

Exploring the Expectations of the Malay Generation X Towards Senior Living Accommodations in Malaysia

Salamiah A Jamal, *Norzuwana Sumarjan, Chemah Tamby Chik, Mohd Taufik Zamri

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Malaysia

Email: drsalamiah@uitm.edu.my, *norzu161@uitm.edu.my, chemah@uitm.edu.my, taufik2009@uitm.edu.my

Corresponding Author: Norzuwana Sumarjan

Abstract: This study explores the expectations of Malay Generation X individuals regarding senior living accommodation. As Malaysia's ageing population continues to grow, with 15.3% of the population projected to be 60 and above by 2030, the demand for culturally appropriate eldercare facilities is rising. This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with 11 Malay informants through purposive sampling. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, resulting in four main themes and nine sub-themes. The findings reveal that informants are open to residing in senior living communities, provided these facilities align with their cultural and religious values. Key expectations include senior-friendly activities, such as leisure, socialising, and religious sessions; well-maintained facilities; qualified and hospitable caregivers; and comprehensive health and well-being services. Informants emphasised the importance of peaceful environments, privacy, and the integration of Islamic practices, such as halal-certified meals and prayer spaces. This study contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour in hospitality and ageing populations by highlighting the specific needs of Malay seniors. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and senior living operators to design facilities that cater to the cultural, emotional, and spiritual needs of Malay individuals. By addressing these expectations, Malaysia can ensure the provision of dignified and culturally sensitive senior living accommodations, fostering higher acceptance and satisfaction among the nation's elderly population.

Keywords: *Malay Elderly, Senior Living Accommodations, Ageing Population, Cultural Expectations, Elderly Care*

1. Introduction

Over the next decade, Malaysia is expected to experience a rapid increase in its ageing population. While developed nations like France, the United States, and the United Kingdom took decades to double their ageing population aged 65 and above, Malaysia is expected to achieve this milestone in just 23 years, increasing from 7% in 2020 to 14% by 2043 (Kinsella & Gist, 1995; Loraine et al., 2014; Tengku Abdul Hamid, 2015). Earlier, the World Health Organisation (2014) announced that the demographic shift is driven by declining fertility and mortality rates, as well as increased life expectancy. However, Malaysia's preparedness to address the needs of its ageing population, particularly within the Malay community, remains a critical issue.

In Malaysia, the Malay population, as the largest ethnic group, possesses unique cultural and religious values that influence their ageing experience and expectations. Urbanisation, modern lifestyles, and dual-income households have significantly impacted traditional family structures, which emphasise filial piety and elder care as religious obligations. These changes have created challenges for families, particularly in providing adequate care for ageing parents. Despite this, the stigma associated with sending elderly family members to senior care centres persists, often seen as a failure to uphold familial and religious duties (Suen, 2019).

Existing research on senior living accommodations in Malaysia has primarily focused on the general population with limited emphasis on specific communities such as the Malay. Studies suggest that Malays are gradually becoming open to institutionalised elder care, provided that facilities align with Islamic principles and cultural values, such as halal-certified meals, prayer spaces, and a sense of communal belonging (Che Anawa, 2015). However, the lack of facilities tailored to these requirements has caused many elderly Malays to show less interest in the current care options (Tabatabaei et al., 2016; Tan & Lee, 2017). Therefore, this study addresses the gap by exploring the expectations of the Malay ageing population - Generation X, regarding senior living accommodation/centres. This study demonstrates how senior living accommodations can be thoughtfully designed to honour the cultural and religious needs of Malays, enabling older adults to live with comfort and dignity, and in alignment with Islamic values. By appreciating what matters most to this community, senior living providers and policymakers can create more meaningful, personalised solutions that improve the lives

of elderly Malaysians while staying true to their traditions. This approach ensures satisfaction and helps bridge the gap between modern eldercare practices and cultural expectations.

Through this focused exploration, the study contributes to the development of culturally sensitive senior living accommodations that reflect the filial piety element integral to Malay and Asian values. Such advancements are essential as Malaysia prepares for the challenges and opportunities its ageing population poses.

2. Literature Review

As of the third quarter of 2024, Malaysia's population is estimated at 34.1 million, marking a 1.6% increase from the same period in 2023 (The Star, 2024). Alongside this growth, the country is experiencing a gradual demographic shift. In 2023, 7.4% of the population was aged 65 and above, a slight rise from 7.2% the year before (Siddharta, 2024). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), by 2030, it's expected that 15.3% of Malaysians will be aged 60 and older—officially placing the nation in the category of an ageing population. This shift is largely due to lower fertility and mortality rates, along with Malaysians now living longer than ever before.

In response to these demographic changes, the Malaysian government has been actively encouraging investment in senior living projects and aged care services. The goal is to improve the quality of care and create facilities that better cater to the needs of an ageing population (Malay Mail, 2024). However, despite these efforts, negative perceptions of institutional eldercare remain widespread. Many still associate such facilities with a loss of independence and a decline in quality of life. To move forward, it's important to challenge these stigmas and design senior living environments that not only reflect Malaysia's cultural values but also offer older adults a safe, respectful, and dignified place to live.

Aged Care Industry in Malaysia

With increasing life expectancy, Malaysia, like many other countries, has begun prioritising the quality of life for its elderly population (Soriano et al., 2016). The healthcare needs of the elderly have become a pressing concern, necessitating a focus on institutionalised eldercare solutions. Since the establishment of the Care Centre Act in 1993, the Malaysian government and non-governmental organisations have worked to provide eldercare services, including nursing homes and residential facilities, for frail elderly individuals and those without family support.

Nursing homes typically provide 24-hour nursing care, support for daily living activities, and specialised medical services for elderly individuals with chronic diseases or disabilities. In contrast, residential homes offer accommodations with basic facilities, such as libraries, recreational areas, and meal provisions, for elderly individuals who do not require constant medical attention. While residential homes are a relatively new concept in Malaysia, they are gaining traction as the elderly population continues to grow (Tan & Lee, 2017).

As of 2019, Malaysia had 21 licensed nursing homes under the Ministry of Health and 350 private residential homes registered with the Department of Social Welfare (MIDA, 2021). Additionally, private institutions, such as the Columbia Asia Extended Care Centre, provide comprehensive nursing and rehabilitation services. The private sector has also shown a growing interest in developing independent and assisted living facilities to cater to the increasing demand among Malaysia's ageing population. The government has encouraged this trend by promoting investment in senior living projects to enhance the quality of eldercare in the region (MIDA, 2021).

Social Stigma of Senior Living Centre

Despite these advancements, a significant social stigma remains attached to institutional eldercare in Malaysia. Studies have shown that many associate institutional care with negative outcomes, including reduced autonomy, depression, and a lack of value for the elderly (Dixon et al., 2009; Sibuh, 2015). The lack of privacy in shared living spaces and instances of neglect or demeaning treatment by caregivers have further exacerbated these perceptions (Calkins & Casella, 2007; Choi et al., 2008; Westin & Danielson, 2007).

To overcome this stigma, there is a growing emphasis on transforming senior living centres into modern, comfortable accommodations that align with cultural values. Malaysia's recognition as one of the top five retirement destinations globally reflects a gradual shift in perception (Diane, 2015). As Generation X approaches retirement, this demographic, which currently dominates the workforce, is expected to have sufficient savings to invest in better facilities, paving the way for higher demand for well-designed senior living communities.

3. Methodology

Selection of Informants

This study employs a constructivist paradigm with a phenomenological approach to explore the expectations of Malay individuals regarding senior living communities, a relatively new concept in Asian countries. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, enabling an in-depth exploration of the informants' perspectives. Informants were exclusively selected from the Malay ethnic group in Selangor, Malaysia. As of July 2024, Selangor's population was estimated at approximately 7.4 million, making it the most populous state in Malaysia (Siddharta, 2024).

This demographic significance makes Selangor a pertinent focus for understanding ageing trends within the Malay community. Eligibility criteria for informants included being between 38 to 58 years of age (Generation X) and enrolled in a government pension scheme. This cohort represents Malaysia's forthcoming ageing population, often referred to as the "silver generation." Their stable financial status, ensured by fixed monthly pension incomes upon retirement, positions them as a demographic likely to consider senior living communities offering comprehensive services and facilities.

In line with Creswell's (1998) recommendation of 5 to 25 informants for phenomenological studies, this research was conducted through in-depth interviews with 11 Malay informants. The sample was evenly divided between male and female informants, with nearly 90% reporting an annual income exceeding MYR60,000. This focused approach aims to provide culturally specific insights into the expectations and preferences of Malay individuals concerning senior living accommodations, highlighting their unique needs and values.

Instrumentation and Procedures

An interview protocol was meticulously developed and reviewed by experts in the hospitality and lodging industry, who were not directly associated with the study. This external review ensured the content validity of the protocol, enhancing its alignment with the study's objectives. While the protocol provided a structured framework for the interviews, the researchers retained the flexibility to ask follow-up questions. This approach allowed for deeper exploration of informants' insights and ensured comprehensive responses. The protocol included questions focusing on informants' expectations regarding facilities, services, and activities in senior living communities.

Data Collection

A snowball sampling technique was employed for participant recruitment. The initial participant was identified through the personal contact of one of the researchers. After confirming that the informants met the study's eligibility criteria, they were contacted via a messaging platform. Upon agreement to participate, the first informant provided referrals for additional informants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at locations and times convenient for the informants, fostering a comfortable environment for open discussion. To ensure informants could express themselves fully, interviews were conducted interchangeably in Malay and English, depending on the informants' preferences. Interviews conducted in Malay were later translated into English for analysis.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the informants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. Additionally, the researchers maintained observation logs to document non-verbal cues and contextual insights during the interviews. Following the transcription process, the interview transcripts were shared with informants for member checking, allowing them to review and confirm the accuracy of the data. This practice enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, adhering to Creswell's (2008) recommendations for rigorous qualitative research. This comprehensive and systematic approach ensured that the data collected were valid

and reliable, providing a robust foundation for analysing informants' expectations regarding senior living communities.

Data Analysis

Pseudonyms were used during data analysis to ensure the anonymity of informants. Each participant was assigned a unique code corresponding to their order in the study, such as M1, M2, and so on, representing the Malay respondents. This approach safeguarded participant confidentiality while enabling systematic data management.

The researchers carefully reviewed the transcribed interviews multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify meaningful patterns and themes within the dataset. This method involved a structured process, starting with familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, and then systematically searching for recurring themes. Emerging themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined before being organised into a comprehensive report. Throughout the analysis, researchers concurrently noted short phrases, ideas, and keywords that captured the essence of informants' responses. Frequently mentioned concepts were grouped and established as sub-themes and overarching themes. This meticulous and iterative process ensured that the analysis accurately reflected the expectations and perspectives of the Malay respondents regarding senior living communities.

4. Findings and Discussion

Informant Profile

Interviews were conducted with eleven Malay informants. Six out of the eleven informants were female, and 63% of the informants held high educational qualifications, including diplomas, Bachelor's degrees, and Master's Degrees. The majority (79%) of the informants were in the 45-year-old age group. Additionally, more than 65% of the informants belonged to the professional and management group, and 88% of the informants reported an annual income exceeding 60,000 Malaysian Ringgit.

Discussion of Themes

The uniqueness of this study lies in its ability to offer diverse views and voices of Malay Gen X, who have different expectations for the facilities, services, and activities that should be made available to ensure their quality of life during the golden years. Four main themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the eleven interview transcripts.

Senior-Friendly Activities

This theme emphasises the importance of brain-stimulating and physical activities in keeping the elderly engaged and active. As supported by Great Senior Living (2012–2019), such activities enhance cognitive function, contributing to better mental and emotional well-being. Furthermore, these activities foster social connections, improve relationships, and enhance physical abilities and overall health.

Most informants (n=11) strongly preferred the Senior Living Centre to offer a range of activities categorised into four sub-themes: leisure activities, low-impact exercises, socialising opportunities, and religious or spiritual activities. A possible explanation for the significance of this theme is the informants' past experiences, as many had active professional lives and were accustomed to structured and meaningful use of their time. The following sections elaborate on each of the sub-themes of Senior-Friendly Activities.

Leisure Activities

This sub-theme received the highest emphasis from the informants. Nine of eleven informants highlighted various leisure activities, including arts and crafts, tours and sightseeing, gardening, reading, board games, singing, and dancing. Among female informants, the most preferred leisure activity was tours and sightseeing, as it was perceived to relieve stress, bring happiness, and reduce feelings of isolation at the centre. This is evident from statements such as:

"... we need to have an activity to take these older persons to go for a trip...Trips to certain places so that they'll also feel entertained, not feeling confined there."

Informant 5

Reading and gardening were also frequently mentioned as leisure activities. These activities are believed to help the informants remain physically and mentally active.

Low Impact Exercise

Five informants highlighted this theme, emphasising the importance of low-impact activities such as aerobics, dancing, tai chi, and physical exercises led by qualified instructors. These activities were viewed as essential for helping senior residents maintain their physical health and overall well-being. Some informants expressed their thoughts as follows:

"There should be activities to keep us fit. Activities like exercises, which are led by the instructors."

Informant 3

Socializing

Ten informants agreed that they would stay at the Senior Living Community for socialising purposes. This is especially true for single informants who have no heirs. Socialising activities help keep their spirit growing and make them feel needed. Some of the socialising activities include chatting with friends of the same age, celebrating birthdays or festivals together, and sharing experiences. Among the statements provided by the informants are:

"I need to mix around with other people...communicate with people, or else your brain is going to age faster."

Informant 1

Religious and Spiritual Activities

Eight informants emphasised this sub-theme heavily, highlighting its importance in their expectations. Among the activities they anticipated were:

"...they [senior living accommodation] should conduct religious classes weekly, invite someone [to] come and teach, we should always organise religious educational events so that the older persons will get the benefits..."

Informant 5

The senior-friendly activities highlighted by the informants encompass leisure, physical, social, and religious activities. Leisure activities emerged as a prerequisite for the elderly to consider staying in a Senior Living Community. These activities were viewed not only as a means to pass the time but also as a way to foster happiness and contribute to improved health and well-being. This aligns with findings by Kim, Yamada, Heo, and Han (2014), who reported that leisure activities help seniors experience psychological benefits, strengthen social support networks, and enhance physical health, all contributing to successful ageing.

The informants particularly emphasised religious activities and facilities as essential components of a senior living centre. These include scheduled religious classes, prayer sessions, and spiritual gatherings providing solace and fulfilment. This finding aligns with similar insights from Chew et al. (2018), who noted that religious facilities and services, such as transportation to places of worship, are crucial for ensuring the emotional and spiritual well-being of elderly residents in senior homes.

Socialising activities were also highlighted as important to staying engaged and maintaining emotional health. Informants expressed a strong desire for opportunities to build meaningful relationships within the community, emphasising the importance of feeling included and supported. This sentiment echoes the findings by Chew et al. (2018), who noted that a sense of belonging and approval in a social circle is critical for the emotional well-being of elderly individuals.

Overall, the informants emphasised the importance of a holistic approach to senior living that incorporates leisure, physical, social, and spiritual activities, thereby ensuring their overall happiness, health, and spiritual fulfilment. Next, the second theme of Senior Living Centre expectations is presented.

Sufficient and Well-Maintained Facilities

This theme refers to adequate and well-maintained facilities that a Senior Living Community should provide to ensure residents' comfort and stability. The majority of informants (n = 11, with 6 being female) expressed their expectations regarding the facilities. Four sub-themes emerged: Fitness and Well-Being Facilities, Connectivity, Hotel-like Facilities, and Clean and Comfortable Facilities. It is reasonable to expect that elderly individuals need a living environment equipped with essential and well-maintained facilities to meet their needs.

Fitness and Well-Being Facilities

Technically, some of the fitness and wellbeing facilities required include a gym, swimming pool, medical assistance, running track or outdoor facilities, and physiotherapy.

Some of the informants stated:

“...swimming pool, gym... You can have like a running track...physiotherapy stuff like that”

Informant 8

Apart from that, religious facilities have been included in this sub-theme as they provide some peace of mind and could improve the informants' well-being. Only two out of eleven informants hoped that comfortable prayer places would be made available for them to perform their duties to God.

Connectivity

Interestingly, three informants emphasised that connectivity with the outside world is essential to any senior living community. They highlighted the importance of having reliable WIFI connections to maintain contact and communication with family members and friends. Additionally, some suggested that the management of the senior living community should provide regular updates on residents' health to their family members, ensuring transparency and fostering trust among them. One informant also expressed the need for a television as part of the facility. The significance of this sub-theme likely stems from the growing reliance on technological devices and internet connectivity in modern life, which enables better communication and access to information. The following statement reflects the informants' expectations:

“We live in multimedia...The IT world now. So, I think Wi-Fi is a must....”

Informant 8

Hotel-Like Facilities

Four informants strongly preferred the Senior Living Community to offer ‘hotel-like facilities,’ demonstrating their willingness to pay for such premium amenities. They underscored the importance of housekeeping, laundry, and room service, which they believed were crucial for ensuring comfort, convenience, and a stress-free lifestyle. These features were seen as essential in creating a living environment that meets practical needs and provides a sense of luxury and relaxation.

The informants emphasised that these services would allow them to focus on enjoying their daily lives without being burdened by routine chores. This preference reflects a growing demand for senior living accommodations that merge functionality with the sophistication and comfort of high-quality hospitality standards. By offering such amenities, senior living communities can cater to residents who value independence while appreciating the convenience and elegance of a well-maintained environment.

“...Providing hospitality services like housekeeping, laundry, room service, things like that. Just like in a hotel, isn't it?”

Informant 2, Informant 3

Clean and Comfort

This sub-theme highlights the importance of a tidy, well-maintained, and home-like environment with ample space, which the informants strongly value. Ten informants emphasised that a senior living centre should embrace a "feels like home" concept, fostering an atmosphere of warmth, familiarity, and comfort. Such an environment was crucial for promoting emotional well-being and facilitating a smooth transition to community living. The "feels like home" concept extends beyond cleanliness, focusing on thoughtful design elements tailored to the unique needs of elderly residents. These include spacious living areas, comfortable sleeping quarters, and accessible layouts that minimise hazards and promote safety. Essential features such as well-ventilated rooms, abundant natural lighting, and relaxing private areas were identified as critical for creating a welcoming space.

Informants also emphasised the importance of home-like amenities in enhancing their daily living experience. These include attached bathrooms for privacy, personal storage spaces for convenience, and dedicated areas for social interactions, such as communal lounges or living rooms. Informants envisioned a space that blends the functionality of modern living with the comfort and warmth of a traditional home, fostering a sense of belonging and security. By adopting these elements, senior living centres can effectively meet their residents' physical, emotional, and social needs, ensuring a high quality of life in a supportive and nurturing environment.

"...so, I prefer my room with a window or balcony, complete with a reading table and computers for my usage and definitely with an attached bathroom."

Informant 11

Security and Senior-Friendly Facilities

This sub-theme, though mentioned by a smaller group of informants (n=2), highlights an important expectation regarding on-site safety and security in senior living communities. Ensuring the safety and well-being of elderly residents is paramount, requiring facilities that minimise the risks of intentional or unintentional harm. Key suggestions included implementing senior-friendly features and robust security measures, such as surveillance systems.

Informants emphasised the need for comprehensive security systems to address concerns about safety in their environment. For example:

"High security...of course, I need security as well...since you know the crime rate in Malaysia also now is very high...so security is the most important part of it..."

Informant 7

"They should have CCTV....to monitor us, just like a centre where we press a button. Someone will be there."

Informant 10

These concerns align with findings in previous research. Tan and Lee (2017) emphasised that retirement homes should incorporate elder-friendly features, such as non-slip flooring, grab bars, and appropriately positioned electrical switches and windows, to enhance accessibility and reduce risks. Additionally, they recommended designs with barrier-free entryways, wider doors, and senior-friendly bathrooms to cater to the needs of residents. An emergency alarm system capable of providing around-the-clock assistance is crucial for security. Such measures not only ensure physical safety but also foster a sense of security and peace of mind for residents, which is vital for their overall well-being. Addressing these safety and security needs can significantly enhance the appeal of senior living communities and ensure that they meet the expectations of prospective residents.

Qualified and Hospitable Caregivers

One of the primary concerns expressed by the informants was the quality of care they would receive in their golden years if they chose to reside in a Senior Living Community (SLC). This concern stemmed from negative portrayals in the media regarding cases of elder abuse and neglect in care facilities. Consequently, seven informants highlighted the importance of having qualified and hospitable caregivers as a key expectation.

Chew et al. (2018) emphasise that as the health of elderly individuals deteriorates, they often require full-time caregiving services. Over time, residents tend to develop strong bonds with their regular caregivers, characterised by proximity, availability, and responsiveness to their needs. For this reason, informants emphasised that senior living centres must prioritise recruiting a professional caregiving team that is responsible, compassionate, and accommodating, ensuring both their physical and emotional well-being.

Their expectations were captured in the following statements:

"Staff must be friendly and courteous towards these old folk...The staff themselves must be creative and innovative. So that they can put some interest in the old folks"

Informant 9

Health and Well-Being Services

Health and well-being services encompass personalised support designed to meet the unique needs of elderly residents. These services include access to basic medical care such as regular health check-ups, on-site medical and healthcare facilities, and alternative treatment options. Additionally, counselling sessions and the provision of healthy, nutritious meals are considered essential for maintaining physical fitness and enhancing emotional well-being among the elderly.

Eight informants highlighted the importance of these services, expressing their expectations through statements such as:

"Other services that I prefer to have are such as medical, health checks, nutrition, maybe like personal service personnel that will look after me from time to time. It will also be great if the management will send reports on my health"

Informant 11

This feedback underscores the necessity of a comprehensive approach to health and well-being in senior living communities. By providing accessible healthcare, emotional support, and balanced nutrition, these services can significantly improve the quality of life for elderly residents, ensuring their comfort, security, and overall happiness in their golden years.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant potential of senior living centres as an emerging market in Malaysia, particularly among the Malay population. The findings are grounded in the positive responses and insights gathered during the interviews, reflecting the informants' expectations for their future living arrangements. The study contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour in hospitality and ageing populations, specifically by exploring the unique expectations of the Malay community regarding senior living accommodations.

Theoretically, this research supports the arguments presented by Che Anawa (2015) about the evolving perspectives of Malays toward institutional eldercare, such as old folk homes. Practically, the findings provide valuable guidance for policymakers and service providers in developing policies and strategies for the operation and management of senior living facilities. Additionally, the expectations shared by informants provide senior living operators with actionable insights to enhance the design, facilities, and activities in these communities, making them more appealing and suitable for elderly residents.

However, this study is not without limitations. It focused solely on the expectations of a single demographic, which limits its comprehensiveness in capturing broader attributes relevant to senior living centres. Future research should explore a broader range of factors, including preferences, motivations, and satisfaction, and investigate how these elements collectively influence the development and success of senior living accommodations. Expanding the scope of future studies to include diverse methodologies and larger sample sizes could provide a more holistic understanding of this emerging market.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of developing culturally sensitive senior living solutions that cater to the unique expectations of specific communities, such as the Malay population. By addressing these needs, Malaysia can ensure a higher quality of life for its ageing population while preserving cultural values and traditions. Future efforts should aim to build on these findings to create inclusive and sustainable senior living models for the nation's diverse elderly demographic.

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