities are socially constructed in terms of a 'discourse', which reflects the perspectives and interests of a dominant group. Therefore, the only route to liberation is by deconstructing this discourse and 'privileging' one's own identity (Foucault, 1972). Discourse analysis is therefore the attempt to observe, unravel, and critique these acts of construction.

Stubbs in Van Dijk (1997, p. 3) defines discourse analysis as: “The close examination of language usage – whether spoken or written, help the observer to understand how the world constructs, and is constructed, perpetuating a system of knowledge that permeates society”. The idea of knowledge as power is related to Foucault’s (1977) notion of the ‘regimes of truth’, which facilitates the reproduction of patterns of power, dominance and control. It is through such regimes of truth which are set out in ‘expert discourse’ on social issues that include parenthood (‘single mothers’), addiction, sexuality, criminality, and youth culture, that individuals in post-modern societies are controlled and scrutinised (Cameron, 1999; Coupland & Jaworski, 2001). With this in mind, the social issues concerning seniors in Australia’s ageing population comes to the fore.

The origin of the term ‘critical discourse analysis’ can be attributed to Norman Fairclough (1995), who designed an interdisciplinary approach to the study of texts. This approach was explicitly influenced by Althusser, Foucault and Bourdieu’s analysis in order to examine ideologies and power relations involved in discourse (Mills, 2004). Fairclough (1988, p. 15) noted that, “language connects with the social through the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power”.

Howarth in Marsh and Stoker (1997, p. 115) states that, “critical discourse theory analyses the way systems of meanings or ‘discourses’ shape the way people understand their roles in society and influence their political activities”. Adding to this, Fairclough (1993, p. 12), views that “critical discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has



upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants". The notion of power is connected to that knowledge system and impinges largely on text and talk, and as a result, the discourses of control can be very subtle within society. However, Locke (2004, p. 37), suggests that, "the power of a discourse relates to its subscription base and the social status of its subscribers. On this basis, it is important to realise that some discourses are more powerful than others and subscribers of non-powerful discourses are therefore marginalised and relatively disempowered". (Ng, 2007, p. 119) has also identified that, "Because language is power, illiteracy means lack of power. Language that relies excessively on technical and hard to comprehend vocabularies and forms of expression renders the general population functionally illiterate and consequently powerless". Going one step further Van Dijk (2006, p. 360), implies that, "this form of power is manipulation and is being exercised through talk, text and visual messages, through advertising, internet", and non-linguist modes such as painting, sculpture, music, dance, film, and so on. So much so that this language has become so naturalised over time, we begin to treat them as common, acceptable and natural features of discourse (Teo, 2000).

### **3.2.1 Discourse Analysis within Tourism Research**

Discourse analysis within tourism research has seen minimal application, the exception being tourism marketing which has been widely researched (Salazar, 2006). The following examples identify the diversity with which discourse analysis is applied within tourism research.

An example of the discourse of power in tourism research is highlighted by Honggen Xiou (2005), in his article, "The discourse of power: Deng Xiaoping and tourism development in China". Xiou discussed China's tourism development and policy through a discourse analysis of Deng Xiaoping's five talks on tourism during 1978-1979. Deng Xiaoping was a legendary figure in the political history of China holding political power from 1978-1992. Not only is the author interested in these talks, but how the recipients – namely the tourism administrators of CNTA, of the discourse have come to respond to the producer's message. Xiou found that through the interrelated dimensions of these talks, the discourse of power was translated into policies and development strategies to govern economic reform and industry practice for China's tourism.

In a recent paper, Salazar (2006, p. 833) examined how global discourses are locally (re) produced enabling Tanzanian students learn how to become professional "local" guides. "Acquiring specialised knowledge from a variety of sources, throughout their training they are instructed both implicitly and explicitly how to use global discourse to represent and sell their natural and cultural heritage".

A critical discourse analysis of ecotourism was undertaken by Stamou and Paraskevopoulos (2004) to analyse the 'tourism' and 'environmentalist' images of the Dadia Forest, Greece. By analysing the visitors' books at the reserve information centre using a qualitative approach, the researchers discovered that the tourism image was found to override the environmentalist image in the way visitors talked about the nature of the reserve at the observation site.

Ateljevic and Doorne (2002) presented a paper contrasting a series of promotional New Zealand texts produced by the central government agency at the beginning and end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They employed discourse analysis to reveal the imagery of place representation as a reflection of the sociocultural (con) text and underlying ideologies of leisure. Results identified that historically, promotional text reflected the then institutional structures and social relations of the time. However this imagery has now given way to consumption based classes of the global cultural economy.

As presented earlier, Australia is a nation experiencing population ageing. Unfortunately, there resides a significant negative perception toward seniors from a variety of sectors within the community. A search of the literature has not revealed any direct investigation into understanding how ageism is viewed, defined and experienced through appraising the use of language and non-linguistic modes.

Indicative to the nature of tourism, the tourism industry also has its own discourse or language. Dann (1996, p. 2), has identified several terms which demonstrate the language of tourism, including, “word power, cliché, formulae, vocabularies, speech, talk, voices, idiom, semantics, grammar, text, advertising, publicity and promotion”. “This language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings and in doing so, convert them from potential to actual clients” (Dann, 1996, p. 5). This second study will explore service providers’ perceptions of senior travellers using discourse analysis

through semi-structured interviews with managers or employers of businesses relevant to the travel experiences of senior tourists.

### **3.3 Methodology**

#### **3.3.1 Survey Procedure**

The manager/employer semi-structured interviews were conducted over a three week period. The days on which the interviews were conducted were weekdays to maximize the availability of interviewing the manager or employer of the business/organisation. The researcher personally conducted each of the interviews which were all carried out in the location of the service provider. Each respondent was informed that the interview was completely confidential and anonymous and that they were required to acknowledge and sign the "Informed Consent Form" (see Appendix F) being an ethical requirement of James Cook University. Each interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes allowing time to build a rapport with the participant and explain the format of the interview.

During the interview, the researcher recorded on the interview sheet the responses of each participant and also recorded the interview by audio tape. The purpose of audio taping the responses was to ensure that information from the interview was not lost or overlooked when analysing the responses, (Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2003; Punch, 1998; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). The first set of questions focused on Australia's ageing population and the second set focused on customer service. A copy of the interview questions is attached as Appendix G.

The method of sampling selected for the service provider sample was a non-probability convenience sample (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Sekaran, 2000). A sample of businesses and government agencies were selected based on the frequency with which that type of organisation was noted in the critical incidents reported in the first study. So it included accommodation providers, local government units responsible for rest areas, visitor centres, and a variety of retail outlets. The final sample involved selecting respondents on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate. The advantages of this approach to the interviews are that it is quick, convenient and cost effective. In total 152 letters of invitation were mailed to service providers in Ingham, Townsville/Thuringowa, Ayr/Homehill, Bowen and Charters Towers on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005. A copy of the interview invitation letter is attached as Appendix E. After a period of two weeks, the researcher contacted by telephone those service providers willing to participate in the research and made an appointment to conduct the interview. Service providers who did not reply to the letter of invitation were also followed up with a courtesy telephone call by the researcher. As a result of both follow up calls, an overall response rate of 39 percent was achieved. The main reasons service providers did not want to participate in the research were, 'too busy' and 'not interested'. It seems that those not interested saw this topic as an issue of little importance.

### **3.2.2 Participants**

The total number of managers/employers who participated in the interview was 59 and a breakdown of the type of organisation can be seen in Table 3.1. The gender distribution of respondents was 45.7% male and 54.3% female. The

average age of respondents was 47 years with the oldest being 69 and the youngest 25. Table 3.2 identifies the breakdown of the location of service providers. Almost half of the service providers were located in Townsville/Thuringowa as this is the regional capital for north Queensland with a population of 151,613 (ABS, 2007) see Table 3.2.

Table 3.1

Service Providers

<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>n=59</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Retail Services	24	40
Caravan Park	12	20.3
Accommodation	6	10.1
Tourist Attraction	5	8.4
Food Outlet	5	8.4
Essential Services	3	5
Local Government	3	5
Information Centre	1	1.6

Table 3.2

Location of Service Provider

<b>Location</b>	<b>n=59</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Townsville/Thuringowa	26	44
Ayr/Homehill	9	15
Bowen	9	15
Charters Towers	9	15
Ingham	6	10

### 3.2.3 Instruments

A more qualitative approach was used in order to gather a great deal of information from a smaller number of people (Veal, 2006). In adopting the

semi-structured interview approach, the researcher was able to determine beforehand the topics to be covered, questions to be asked, and people to be interviewed. This approach differs from other interview techniques in that it minimises bias through careful design of the technique itself, the sequence in which the subject matter is addressed, and a fair representation of the sample (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005).

Using a qualitative approach for this study was based on the belief that the people personally involved in a particular situation are best able to describe and explain their experiences, feelings or knowledge in their own words without being constrained by the researcher (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Veal, 2006). According to Saunders et al. (2007, p. 250), “managers are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire, especially where the interview topic is seen to be interesting and relevant to their current work. This situation also provides the opportunity for interviewees to receive feedback and personal assurance about the way in which information will be used”. This approach is also more appropriate for conducting discourse analysis. A further advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that the interviewer can use suggestions for prompts and probes. Summarising techniques is a probe in which the interviewer summarises what the person has said, allowing the person to add any more information (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2003; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Hair, Babin, Money, & Samouel, 2003; Saunders et al., 2007).

One month prior to the interview, a pre-test of the interview questions was conducted with a selection representative sample of relevant industry employers. The benefits of pre-testing are well documented (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Babbie, 2005; Oppenheim, 1972; Ritchie & Goeldner, 1994). As a result, several minor changes were made to the interview questions and structure.

Table 3.3

Semi Structured Interview Questions

<b>Set 1: Focus on Australia's Ageing Population</b>	
1.	What do you know about the trend in Australia's ageing population?
2.	What do you think, if any, are the implications for your organisation/business?
3.	Are you aware of any local, state, or federal government policies or strategies concerning Australia's ageing population? If yes, do you know what they are?
4.	With the ageing of Australia's population, do you anticipate any economic impacts either positive or negative for your organisation/business?
5.	What do you think those impacts might be?
<b>Set 2: Focus on Customer Service</b>	
6.	What do you believe is your recipe for good customer service?
7.	Would the above ingredients for your recipe of good customer service differ with senior customers? (take a few moments to consider this)
8.	If yes, what would those ingredients be?

The final set of semi-structured interview questions are presented in Table 3.3 and were included to address the aims of the present study which are:

1. To identify perspectives of Australia's ageing population by employers.
2. Examine perceived impacts of an ageing population on service providers.



3. To identify gaps in the downward flow of information to service providers concerning local/state/federal government policies/strategies for an ageing population.
4. Evaluate employer's recipe for good customer service.
5. Identify underlying perceptions of ageism by employers.

The questions in Set 1 addressed aims one, two and three, while questions in Set 2 addressed aims four and five.

In analysing the qualitative data, a categorisation procedure was applied as outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007). This involved both reading the interview sheet and listening to the audio taped interview together to ensure no information was missed and summarising the main categories identified for each question. The content analysis of the responses to the questions in the first set used themes derived from the participant responses themselves. In the second set of questions addressing customer service, the responses were organised into themes using the five key dimensions of the SERVQUAL model to allow for comparisons with the results of the first study. Each interview was scrutinized to correctly identified target phrases and words that matched the terminology used to define the SERVQUAL dimensions.

### **3.3 Results and Discussion**

The results are organised into two stages matching the research questions listed in this study. The present study applies a qualitative approach and examples of responses are provided after the discussion of each theme. Stage one examines the perspectives of Australia's ageing population by employers. Part

one is to identify the respondents understanding of an ageing population. In analysing this interview question, responses were categorised into key themes. Part two examines the respondents' perceptions of general impacts, if any, of an ageing population on the service provider. The responses given by participants were separated and themed into positive and negative impacts. The third part of stage one asked employers if they could identify any Local, State or Federal government policies concerning Australia's ageing population and what those policies were. The results were categorized into the three levels of government with the relevant policies identified in each level. The final part for stage one identifies the positive and negative economic impacts on service providers as a consequence of an ageing population. Several patterns were identified within these two impact categories.

The second stage of the results is concerned with the perceived implications of an ageing population for customer service. Results for the first part of this stage were categorised into the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model and then compared with previous results of senior travellers in Study One to identify service gaps. The final question analyses changes to customer service specifically aimed towards senior customers. The qualitative data provided by the participants involved in the semi-structured interviews, will also be analysed against ageist stereotype assumptions applying discourse analysis.

### **3.3.1 Perspectives on Australia's Ageing Population**

The first question sought information on the respondent's understanding of the idea of an ageing population. Three quarters (75%) of the respondents clearly

believed that the concept of Australia's ageing population related specifically to the senior population. Some examples of participants' responses illustrate this:

*"The ratio to younger people – older people are growing faster".  
(Museum Manager)*

*"The ageing population is rapidly increasing for we are seeing more pensioners". (Retail Manager)*

Table 3.4 provides a summary of the main themes in the responses. According to Costello (2005), the perception held by most Australians that population ageing is just about the numbers of old people is incorrect. Costello (2005) argues that the critical feature is the changing age structure and the ratio of old people to other ages with the slowing of growth in the population of younger ages in the coming decades. As can be seen in Table 3.4, the most common responses in this sample focused on the increase in older people, with only a small number recognising the changing age ratio. Overall the comments did not reveal a detailed understanding of the concept, but rather a general notion that a trend exists.

*"Our population is getting older, people are living longer and healthier". (Caravan Park Manager)*

*"As people are living longer, the average age is becoming older". (Food Outlet Manager)*

*"Catering to more elderly citizens". (Service Station Manager)*

Table 3.4

What do you know about the trend in Australia's Ageing population?

<b>Trends</b>	<b>n = 83</b>	<b>Percent</b>
More older people	28	33
It is ageing	16	19.2
Living longer	11	13.2
Baby boomers	10	12
Less younger people	7	8.4
Living healthier	6	7.2
Less in the workforce	2	2.4
Average age becoming older	1	1.2
More independent	1	1.2
Social impacts	1	1.2
Housing impacts	1	1.2
Not aware of any trend	3	3.6

The next question asked respondents to contemplate what, if any, implications they thought an ageing population might have on their businesses or organisations. Some respondents only discussed the magnitude of the effect with 5.6 percent reporting large implications, 9.4 percent reporting not many implications, and another 5.6 percent suggesting there were no implications at all.

The responses given by the rest of the sample are summarised in Table 3.5 and are presented firstly as general responses and then as more industry specific implications. Both types of implication are further classified into positive and negative responses. Overall 37 percent of respondents identified a general increase in senior customers with a small number recognising a corresponding decrease in younger people.

*“No implications expected in the medium-term. However, I am anticipating changes in the long-term”. (Motel Manager)*

*“We will need to identify strategies to support seniors, create greater awareness levels in the community and address access issues”. (Local Government Representative)*

In the more specific categories only a few respondents identified positive implications:

*“Heaps, they are the most regular users of medication”.  
(Pharmacy Manager)*

*“Our hair dressing salon will get busier as seniors like to look good”. (Hair Dresser Manager)*

*“With more senior travellers we have more caravans which means the caravan park industry is secure”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

The majority of the reported business implications were negative. These included perceptions that required facilities and upgrades to infrastructure would place a burden on the business.

*“Seniors want bigger sites because of larger RV’s and motor homes. To expand requires significant and costly changes to infrastructure”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

Providing access was an implication raised by 9.4 percent of respondents across all industries suggesting that many respondents were focused on diminishing capabilities as a key feature of senior travellers.

*“May need to cater more to disabled seniors, ie: access, rails etc”. (Motel Manager)*

*“Suitable access for all seniors including those with a disability”.  
(Local Government Representative)*

*“Seniors have different demands one of which is access”.  
(Restaurant Manager)*

*“As part of our town planning program in approving accommodation to house seniors, access is a major issue”.  
(Local Government Representative)*

*“We need to provide more adequate access facilities”.  
(Museum Manager)*

A number of the other comments also revealed some underlying negative ageist stereotypes. For example, there was the assumption that seniors go to bed early and so don't require longer opening hours and they spent less.

*“With an ageing population we have more seniors using the restaurant in the evening but they go home early, so we have to close earlier”. (Restaurant Manager)*

*“Surprised at the high number of senior customers using the budget end of the food line”. (Fish & Chip Shop Manager)*

*“With an increase in senior customers due to an increase in retirement, these seniors will probably spend less”. (News Agency Manager)*

*“Seniors have less spending power”. (Retail Manager)*

Largely, the implications identified by managers are consistent with claims made in the literature concerning the likely consequences of the shift from a younger population to an older one affecting a range of industries including recreation, health, hospitality, housing and transport (Santoro, 2006).

Table 3.5




What do you think if any are the implications for your business?

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
General	Increase in customers 37%  Access 9.4%  More people travelling 5.6%  Increase in disabled seniors 1.8%	Less younger people 1.8%
Caravan Park	Greater demand for caravan parks 1.8%	Too many caravanners 1.8%  Caravan parks too full – disgruntled customers 1.8%  Increased traffic on roads 1.8%  Larger sites required for RV's and mobile homes 1.8%  Expansion requires significant changes to infrastructure 1.8%
Pharmacies	Increased demand for medication 3.7%	
Food Outlets		Change in the culture and perception of fast food industry 1.8%  No longer open 24 hours – no young people 1.8%  Early closing of restaurant 1.8%




Local Council	More strategies to support seniors 1.8%  Create greater awareness levels for an ageing population 1.8%	
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The third question in this set dealt with awareness of government policies or strategies' concerning Australia's ageing population. More than half of the managers (58%) were not aware of any policies or strategies with the remaining 42% reporting some awareness of population ageing policies. Table 3.6 presents the main responses from this group and these results suggest that respondents had only limited awareness of policies or strategies at both Local, State and Federal government levels. There are numerous ageing policies and strategies within the various levels of government which include:

### **The Australian Federal Government Ageing Policies and Strategies**

-  Healthy Ageing Task Force – 2000
-  The National Strategy for an Ageing Population – 2003
-  Promoting Healthy Ageing in Australia – 2005

### **State Government and Territory Policies and Strategies include:**

-  Queensland: Queensland 2020 A State for all Ages 2003  
Our Shared Future 2000 – 2004  
Strategic Policy for Seniors 2007-2011
-  Victoria: Making this the Age to be in Victoria - 2003
-  Western Australia: State Aged Care Plan 2003 – 2008



- ✚ Tasmania: Plan for Positive Ageing 2000 – 2005
- ✚ New South Wales: Healthy Ageing Framework 1998 – 2003
- ✚ Australian Capital Territory: Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing Strategic Plan 2003 – 2005

No Local Governments within the surveyed region were identified to have any policies concerning the ageing population. However, the larger local council's of Townsville and Thuringowa have introduced a "Senior's Council" to give advice and suggest strategies concerning issues surrounding the ageing population. One organisation that has identified the implications of an ageing population is the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), which has initiated an Australia wide Population Ageing Action Plan 2004 – 2008.

While some participants could name specific policies, their limited responses suggested that most have very little knowledge, if any, of the content of the policies with the exception of pharmaceutical managers and local government representatives. A substantial proportion of the pharmaceutical business is directly related to federal government drug subsidies. Regular updates through local pharmaceutical presentations and pharmacy magazines addressing the subsidies for pensioners and the federal government research into the ageing population from a pharmaceutical point of view and their spending analysis over the next 25 years, explains their ability to expand on the relevant policy affecting their industry. Aside from federal government drug subsidies, pharmaceutical managers were not aware of any local or state government policies or strategies concerning the ageing population.

Table 3.6

Awareness of any government policies concerning Australia's ageing population?  
If yes, do you know what they are?

<b>Government</b>	<b>Policies</b>	<b>n = 26</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Local	Local strategy and policy	1	3.8
State	State seniors discount program	2	7.6
	State 2020 Vision	2	7.6
	State government programs to encourage seniors to get out more	1	3.8
Federal	Superannuation to replace the pension	5	19.2
	Pharmacy subsidies	3	11.5
	Senior's card	3	11.5
	Health system	2	7.6
	Strategies to keep seniors in the workplace	1	3.8
	The Way Forward Strategy for Community Care	1	3.8
	Employment training	1	3.8
	Move to get seniors into private medical	1	3.8
	Increase the retirement age	1	3.8
	Incentives to have more babies	1	3.8
	Research into aged care	1	3.8

Examples of responses to this question on government policies relevant to an ageing population include:

*“Federal government is looking at the ageing population from a pharmaceutical point of view and their spending analysis over the next 25 years”. (Pharmacy Manager)*

*“Federal government is cutting back on pharmaceutical benefit scheme (PBS) expenditure resulting in users paying more and pharmacies getting less gross profits”. (Pharmacy Manager)*

Of the three local government representatives interviewed, only one identified the National Senior’s Week which is funded by the Federal government. Two were aware of the Queensland Government State 2020 Vision discussion paper concerning the ageing of the population in Queensland, with only one respondent aware of its content. This particular local government prepared a response paper to the Queensland Government State 2020 Vision discussion paper identifying its suggested future strategic directions in dealing with the challenges and opportunities opened up by a rapidly ageing society.

*“Nothing we are aware of, but certainly there will be in the future. Locally we have no strategies or policies at present”.  
(Council Representative)*

*“Our council is looking at strategies to support seniors, create awareness levels and initiating pensioner subsidy schemes”.  
(Council Representative)*

Of the remaining service provider managers interviewed, most could identify issues relating to government policies, but almost none of them could communicate any specific strategies concerning Australia’s ageing population.

*“No, not aware of anything the government is putting in place”.  
(Museum Manager)*

*“Superannuation to remove pension, lots of words but you don’t see any delivery”. (Motel Manager)*

*“Nothing filtering through to banks”. (Bank Manager)*

*“Some things in the newspaper and on the news about incentives to stay in the workforce longer, but not really aware of any”. (Bank Manager)*

*“State government programs to encourage seniors to get out more by encouraging service providers to reduce admission prices”. (Museum Manager)*

*“Along the lines of superannuation only”. (Retail Manager)*

*“I was made aware of Federal government strategies to keep seniors in the workplace through the media”. (Motel Manager)*

*“Know some are in place”. (Retail Manager)*

*“Not really, not directly”. (Food Outlet Manager)*

*“Government has no idea of how to deal with the ageing population”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

This lack of awareness of government policies or strategies concerning Australia’s ageing population, confirms the suggestion from the previous question one that service providers only have a vague notion of the trends in Australia’s ageing population. This result corroborates that there exists a gap in the downward flow of information from federal/state/local government to industry service providers.

The final question for this section of the interview asked respondents if they anticipated any positive or negative economic impacts as a result of Australia's ageing population and what those impacts might be? Overall, 57 percent of respondents reported positive economic impacts, 27 percent stated negative economic impacts and 16 percent stated no economic impacts for their business. No patterns appeared in further investigations of these service providers who indicated they did not anticipate any economic impacts for their business. The more detailed responses about the nature of these impacts are listed in Table 3.7. The positive impacts category emphasised the results of an increase in customers and its subsequent effects, which reflects the positive implications identified in the general industry category of Table 3.5. Examples of participants describing positive economic impacts included the following responses:

*"More purchases and spare parts/products". (Caravan Retailer)*

*"Greater occupancy rate". (Caravan Park Manager)*

*"An increase in customers – especially the high numbers of seniors". (Fast Food Manager)*

*"More older people- more medication". (Pharmacy Manager)*

*"More travellers, more money to spend". (Tourist Attraction Operator)*

*"Many seniors are cash asset strong ie; superannuation, investments etc". (Bank Manager)*

*"Seasonal influx due to increased motor home travellers in the mid-year". (Service Station Manager)*

*“More grey nomads”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

Australia’s ageing population is bringing with it an increasing number of senior travellers and a greater increase in tourism spending (Tourism Research Australia, 2008b). This combined with the positive impacts of WOM experiences concerning senior tourists planning decisions and the persuasive impact of good customer service, anticipates a correlation with positive economic outcomes for service providers.

Despite the lesser number of negative impacts reported, these included a much wider range of factors. Several negative economic impacts also reflected aspects of the negative implications already listed in Table 3.5. In addition, many of the negative impacts appear to be based on negative ageist stereotypes including assumptions about seniors being less able, and seniors having less money and less willingness to spend money (Crowley & Carroll, 2005; Healey, 1993; Minichiello, Browne, & Kendig, 2000; Palmore, 1999; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Sargeant, 2003).

*“A negative impact for our business is that seniors have less income”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

*“The costs of renovations involved in constant high occupancy rates”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

*“Our region already has an above average age population. In 10 years time we will not be able to keep up with the costs involved in providing the necessary infrastructure for the aged”. (Local Government Representative)*

*“Economically this business will suffer as the government is reducing the PBS and at the same time we will need to put on more staff as a result of an increase in script volume”.  
(Pharmacy Manager)*

*“Many seniors like to sit around longer which means less turnover of customers”. (Restaurant Manager)*

*“Will need to restructure the [caravan] park to accommodate seniors, ie: access. Will also need to increase liability insurance against falls”. (Caravan Park Manager)*

Table 3.7

With the ageing of Australia’s population, do you anticipate any economic impacts for your business, and what are those impacts?

<b>Positive Impacts n=42 (57%)</b>	<b>Negative Impacts n=20 (27%)</b>	<b>No Impacts n=12 (16%)</b>
More customers	Skills shortage	
More purchases	Doing more for less	
More profit	Government reduction in PBS	
Expansion	Less customer turnover	
	Costs involved to meet access specifications	
	Increase in liability insurance	
	Increase staff numbers	

### **3.3.2. Perceived Implications of an Ageing Population for Customer Service**

The second set of questions was concerned with customer service. The SERVQUAL model identified and explained in the literature review of Chapter 1 was used in analysing the responses concerning customer service. This model looks specifically at perceptions of different actors in the settings to identify service gaps. The first question was a general one asking respondents what they believe is their recipe for good customer service. In total, 41 different ingredients/characteristics of customer service were identified and categorised using the five key dimensions of the SERVQUAL model and presented in Table 3.8. More than half of the responses (53%) emphasised the Assurance dimension suggesting that there is some consistency with the perceptions of senior travellers as they also emphasised the importance of assurance in their descriptions of service encounters in Study One. Similar results to support these findings were also identified in studies assessing customer service in general (Wisniewski, 2001), service improvements in public services (Bryslan & Curry, 2001), service quality and tourism (Yu et al., 2005), and service in the Northern Ireland hotel sector (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997).



Table 3.8

What do you believe is your recipe for good customer service?

<b>Tangibles 3%</b>	<b>Reliability 9%</b>	<b>Responsiveness 22%</b>	<b>Assurance 53%</b>	<b>Empathy 12%</b>
3 First impressions 2 Clean 1 Roomy	5 Customer goes away happy 5 Know your product 3 Staff training 3 Fast service 1 Guaranteed satisfaction	17 Helpfulness 9 Give people what they want 5 Happy 3 Acknowledge customers 2 Provide after sales service 2 Exceed expectation of customer 1 Patience 1 Sincere 1 Look after them well 1 No hard sell 1 Provide guides	22 Friendly staff 13 Treat customer as special 12 Greet with smile 10 Listen 10 Politeness 8 Welcoming 6 Respect 5 Use persons name 4 Courteous 4 Honesty 3 Good prices 2 Good phone manners 2 Pleasant 1 Want to come back again 1 Ensure enjoyment 1 Safe environment 1 Good front counter staff	8 Provide info 7 Good communication 4 Access 3 Customer is important 2 Treat everyone equal

Further analysis of Table 3.8 identified that managers were less likely to mention tangibles as compared to the senior travellers in Study 1. This finding suggests that senior travellers placed greater emphasis on the physical appearance of the facilities indicating that the first impression has a lasting impression. Minimal emphasis on the Reliability dimension suggests that managers may need to place greater importance on staff training to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. It also suggests the need for managers to reassess

their in-house customer service training to ensure that all components of reliability are considered vitally important to a successful outcome.

The final question analysed in this section asked the participants if they would change their ingredients of good customer service for senior customers. The majority (64%) responded that they would not change their customer service for seniors. The remaining 21 responses, (36%) were organised into six categories and are presented in Table 3.9. However, the suggested changes made by respondents reflect some underlying ageist stereotype assumptions.

Table 3.9

Would you change the ingredients for senior customers?

<b>Category</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1 No change	38	64
2 Go a bit more out of my way to help	8	13.5
3 More patience	5	8.4
4 Pay more attention to their needs	3	5.0
5 Emphasise more with senior customers	2	3.3
6 Show more sensitivity	2	3.3
7 Speak louder	1	1.6

For example, the second most common response seems to assume that seniors are confused, disorientated or even frail (Macneil, 1987). The third response suggests that older people behave like children (and require patience) (Minichiello et al., 1992) or are intolerant (St Vincent's Nursing Monograph, 1993). The “emphasise more” response implies that senior customers are stupid, and according to Rowe and Kahn (1998), it assumes that ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks’. Finally, with the last response the assumption is that

seniors are hard of hearing and associated with that is the need to speak louder, slower, and use less sophisticated grammar (McCann & Giles, 2002).

Examples of suggested changes to enhance customer service for seniors include:

*“Take to a quieter area for medication counselling/advice”.*

*(Pharmacy Manager)*

*“Help them when parking their caravan”.* *(Caravan Park Manager)*

*“Help and explain more when new techniques are required”.*

*(Hair Dresser Manager)*

*“Provide more products that are in line with the needs of the elderly”.* *(Pharmacy Manager)*

### **3.4 Conclusions and Implications**

This section will only briefly highlight the main findings of this study as the final chapter will discuss in more detail the implications. In applying the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews with employers/managers, the researcher was able to take advantage of being personally involved in obtaining the subject matter at the location of each service provider. Two sets of questions were presented to the respondents addressing perspectives of Australia's ageing population by employers/managers, and the perceived implications of an ageing population for customer service.

**3.4.1 Trend in Australia's ageing population.** Results addressing this question found that three quarters of respondents believed that Australia's ageing population related specifically to an increase in the senior population. However, the overall comments did not reflect a detailed understanding of the concept but rather a vague notion that a trend exists.

**3.4.2 Implications for your organisation/business.** The majority of respondents indicated that there were implications for their business. These implications recognised both positive and negative impacts on service providers as the likely consequence from a shift of the younger to the older population. Significantly more negative implications were identified revealing several underlying negative ageist stereotypes.

**3.4.3 Awareness of government policies/strategies concerning Australia's ageing population.** All service providers, with the exception of Pharmacists and Local government representatives, reported having limited awareness of ageing policies/strategies at any government level. Pharmaceutical manager's awareness resides only with the PBS scheme which is directly related to the Federal government and does not extend beyond this. Local government representatives had some knowledge at State level but minimal knowledge at Federal level. These findings clearly suggest a lack of downward information flow of relevant government policies/strategies pertinent to industry service providers.

**3.4.4 Anticipated positive or negative economic impacts.** More than half of the responses (57%) indicated the positive impacts an ageing population will have on business. 27% of responses are identified as having a negative impact on business that were drawn from a wide range of factors, several of which implied negative ageist stereotype assumptions.

**3.4.5 What do you believe is your recipe for good customer service?** When categorising the responses by applying the five dimensions of SERVQUAL, the majority of the respondents identified assurance as the most important ingredient (53%), a finding that is consistent with other studies reported in the literature. However, managers placed least emphasis on Tangibles (3%) suggesting this is a low priority and not important. Minimal emphasis was also placed on the Reliability dimension suggesting a lack of staff training. These latter two areas were, however, areas highlighted in the analysis of the critical incidents reported by senior travellers and this suggests a service quality gap.

**3.4.6 Would the ingredients for your recipe for good customer service differ with senior customers? What would those ingredients be?** 64% of responses indicated that they would not change their customer service approach to seniors which further suggests that managers lack a detailed understanding of Australia's ageing population but instead only have a vague notion that a trend exists. The remaining suggested changes reveal several underlying negative ageist stereotypes.

**3.4.7 Ageist stereotype** The implementation of applying discourse analysis has identified several negative ageist stereotypes with reference to senior customers from the perspective of managers/employers. These negative stereotypes suggest an underlying prejudice or attitude toward seniors which may have been formed, influenced or reinforced through: “blaming the victim”, values, language, humour, song, art, literature, journalism, and television (Kart & Kinney, 2001; Nelson, 2002; Palmore, 1999; Woolfe, 1998). The ageing of Australia’s population and the negative perceptions towards the aged has been widely acknowledged by all levels of government within Australia. However, according to the Productivity Commission’s Review of National Competition Policy Reforms 2005, it has presented the ageing population primarily as a burden, particularly economically and as a looming crisis (Matthews, Lindner, & Collins, 2007). The influence and power associated with this discourse is a form of manipulation (Van Dijk, 2006) and as this discourse becomes so natural over time, society begins to treat it as common, acceptable and natural features of daily language (Teo, 2000). According to Palmore (1999), prejudice against elders can be divided into negative stereotypes and negative attitudes, although both tend to go together – negative stereotypes usually produce negative attitudes and negative attitudes support negative stereotypes. The findings of this study has identified three general categories, each recognising several negative ageist stereotypes as identified in the literature review:

1. Poor in terms of finances or unwilling to spend money
  - Seniors use the budget end of the food line i.e. fish and chips
  - The spend less
  - They have less spending power

2. Poor mental and physical health
  - They have diminishing capabilities
  - Confused, hard of hearing, intolerant, stupid, unteachable
3. Financial burden on service providers and all levels of government
  - They go home early – restaurant closes early
  - Increase liability insurance against falls
  - Costs associated to restructure structure park
  - Sit around longer – less turnover of customers
  - Costs involved in providing necessary infrastructure for the aged

### **3.5 Directions for Further Study**

Overall, the interviews with managers/employers in this study provided some useful information regarding the evaluation of customer service by service providers, particularly pertaining to Australia's ageing population, customer service, and ageist stereotypes. As there were some inconclusive results due to limitations with the interview methodology, such as the limited numbers of questions, and results from only one element of the population, only a small number of substantial conclusions have been drawn at this point. Therefore, the next step in the research process was to develop a structured questionnaire for employees and employers of service providers using closed questions and rating scales allowing for some statistical analysis of results. These investigations will focus more directly on the differences between employee and employer. Other areas of further investigation include individual perceptions of ageism, how much do you know about Australia's ageing population and where did you learn this. Customer service training will be examined and comparisons made between

employees and employers. This further investigation will also explore the service providers' perceptions of seniors using discourse analysis.



## **Chapter 4: Survey Questionnaire for Employees & Employers**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The semi structured interview conducted with managers/employers in Chapter 3 addressed two sets of questions focusing on perspectives of Australia's ageing population by managers/employers, and their perceived implications of an ageing population for customer service. Overall the responses indicated that respondents lacked a clear understanding of this demographic trend. Respondents further identified this trend as having both positive and negative implications, in general, on service providers with significantly more negative impacts recognised. With the exception of Pharmacists and Local government representatives, the interview results also revealed that service providers have limited awareness of ageing policies/strategies at any government level.

The second set of questions focused on customer service in general and customer service approach to senior customers. Findings revealed that respondents emphasised Assurance as most important, reflecting the value of managers/employers attitude to all customers in general. One third of respondents indicated they would modify their customer service approach to seniors, however the reasoning behind these modifications suggest underlying ageist stereotypes.

These interviews also identified some gaps in perceptions of service quality dimensions between the managers/employers and senior travellers. Other areas for gaps in the SERVQUAL model include gaps between managers/employers

and employees, and employees and customers. It is also possible that employees who deal more directly with customers may have different perceptions of demographic changes. Finally, the interviews did reveal some elements of ageist stereotypes. In order to examine each of the themes in the results from the interview it was decided to survey a wider sample of employers and employees. This present study used the results from Chapter 3 to develop a more structured employee and employer survey questionnaire.

The aims of study three were:

1. To evaluate perceptions of customer service from the perspective of the service provider to the senior market and assess both employee's and employer's knowledge of Australia's ageing population.
2. To identify gaps in the perceptions of customer service between the service provider employee and employer to the senior market.
3. To examine service providers' perceptions of ageism.
4. To examine the differences of ageism perceptions according to demographic characteristics and customer service training.

## **4.2 Survey Locations**

### **4.2.1 Survey Procedure**

The employee and employer self-administered questionnaires were conducted at the same location of the service provider after the completion of the interview with the manager/employer as identified in Chapter 3. The purpose of applying this approach was to maximise the availability of both employees and employer. The researcher personally distributed each of the self-administered

questionnaires which were completed in the location of the service provider. In an effort to reduce response bias, the researcher was present to answer any questions respondents raised concerning the questionnaire. The survey used two questionnaires – one for employees and one for employers/managers. The two questionnaires shared a range of common questions, but differed with the inclusion of questions relating more specifically to the business operations in the employer questionnaire. Each respondent was informed that the questionnaire was completely confidential and anonymous. The average time to complete the questionnaire was approximately eight minutes. The method of sampling selected for this study was a non-probability convenience sample (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Sekaran, 2000), which involved selecting respondents primarily on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate. They were also selected according to their involvement in a relevant business matched to the type of place noted in the travel diaries in the first study. At each participating service provider location, the employer and employees were invited to complete their respective questionnaire. Several advantages of this approach include: generating a higher response rate (Hair et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2007), allowing for anonymous responses which may be more important in the analysis of negative stereotypes (Veal, 2006), a higher completion rate for questions (Babbie, 2005), and being cheaper and quicker to administer (Bryman, 2008).

#### **4.2.2 Participant Employees**

The total number of employees who completed the questionnaire was 116 which is approximately one third of those employed in the organisations sampled. The distribution of types of service providers is presented in Table 4.1. The majority

of the staff surveyed (60%) were employed in retail services comprising banks, hairdressers, pharmacies, newsagencies, repair shops, hardware, fish and tackle stores, and retail outlets. The gender distribution of respondents was 85% female and 15% male. The average age of the total sample was 36 years old and the breakdown of age groups is provided in Table 4.1. A diverse range of time employed in this position was identified. Overall the mean was five years and four months. However, the mean for males was three years and eight months compared to five years and seven months for females.

Table 4.1

Profile of Employee and Employer Samples

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Employee (n=116)</b>	<b>Employer (n=59)</b>
<b>Type of service provider</b>		
Retail service	60%	41%
Local government	12%	20%
Food outlet	8%	10%
Tourists attraction	8%	10%
Hotel/motel	4%	8%
Caravan park	3%	7%
Information centre	3%	2%
<b>Age</b>		
17-29	40%	11%
30-49	40%	48%
50-69	20%	41%
<b>Length of time in position</b>		
1 year	28%	
2-3	31%	
4-10	22%	
>10	19%	

A total of 347 front counter staff were employed by service providers with the majority (44%) employed in the retail sector (Table 4.2). Of the 11 caravan parks, seven respondents reported that they did not employ any front counter

staff but performed these duties themselves. Food outlets, tourist attractions, local governments and information centres, although small in quantity of providers, attract large numbers of customers therefore requiring many front counter staff.

Table 4.2

Employed Front Counter Staff

<b>Service Provider n=58</b>	<b>Employees n=347</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Retail (24)	153	44
Caravan Park (11)	19	5.4
Food Outlet (6)	34	9.8
Hotel/Motel (6)	13	3.7
Tourist Attraction (5)	48	13.8
Local Government (4)	37	10.6
Information Centre (1)	37	10.6
Other (1)	6	1.7

**4.2.3 Participant Employers**

The total number of employers who completed the questionnaire was 59, with 91 percent identified as managers and the remaining eight percent employed in a managerial position within local government. The gender distribution of respondents was 59.3% female and 39.6% male. The average age of the total sample was 46 years old and the breakdown of age groups is provided in Table 4.1.

**4.2.4 Instruments**

In both the employee and employer sample, a self-administered questionnaire was used. The employee questionnaire was a two page survey, consisting of an introduction and 16 questions used to collect information from respondents.

Eight questions were close ended, five were open ended, and two questions used rating scales. A copy of both questionnaires are provided respectively in Appendix H and I. Three employment questions were placed at the beginning of the survey to identify the respondent's employed position, length of time employed, and the type of service provider they worked for. The second set of questions addressed issues concerning customer service and in particular customer service to seniors. Completing this set, respondents were asked several questions with reference to formal and informal customer service training. The third and final set of questions addressed Australia's ageing population and the respondents' perceptions of ageism. The perception of ageism statements were adapted from Beissner (1990), Rowe and Kahn (1998), Palmore (1999), and Crowley and Carroll (2005). The final questions of the survey asked for the respondent's gender and age.

The employer survey was a three page questionnaire also comprising 16 questions. A similar format, structure and content to the employee survey was adopted, however more closed ended questions relating specifically to ageing population impacts from an employer perspective were presented. Eleven questions were close ended, three open ended and two questions applied rating scales. The final question of the survey identified the respondent's gender and age.

A pre-test of both questionnaires was undertaken with a representative sample of 21 front counter employees and six employers. The benefits of pre-testing are well documented (Babbie, 2005; Bryman & Bell, 2008; Hair et al., 2003). It

serves to ensure respondents can understand the wording, sequence and layout of the questions, as well as provide an estimate of time required to complete the questionnaire and likely response rate.

### **4.3 Results and Discussion**

The overall structure for the results has been organised into three components corresponding to the first four research aims identified for this study. The first stage will look at the substance or content of what the employees and employers say about service and training, seniors as customers, and ageing in general. The first stage will also look at how employers responded to questions relating to ageing and its implication to their business/organisation. This component of the results comprises both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The second stage will compare the results of the two groups, employees and employers, with a particular emphasis on service gaps. Finally, the analysis will examine attitudes towards ageing in more detail addressing the last research aims.

#### **4.3.1 Description of Employee Responses**

##### **4.3.1.1 Section A – Service and Training**

The first questions examined in this section were related to service and training. All the employees identified customer service as being very important to the business they worked in. Despite this importance, less than half (43%) reported having had any formal training in customer service through TAFE, University or some other external organisation. Despite low levels of external training, most

of the employees (71%) did have some in-house customer service training. When these two questions were crosstabulated (Table 4.3) it can be seen that nearly one-quarter of the respondents had no customer training at all.

Table 4.3

Employee Training in Customer Service

		Has your current employer provided you with in-house staff training in customer service				Total
		Yes		No		
Have you had any formal training in customer service	No	41	35%	25	22%	66
	Yes	41	35%	9	8%	50
<b>Total</b>		82		34		116

**4.3.1.2 Section B – Seniors as Customers**

The second set of questions analysed looked at employee perspectives on seniors as customers. Nearly one-third (32%) of the employees thought that seniors made up a third or less of all customers with 27 percent reporting seniors as two thirds of their business. Despite the relatively high proportion of business attributed to seniors, few employees reported receiving any training specifically about seniors as customers. Only 40 respondents experienced any formal customer service training which addressed senior customers. Of these, more



than half reported that training related to senior customers made up 20 percent or less of the total training (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Customer service training addressing senior customers

<b>% of Senior Customer Service Training</b>	<b>n = 40</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1 - 20	24	58
30 – 50	12	29
50>	4	12

These results were consistent with results for in-house training. Of the 70 percent of employees who indicated that they had been the recipients of in-house customer service training by their employer, only 46.6 percent reported that the training addressed senior customers as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

If yes, did it address senior customers?

<b>Address Senior Customers</b>	<b>n = 116</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	54	46.6
No	62	53.4

Just over half of the employees surveyed stated that they felt senior customers needed different services and Table 4.6 lists the types of different services described by employee respondents. Overall the majority of employees

surveyed identified Responsiveness and Assurance as the key service dimensions for senior customers. This is consistent with the results from Study 1 (reported in Table 2.5 Best Service Incident and Table 2.6 Worst Service Incident), in that both Assurance and Responsiveness were also identified by senior travellers as the most important dimensions across the majority of service locations. In comparing the combined Tables 2.5 and 2.6 with Table 4.6, a substantive difference on the dimension of Reliability has been identified. Senior customers place a great deal more emphasis on Reliability in comparison to employees, suggesting employees do not have the same emphasis on performance of the promised service dependably and accurately. A similar finding can also be identified with the Tangible dimension suggesting the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment and personnel are seen as the responsibility of the manager.

Table 4.6

Different Services Required by Senior Customers

<b>Different Services Required by Senior Customers as identified by employees</b>	
9	Need more attention and explanation
8	Need to listen and have patience
6	Need more time to digest information
4	Need more time and patience
4	Understanding
3	Different displays that are suitable to age
2	No interest in technological gadgets
2	Wheelchair access
2	Need help with technology

2	Need to be more caring
2	Assistance with carrying items
2	Discounts
1	Like to chat more
	They don't like to wait long
	Offer alternatives to new technology at no cost to them
	They value personalised service
	Provide a delivery service
	They like lots of information
	Assistance with products
	After sales service

The final question analysed in this set asked the respondents to describe senior customers in their own words. Table 4.7 contains a summary of responses to this question. The responses have been organised into three categories – positive, negative and other. While the majority of responses were positive, one-third of the comments were negative. Most if not all of these expressions have negative connotations in relation to the elderly and reflect negative social constructs and perceptions about growing old. According to Zebrowitz (1999), these negative stereotypes are closely related to prejudice and can be used to fuel derogatory attitudes and beliefs, and display hostile or discriminatory behaviour toward members of a particular group. This form of prejudice was identified by Butler (1995, p. 38) stating, “Ageism has been called the ultimate prejudice, the last discrimination, the cruellest rejection. I believe it is the third great ‘ism’ in our society after racism and sexism. Like racism and sexism, it is prejudice or discrimination against a category of people – in this case, against

older people". The literature suggests that there are widespread negative attitudes to older people based upon the negative stereotypes perpetuated in language, media, humour, advertisements, images and books. The vocabulary used to describe senior customers by employees reflect those descriptions identified by Beissner (1990), Crowley and Carroll (2005), Palmore (1999), Rowe and Kahn (1998), Nelson-Carr (2008), and World Health Organisation (2008) documented in Chapter One of this thesis.

Table 4.7

In your own words, how would you best describe senior customers?

<b>Positive Responses (53%)</b>	<b>Negative Responses (33%)</b>	<b>Other (14%)</b>
13 Friendly	6 Impatient	5 Need more time & extra assistance
11 Polite	5 Unwilling to accept change	4 Some confused easily
8 Wealth of Information	5 Lonely	4 Over 50
6 Talkative	4 Need more attention	3 Retired from work
6 Pleasant	3 Do not like change	3 Have a senior card
5 Happy	3 Expect a high level of service	2 Like consistency
4 Kind	3 Demanding	2 Treated with respect
4 Relaxed	3 Grumpy	2 Expect good service
3 Patient	3 Set in their ways	1 Unsure of change
3 Pleasure to talk to	2 Sick	
3 Courteous	2 Old	
3 Like to be treated like everyone else	2 High maintenance	
3 Enjoy personalised service	2 Some unreasonable	
2 Gentle	2 Fussy	
2 Well mannered	2 Rude	
2 Caring	2 Intolerant	
2 Delightful	1 Easily annoyed	
2 Easily pleased	1 Fragile	
2 Lovely people	1 Picky	
2 Thoughtful	1 Self centred	
1 Enjoying life	1 Anxious	
Adapt to life as body changes	1 Stubborn	
Mostly friendly	1 Concerned about money	
	1 Frustrating	



9	2	1.7
A great deal	8	6.9

Respondents were then asked to identify one or more sources for their knowledge of Australia's ageing population. Table 4.9 shows that television was the most frequently recorded category with 55.2 percent. The second most popular category was newspaper/magazine recording 47.4 percent. The 'other' category recorded 35.3 percent and comprised in order of responses, family, employment in aged care, education, and personal experience. Only 24 respondents recorded learning about Australia's ageing population from their employer.

Table 4.9

Where did you learn about Australia's ageing population?

<b>Categories</b>	<b>n = 116</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Television	64	55.2
Newspaper/Magazine	55	47.4
Radio	32	27.6
Friends	29	25
Employer	24	20.7
Other	41	35.3

Finally, respondents were asked to rate a series of statements reflecting perceptions of ageism. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was 'strongly agree' and 5 was 'strongly disagree'. Table 4.10 shows the mean agreement scores for each statement. On the whole the respondents were generally positive about older people. The one exception to this is the category 'Many older people are

depressed' where 34 percent strongly agreed with this perception. Some did, however, have concerns about their own ageing with only 27 percent strongly agreeing that they would be able to do most things for themselves as they are older and 10 percent strongly disagreeing with the statement 'It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being old'.

Table 4.10

Common Perceptions of Ageism

<b>Perceptions of Ageism</b>	<b>n = 116</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>% Strongly Agree</b>	<b>% Strongly Disagree</b>
I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person	115	1.70	57.1	2.6
I enjoy doing things for older people	115	1.71	43.1	0
Older people often behave like children	112	3.29	8.6	15.5
I expect to feel good about life when I am older	111	2.07	37.1	2.6
Many older people are depressed	110	3.23	34	11.2
I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older	113	2.12	26.7	.9
Most older people live in institutions	114	3.94	0	30.2
Older people are all the same	112	4.42	1.7	62.9
It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being old	112	2.76	21.6	9.5
I have never dreaded looking older	113	2.96	18.1	14.7
Older people offer little to society	113	4.07	7.8	50
It is common for older people to live in poverty	112	3.46	3.4	18.1
The older I become the more I worry about my health	114	2.63	16.4	5.2
Growing old means becoming sick and disabled	113	3.88	4.3	36.2
I worry that people will ignore me when I am old	115	3.36	3.4	16.4

## 4.3.2 Employer Survey

### 4.3.2.1 Section A – Service and Training

The first questions examined in this section were related to service and training. 95 percent of all the employers identified customer service as being very important to the business they worked in. Despite this importance, less than half (49%) reported having had any formal training in customer service through TAFE, University or some other external organisation. Slightly less than half of the service providers were in the retail business (41.4%) which included banks, hairdressers, pharmacies, tyre repair centres and news agencies (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

What type of organisation/business is this?

<b>Organisation/Business</b>	<b>n=58</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Retail	24	41.4
Caravan Park	11	19.0
Food Outlet	6	10.3
Hotel/Motel	6	10.3
Tourist Attraction	5	8.6
Local Government	4	6.9
Information Centre	1	1.7
Other	1	1.7

### 4.3.2.2 Section B – Seniors as Customers

The second set of questions analysed employer perspectives on seniors as customers. Table 4.12 shows that 36 percent of employers thought that seniors made up less than 50 percent of their customers as compared to 64 percent who thought that more than half their customers were seniors.



Table 4.12

Approximately, what percentage of your customers are seniors?

<b>% Seniors Customers</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
4-15	6	10.2
20-45	15	25.5
50-75	26	44.1
80 +	12	20.3

Considering the reasonably high proportion of business attributed to seniors as identified by respondents, approximately half reported participating in training specifically about senior customers. Only 29 employers experienced any formal customer service training and of these only seven employers reported that their training specifically addressed senior customers 50 percent or more of the time (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

Percentage of training specifically addressing senior customers

<b>% of training addressing senior customers</b>	<b>n = 15</b>	<b>Percent</b>
2 – 10	5	33.3
20 – 40	3	20
50>	7	46.7

The next question revealed that 62.1 percent of employers reported providing their employees with customer service training with 75 percent of these including senior customers as a component of their in-house customer service training.

#### 4.3.2.3 Section C - Questions on Ageing

The third set of questions examined in this section was about employer perceptions of ageing in general. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 0 – 10 (where 0 = nothing and 10 = a great deal) how much they thought they knew about Australia's ageing population. Table 4.14 shows the distribution of responses. The mean for this table was 6.2 suggesting employers believed they had a slightly above average knowledge of Australia's ageing population. The majority (61%) gave a rating of 6 or more.

Table 4.14

How much do you think you know about Australia's ageing population?

<b>Know about Australia's ageing population</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Nothing	1	1.7
1	1	1.7
3	4	6.8
4	5	8.5
5	12	20.3
6	8	13.6
7	13	22.0
8	7	11.9
9	2	3.4
A Great Deal	6	10.2

Respondents were then asked to identify one or more sources for their knowledge of Australia's ageing population. Table 4.15 shows that newspaper/magazine as the most frequently recorded category with 59.3 percent closely followed by television with 57.6 percent. The 'other' category recorded 35.6 percent and comprised in order of highest responses; employment, family, education, internet and Federal Government.

Further analysis of Table 4.15 has identified that Local, State, and Federal governments were rated poorly by employers considering all levels of government are aware of the implications of an ageing population. According to the Australian Local Government Association Ageing Awareness and Action Survey Report (2006, p. 9), "Every respondent to the survey is aware that Australia's population is ageing and that nearly all respondents consider themselves *very well to well informed (67%), informed (29%) and not well informed (4%)*. Within the surveyed region, the local governments of Townsville, Thuringowa, Charters Towers, Bowen, Burdekin and Hinchinbrook have identified their involvement in partnering with community groups, local businesses and industry stakeholders. These councils have also indicated being proactive in a representative and collaborative approach with State and Federal Government.

*"To achieve our vision of a leading 'lifestyle' city, we recognise Council must be responsive, proactive, inclusive and flexible. We will continue to partner with community groups, business and other levels of government to achieve sustainable outcome". (Townsville City Council, 2006)*

*"Council plays an important role in working with government, non-government organisations and community groups in planning and delivering programs services and facilities to strengthen and enhance the local community". (Charters Towers Regional Council, 2007)*

*“Co-operation and co-ordination are the key elements of the operation plan which should not be understated. Communicating and engaging with public and private sector agencies is necessary in Council’s day to day operations. It must be ongoing and successful to achieve participation and co-operation of all involved”. (Hinchinbrook Shire Council, 2003)*

*“Council will provide leadership within the community and continue to develop a relationship between all levels of government and the community focused on employment opportunities, growth to ensure economic strategies are in place embracing sustainable development opportunities and nature based tourism”. (Burdekin Shire Council, 2004)*

*“Examine, comment and report on policies and legislative initiatives by State and Federal Government which may impact on Bowen Shire Council. Represent, develop and maintain close working relationships with all levels of government, neighboring municipalities, appropriate regional groups, agencies and corporate entities”. (Bowen Shire Council, 2005)*

The State Government also rated poorly in providing information to service providers and Local Governments concerning Australia’s ageing population. Queensland Government documents such as; Queensland 2020: A State for All

Ages (Spence, 2003); Our Shared Future: Queensland's Framework for Ageing 2000 – 2004 (Queensland Government, 2000), and Queensland Tourism Strategy: A 10 Year Vision for Sustainable Tourism (Keech & Smith, 2006), clearly state the importance of collaborating across the three levels of government, community sector, private sector, service providers and peak older people's organisations.

Within the 'Other' category, the Federal Government was identified by only one respondent being a caravan park operator. According to the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia (2002a, pp. 34-35), the National Strategy has identified the Commonwealth Government role and involvement in, "encouraging business to respond to the increasing market of older Australians, through the provision of appropriate choices in both product and services". The Australian Government Tourism White Paper (2004, pp. iii, 14) ".....clearly identifies its central aim of working closely with industry to further develop markets. Advisors from the Tourism Statistics Regional Advisory Service will liaise with government bodies and tourism industry operators in regional Australia and will also work with individual businesses requiring additional assistance".

Also within the category of 'Other' at a regional focus, respondents did not identify either their local Chamber of Commerce or the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO). These organisations have a considerable large and small business membership base with clearly defined goals. Up to 20 percent of respondents are members of these organisations.

*“The Townsville Chamber of Commerce is active in representation at all levels of government regarding commercial and legislative matters and is dedicated to providing: lobbying/voice/representation/influence over decision makers; information and education; promotion and identification of long and short term business opportunities to its members and the local business community.” (Townsville Chamber of Commerce, 2008)*

*“The Hinchinbrook Chamber of Commerce Inc is proactively involved in championing the cause of the Shire’s local business community by maintaining strong links with local, state and federal government departments and agencies in ensuring small business owners in the Hinchinbrook Shire are well represented.” (Hinchinbrook Chamber of Commerce, 2004)*

*“Townsville Enterprise is keen to develop long term investment opportunities that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. To ensure this we place great importance on government, business and community relations. In close co-operation with our sponsors, members and other stakeholders we liaise with all levels of government and their agencies and provide relevant data and market intelligence to stakeholder and business members.” (Townsville Enterprise, 2008)*

Table 4.15

Where did you learn about Australia's ageing population?

<b>Categories</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Newspaper/Magazine	35	59.3
Television	34	57.6
Industry	32	54.2
Radio	17	28.8
Friends	17	28.8
State Government	16	27.1
Local Government	12	20.3
Other	21	35.6

Employers were asked to rate a series of statements reflecting common perceptions of ageism on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = 'strongly agree' and 5 = 'strongly disagree'. Table 4.16 records the mean agreement scores for each statement. Largely, employers held a positive view about older people possibly due to the employer's average age of 46 and employees 36. Employers strongly disagreed with the category 'Older people offer little to society' (78.6%) suggesting they have a greater knowledge and understanding of ageism and therefore tend to have more positive attitudes to the aged. Table 4.16 also identified that 60 percent of employers strongly agreed that they will feel good about life when older and they feel more comfortable with the category 'I worry that people will ignore me when I am old' as 36 percent strongly disagreed with this statement.

Table 4.16

Common Perceptions of Ageism

Perceptions of Ageism	n = 59	Mean	% Strongly Agree	% Strongly Disagree
I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person	58	1.38	75.9	3.4
I enjoy doing things for older people	58	1.47	62.1	1.7
Older people often behave like children	57	3.51	8.8	22.8
I expect to feel good about life when I am older	58	1.69	60.3	3.4
Many older people are depressed	55	3.31	12.7	9.1
I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older	58	1.81	37.9	1.7
Most older people live in institutions	58	4.38	1.7	53.4
Older people are all the same	57	4.54	5.3	77.2
It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being old	57	2.51	28.1	15.8
I have never dreaded looking older	58	2.81	25.9	20.7
Older people offer little to society	56	4.61	1.8	78.6
It is common for older people to live in poverty	58	3.50	6.9	22.4
The older I become the more I worry about my health	58	2.95	10.3	15.5
Growing old means becoming sick and disabled	58	4.12	5.2	46.6
I worry that people will ignore me when I am old	58	3.71	10.3	36.2

**4.3.2.4 Section D: Ageing and Business**

The final set of questions examined in this section addressed population ageing issues and the employer's business. In identifying the likely impact of population ageing on their organisation or business, employers were asked to rate the likely impact of population ageing on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 = strong impact and 5 = uncertain. Table 4.17 presents the responses. The mean for this table was 1.7 suggesting employers recognise a moderate to strong impact (84.7%) from



population ageing on their business. This finding reflects the economic impacts in Table 3.7 where employers identified 57% positive impacts and 27% negative impacts as a result of the ageing of Australia’s population.

Table 4.17

Likely impact of population ageing on your organisation/business

<b>Likely impact of population ageing</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strong Impact	31	52.5
Moderate Impact	19	32.2
Minor Impact	4	6.8
No Impact	4	6.8
Uncertain	1	1.7

In following on from the above table 4.17, employers were then required to rate on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 = clearly integrated and 5 = not integrated, how integrated ageing and/or older person issues were in their business plan. Within the distribution of responses in Table 4.18, more than half (56%) indicated these issues were integrated, implying the importance employers place on the inclusion of these issues in their business plan. However, the remaining 44 percent of employers were either ‘uncertain’, ‘not clearly integrated’ or ‘not integrated’ these issues into their business plan, which may be a reflection of why the majority of employees in-house customer service training did not incorporate training addressing senior customers. It may also reflect the findings of CPA Australia (2004), that 95% of small businesses do not have a formal business plan, therefore additionally suggesting a lack of formal management training (Schaper, 2008).

Table 4.18

Integration of ageing/older person issues into your business plan?

<b>Level of Integration</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Clearly Integrated	9	15.3
Integrated	24	40.7
Uncertain	12	20.3
Not Clearly Integrated	6	10.2
Not Integrated	8	13.6

The last question for employers in this set raised the question of inputs. Inputs are a range of support mechanisms, processes and activities made available for service providers. In determining what inputs would assist employers in responding to population ageing, respondents were asked to identify one or more input categories. Table 4.19 has identified that the assistance of information and knowledge is the highest priority (61.1%) suggesting a lack of population ageing information being provided to service providers by Federal, State, and Local government, Chamber of Commerce and RTO's. This table also suggests that respondents place more emphasis on the provision of knowledge and information than on the need for financial and human resources. This finding is in complete contrast to that of Australian Local Government Association 2007 Ageing Awareness and Action Survey Report (2007), where 88 percent of respondents identified the need for financial resources and 53 percent needing information and knowledge. Interestingly, 'skills and training' was the next most important resource identified suggesting that small business employers do not have the skills to research this information and provide the necessary training for staff, and that their awareness of an ageing population is being derived from the media and printed material as reflected in Table 4.15.

Table 4.19

What inputs would assist your org/business in responding to population ageing?

<b>Input Categories</b>	<b>n = 59</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Information and knowledge	39	66.1
Skills and training	23	39.0
Awareness raising activities	21	35.6
Support systems and networks	20	33.9
Resources	17	28.8
Other	3	5.1

### **4.3.3 Comparison of Employer and Employee Responses**

The second aim of this chapter was to further explore gaps in the perceptions of employees and employers. As noted previously, one gap appeared to exist in terms of experiences of in-house training. More specifically, further analysis indicated a difference between the employees and employers concerning the amount of in-house customer service training addressing senior customers. Employers stated that 75% of their in-house training is committed to senior customers as compared to 46% for employees. This finding could suggest that the employers have overstated the percentage of training they provide employees that specifically addresses senior customers. It is also suggested that the more recently employed workers have not yet had any in-house customer service training. However, this percentage would be minimal considering the average time employed was five years and four months. In this instance, it is clearly identified that a gap in the SERVQUAL model has been recognised, addressing the service performance, linking service quality specifications and service delivery – Gap 3.

A series of t-tests were conducted to further analyse differences between the responses from the two groups with probability set at 0.05. The first two tests examined answers to the questions “What percentage of your customers are seniors?” and “How much do you think you know about Australia’s ageing population?”. No significant difference was found in the first case. In the second case, the test ( $t = -2.15$ ) indicated that the employer group gave a significantly higher rating (mean = 6.2) than the employees (mean = 5.4).

T-tests were also conducted on all of the ageism statements and five significant differences were detected (see Table 4.20). From the table it can be seen that with each of the statements, while important to both respondent groups, the results indicated stronger responses from the employers. The first statement, ‘I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person’ was rated higher by the employer reflecting the fact that the employer is closer in age and that they may have more of an association with older people. Again in the second statement, ‘I enjoy doing things for older people’ it is the employer who has rated higher, suggesting that the employee does not share the same experience as the employer in doing things for older people. In comparison with the previous two statements, the mean for both respondents concerning statement three, ‘I expect to feel good about life when I am older’ has identified an increase towards strongly disagreeing with this statement. This finding suggests that employees may not have given this much thought as the majority in this age group (67%) are generation Xers and Y’s, and their personal interest are more about the ‘here and now’ and not the future (Brousseau & Driver, 1996; McCrindle, 2007; Wood, Zeffane, Fromhltz, Wiesner, & Creed, 2009). The

employee's higher rated response to statement four suggests that they are less supportive of the senior population in that when a person reaches old age they are requiring assistance to do most things. This could be related directly to the negative perceptions portraying old age which is perpetuated through the expression of familiar ageing myths (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), negative expressions of ageism (Palmore, 1999; Thornton, 2002), and humour on printed material (Mamarocks, 2007; Palmore, 2003; Smith, 2002; Suddenly Senior, 2007). For the statement it can be seen that while both responses were rated high it was less supported by the employee. The overall pattern of these results suggest a further gap between employers and employees, with employees generally less comfortable with ageing and dealing with senior customers.

Table 4.20

T-Test Ageism Statements

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Employer mean</b>	<b>Employee mean</b>	<b>T-test</b>	<b>Sig (2-tailed)</b>
I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person	1.38	1.70	2.24	.027
I enjoy doing things for older people	1.47	1.71	2.11	.037
I expect to feel good about life when I am older	1.69	2.07	2.24	.027
I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older	1.81	2.12	2.24	.027
Older people offer little to society	4.61	4.07	-3.19	.002

Rating Scale 1=Strongly Agree to 5=Strongly Disagree

#### **4.3.4 Factor Analysis**

In order to reduce the number of variables for further analysis, a principal components factor analysis was conducted on the 14 ageism statements (Table 4.16). In the first instance, Factor Analysis (Principle Components) was used to summarise the common perceptions of ageism. From the frequency distribution it appeared that some of the perceptions of ageism were being answered in a similar way by respondents. This was confirmed by a correlation matrix indicating that there were a considerable number of correlations exceeding 0.4, and the matrix was suitable for factoring (Field, 2009). Factor analysis was used to reduce the total number of variables to a smaller set which summarised the essential information contained in the variables (Field, 2009). The initial eigenvalues indicated that five components had eigenvalues greater than one and this explained 63.3% of the variance. However with components four and five, due to their weak correlation and weak interpretation were not included, resulting in a solution explaining 46.3% of the variance. The scree plot confirmed that a three factor solution was reasonable. Table 4.21 shows the rotated component matrix which summarised the variables as follows:

##### **Factor 1: Pessimistic Ageing**

- Growing old means becoming sick and disabled
- I worry that people will ignore me when I am old
- It is common for older people to live in poverty
- Many older people are depressed
- Older people often behave like children
- The older I become the more worry about my health
- Older people offer little to society

### Factor 2: Optimistic Ageing

- It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being old
- I have never dreaded looking older
- I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older

### Factor 3: Positive Social Interaction

- I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person
- I enjoy doing things for older people

Table 4.21

#### Rotated Component Matrix

Variable	Component		
	1	2	3
Growing old means becoming sick and disabled	<b>.687</b>	-.243	-.053
I worry that people will ignore me when I am old	<b>.647</b>	-.216	.131
It is common for older people to live in poverty	<b>.595</b>	-.029	.228
Many older people are depressed	<b>.585</b>	-.129	-.122
Older people after behave like children	<b>.504</b>	.094	-.215
The older I become the more I worry about my health	<b>.493</b>	-.045	.024
Older people offer little to society	<b>.463</b>	.147	-.357
It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being older	-.104	<b>.802</b>	.051
I have never dreaded looking older	.022	<b>.788</b>	-.071
I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older	-.216	<b>.637</b>	.161
I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person	.086	.148	<b>.764</b>
I enjoy doing things for older people	.055	.187	<b>.722</b>
Older people are all the same	.071	.247	-.580
I expect to feel good about life when I am older	-.220	.400	.475

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation

The next stage in the analysis examined the three factor scores, 'Pessimistic Ageing', 'Optimistic Ageing', and 'Positive Social Interaction' as dependant variables and tested for significant difference between groups applying independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAs. Means difference tests were used to find out if there are any significant differences between the groups examined and the significant levels for all analysis was  $p < .05$ . The following independent variables combined employer and employee responses and where appropriate were recoded so that the responses were divided approximately evenly: 'Have you had any formal training in customer service?', 'Age', 'Gender', 'How much do you think you know about Australia's ageing population?', 'What type of service provider do you work for?', and 'Approximately what percentage of your customers are seniors?' The variable 'Length of employment' was only analysed on the employee responses as no data for this variable was collected from the employer.

Independent t-test was conducted with 'Have you had any formal training in customer service?', and no significant difference was identified. ANOVA's indicated that there were no significant differences within the groups for the following variables: 'Age', 'Length of Employment', 'What type of service provider do you work for?' and 'Approximately what percentage of your customers are seniors?'

#### **4.3.4.1 Gender**

An independent t-test indicated a significant difference (.017) between genders with females scoring more highly on the statements that make up Factor 2 (mean



score for women versus men). These results suggested that women were more concerned about their own ageing.

Table 4.22

Results of t-tests on gender and ageing stereotypes

<b>Variable</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Factor 1 Pessimistic Ageing	.457	61.553	.649
Factor 2: Optimistic Ageing	-2.432	82.185	<b>.017</b>
Factor 3 Social Interaction	-.243	85.504	.808

#### **4.3.4.2 Knowledge of Australia's Ageing Population**

Both employee and employer responses were combined for this independent variable and responses were categorised into four age groups (1 = less than 30 years, 2 = between 30–39 years, 3 = between 40-49 years, and 4 = 50 years +). ANOVA indicated that only one significant difference existed between the four groups when compared against the three factor scores. Table 4.23 shows that there was a difference for Factor 1 with people who believe they know the most (score of 8 or more) scoring the lowest on those statements (mean = -.3125) that make up the first factor and people who know the least also scoring low on the first factor (mean = 2375). It appears that the most informed had the most positive views of ageing. Further those who had given thought to the topic also were more positive.

Table 4.23

Knowledge of Australia's Ageing Population

<b>Variable</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig</b>
<b>Factor 1</b> Pessimistic Ageing	3	3.057	<b>.030</b>
<b>Factor 2</b> Optimistic Ageing	3	1.904	.131
<b>Factor 3</b> Positive Social Interaction	3	2.533	.059

P<.05

**4.4 Summary and Conclusions**

The broad emphasis in this study has been on evaluating the perceptions of customer service and the senior market of both employers and employees by utilising self administered questionnaires. A similar format, structure and content was used in both questionnaires, however more closed ended questions relating specifically to ageing population impacts were added to the employer questionnaire. The main findings have been summarised as follows:

- Employee and employer respondents recognised and identified the importance of customer service. Although minimal external training was identified, 71% of employees reported having had some in-house training provided by employers.
- Only seven employers experienced formal customer service training that specifically addressed senior customers as a component of that training.

- Employees and senior travellers confirm the importance of staff attitudes and behaviour towards senior customers in providing excellent customer service.
- Describing senior customers, 33% of employee responses were negative reflecting typical ageist stereotype perceptions.
- Employers had slightly above average awareness than employees concerning their knowledge of Australia's ageing population. Employee's major source of information was television (55.2%) as compared to employers who obtained their information predominantly from newspapers/magazines (59.3%). Local, State, and Federal governments, Regional Tourism Organisation and various Chambers of Commerce rated poorly in providing this information.
- The highest priority employers identified for external input into their business was the need for information and knowledge concerning Australia's ageing population.
- Attitudes towards ageing were generally positive with employers more positive than employees.
- Several one way Anova's were conducted resulting in only one indicating a significant difference between groups for factor one concerning respondent's knowledge of Australia's ageing population, with people who believe they know the most scoring lowest on those statements that make up the first factor and people who know the least also scoring low.

#### **4.4.1 Service and Training**

Both employee and employer respondents identified the importance of customer service, however less than half - 43% and 49% respectively had any formal training in customer service. Whilst this study has identified minimal external customer service training for all respondents, 71% of employees did have some in-house training. In an effort to improve customer service, there is consensus in the literature that more training is needed with front line staff across all service industries including: retail, accommodation, hospitality, transportation, and tourism (Butcher, Sparks, & McColl-Kennedy, 2009; Chen & Quester, 2009; Donaldson, 1995; Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994; Harris & Ogbonna, 2009; Johns & Mattson, 2003; Ma & Niehm, 2006; McKechnie et al., 2007; Mey et al., 2006; Namasivayam & Hinkin, 2003; Naylor & Frank, 2000; Nickson, Warhurst, & Dutton, 2005; Sharma, 2001; Walker et al., 2006; Wuest et al., 1998). In addition to training, the importance of empowering front-line staff contributes significantly to the effectiveness and efficiency of successful customer service (Brymer, 1991; Donaldson, 1995; Johns & Mattson, 2003; Mill, 2006; Thomson & Thomson, 1995; Timm, 2008). Several authors have also intimated the importance of an appropriate reward system (Donaldson, 1995; Harris & Ogbonna, 2009; Johns & Mattson, 2003; Nickson et al., 2005; Sharma, 2001). According to Schmitt (2003, p. 221), "Training is usually not enough to ensure that employees maintain customer- centered over time. It is important to provide employees with meaningful incentives and rewards to acknowledge their ongoing customer-centric accomplishments". Several authors identified the importance of a recruitment strategy in supporting good customer service. Sharma,(2001) and Thomson and Thomson (1995), both suggest that when recruiting for quality,

select experienced and educated personnel as they often have a clearer and more objective picture of the need for quality and how to achieve it.

Wuest et al.(1998) and Pettigrew, Mizerski, and Donovan (2005), support this approach but take it one step further when the target market is senior customers – ensure staff are screened, recruited, and trained in such a fashion in satisfying interactions with older customers. According to Vieregge, Phetkaew, Beldona, Lumsden, and DeMicco (2007, p. 170), “some hotel properties have even begun to employ mature personnel because they show more understanding and are more patient with other mature guests”. These recommendations are supported by the results of this study where it was found that those closer in age, with more experience and greater perceived knowledge of ageing held more positive perceptions of senior customers.

Although there is an abundance of service quality literature addressing the need for greater improvement in customer service, the suggested management implications in almost all instances target the employee/front counter staff through more appropriate training, supervision, compensation, selection, education, etc. The literature is almost silent on applying top-down service training that includes issues related to management approaches. According to Arthur (1994, p. 220), “To instil credibility and maintain morale, a customer service program should ideally involve the entire staff and represent a commitment on the part of management and front-line staff alike to service”. In this organisation, the service training program involves all levels of management, department heads and co-ordinators (Arthur, 1994). Why there is such a

significant gap in the literature concerning customer service training of managers would be an interesting topic for further research.

#### **4.4.2 Seniors as Customers**

In-house customer service training is provided by approximately half of the employers; however these employers have had only minimal training themselves specifically addressing senior customers. This suggests the potential for a lack of relevant communication and instruction to front-line staff concerning appropriate customer service to senior customers. When employees were asked what they perceived to be the different services senior customers need, the majority surveyed identified both Assurance and Responsiveness as the key service dimensions. These are the same dimensions identified as most important by senior travellers in Study 1 for both the best and worst service incidents. Interestingly, this finding reveals two points: Firstly that front-line staff and senior travellers confirm the importance of staff attitudes towards senior customers and its importance in providing excellent customer service. Secondly, as only 11% of employers had customer service training which specifically addressed senior customers, a need has been identified for managers to have training in this area which may reduce the high negative percentage of occurrences concerning staff attitudes towards senior travellers in the dimensions of Assurance and Responsiveness (Table 2.6).

In how would you best describe senior customers, 53% of responses given by employees was positive. However one third of responses (33%) were negative and most if not all reflect negative social constructs and perceptions about

growing old. These responses describing senior customers are perpetuated by the numerous negative stereotypical forms of communication (Thornton, 2002) which is often an indication of work related attitudes towards older people (Macneil, 1987).

#### **4.4.3 Ageing Population & Implications for Business**

When asked on a scale of 0 – 10 (where 0 = nothing and 10 = a great deal), ‘How much you know about Australia’s ageing population?’ employers believed they had a slightly above average knowledge with 61% who gave a rating of 6 or more. In comparison to employees, the majority of employers (56%) gave a rating of 5 or less. Where respondents learnt about Australia’s ageing population, primarily employers’ identified newspapers/magazines (59.3%) as their major source of information and employees identified television (55.2%) as their major source. This finding may suggest that the print media may provide more information concerning Australia’s ageing demographics. Both respondent groups identified television, print and radio media as major primary sources of information. Slightly more than half of the employers (54.2%) were provided with information from industry. However, Local, State, and Federal government, the Regional Tourism Organisation and various Chambers of Commerce were rated poorly by employers. An apparent lack of information and communication regarding the implications of an ageing population upon local service providers from these bodies suggests that there are gaps in the downward flow of information from the Federal government level all the way down to the service providers.

The majority (85%) of employers has also identified a moderate to strong impact of population ageing on their business and 61% indicated that their highest priority for external input into their business is the need of information and knowledge to be able to respond appropriately to the demands of population ageing. This finding also reinforces the lack of information being provided to service providers.

#### **4.4.4 Attitudes Towards Ageing**

Both respondent groups were asked to rate a series of statements reflecting 14 aspects of perceptions of ageism. The attitudes towards ageing were identified through seven of the common perceptions of ageism and seven concerns about the respondents own ageing (Palmore, 1999). Although both respondent groups were generally positive about older people, employers were more positive, possibly due to the employer's average age of 46 years as compared to employees 36 years. Employees on the other hand appear less concerned about ageing issues that impact on them directly. Responses to perceptions of personal health, appearance, physical abilities and general well-being when old suggested that employees own ageing issues are not important at this time in their life. However for each of these own ageing perceptions, employers rated higher suggesting a greater level of awareness and concern for their own personal future. Significantly, employers strongly disagreed with the statements 'Older people are all the same' (77.2%) and 'Older people offer little to society' (78.6%) suggesting they have a greater knowledge and understanding of ageism and therefore tend to have more positive attitudes to the aged. T-tests were conducted on all of the ageism statements resulting in five significant differences



being identified; the most considerable difference identified was with the statement 'Older people offer little to society'. These differences suggested more positive perceptions were held by the employers. Further analysis to reduce the number of variables using factor analysis produced three factor scores. Independent t-test revealed a significant difference between genders with females scoring highly on the statements that make up factor two – optimistic ageing. Independent t-test was conducted with 'Have you had any formal training in customer service?', and no significant difference was identified. ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference between groups for factor one concerning respondent's knowledge of Australia's ageing population, with people who believe they know the most scoring lowest on those statements that make up the first factor and people who know the least also scoring low. ANOVA's indicated that there were no significant differences within the groups for the following: 'Age', 'Length of Employment', 'What type of service provider do you work for?' and 'Approximately what percentage of your customers are seniors?'

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This thesis began with a recognition that globally the world population will increase by 29 percent from 6.5 billion in 2005 to 9.1 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2005), and the number of older persons (60 years +) will triple in size to 2 billion in 2050, a significant increase of 21 percent (United Nations, 2007). However over the same period of time there will be a decrease in the population of children aged 0-14 from currently 28 percent to 20 percent of the population (United Nations, 2007). At the heart of this change is a decline in fertility and significant improvements and advances in medical technology making it possible for seniors to achieve greater longevity (Bonder & Wagner, 2001). Australia also is experiencing an ageing population and has been recognised as having one of the longest life expectancies in the world (Andrews, 2002; Costello, 2007). The Productivity Commission Research Report stresses that, "Australia's ageing population is sometimes seen as a baby boomer 'problem'. However, it is a mistake to see population ageing as just about the number of old people. It is about the age structure of the population – the ratio of the older groups to other ages. Much of the projected change in the age structure reflects slow growth in the population of younger ages in the coming decades. Therefore, this is not a symptom of the baby boom, but its opposite, the long run decline of fertility in Australia since the 1960's" (Costello, 2005, pp. xxiv-xv). This shift from a young population to an older one will affect our economy, health priorities, urban planning, housing, employment, and the nature of recreation (Santoro, 2006). This change in population structure will also have implications for the tourism

industry and the provision of genuine and efficient service in meeting the needs of the senior traveller. It is clear that there is a significant and growing segment of senior travellers in Australia's domestic tourism market. Senior travellers expenditure has risen from \$10 billion in 2001 (Hossain, 2003) to \$11.6 billion in 2007 (Tourism Research Australia, 2008) accounting for 21.3 percent of all domestic tourism spending. Tourism Australia (2007) predicts that this figure will increase to \$24.6 billion by 2022 indicating that the senior travel sector is an important tourism market segment.

There are few studies however that have attempted to generate findings that are specific to the senior traveller. Chapter 1 provided a review of the available research noting a gap in the literature on senior tourism pertaining to the satisfaction of senior tourists. Overall the literature review identified three main areas where knowledge was lacking and it was these areas which guided the approach taken in this thesis. Firstly there are no studies with a specific examination of satisfaction and senior tourism in an Australian context. Numerous research studies have been conducted to measure tourist satisfaction in different areas of the tourism and travel which may not be applicable or consistent with senior tourists. Secondly, few studies are grounded in theory. Many are undertaken in response to specific problems or needs and while these are legitimate reasons for research, such studies do not always generate results applicable to other senior traveller and satisfaction contexts. Finally, considering the global phenomenon of an ageing population and its impact on senior tourism there still remains a general lack of research in this area.

The overall focus of this thesis was on understanding travel satisfaction of senior tourists in Australia and the main objective was to study perceptions of both senior tourists and tourism service providers to develop our understanding of satisfaction in this growing tourism group.

This objective was then translated into three more specific research aims:

1. To explore senior travellers' perceptions of tourist customer service and satisfaction.
2. To identify and understand service gaps within the senior traveller market.
3. To investigate service providers' perceptions of service gaps and issues for senior tourists with a focus on identifying factors that may contribute to an understanding of these gaps.

In order to address these research aims a three study program was designed using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and conducted in North Queensland, Australia. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the program and a brief description of each of the three studies that were conducted. This final chapter will firstly summarise key findings and conclusions from each of the previous chapters and place these in the context of study limitations. It will then take each of the three research aims and discuss overall conclusions and implications. Finally it will examine the research in terms of additional themes that emerged from the analyses and theoretical and practical implications before suggesting further research directions.

## Overview of Research

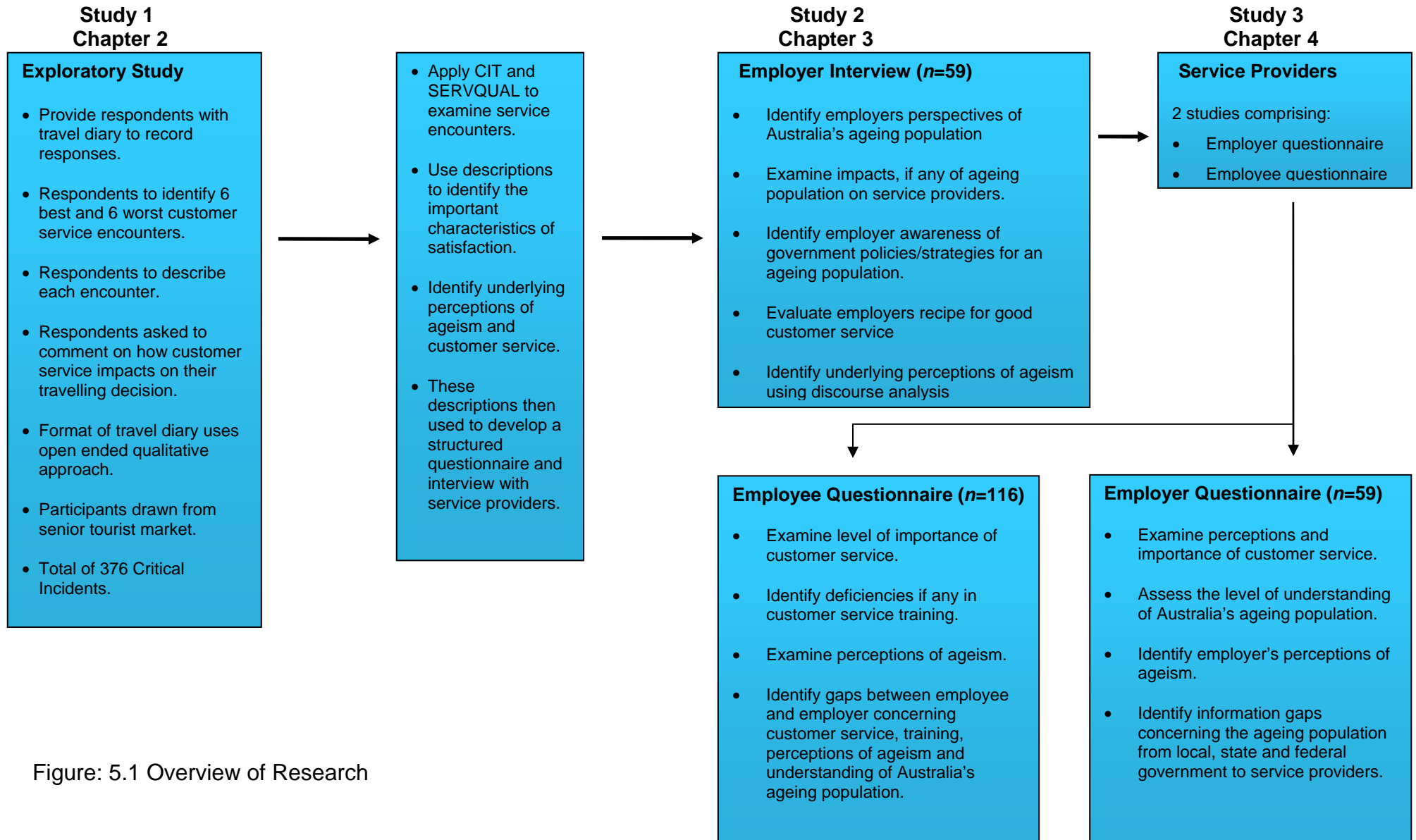


Figure: 5.1 Overview of Research

## **5.2 Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions**

### **5.2.1 Chapter 1: Literature Review**

The chapter started reviewing what is known about an ageing population globally and in Australia. It highlighted the emergence of a phenomenon labelled Senior Tourism and described its size and significance for tourism. Despite this there is little research into Senior Tourism. Chapter 1 reviewed what was available and found that it could be grouped into three types of research – studies of motivation; travel behaviours and market segments. The key themes to emerge from this review included:

- ❖ the diversity of travel behaviours and market segments amongst senior travellers,
- ❖ a diversity of travel motivations but a general tendency to emphasize health, social connections and nostalgia,
- ❖ that the seniors market is not a uniform market but a heterogeneous and vibrant segment of the population, and
- ❖ considerable debate about future dynamics of this group of travellers.

What was also noteworthy was the lack of research into travel satisfaction. Further analysis of the literature suggested that an understanding of ageism and ageist stereotypes could be important in understanding Senior Tourist satisfaction as it has been shown to be a problem in other areas. Table 5.2 summarises some of the commonly recurring themes in ageist stereotypes. Concern over these and other issues have contributed to a number of national and state policies and strategies.

Table 5.1

Ageist Stereotypes

All older people are sick	Older people behave like children
Older people offer little to society	Majority of older people are poor
All older people are depressed	Most live in institutions
To be old is to be sick	The elderly don't pull their weight
Older people are largely miserable	Declining intelligence
Older workers take more absences	Cost more in training
Less creative	Less productive than younger workers

A more specific review of tourist satisfaction research identified SERVQUAL as a major approach to understanding and measuring perceived serviced quality. SERVQUAL focuses on identifying gaps in the perceptions of different actors in the service encounter. In tourism, service encounters occur within a larger system such as that described by Gunn and Var (2002). Combining SERVQUAL with the functioning tourism system offered a way examining a wider range of gaps and exploring the impact of government policies and strategies.

**5.2.2 Chapter 2: Evaluating the perceptions of customer service encounters by Australian senior travellers**

In understanding senior traveller's perceptions of tourist customer service and satisfaction a travel diary was provided and in it respondents were asked to describe in their own words their best and worst customer service experiences. Details were recorded in the diaries of 376 critical incidents and which were

content analysed and firstly grouped into the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. The analysis then explored the frequency with which the SERVQUAL dimensions were associated with the positive and negative incidents across different service places. A generally consistent pattern of responses across the different service places was recognised with the Best Service Incidents (Table 2.5), whereas a greater variation across places was found within the Worst Service Incidents (Table 2.6). For the positive service encounters assurance and responsiveness were the commonly described features. For the negative incidents, these were still the most commonly noted SERVQUAL dimensions with responsiveness particularly likely to be a problem in retail stores and shopping centres. A lack of empathy with customers was noted in nearly a third (31%) of all the negative incidents described for information centres and both tangible and reliability were difficulties most likely to be associated with accommodation, especially caravan parks.

Further analysis of the critical incidents identified some additional themes which emerged from the respondents' comments: value for money, concern about status as tourists, opportunities to socialise with other travellers, the availability of information, and the quality of amenities. Customer service encounters did have an impact on where senior travellers chose where to shop, accommodation, attractions they planned to visit and their overall travel decisions and their recommendations to others.



### **5.2.3 Chapter 3: Evaluations of Customer Service by Service Providers**

#### **Interviews with Managers/Employers**

A qualitative approach was applied by the researcher in this second study in the form of semi-structured interviews with employers/managers and the application of discourse analysis. The two sets of questions presented to the respondents addressed their perceptions of Australia's ageing population and their perceived implications of an ageing population pertaining to customer service. The first set of questions revealed that respondents, (while aware that a trend related to this existed) did not have a clear understanding of the concept of Australia's ageing population. The majority of respondents thought that an increase in senior customers would have negative implications and would place a burden on their business. More than half of the managers (58%) were not aware of any relevant government policies or strategies. While 57% of respondents anticipated positive economic impacts as a result of an ageing population, many of the perceived negative implications and impacts appeared to be based on negative ageist stereotypes.

The second set of questions was concerned with customer service. Respondents emphasised the SERVQUAL dimensions of Assurance and Responsiveness (75%) in what they believe is their recipe for good customer service. Only 36% of employers/managers would change their customer service for seniors, and again the suggested changes seemed to reflect several underlying ageist stereotype assumptions.

#### **5.2.4 Chapter 4: Survey of Employees and Employers**

In the final study self administered questionnaires were used to evaluate the perceptions of customer service and the senior market of both employees and employers. A similar format, structure and content was used in both questionnaires, however more closed ended questions relating specifically to ageing population impacts were added to the employer questionnaire. Both respondent groups recognised and identified the importance of customer service, however results found low levels of customer service training especially with any recognition of senior customers. As a result a gap has been identified between employer perceptions of the levels of training provided and employee reports of actual training completed. Employees and seniors travellers confirmed the importance of staff attitudes and behaviour towards senior customers in providing excellent customer service. In describing senior customers, 33% of employee responses were negative, reflecting typical ageist stereotype perceptions. Overall the attitudes towards ageing were generally positive, with employers more positive than employees.

In terms of knowledge about ageing populations, overall for both groups it was low - 56% of employees scoring 5 or less and 39% of employers. 85% of employers thought that population ageing would have a moderate to strong impact on their business and some had awareness of government information, but few could provide detail on how it was integrated into their business plan.

As in Study 2, open ended questions revealed the existence of negative ageist stereotypes. The survey included a set of statements about ageing which

were factor analysed to reveal three ageing perception dimensions – pessimistic ageing, optimistic ageing, and positive social interactions with older people. Across all respondents there were issues about growing older and some support for negative stereotypes of older people. Further analysis found that overall employers had more positive views of ageing and older people. Women were more concerned than men about their own ageing and greater knowledge was associated with more positive attitudes.

61% of employers identified the highest priority for external input into their business was the need for information and knowledge concerning Australia's ageing population. Overall it appears that the most informed respondents and those who had given thought to the topic had the most positive views of ageing.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Studies**

As is the case with any research, there are a number of limitations that must be recognised and taken into account when interpreting the findings. In the method section of each of the studies the advantages and disadvantages of each of the methods used were listed and discussed, so this section will focus on sampling. The travel diaries were distributed during the high tourism season of North Queensland which is very popular with senior travellers due to its warm climate. As a result, 95 percent of critical incidents were identified in Queensland service locations. Although the destination was restricted it should be noted that a good distribution of respondents from across Australia participated in the survey. Another limitation was that for many of the respondents this was the first time they had participated in a travel diary survey. As a result, more entries were made at the beginning of the diary period and

fewer towards the end which is a pattern identified in the literature (Bryman, 2008; Corti, 1993; Johnson & Bytheway, 2001). In the third study, time and financial constraints restricted a larger number of participating service providers; however the sample did have a good representation of the service locations identified in the first study. A final limitation is reflected in the number of employee respondents where only one third of the total number of employees participated due to the remainder being on rostered shift work, holidays, sick leave and too busy to participate.

## **5.4 The Main Thesis Aims**

### **5.4.1 Aim 1: To explore senior travellers' perceptions of tourist customer service and satisfaction.**

In addressing this aim, five major themes have been identified: service quality matters, importance of both Assurance and Responsiveness dimensions, issues about senior's status as travellers, their similarity to backpackers, and preliminary indications of the effects of ageism.

Results have indicated that senior travellers are concerned with service quality issues across all five SERVQUAL dimensions which in turn influence both their decisions and recommendations concerning service locations. These experiences, either positive or negative, create inner emotions that motivate the consumer who subsequently shares the experience with others (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Neelamegham & Jain, 1999; Nyer, 1997). Several comments below reflect these emotions.

*“WOW” Absolutely the best. The service started in the car park with an umbrella for the rain”. (Male & Female, QLD)*

*“This is our fifth visit to this caravan park and we always get the same friendly service each time we arrive”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Prepayment of booking lost. One bedroom cabin in place of a two bedroom cabin. Badly designed facilities, rattling fridge, loud clock, had to turn the fridge off, and hide the clock under a pillow to be able to get to sleep”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Advertised as the best kept secret in Queensland. Should be kept a secret”. (Female, VIC)*

A second major theme was that Assurance and Responsiveness were the two important dimensions across both best and worst service encounters. With best service encounters (Table 2.5), respondents most often associated the features of the Assurance dimension with positive service encounters. The dimension of Responsiveness was also commonly associated with positive encounters but not to the same extent. These two dimensions rated significantly higher than the other three dimensions. Worst service encounters (Table 2.6) also highlighted the Assurance and Responsiveness dimensions as most common for senior travellers. However a greater variety of incidents emerged across the worst service incident locations and dimensions. This outcome appears to be related to social connection motives which have been linked to senior travellers (Yabsley, 2005). Service providers who make available opportunities for senior travellers to socialise with each other are likely to generate positive customer responses. These opportunities have been clearly identified in some caravan park locations where free barbeques, happy

hour, morning tea and various forms of entertainment are provided. According to (Onyx & Leonard, 2005; Pearce, 1999; Yabsley, 2005; You & O'Leary, 1999), meeting and socialising is an important part of travelling for this cohort as it is a necessary form of exchanging all kinds of travel information, creating social networks and sharing experiences.

A third theme emerging from the CIT analysis identified respondents' concerns about their [senior] status as travellers. This comes about because of media and some resident portrayals of senior travellers as undesirable tourists who cost money in terms of facilities but offer little in return (Chadwick, 2006; Skene, 2008; Thornton, 2002; Townsville Bulletin, 2006). This negative image reflects wider negative portrayals as identified by Palmore (1999), Crowley & Carroll (2005), World Health Organisation (2008), Nelson-Carr (2008) and Healey (2008). But the stereotype of older persons that accompany the negative perceptions is contradictory. Katz (1996, p. 6) states, "that at one and the same time they [seniors] are characterised as a financially secure, healthy, homogeneous, powerful interest group, and as a massive dependent burden on welfare, health programs, and the tax base generated by the currently shrinking work force".

These conflicting views highlight a further theme in the similarity of senior travellers to backpackers. A negative portrayal about tourist status is one way these two groups are similar. Other similarities include:

- importance of social connections
- power of word of mouth recommendations
- the importance of en route information

- emphasis on value for money and budgeting
- budget tourists on extended vacation

(Littrell, Paige, & Song, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006; Onyx & Leonard, 2005; Vieregge, et al. 2007)

In many ways they can be considered as nomads:

- global nomad (backpacker) and grey nomad (senior traveller)

These similarities suggest that age may not be as important a variable but rather transitions in lifecycles. The marketing of destinations via the media, internet travel sites, travel blogs and diaries, access to remote destinations by various modes of transportation, variety of accommodation, familiarity with the internet as a tool for continual communication, healthier life choices and disposable income have brought about a shift in the lifecycles of both senior travellers and backpackers. The transition in lifecycles in travel has been explored by Collins & Tisdell (2002) who found that there are systematic changes in the travel patterns of individuals throughout their life cycles. Where once the dominant reason for senior's travel was to visit friends and relatives, it is now to visit new and exciting places (Kuilboer, 2002; Shoemaker, 2000). Alterations in any unique characteristic associated with a population cohort will influence these future travel patterns (Collins & Tisdell, 2002).

Finally, in exploring senior travellers' perceptions of tourist customer service and satisfaction, there are issues to be addressed and some preliminary indications that ageism could underly some of the problems. Predominantly

this was reflected in the worst service encounter service locations of retail stores and shopping centres revealing the attitude of service staff.

**5.4.2 Aim 2: To identify and understand service gaps within the senior traveller market.**

As reviewed in Chapter 1, the SERVQUAL model developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry (1990) is a generic instrument for measuring perceived service quality. In analysing service quality, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) identified and applied five gaps in the model to identify service quality shortfalls. The five gaps in the SERVQUAL model are:

- Gap 1:** Customer's expectation – Management perceptions of customer expectation
- Gap 2:** Between management's perceptions of customers' expectations and service quality specifications
- Gap 3:** Between service quality specifications and service delivery
- Gap 4:** Service delivery and external communications to customers about service delivery
- Gap 5:** Between customers' expectations and perceived service

Gap 1 is defined as the difference between what customers expect and what management perceives they expect. Knowing what customers expect is the first and often a critical step in delivering a quality service. A key influence on the customers' expectations is word of mouth communication and in the present research respondents indicated this was an important source of information for their decisions (see Table 2.13). A second major contributing factor in the present research that significantly influenced customers' expectations was their



previous experience (Table 2.12). Across all three studies in the present research, the most commonly reported service issues were related to the dimensions of Assurance and Responsiveness. In Study 1 these dimensions accounted for more than half of all themes coded for both best (56%) and worst (52%) service incidents. The results of Study 2 presented in Table 3.8 reflected the importance that managers also placed on both Assurance and Responsiveness (85%). Employee respondents in Study 3 also recognised Responsiveness and Assurance as key service dimensions for senior customers but reported lacking customer service training that specifically addressed senior customers suggesting that the employees might find it difficult to achieve high service standards on these dimensions.

Gap 2 is the difference between what management believes customers want and what customers expect the organisation to deliver. Therefore, the emphasis of this gap is on the service quality standards management has in place to match or exceed the customer expectations. A number of findings in the present research suggest that this gap may be an issue for senior travellers. Firstly, in Study 1 the respondents reported on the importance of the appearance of physical facilities and personnel, (see Tables 2.5 and 2.11) Senior travellers both recognise good physical facilities and amenities and responded negatively when these service features were not up to expectations. In the worst service encounters (Table 2.6), accommodation, caravan parks, and tourist attractions all featured as performing poorly in terms of the Tangible dimension. This lack of service quality was consistent with the findings of Study 2, Table 3.8 where managers allocated only 2% of good customer

service to the appearance of physical facilities and personnel. The majority of these managers (64%) also indicated they were not prepared to change their business approach to customer service to accommodate a growing senior market (Table 3.9). In Study 1, the worst service encounters (Table 2.6) also revealed problems with the Reliability dimension, where the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately was lacking, especially in the service locations of caravan parks, tourist attractions and in particular accommodation. In comparing the combined Tables of 2.5 and 2.6 with Table 4.6 in Study 3, it is clear again that senior customers place a great deal more emphasis on Reliability than employees.

In summary, the Senior Travellers in Study 1 identified a number of service quality specifications. In Study 2 and 3, both employees and employers recognised that senior customers may have specific service specifications (Tables 3.9 & 4.6) but when asked to describe these tended to make comments suggesting underlying ageist stereotype assumptions. Additionally in Study 2 and 3, it seemed there was very limited knowledge about ageing in general and as a result, management seem to have only a vague understanding of the customer service implications for this group.

Not surprisingly Study 3 also identified that in-house customer service training by employers specifically addressing senior customers was lacking with only 11% of managers with formal training in this area and only half of these managers provide training to their staff. Also in Study 3, Table 4.18, 44% of service providers reported being either uncertain about or did not integrate

ageing population issues into their business plan. This finding may reflect why the majority of employee in-house customer service training did not incorporate training addressing senior customers. Managers in Study 3 acknowledge a deficiency in information and knowledge, and skills and training (Table 4.19) and listed these as the highest priority in addressing population ageing issues.

Gap 3 is between the service quality specifications set by management and how this is expressed through the frontline workers and their service delivery. This is generally referred to as the service performance gap which, according to Zeithaml et al (1990) is common in service businesses. In Study 1, Table 2.6, retail stores and shopping centres were particularly susceptible to this problem as respondents identified a lack of willingness to help customers and provide prompt service - components that make up the Responsiveness dimension. In the same table under the dimension of Reliability, respondents emphasised accommodation service providers lacking in the ability to perform the promised service both dependably and accurately. Similarly with the dimension of Empathy in Table 2.6 concerning information centres, respondents experienced poor communication, lack of information and individual attention. These instances are likely to reflect the limited customer service training which was revealed in Study 2 Table 3.8, with managers placing minimal emphasis on staff training. Study 3 reinforces this gap in that it revealed limited in-house training committed to senior customers being provided to employees.

The fourth service gap emerges when externally communicated promises from advertising campaigns, public relations or marketing promotions are

exaggerated and actual service encounters result in customer disappointment. All five SERVQUAL dimensions are applicable to this service gap as marketers promote one or more of the dimensions in an effort to attract customers. Two key factors have been identified by Zeithaml et al.(1990) in this area: (1) inadequate horizontal communication particularly between operations and marketing, advertising, sales people, human resources, and policies and procedures, and (2) a tendency to over promise and not accurately reflect what customers receive in the service encounter. Specifically this gap relates strongly to the Reliability dimension which emphasises the ability to perform the 'promised service' dependably and accurately. Evidence where this was not the case is found in Study 1, Table 2.6 where the accommodation sector was rated poorly and similarly with tourist attractions and caravan parks. In the same table, customer disappointment was also experienced at information centres where respondents experienced staff lacking in local knowledge and a lack of information in the printed literature. This gap also extends to include the Tangible and Reliability dimensions of Table 2.6 where marketing and advertising promises have failed to deliver in the accommodation, tourist attractions and caravan park service locations. Examples of respondents' comments from Study 1, (2.4.2) include:

*"Springs poking through the mattress, air-conditioning sounds like a tractor. Poor kitchen amenities. Had to use a block of wood to lock the screen door". (Male, NSW)*

*"Haphazard booking arrangement which reflected office staff. Queen bed with hard lumpy mattress". (Male, VIC)*

*“Advertised as the best kept secret in Queensland. Should be kept a secret”. (Female, VIC)*

*“Woman in office was savage and few people would come back for information.” (Female, VIC)*

*“Caravan sales centre staff did not acknowledge our presence, no one came near us, we left and no one ever asked us if we needed anything.” (Male, QLD)*

These findings and examples draw attention to Table 3.9 where the majority of managers (64%) reported that they would not change their customer service for seniors. Further highlighting this fact is that according to Table 4.18, only 56% of managers have integrated ageing/older person issues into their business plan. Both these instances point towards several operational issues that are not being addressed in order to minimise this gap.

Gap 5 of the SERVQUAL model is the difference between what customers expect of a service and what they actually receive. This is as a result of the influences exerted from the customer side – past experiences, personal needs and word of mouth communication, and the shortfalls from gaps 1-4 on the part of the service provider.

Study 1, Table 2.5, has clearly identified a consistent larger gap for all service locations with the exception of free rest stops between the expected and perceived service for the dimensions Tangibles, Reliability and Empathy indicating lower levels of satisfaction. For the dimensions of Assurance and Responsiveness, across all service locations, Gap 5 was much less suggesting senior travellers were consistently more satisfied in these areas with the softer

intangible elements within the service locations. In comparison with Table 2.6, there is less consistency and greater diversity of results across most dimensions and service locations. The only major consistent emphasis indicating a large gap is shown in the Assurance and Responsiveness dimensions. Several service locations in the Tangible and Reliability dimensions also reflect higher than average levels of dissatisfaction. A greater diversity of results within Table 2.6 points towards respondent's heightened awareness of customer service satisfaction within these service locations.

***5.4.3 Aim 3: To investigate service providers' perceptions of service gaps and issues for senior tourists with a focus on identifying factors that may contribute to an understanding of these gaps.***

Having detailed the service quality shortfalls which exist in Gaps 1 through to 4, this paper will now concentrate on addressing the implications of these results in terms of possible corrective actions needed to ensure the delivery of high quality service. In minimising Gap 1, service provider management must first recognise that the service expected by customers is mostly formed by word of mouth communication, personal needs and past experience which in the present research was often different than assumed by managers. According to Zeithaml et al, (1990, p. 51), "Knowing what customers expect is the first and possibly the most critical step in delivering quality service, irrespective of the size of the firm. Stated simply, providing services that customers perceive as excellent requires that a firm know what customers expect." These problems can be further exacerbated by a lack of a marketing research orientation (Moschis, 2003). Albacete-Saez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Llorens-Montes (2007),

point out that from a practical point of view, use of the following approaches are important to evaluate the customers' expectations and perceptions for better management of the establishment:

- ✚ Murphy (2003), Chung & Hoffman(1998) and Kang, Okamoto, & Donovan (2004) suggest the use of comment cards with feedback entered into a data base which allows managers to pinpoint core problems and find viable solutions.
- ✚ Lewis & Spyropoulos (2001), encourage the retail banking sector to be more proactive by educating their customers to encouraging them to give feedback rather than letting customer dissatisfaction be spread by negative word of mouth.
- ✚ To better assess the needs of hotel customers Mohsin & Ryan (2005) suggest using the research technique of focus groups, the names of possible participants being derived from comment cards.
- ✚ Mey, Akbar, & Fie (2006) and Juwaheer & Ross (2003) encourage managers to clearly identify and understand customer requirements to be able to anticipate and fulfil customers' needs and wants rather than reacting to their dissatisfaction.
- ✚ Research conducted by Gabbie & O'Neill (1997), identified senior management was involved in the day-to-day hands on operation of the organisation believing this to be important for both staff and customer morale. One approach implemented was conducting monthly staff meetings where staff were encouraged to voice their opinions and make

suggestions relative to improving overall business performance (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997).

Repeating these approaches regularly allows management to track whether actions taken have closed gaps and whether new gaps are appearing (Mey et al., 2006; Murphy, 2003; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1995; Wisniewski, 2001). According to Schmitt (2003, p. 54), "The starting point for any company is to obtain vital insight to develop an experiential platform and successful implementation. This insight enables a company to position a product with the right features, appeal, communication and customer interface". To sum up the approaches taken addressing Gap 1, Shaw & Ivens (2005, p. 69) stress, "Great customer experiences are designed 'outside in' rather than 'inside out', emphasising the critical importance of understanding customer expectations. According to Nielson and Curry (1997) and Higgs & Quirk (2007), implementing a series of proactive and ongoing research is imperative to getting closer to the mature customer. Based on the information derived from these approaches, managers are then able to address issues relevant to Gaps 2-4 overall customer perceptions of the provided service.

Identifying and understanding customers' expectations is the first step in delivering effective and efficient service quality. Using this knowledge, only then can managers set service quality standards to match or exceed customer's expectations. In the present research a number of issues related to Gap 2 were identified but all can be seen as reflecting management's inadequate commitment to service quality. Addressing this gap concerning the



appearance of physical facilities, managers should allocate more resources as suggested by Mey, Akbar, & Fie (2006), Johns & Mattson (2003), and Albacete-Saez et al. (2007) to improve these Tangible elements and see this allocation of resources not as an expense but as an investment in the overall customer experience (O'Neill & Palmer, 2004).

The studies in this thesis also found that a number of service locations were lacking in the area of performing the promised service dependably and accurately reflecting the need for both managers and staff training in customer service particularly with an emphasis on senior customers, which may involve re-training, and re-vamping delivery techniques (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997). Vogt & Fesenmaier (1995) argue that an important aspect of service quality is that all management and staff actions are customer focussed – hence the importance of management and staff training.

Gap 3 is often referred to as the delivery gap where a service-performance mismatch occurs when the service delivered by employees does not comply with specifications set by management (Augustyn & Ho, 1998; Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997). Highly interactive and labour intensive service providers are particularly susceptible to a broad Gap 3 when frontline workers are not capable of or are reluctant to perform at the level expected and set by management. Several contributing factors have consistently been identified in the literature to assist managers in an effort to minimise this gap:

- ✚ Effective recruitment strategies are essential to the provision of quality services for mature travelers (Wuest, Emenheiser, & Tas, 1998). Identifying and recruiting the right employee for the right job is widely

supported in the literature (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Getz, O'Neill, & Carlsen, 2001; Johns & Mattson, 2003; Pettigrew, Mizerski, & Donovan, 2005; Sharma, 2001; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1995). However, several authors have taken this approach further suggesting service organisations employ mature personnel as they show more understanding and are more patient with mature customers (Ananth, De Micco, Moreo, & Howey, 1992; Vieregge et al., 2007; Wuest et al., 1998). Part of this process involves induction training (Harris & Ogbonna, 2009) which is reinforced with the availability of the policies and Standard Operating Procedures of the organisation (Bryslan & Curry, 2001).

✚ Closely connected to recruitment is the training of frontline employees. Recommendations in the service quality literature strongly reinforces the importance of appropriate and regular training (Chung & Hoffman, 1998; Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994; Harris & Ogbonna, 2009; Johns & Mattson, 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2005; Sharma, 2001; Thomson & Thomson, 1995), with at least one author (Pettigrew et al., 2005) stating that staff are trained in such a fashion as to enable them to engage in satisfying interactions with older customers.

✚ Growing interest in one aspect of training frontline employees is empowerment. Not only does empowering frontline staff enrich their job, it is the ability of staff to make decisions to satisfy the customers' needs (Bitner et al., 1990; Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997; Harris & Ogbonna, 2009; Hjalager, 2001; Hoffman, Kelley, & Chung, 2003; Johns & Mattson, 2003; Leiper, 2004; Lewis & Spyropoulos, 2001; Shaw & Ivens, 2005). Examples reflecting empowered employees from Study 1 include:

*“Girls behind the desk could not do enough for us; the trouble they went to was unreal”. (Male & Female, QLD)*

*“Helpful, polite and willing to negotiate with price”. (Male, VIC)*

*“WOW” Absolutely the best. The service started in the car park with an umbrella for the rain”. (Male & Female, QLD)*

✚ Bitner, Booms, & Mohr (1994) suggest that employees need appropriate problem solving skills training. What is now more commonly known as servicescape failures (Hoffman et al., 2003) or simply service failures (Lewis & Spyropoulos, 2001), has highlighted the importance of appropriate skills in service failure recovery (Moscardo, 2006) for enhancing service quality perceptions. Examples of service failures from Study 1 include:

*“Haphazard booking arrangements which reflected office staff”.  
(Male, VIC)*

*“Refused to lend us a rake to find a lost item saying we might damage or steal the rake”. (Female, WA)*

*“House boat hot water system broken and lost a day having it repaired. Paid for seven days and only got six”. (Female, WA)*

*“Springs poking through mattress, air-conditioning sounds like a tractor and had to use a lock of wood to lock the screen door”.  
(Male, NSW)*

✚ According to Walker, Johnson, & Leonard (2006) and Wisniewski (2001), management understanding the importance of providing the right quality

service for the internal customer is a prerequisite to providing good customer service. Several areas include : providing performance appraisal feedback; staff rewards/incentives, cross training and multi-skilling (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997), and implementing quality controls/monitoring systems (Harris & Ogbonna, 2009; Hoffman et al., 2003).

The critical implication of the above approaches is that front line personnel represent the firm and in many ways are performing a marketing function, which further supports the importance for customer service training to align service quality with the customer expectations.

The fundamental factors in reducing the fourth service quality gap involve both internal and external communication. Establishing two-way formal and informal communication channels and feedback systems within and between all departments and front line personnel (Augustyn & Ho, 1998) must be open to ensure perceived service quality is not in jeopardy. According to Gabbie & O'Neill (1997), service quality discrepancies emerge when externally communicated promises from advertising campaigns, public relations exercises or marketing promotions are exaggerated. In most instances front line staff are the first point of contact for customers and it is crucial that they are fully informed, updated regularly, and actively involved in issues concerning internal and external communications which will minimise the tendency to overpromise through advertising and or what customers receive at the service encounter (Zeithaml et al., 1990). From the organisation's operational perspective, front

line personnel must be kept informed of changes to policies and procedures as they may negatively impede on the service outcome. The dimensions of Tangible and Reliability are predominantly impacted (as seen Table 2.6) when addressing the service quality issues of gap 4. Although the literature suggests several ways to minimise this gap, most of those suggestion have already been addressed in gaps 1-3. However, there are two specific approaches pertinent in achieving positive outcomes for the senior customer.

- ✚ According to Nielson & Curry (1997), consistency of the message across all functions of the organisation is crucial in building long term relationships with mature customers. To achieve this, management must be adamant to ensure all employees are fully briefed on new promotions, concept changes and policy changes (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997). An example from Study 1 reflecting where this approach has been applied:

*“This location was a service ‘experience’. From the time we approached the ticket office to leaving the site, we were impressed by the service and the presentation of all aspects of the zoo”. (Male, VIC)*

- ✚ Myers & Lumbers (2008) have identified that older consumers continue to be seen as irrelevant and overlooked by the marketing community and therefore many businesses do not make the effort to communicate to senior customers effectively and with understanding. Examples from Study 1 from the Reliability dimension include:

*“The manageress was rude and badly needs public relations training”. (Female, NSW)*

*“The assistant was surely and unhelpful”. (Female, WA)*

*“..... more than I can say for the owner. He would have to be the rudest man I have ever come across on my holidays. It is a wonder that no one has smacked him in the mouth”. (Female, VIC)*

*“The woman in charge can be very rude if someone inadvertently does something that in her eyes is wrong. The end result is being loudly berated in front of other guests”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Arrived at the caravan park office and stood at the front desk for 5 minutes. No welcome or hello. When served was asked what do you want. No smile and no introduction. Unfortunately we had booked for a week otherwise we would have left”. (Female, QLD)*

Examples of communication from the Tangible dimension are not specific to one target market, but the following observations have been identified by senior travellers:

*“Condition of the park very grubby – certainly not as portrayed in the RACQ book”. (Male, NSW)*

*“Advertised as the best kept secret in Queensland. Should be kept a secret”. (Male, VIC)*

*“Worst caravan park we have stayed in after being on the road for 9 months. Rated as 3½ Stars – it would be struggling to get 1”. (Female, SA)*

Figure 5.2 is a generic service quality framework developed by Zeithaml et al. (1990), in the mid 1980's for the purposes of measuring the service quality gap between the customers' perceptions and expectations. To arrive at the

perceived service, management commences with trying to identify and understand the customer's expectation (Gap 1) and then the focus is on the internal components (Gaps 2-4). The model represents a predominantly internal approach to assist organisations in making more informed customer service decisions, the research in this suggests that an additional gap (Gap 6) identifying the need for external communications to managers be added to the model. The research conducted in Studies 1-3 clearly demonstrated that for managers to make better operational decisions in achieving improved customer service, it is necessary to have current information regarding changes in the external environment which could have a direct or indirect impact on achieving a better customer service outcome for their business. In Study 2, it was concluded that employers generally lacked understanding of the concept of Australia's ageing population and only had a vague notion that a trend exists; limited awareness of ageing policy/strategies at any government level; and several negative ageist stereotypes with reference to senior customers. Study 3 revealed that the main sources of information for managers about Australia's ageing population were newspapers/magazines. Local, State, and Federal governments, Regional Tourism Organisation and various Chambers of Commerce rated poorly in providing this information. The results in Table 4.19 indicate that the highest priority employers identified for external input into their business was the need for information and knowledge concerning Australia's ageing population. These findings clearly demonstrate that there is a gap in the flow of information to service providers and not having this information or knowledge severely hinders firms in providing better possible customer service. This is not offered as a final or definitive approach to minimising this gap, but

rather an approach to begin to incorporate more accurate and detailed information to assist management in making quality informed decisions to be implemented at the operational level (Gap 2).

This additional gap from an external perspective aligns very closely with the Functioning Tourism System model (Figure 1.8) promoted by Gunn & Var (2002). All the external factors which influence the functioning tourism system are relevant to minimising Gap 6.

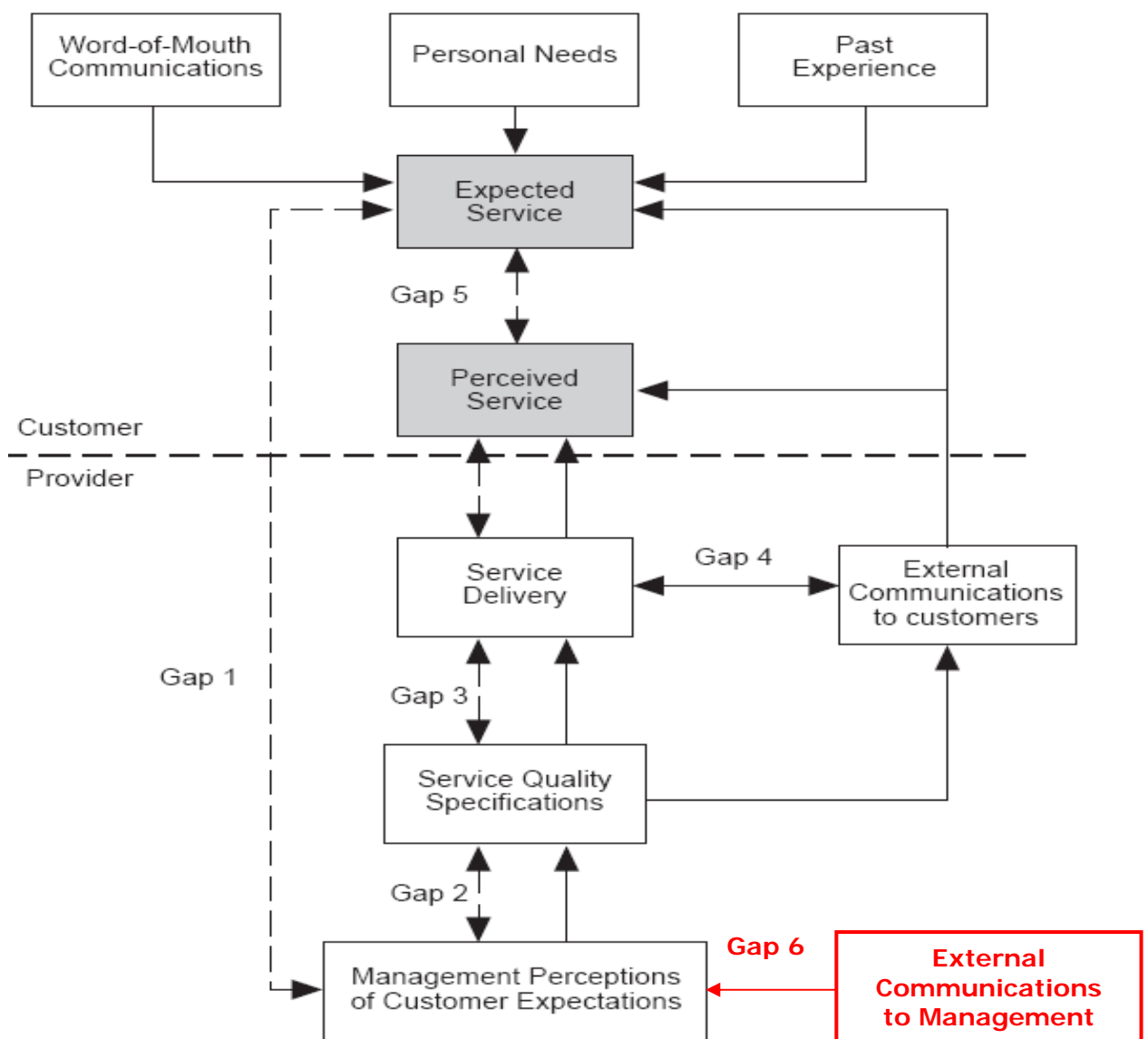


Figure 5.2: SERVQUAL Model (Zeithaml et al., 1990)



Finally, it is important to note that the service quality literature is silent on the issue of addressing management implications and policies through providing customer service training for managers. This literature addressing service quality issues stresses the importance of customer service training, but only for employees (Harris & Ogbonna, 2009; Ma & Niehm, 2006; Sharma, 2001; Walker et al., 2006; Wuest et al., 1998). Yet it is not the employees who set the service quality specification or establish standard operating procedures. This is the responsibility of the owner/manager and in doing so establishes the organisation's culture linking the leader's values to the business identity, reputation and aspirations which shape overall effectiveness and long-term success (Davidson, Griffin, Simon., & Woods., 2009). Therefore if the culture of an organisation starts at the top, (Daft, 2008; Wood, Zeffane, Fromhltz, Wiesner, & Creed, 2009), this would then mean to implement a culture of staff training it should commence at the top. Sadly only two articles have been identified that specifically encourage and support this approach Arthur (1994) and Butcher, Sparks, & McColl-Kennedy (2009).

## **5.5 Future Research Directions**

Senior tourism is a rapidly growing niche market that is a significant contributor to Australia's domestic tourism industry. Not only is it recognised for its growing numbers but more importantly the increasing financial contribution which is approximately 23% of total expenditure on domestic tourism. To date however, there has been a limited amount of research about this cohort when considering most developed and developing countries are experiencing considerable in population ageing. Areas of interest addressing senior travellers that have been researched include: motivation, travel behaviour, market segmentation, and more recently marketing. Until now the literature has been silent on the specific examination of customer service satisfaction and senior tourism. In effect, the expectations on which this study is based were taken from the only available previous research, which was different to the present study. This study was more investigative in nature than one that was built on existing knowledge.

This program of research has served to illustrate that customer service satisfaction amongst senior travellers is not well understood. Much of the literature addressing tourist satisfaction reflected a diverse range of services but was not age specific. A useful extension of this present work would be to consider segmenting the senior traveller into a younger and older group. It would also be good to compare seniors to other age groups. This would provide a check on the present results and extend knowledge on customer service satisfaction from an older cohort perspective.

The results of the studies in this thesis suggest further avenues for research into understanding customer service and satisfaction within the senior tourism

market. Three of the main areas for further research are ageist stereotypes, service training for managers and external communication breakdown.

#### 1. Ageist Stereotypes

The studies in this thesis established that providing good customer service to senior tourists is an interesting topic, but to achieve this, an understanding and appreciation of the underlying topic of ageist stereotypes would be most interesting and helpful to service providers. Issues surrounding ageism has infiltrated many aspects of society including, the workplace, road signage, humour, the medical profession, to name a few. What is not well understood in the literature and has not been studied in this thesis is the interpretation, identification, understanding of ageism from the senior traveller perspective and the possible impact on customer service. This would be more than an informative piece of research as the implications would extend to a suite of marketing approaches, and all industry service providers. This could be undertaken by conducting both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a variety of settings.

#### 2. Top-down service training for managers

The second potential avenue for investigation relates to top-down service training for managers. In much of the service quality literature, it is often found that researchers include in the general discussion concerning managerial implications/recommendations, the need for employees to be trained in customer service. Although correct, in many instances sending staff to attend the relevant courses can be both costly and inconvenient. There is also the

possibility the owner/manager may not endorse all aspects of the training. However to instil credibility and maintain morale, a customer service program should ideally involve the entire staff led by the owner/manager. To establish a culture of high quality customer service, managers must lead and set the standard to be expected of employees. It would be informative to conduct a comparative study of managers who have and have not has completed customer service training to identify the many impacts this would have on both the internal and external customer.

### 3. External Communication Breakdown

A third avenue for further research is that if managers are to make more informed operational decisions in achieving improved customer service this information needs to come from credible and reliable sources in the external environment. This research identified employer's main sources of information comes newspapers/magazines which is a far cry from the government and tourism organisations where the relevant information is readily available. Further investigation into this topic could suggest how this information could be made more readily available to service providers.

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## Appendix A : Travel Diary



# Travel Diary







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Dear Participant,

First of all, let me thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. This research is the first stage of my PhD studies and is looking at evaluating the perceptions of customer service encounters by senior travellers.

In accepting the opportunity to assist me with this research, I have provided a travel diary with complete instructions on what is required. Over a three week period, you need to identify each week two best and two worst customer service encounters. Examples of what to look for are given in the travel diary. All information is to be recorded in the diary and after the encounters have been recorded, simply place the diary in the reply paid envelope to be posted to my address.

You will also be required to sign an Informed Consent Form, which identifies the above details and states that any information given will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any further questions or anything that required clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address.

Once again, I would like to thank you for participating in my research and appreciate the time and effort that you will put into the diary.

Regards

Alfons Kuilboer

Alfons Kuilboer  
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Hello, my name is Alfons Kuilboer, and I have recently commenced my PhD studies in Tourism at James Cook University, Townsville. The research I am conducting is on evaluating the perceptions of customer service encounters by senior travellers. My initial research into this topic will be through the use of information gained from travel diaries such as this one. Travel diaries are also known as either a travel log or field diary and are often used when gathering research information.

I would first of all like to thank you for taking part in this research and appreciate your time and effort. In taking part in this research, I do need to make clear some very important points:

- ❖ All information that you give will be kept strictly confidential.
- ❖ The purpose of providing your name and address is to send you a reminder letter to return the travel diary, forward a thank you card for your participation, and to notify the winner of the magazine subscription draw.
- ❖ Finally, you will need to fill in the Informed Consent Form, which is a requirement of the university ethics committee.

### **Instructions**

1. Fill in your demographic details on page 4.
2. At the end of each week for the next consecutive three weeks, you will be required to record the two best and two worst customer service encounters. Examples of different services and various aspects of the customer service encounters are provided on page 4. Please remember not to be limited by these examples only. The amount of information for each individual encounter should not exceed approximately half a page in the diary provided.
3. After three weeks and the completion of the diary, please return the diary using the reply paid envelope that has been provided.
4. If you wish to be in the draw for the magazine subscription prize, simply fill in the tear off section on the last page.

## Demographic Details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick the appropriate box:

Male

Female

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: Single  Married  Defacto  Widow

Are you: Retired  Employed  Self Employed  Unemployed

Total length of trip: \_\_\_\_\_ days

Have you taken a trip like this before: Yes  No

The remainder of the travel diary is divided into weeks identifying the best and worst service encounters. The following are examples of service locations and customer service encounters:

### **Service Locations:**

information centres  
souvenir shops  
corner stores  
understood  
tourist attractions  
fast food chain store  
caravan parks  
service stations

### **Customer Service Encounters:**

politeness                      helpfulness  
cleanliness                      literature  
décor                              being  
  
greeting/welcome  
speed of service  
waiting facilities  
parking facilities  
access  
individual presentation

**Please remember that these are only examples of locations and service encounters and that you do not need to be limited by these.**

**Week 1: Best Encounter (1)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a description of the customer service encounter. You may refer to the examples on the previous page. Remember, do not be limited by the examples.

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**Week 1: Best Encounter (2)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Week 2: Best Encounter (1)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a description of the customer service encounter. You may refer to the examples on the previous page. Remember, do not be limited by the examples.

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**Week 2: Best Encounter (2)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Week 3: Best Encounter (1)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a description of the customer service encounter. You may refer to the examples on the previous page. Remember, do not be limited by the examples.

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**Week 3: Best Encounter (2)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Week 1: Worst Encounter (1)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a description of the customer service encounter. You may refer to the examples on the previous page. Remember, do not be limited by the examples.

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**Week 1: Worst Encounter (2)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Week 2: Worst Encounter (1)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a description of the customer service encounter. You may refer to the examples on the previous page. Remember, do not be limited by the examples.

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**Week 2: Worst Encounter (2)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Week 3: Worst Encounter (1)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a description of the customer service encounter. You may refer to the examples on the previous page. Remember, do not be limited by the examples.

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**Week 3: Worst Encounter (2)**

**Service Location** \_\_\_\_\_ **Town** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the week** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of Day** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Check List

Now that you have completed the travel diary, please go through the following checklist to ensure that you have completed all aspects of the diary.

- Completed the demographic details on page 4
- Completed the best and worst customer service encounter entries
- Filled in the optional tear off section below to be in the draw for a 12 month magazine subscription

**Finally**, all you need to do now is to place the travel diary in the pre-paid envelope and drop it into the nearest mail box for postage.

I would personally like to thank you once again for assisting me in taking the time to fill in this travel diary. If at any time you require any further information, or would like to find out the results of this survey, please do not hesitate to contact me.

-----  
Tear off Section

### Magazine Subscription Draw

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick **one** of the following magazines if you wish to enter into the draw for a free 12 month subscription. The winner will be notified by mail. Good luck.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing World        | <input type="checkbox"/> Net Guide            | <input type="checkbox"/> Your Garden    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Circle        | <input type="checkbox"/> Burke's Backyard     | <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Weekly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vacations and Travel | <input type="checkbox"/> Australian Woodsmith | <input type="checkbox"/> Readers Digest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Handyman      | <input type="checkbox"/> National Geographic  |   |

## Appendix B: SERVQUAL Original Ten Dimensions

**Reliability** involves consistency of performance and dependability. The firm performs the service right the first time and that the firm honors its promises.

**Responsiveness** concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service. It involves the timeliness of the service.

**Competence** means possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service.

**Access** involves approachability and ease of contact.

**Courtesy** involves politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel (including receptionists, telephone operators, etc).

**Communication** means keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them. It may mean that the company has to adjust its language for different customers – increasing the level of sophistication with a well-educated customer and speaking simply and plainly with a novice.

**Credibility** involves trustworthiness, believability, honesty. It involves having the customer's best interests at heart.

**Security** is the freedom from danger, risk, or doubt.

**Understanding/knowing the customer** involves making the effort to understand the customer's needs.

**Tangibles** include the physical evidence of the service.

## **Appendix C: SERVQUAL Five Dimensions with definitions**

**Tangibles** – Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication material

**Reliability** – the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately

**Responsiveness** – Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

**Assurance** – Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence

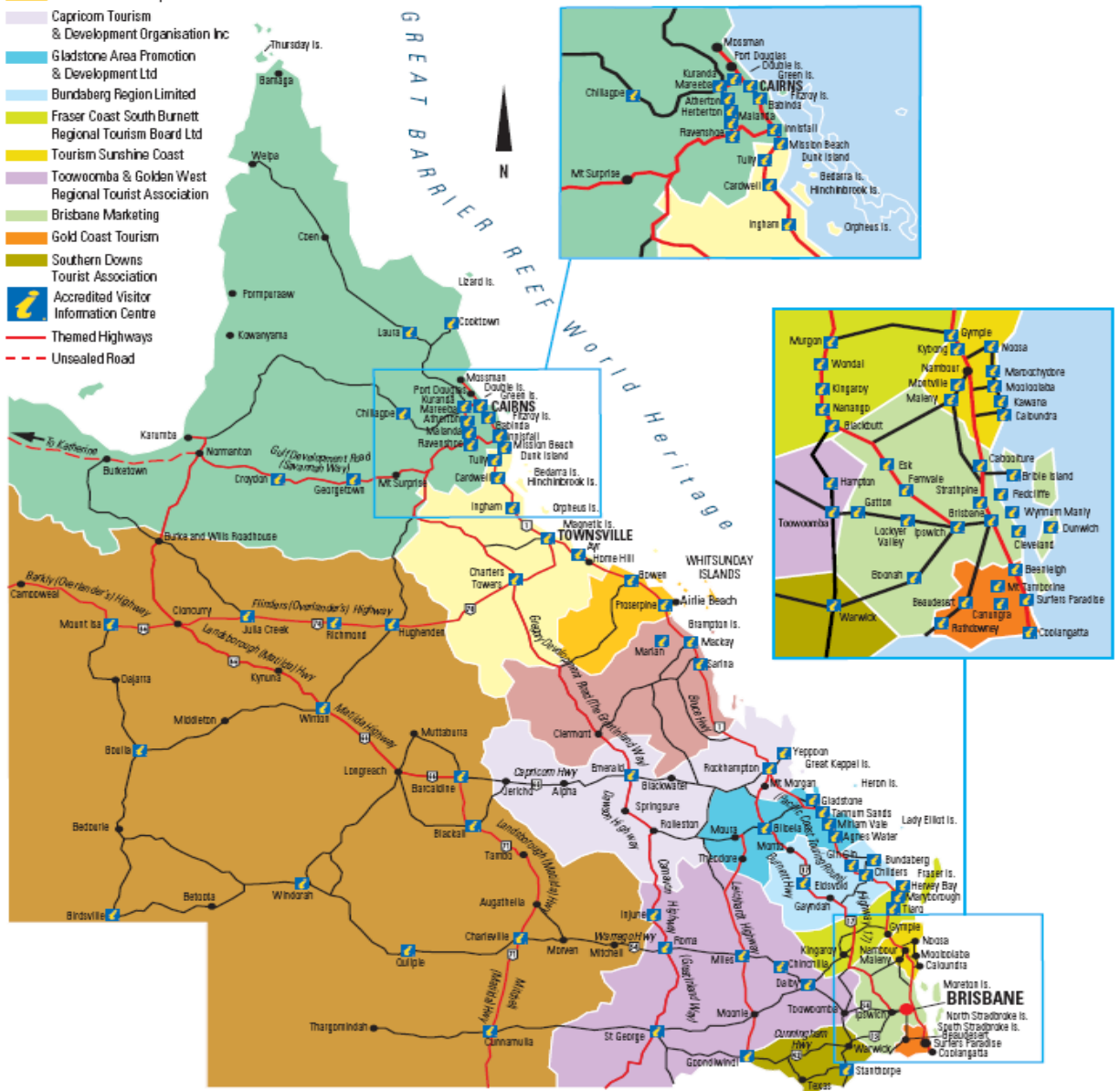
**Empathy** – Caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers

# Appendix D: Visitor Information Centre Signage



## LEGEND

- Tourism Tropical North Queensland
- Townsville Enterprise Ltd
- Outback Queensland Tourism Authority Inc
- Mackay Tourism Ltd
- Tourism Whitsundays
- Capricorn Tourism & Development Organisation Inc
- Gladstone Area Promotion & Development Ltd
- Bundaberg Region Limited
- Fraser Coast South Burnett Regional Tourism Board Ltd
- Tourism Sunshine Coast
- Toowoomba & Golden West Regional Tourist Association
- Brisbane Marketing
- Gold Coast Tourism
- Southern Downs Tourist Association
- Accredited Visitor Information Centre
- Themed Highways
- Unsealed Road



## Appendix E: Service Provider Interview Invitation Letter



**JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY**  
Townsville QLD 4811 AUSTRALIA

Name  
Address

**Alfons Kuilboer**  
**PhD Candidate**  
**School of Business**  
**James Cook University**  
**Townsville, Qld, 4810**  
**Ph: (07) 47814100**  
**Fax: (07) 47814019**  
**Email: [alf.kuilboer@jcu.edu.au](mailto:alf.kuilboer@jcu.edu.au)**

**Dear**

My name is Alfons Kuilboer and I am currently doing my PhD studies in Tourism at James Cook University, Townsville. The overall topic of my research is: "Understanding service gaps for Senior Travellers in Australia with a particular focus on the role of government policy". Having successfully completed the first stage of research involving senior travellers, I am now at the second stage of my research, which is aimed at service providers and identifying their perceptions of customer service to senior travellers.

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in this second stage of my research. The structure of this component involves a 5-minute survey questionnaire for both front counter employees and managers and a 5-minute interview with the manager. The survey and interview ask questions about customer service and perceptions of seniors. This study is both significant and innovative in that Australia's ageing population will bring with it a significant increase in senior travellers resulting in a greater demand on effective and efficient customer service bringing economic benefits for the service industries (such as yours) and tourism.

To ensure confidentiality, participants will not be required to provide any personal identifiers or any other identifying information that would be a breach of confidentiality. No names, addresses or any other identifying information is recorded so your responses to questions in this survey/interview cannot be traced to you.

If you are interested and would like to participate in this research, or would like to know more, please do not hesitate to telephone, fax or email me at the above address. If you are willing to participate, you will be required to sign an Informed Consent form on the day the survey/interview is conducted.

Looking forward to your reply,  
Regards

Alfons Kuilboer

Reply Comments (please use this form to fax reply)

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## Appendix F: Manager/Employer Informed Consent Form



**JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY**

TOWNSVILLE Queensland 4811 Australia Telephone: (07) 4781 4111

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR** Mr Alfons Kuilboer

**PROJECT TITLE:** Identifying underlying perceptions of ageism and customer service to senior travellers by service providers and local governments

**SCHOOL** JCU School of Business (Tourism)

**CONTACT DETAILS** [alf.kuilboer@jcu.edu.au](mailto:alf.kuilboer@jcu.edu.au)

#### DETAILS OF CONSENT:

*This project is the second study of a PhD program. This research will be used for my PhD and the outcomes of this study will be used to further guide the remaining research of my PhD thesis.*

*The aim of this study is to identify perceptions of customer service to senior travellers by service providers including local governments.*

*This study will adopt the data collection methods of surveys and semi-structured interviews. Participants involved will be front counter employees and managers. Both participating groups will be invited to complete a survey questionnaire, which will take approximately 5 minutes. Managers will also be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to take approximately 20 minutes.*

*Permission is requested from the manager to audiotape the interview for data analysis.*

*I agree:  Yes  No*

*Permission is requested from the manager to participate in the semi-structured interview.*

*I agree:  Yes  No*

*Permission is requested from the manager to participate in the questionnaire.*

*I agree:  Yes  No*

#### CONSENT

The aims of this study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I know that taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time and may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

**Name:** *(printed)*

**Signature:**

**Date:**



## Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

**The following are questions for the semi-structured interview.**

**Introduce this section to focus on Australia's Ageing Population.**

**Explain what is population ageing.**

1. What do you know about the trend in Australia's ageing population?
  
2. What do you think, if any, are the implications for your org/business?
  
3. Are you aware of any local, state or federal government policies or strategies concerning Australia's ageing population? If yes, do you know what they are?
  
4. With the ageing of Australia's population, do you anticipate any economic impacts either positive or negative for your org/business?
  
5. What impacts do you think they might be?

**Introduce this section so that their mind is now on customer service. Customer service can be defined as all aspects of the service firm with which the customer may interact, including personnel, its physical facilities, access, willingness to help customers, courtesy, attention, being able to provide the promised service etc. Now with this in mind:**

6. What do you believe is your recipe for good customer service?
  
7. I will give you a few moments to think about this question before you respond. Would the above ingredients for your recipe for good c/s differ with senior customers?
  
8. If yes, what would those ingredients be?



- Q10 If yes, approximately what percentage of customer service training addressed senior customers? \_\_\_\_\_%
- Q11 Has your current employer provided you with in-house staff training in customer service?  
 Yes  No (if No go to Q13)
- Q12 If yes, did it address senior customers?  
 Yes  No
- Q13 How much do you think you know about Australia's ageing population?  
 Please colour in the appropriate circle like this - ●  
             
**Nothing**  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 **A great deal**  
 If your response was 'nothing' please go to Q15
- Q14 Where did you learn about Australia's ageing population?  
 Television  Radio  Newspaper/Magazine  
 Friends  Employer  Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Q15 Please identify any of the following common perceptions of ageism that you have. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate these statements 1 = 'strongly agree' to 5 = 'strongly disagree'.

Please colour in the appropriate circle like this - ●	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy doing things for older people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people often behave like children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to feel good about life when I am older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many older people are depressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most older people live in institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people are all the same	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being old	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have never dreaded looking older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people offer little to society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is common for older people to live in poverty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The older I become the more I worry about my health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Growing old means becoming sick and disabled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry that people will ignore me when I am old	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Q16 Please colour in the appropriate circle.  
 Male  Female Year Born \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your participation.**

## Appendix I: Employer Survey (Modified Version)



Hello, my name is Alfons Kuilboer and I am a PhD student at James Cook University. I am currently doing research on identifying underlying perceptions of customer service to senior travellers by service providers and local governments and was hoping that you could spend the next 5 minutes answering this questionnaire. I do not need your name or personal details, so your responses will be completely confidential. If you would like further information on this study or to find out the results of my research, please email me on [alf.Kuilboer@jcu.edu.au](mailto:alf.Kuilboer@jcu.edu.au).  
Thank you for your participation.

Survey No  

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- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9

### **Instructions**

***It is important to note that this survey identifies seniors as 50 years of age and older.***  
***In answering each question please colour in the appropriate circle like this - ●***

- Q1    Please indicate your position:**
- Manager
  - Local Government
- Q2    What type of organisation/business is this?**
- Food Outlet
  - Retail/Services (eg: Bank, Hairdresser, Pharmacy, etc)
  - Tourist Attraction
  - Caravan Park
  - Information Centre
  - Hotel/Motel
  - Local government
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Q3    How important do you think customer service is to your org/business?**
- Very Important
  - Important
  - Uncertain
  - Not important
- Q4    Approximately, what percentage of your customers are seniors? \_\_\_\_\_%**
- Q5    Have you had any formal training (i.e. Training & Development course, TAFE, University etc) in customer service?**
- Yes
  - No (If no, please go to Q7)
- Q6    If yes, approximately what percentage of customer service training specifically addressed senior customers? \_\_\_\_\_%**
- Q7    How many front-counter staff do you employ? \_\_\_\_\_**
- Q8    Do you provide in-house staff training in customer service?**
- Yes
  - No (If no, go to Q10)

Q9 **If yes, does it address senior customers?**

- Yes  No

Q10 **How much do you think you know about Australia's ageing population?**

Please colour in the appropriate circle like this - ●

- 
- Nothing**  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 **A great deal**

*If your response was 'Nothing' please go to Q12*

Q11 **Where did you learn about Australia's ageing population?**

- State Government  
 Local Government  
 Industry  
 Television  
 Newspaper/Magazine  
 Radio  
 Friends  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q12 **How would you describe the likely impact of population ageing on your org/business?**

- Strong Impact  
 Moderate Impact  
 Minor Impact  
 No Impact  
 Uncertain

Q13 **Are ageing and/or older person issues integrated into your org/business plan?**

- Clearly Integrated  
 Integrated  
 Uncertain  
 Not Clearly Integrated  
 Not Integrated

Q14 **What inputs would assist your org/business in responding to population ageing?**

- Awareness raising activities  
 Skills and training  
 Information and knowledge  
 Support systems and networks  
 Resources  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q15 Please identify any of the following common perceptions of ageism that you have. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate these statements 1 = 'strongly agree' to 5 = 'strongly disagree'.

Please colour in the appropriate circle like this - ●	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
I usually feel very comfortable when I am around an older person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy doing things for older people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people often behave like children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to feel good about life when I am older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many older people are depressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I will still be able to do most things for myself when I am older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most older people live in institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people are all the same	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It doesn't bother me to imagine myself as being old	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have never dreaded looking older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people offer little to society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is common for older people to live in poverty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The older I become the more I worry about my health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Growing old means becoming sick and disabled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry that people will ignore me when I am old	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Please colour in the appropriate circle.

Male  Female Year Born \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your participation.**

## Appendix J: Employee Informed Consent Form



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR** Mr Alfons Kuilboer

**PROJECT TITLE:** Identifying underlying perceptions of ageism and customer service to senior travellers by service providers and local governments

**SCHOOL** JCU School of Business (Tourism)

**CONTACT DETAILS** [alf.kuilboer@jcu.edu.au](mailto:alf.kuilboer@jcu.edu.au)

**DETAILS OF CONSENT:**

*This project is the second study of a PhD program. This research will be used for my PhD and the outcomes of this study will be used to further guide the remaining research of my PhD thesis.*

*The aim of this study is to identify perceptions of customer service to senior travellers by service providers including local governments.*

*This study will adopt the data collection method of a self administered questionnaire survey. Participants involved will be front counter employees and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.*

*Permission is requested from the employee to participate in the questionnaire.*

*I agree:  Yes  No*

### CONSENT

The aims of this study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I know that taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time and may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

**Name:** *(printed)*

**Signature:**

**Date:**