EXPLORING THE MOBILITY OF OLDER ADULTS IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: A PROPOSAL

Sri Fatiany Abdul Kader Jailani
Department of Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor Malaysia
fatiany@uitm.edu.my

Emi Normalina Omar
Department of Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor Malaysia
emi128@uitm.edu.my

Noor’ain Mohamad Yunus
Department of Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor Malaysia
noorainyunus@uitm.edu.my

Siti Noorsuriani Maon
Department of Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor Malaysia
sitinoor123@uitm.edu.my

Naffisah Mohd Hassan
Department of Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor Malaysia
naffi885@uitm.edu.my

*Corresponding Author email: fatiany@uitm.edu.my

Submitted: 22 March 2023           Revised: 06 June 2023           Accepted: 12 June 2023

Peer-review under responsibility of 8th ASIA International Conference (KLCC, Malaysia) Scientific Committee
http://connectingasia.org/scientific-committee/
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ABSTRACT

The issue of ageing is a global concern, and as urban areas develop, the proportion of citizens aged 60 and over increases. The percentage of Malaysians aged 65 and older increased from 6.5% in 2018 to 6.7% in 2019. In a decade, Malaysia is anticipated to attain the status of an ageing nation, with at least 15 percent of the population being 60 or older. By 2056, Malaysia will be a “super-aged society,” as 20% of its population will be over the age of 65. In accordance with the 11th Malaysian Plan (2016–2020), Malaysia has launched the Smart City Initiative to prioritise the welfare of its ‘rakyat’ people. In addition, the government has unveiled the Intelligent Transport System Blueprint (2017–2022) to modernise the existing transport system. The global trend of an ageing population influences numerous aspects and facilities, including healthcare, financial services, urban planning, transportation, and religious centres. To improve the quality of life for the elderly, their residential environment must be modified. In terms of healthcare services and physical accessibility, elderly mobility presents difficulties. Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors that enable elderly people with smart mobility to access public spaces and transport facilities. To achieve these goals, the research design employs a qualitative approach. This study contributes to the development of smart cities and transport planning, which can support the sustainable mobility of the elderly in Malaysia, a nation confronting the challenges of an ageing population. In addition, the study will address the requirements of the elderly by incorporating the ageing population into national development plans and reevaluating existing planning alongside physical development zones. These initiatives are consistent with the National Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to improve the quality of life for the elderly population.

Keywords: Ageing; Mobility; Transport

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

1. Promoting supportive environments for the elderly, which encompass transportation and public spaces, is crucial. A key aspect of fostering sustainable mobility lies in comprehending the travel patterns of older individuals and their access to public areas and transportation options. With this in mind, the objective of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to elderly smart mobility in accessing public spaces and transportation facilities in urban areas.

2. The belief is that by optimizing urban space, it is possible to establish cities that are healthier, more convenient, and more enjoyable for both the general population and the elderly. In light of this, it would have been more pertinent for this research to encompass a wider spectrum of elderly individuals residing in both urban and suburban areas.

3. The findings of this research will be of great significance to policymakers and relevant industries because they directly address the challenges posed by an ageing society within national development plans.

Research Objectives

Malaysia is experiencing a rapid increase in its ageing population. By 2030, it is projected that Malaysia will attain the status of an ageing nation, with at least 15% of the population being 60 years old or older (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). As driving skills tend
to diminish with age, careful planning becomes crucial to ensuring road safety, along with initiatives to encourage the utilisation of public transportation (Billot et al., 2020). The government should be prepared to adapt to these demographic changes and address the issues arising from population ageing. Therefore, urban development and planning play a vital role in supporting the mobility of older adults. The older people require supportive environments that encompass transportation options and access to public spaces. Gaining an understanding of the travel habits of the elderly, their access to public areas, and their use of transportation is essential for promoting sustainable mobility. Hence, this study aims to investigate the contributing factors that enable smart mobility for older individuals in accessing public areas and transportation facilities within urban settings.

**Methodology**

To accomplish the research objectives, the current study will employ a qualitative research design. This design will enable a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of active behaviour among the elderly, particularly concerning their mobility-related activities and expectations. The study will involve interviews with a specific group of older adults who meet the following criteria: 1) relatively healthy, 2) physically independent, and 3) residing in the community. Purposive sampling will be used to select respondents based on specific criteria. Once the data collection is complete, qualitative data analysis software will be utilised to analyse the collected data. The process will involve extracting themes from the transcriptions of the interviews with the informants. The themes will be cross-referenced among all the informants, and the most prevalent theme or outcome will be identified. However, it should be noted that the researcher will be responsible for interpreting the findings based on the identified theme. The current research has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty.

**Results**

The present study is still in progress. The focus of the present research is to examine the factors that impact the elderly's ability to access public spaces and transportation facilities in urban areas, with a specific emphasis on smart mobility. Through a qualitative approach, this study aims to enhance comprehension regarding the factors associated with smart mobility among the elderly population, particularly in urban settings. The insights derived from this study will be advantageous to relevant stakeholders and contribute to the existing knowledge base. Furthermore, it is encouraged that future studies explore additional variables that could influence elderly mobility in different geographical areas.

**Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to thank the Malaysia Institute of Transport (MITRANS), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, for funding this research study, grant number 600-RMC/MITRANS_ires 5/3(018/2020). The authors would also like to thank the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor, Malaysia, for supporting this research.
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Author’s Biography

**Sri Fatiany Abdul Kader Jailani** is a senior lecturer at Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She received her PhD from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She received a Bachelor’s Degree and Master’s Degree in Information Technology from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Her research area includes information technology, sustainability and social networking.

**Emi Normalina Omar** obtained her degree in professional studies in The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She holds a master’s degree in MSc International Logistics at the University of Plymouth (UK) and also, she did her Ph.D. in transport and logistics at Malaysia Institute of Transport (MITRANS). Her PhD thesis is specifically in the area of halal supply chain management. Currently, she is a senior lecturer with more than 15 years’ experience and is attached to the Centre for Technology and Supply Chain Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

**Noor’ain Mohamad Yunus** is an associate professor in the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She received her PhD in Business Administration from International Islamic University Malaysia in 2018. Her current field placement is with the Department of International Business and Management Studies. She is interested in research related to population ageing, healthcare utilisation, health informatics, management, and healthcare management.

**Siti Noorsuriani Maon** is an associate professor in the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She obtained her PhD from the University of Queensland (UQ) in Australia. She has taken part in a number of academic projects and community initiatives related to her areas of interest. She has received several internal and national research grants. She has published papers in various journals. Her research interests include management, health behaviour, health informatics, and technological health improvement interventions.

**Naffisah Mohd Hassan** is an associate professor in the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She received her PhD from the University of Wollongong, Australia. She has published papers in various journals and conference proceedings. She is an active member of community engagement projects with NGOs. She has organized several community projects to raise awareness, understanding, and acceptance of autism within Muslim community.