Study on the meaning of elderly consumers’ consumption after retirement

EunHye Oh*, Hyekyung Choi**
*A Candidate of PH. D, Department of Consumer Science, Ewha Womans University
52, Ewhayeodae-gil, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, 120-750-Korea
E-mail: yellori@naver.com
**A Professor, Department of Consumer Science, Ewha Womans University

Abstract. This study is designed to determine impacts and meanings of the elderly’s consumption activities after their retirement. The study indicates that consumption after retirement is used to show their identity. In addition, it is verified that the elderly tend to want to compensate losses caused by retirement and optimize their life through consumption. This study is meaningful in that it suggests a new perspective on retired seniors who are free of production and pursue a new consumption paradigm by putting more time and devotion into consumption while searching identity Renaissance and a new life project in that process.

Keywords: elderly consumers, SOC, consumption, retirement

1 Introduction

It may have significant meanings not only arithmetically but also in the context of social and cultural changes that the number and the proportion of the retired elderly people are rapidly increasing. In the work-centered environment of the post-industrial society, retirement is likely to mean the loss of meaning and purpose in life accompanied by frustration, despair and depression. However, in recent days, a variety of retired consumer groups who are well-educated, rich and interested in diverse fields and activities have appeared, so many people increasingly suggest that new light should be shed on retired consumers in not the traditional passive retirement paradigm but in successful context. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to figure out how retired elderly people in Korean society seek their identity through consumption and how they view their lives after retirement.

2 Methods and participants

2.1 Methods and participants
This study is aimed at retired elderly consumers, conducting in-depth interviews in a way that recalls the changes in their consumption behaviors and identities after retirement. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling and retired elderly consumers over the age of 55 participated in the interviews. Information of each participant is shown in the Table 1 as below.

**Table 1. Characteristics on Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Years after Retirement</th>
<th>Occupation before the Retirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>4yrs</td>
<td>Financier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1yr</td>
<td>Professor &amp; Surgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>5yrs</td>
<td>Elementary School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2yrs</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>4yrs</td>
<td>Policeman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Results

3.1. A new life in retirement

At every stage in life, consumers take advantage of symbolic and empirical resources to demonstrate their personal and collective identity. In other words, anyone can create and recreate their consumer identity through consumption and form an identity commensurate with each stage of life. In particular, it turns out that since retired elderly consumers can invest more time in personal resources and matters free of work and rearing of children, they are more likely to express, expand and complete their identity through consumption. During the interviews, it is verified that retirement largely affects consumption behaviors of retired seniors and generates a new chapter for consumption. As they have more time physically and emotionally after retirement, they become interested in activities that they have wanted to do but couldn't before retirement or in totally new activities and want to show their identity by consuming products or services related to those activities.

3.2. Consumption as an adaptive strategy

Baltes and Baltes (1990) suggests 'The Model of Selective Optimization with Compensation: SOC'. According to this model, despite damage and functional impairment caused by aging, elderly people can achieve successful aging through compensating losses, selecting activities suitable to their ability and optimizing
holding skills. This study also identifies through interviews that retired seniors who went through retirement, a big change in life, want to pursue a desirable future by compensating losses due to retirement and aging and putting their resources in the best way into activities which fit their circumstances. In addition, they try to live a balanced life between continuity and change. The study demonstrates that in that process, consumption is properly utilized as an adaptive strategy.

4 Conclusion

This study intends to find out how the elderly facing a turning point in their life keep or develop their identity as consumers. The study shows that retirement creates a new place for consumption for retired seniors. In the new or expanded place for consumption, the participants, who are experiencing a change from production-centered life to consumption-centered life, become interested in activities that they wanted to do but couldn't before retirement or in totally new activities. They try to reveal their identity by consuming products or services associated with those activities. Furthermore, the participants faced with a huge change, retirement, want to pursue a desirable future by compensating losses caused by retirement and aging and putting their resources in an optimal way into activities fitting their environments, taking advantage of consumption as an adaptive strategy.

This study was conducted based on the concept that retired seniors want to form a new identity and continue new experiences while existing studies on elderly consumers perceive them as a passive group that has a fixed identity. Additionally, it is indicated that in that process, consumption is utilized as a means to demonstrate retired elderly people's identity. This study is meaningful in that it suggests a new perspective on retired seniors who are free of production and pursue a new consumption paradigm by putting more time and devotion into consumption while searching identity Renaissance and a new life project in that process.

References