



Developing a scale of hospitableness: A tale of two worlds

Asli D.A. Tasci, Kelly J. Semrad*

Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida, 9907 Universal Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32819, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 March 2015

Received in revised form

16 November 2015

Accepted 16 November 2015

Available online 7 January 2016

Keywords:

Hospitality

Hospitableness

Scale development

Mixed-methods

EFA

CFA

ABSTRACT

Hospitableness is a socio-psychological phenomenon. Thus far, scientific attention to this concept has been mainly conceptual rather than empirical. One reason may be the difficulty of precisely measuring this emotionally laden concept that is felt easily but cannot be described with the same level of ease in a scientifically rigorous manner. The current study was conducted to define and measure this critical construct using a mixed-methods approach. A scale of hospitableness with structural (underlying dimensions) and psychometric (reliability and validity) properties was developed to measure the importance of hospitableness in different consumption contexts including, destination, hotel, and restaurant products. Several steps of scale development procedures resulted in a Hospitableness Scale with 10 stable items assembling into Heartwarming, Heart-assuring and Heart-soothing factors.

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“There are two worlds: the world we can measure with line and rule, and the world that we feel with our hearts and imagination.”

– Leigh Hunt

1. Introduction

Today's pervasive technological invasion in all dimensions of human life is interrupted in the consumption of some products, especially those that are highly interlaced with service delivery – or *serviceful products*. These serviceful products are labor-intensive products that still require intense, highly interactive, and dynamic face-to-face interaction between consumers and providers. Such intense interactions render the human component of the product as the most essential ingredient for a positive consumption experience (Carlzon, 1986; Denizci and Tasci, 2010). Especially for those serviceful products that are generally labeled with the umbrella term of hospitality, the hospitableness element of the human component is what makes the product special. Although hospitableness is an enduring phenomenon that has been felt in different cultures for centuries, a firm definition and measurement of the emotional-laden nature of this concept has not yet emerged.

In the literature, hospitableness is usually discussed along with the concept of hospitality, which, in fact, creates some confusion

between these two interrelated concepts. As a transforming concept, ranging between “love of strangers” (Lashley, 2007) and being friendly to guests, the concept of hospitality has been deemed relevant to religious, social, moral, and business aspects of human life. Therefore, much has been said about hospitality and hospitableness by priests, writers, poets and scholars, cross-fertilizing these constructs from diverse disciplines including philosophy, theology, history, geography, sociology, medicine, political science and hospitality (e.g. Bell, 2007; Brotherton, 1999; Lashley, 2007; Lugosi, 2008, 2009; O'Connor, 2005; O'Gorman, 2007; Pizam and Shani, 2009; Telfer, 1995, 2000; Smith, 1994).

In the late 1970s, hospitality emerged in the United States as a label for the tourism and hospitality industry and service sectors that were broadly involved in catering to the needs of visitors and tourists (Lashley, 2007). Despite its longevity as a defined industry and a substantial amount of literature discussing the concepts of hospitality and hospitableness, the literature is still devoid of a measurement tool that captures the essence of the hospitableness construct. The limited empirical research (Ariffin and Maghzi, 2012; Ariffin et al., 2013) has mostly occurred within the hotel context and does not clearly differentiate hospitality from hospitableness. Thus, the goal of this study is to reach a human-centered definition of the concept and design a scale that is concise, parsimonious, and useful in measuring hospitableness in different consumption contexts where hospitality is involved in product or service delivery, including tourism and hospitality as well as other sectors and fields.

Measuring hospitableness may be crucial especially from the experiential view of consumption. Literature indicates that a paradigm shift has occurred from the utilitarian view to

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Asli.Tasci@ucf.edu (A.D.A. Tasci), Kelly.Semrad@ucf.edu (K.J. Semrad).

experiential view of consumption in experience economies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Oh et al., 2007; Petkus, 2002; Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999). This paradigm shift may render 'hospitalableness' as a crucial dimension in the creation of memorable experiences. Hospitalableness may be the critical sensory and hedonic dimension of consumption for serviceful products, especially those marked with the hospitality phenomenon such as in the tourism and hospitality industry. Considering that hospitalableness may significantly influence consumer satisfaction (Ariffin et al., 2013; Teng, 2011), the ability to measure hospitalableness from a consumer perspective may provide a competitive advantage (Ariffin et al., 2013) in today's highly competitive environments.

However, the endeavor of defining and measuring a concept such as hospitalableness poses certain challenges. First, the measurement of such a construct becomes elusive, intangible, varied, and abstract since most people may *know* or *feel* what hospitalableness is, but may not be able to easily articulate. In addition to the psychometric challenges that would pertain to scale development, an additional challenge is that existing theoretical framework is lacking definitive conceptualizations delineating hospitality and hospitalableness constructs from one another. The current literature discusses these concepts together and sometimes interchangeably. Therefore, the literature review section will sift through the theoretical elaborations on both the hospitality and hospitalableness concepts together until a concrete conceptualization of hospitalableness emerges for effective and efficient operationalization.

Fig. 1 synthesizes the existing literature with the authors' understanding of how hospitalableness and hospitality relate to one another. The relationship between hospitality and hospitalableness may be illustrated via a layered structure of hospitality inclusive of sustenance products, entertainment products, service and hospitalableness. Depending on a company's marketing mix, all or some of these layers may be included on the hospitality plate of a supplier. For true hospitality, however, the layer of hospitalableness needs to be in place.

The first layer is hospitality in its most basic form, involving provision of some tangible products such as food, drink, shelter, and hygiene amenities for travelers and their companions while away from home. Some components of this layer do not have to be present for true hospitality. For example, food and drink components may be eliminated from a basic hotel product but consumers may still feel true hospitality if the layer of hospitalableness is in place. The second layer involves entertainment, targeted more for higher level needs of socializing, learning, and self-actualization by offering products and services such as TV, pool, sports facilities, social activities, and playgrounds. This layer may also be eliminated from a basic hotel product but consumers may still feel true hospitality if the layer of hospitalableness is in place.

The third layer includes several tasks such as check in/out and housekeeping that are used to deliver both sustenance and entertainment products. The quality of the service layer affects the perception of products within the entertainment and sustenance layers. A good quality service satisfies many different needs of consumers ranging from basic safety and security needs to social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. The layer of service may also be eliminated through automated systems to some extent; however, automation eliminates human component, thus endangering the hospitalableness layer as well. When the hospitalableness layer is not in place, true hospitality is questionable.

Hospitalableness, the overarching layer of hospitality, is an anthropocentric concept that is manifested in human interaction between providers and consumers. It is what makes or breaks the entire customer experience about a company's products and services. In order for consumers to feel true hospitality, hospitalableness must surround the inner layers of hospitality, by being present during the delivery of goods and services for sustenance and

entertainment. The level of hospitalableness, thus, affects the perception of service of sustenance and entertainment products. True hospitalableness addresses different levels of needs, making consumers feel welcomed, safe, loved, respected, and achieved. The layer of hospitalableness may also be eliminated through automated systems or due to the lack of employees with skills to deliver genuine hospitalableness. However, in lack of hospitalableness, true hospitality may not be evident.

Thus, it becomes clear that hospitalableness is the differentiating aspect of hospitality in its true sense, namely, taking care of guests away from home. It is the most prominent, dynamic, and influential component of hospitality, marking the delivery of tangible and intangible components of hospitality to consumers. Therefore, the current study centrally focuses on hospitalableness and endeavors to conceptualize and operationalize this construct by developing a reliable and valid scale applicable in different serviceful product contexts.

Although existing literature is devoid of a complete definition of hospitalableness, some pieces of arguments about hospitalableness are integrated into a working definition of hospitalableness to guide the current study: the positive attitudinal, behavioral, and personality characteristics of the hosts that result in positive emotional responses in guests feeling welcomed, wanted, cared for, safe, and important. The results of the current study reveal that these positive characteristics formulate a mutually interrelated and three-dimensional structure of hospitalableness including: heartwarming, heart-assuring and heart-soothing factors. A close inspection of the hospitalableness items regarding the attitude, behavior, and personality traits reveal that they are mutually implicating. For example, the personality trait of sociable implies a welcoming attitude and helpful behavior at the same time. Hence, this trifecta structure of hospitalableness, inclusive of attitude, behavior, and personality characteristics does not really challenge the differing nature of the attitude, behavior, and personality trait constructs.

Since hospitalableness is a human dimension permeating across different social and commercial contexts, the purpose of the current study is to capture it in its general meaning, ranging from hospitalableness of the locals of a destination to workers in hotels and restaurants. The general hospitable attitude of locals of a destination manifests in their hospitable performance at work as well, which makes it especially relevant in the tourism and hospitality industry. Therefore, the current study endeavors to measure the concept of hospitalableness in a multi-contextual manner.

2. Theoretical background

Hospitality and hospitalableness are inherently related, but essentially different concepts. The literal meaning of hospitality is connected to several different languages and cultures. Its origins have been proposed to mean "friendliness to guests," rooted in Old French "hospitalité" and Latin "hospitalitem (nominative hospitalitas)" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2014). From medieval times forward, hospitality means making strangers or guests feel welcomed, accompanied, safe, and wanted by offering products and services to sustain their physical and mental wellbeing including: food, drink, hygiene amenities, shelter to rest and conduct other needs, and entertainment for travelers and their companions (Ariffin et al., 2013; Brotherton, 1999; Lashley, 2007; Lugosi, 2009; O'Connor, 2005; O'Gorman, 2007; Pizam and Shani, 2009; Smith, 1994; Telfer, 1995, 2000). In essence, hospitality caters to travelers and their companions' multiple level of needs as outlined in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs which include the physiological, safety security, psychological and social entities.

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