

**USING A BRICOLAGE STRATEGY TO AUGMENT THE HUMAN TOUCH AND DELIVER DIGITALLY
ENHANCED ADVANCED SERVICES IN THE CHARITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR:
A RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

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RESEARCH MOTIVATION

Vulnerable groups such as the elderly, homeless people, children from low-income families, and refugees have been disproportionately affected by the outbreak of COVID-19. The Pandemic, with its consequent social distancing measures and large-scale service disruptions, has changed how people access and utilise services. This widespread change in service delivery and consumption has had a severe impact on the instrumental, social, and emotional needs of vulnerable service users with wellbeing consequences due to their unmet needs. Particularly, whilst these groups are reliant on Charity and Voluntary Services (CVSs) to fulfil their multiple needs, the Pandemic-induced digitalisation of services could be detrimental to their wellbeing which needs further investigation.

The ability to deliver person-centred and holistic services is a distinguishing characteristic of many CVSs which is operationalised through the combination of a core service (e.g., education, skills training, money matters, etc.) with complementary peripheral services (e.g., emotional support, social capital, confidence building, etc.). The human-touch element, which is meaningful and sympathetic interpersonal interactions (Solnet et al., 2019), is often perceived as a peripheral service by service providers. Nonetheless, in the Transformative Service Research (TSR) paradigm, these service interactions are recognised as key determinants of the wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable groups (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). Regardless, the rapid digitalisation of CVSs since the beginning of the Pandemic has been more focused on core services with less attention to the online transitioning of human touch which could harm an individual's sense of social integration (i.e. evaluation of the quality of relationships) and social wellbeing (i.e., the appraisal of one's circumstances and functioning in society) (Keyes, 1998). Therefore, in the digital transformation of CVSs, the question was how the sector can, with resources they have at hand, transfer human touch online to offer integrative services that transcend instrumental needs and respond to the social needs of service users.

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in expanding the adoption of advanced service (Digitally Enhanced Advanced Service [DEAS] in particular) and servitization principles to sectors outside the manufacturing. Within the area of servitization, advanced services are bundles of offerings that focus on the ongoing outcomes from service consumption, specific to individual service users (Baines & Howard, 2014). This resonates with the holistic and person-centred approach that the charity and voluntary sector maintains. Moreover, the DEAS focus is on the delivery of outcomes to service users and the value of the outputs, and not merely on how the service is delivered and the efficiency of service processes (Ennis & Barnett, 2019). This outcome-centricity makes DEAS apt to offer new solutions to the charity and voluntary sector to sustain their multiplex wellbeing outcomes whilst adopting their service processes to online delivery.

Thus, a three-stage study was undertaken on an education service for refugee learners provided by a charity that had been transitioned online following the start of the Pandemic. The first stage was an exploratory study by conducting 25 interviews and 2 focus groups to understand how human touch is experienced in the context of online CVSs and further ascertain service users' evaluation of their social integration and wellbeing. Furthermore, employing a bricolage strategy (i.e., making do with what is at hand) (Witell et al., 2017), and in consultation with service practitioners, findings from the first phase were used to propose a socially enhanced digital service toolkit, encompassing core and

peripheral services, that facilitates the flow of the social resources and encourages positive behaviours and attitudes towards the online service to further meet the multiplex needs of service users. Finally, through a usability study, the proposed intervention was tested with 5 follow-up interviews to ascertain the efficacy of the bricolaged solution in delivering social wellbeing outcomes.

CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

This research responds to the call to study the adoption of servitization and DEAS in non-manufacturing contexts. Exploring the human touch in online CVSs, the findings enhance our understanding of advanced services and their wellbeing outcomes in the charity and voluntary sector. For advanced CVSs, service user value is centred on the multiplex wellbeing outcomes from direct and indirect service interactions rather than the use of core services. The research findings suggest that to create digitally enhanced advanced offerings in the charity and voluntary sector, the quality of interactions, by shaping the flow of social resources, is largely responsible for determining service users behaviours and attitudes towards the service. In other words, a combination of digital enhancement and social enhancement is required to deliver advanced digital CVSs. Moreover, the study's specific consideration of social wellbeing and social integration, as suggested by the TSR paradigm, contributes to the development of a performance measurement tool for advanced services in the charity and voluntary sector to assess the sector's digital transformation.

This research revealed service users' poor appraisal of their social integration and a sense of being socially disadvantaged as potential pitfalls of digital CVSs that can enforce vulnerabilities. By discovering the missing elements of human touch in online CVSs as well as identifying pull factors that can attract service users to the online service and enhance human touch, this study suggests that the sector benefits from optimising their online services not only for direct dialogical interactions through their core service but also for indirect interactions by providing social and emotional resources. This offers new opportunities to the sector to capitalise on the advantages of digitalisation whilst responding to their service users' needs. Also, bricolage has been proved as a promising strategy for the sector to deliver advanced services by implementing innovative yet feasible solutions whilst dealing with restricted resources.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- Servitization and TSR can mutually inform and guide the digitalisation of services in the charity and voluntary sector to deliver holistic and person-centred services.
- The advanced value of charity and voluntary services is in their ability to respond to multiple needs of their service users which is crucial to be sustained in digital services.
- Digital charity and voluntary services ought to be socially enhanced, alongside being digitally enhanced, where the human touch is a key determinant of the wellbeing outcomes.
- Bricolage proves to be promising in the implementation of advanced services in the charity and voluntary sector as they function within the context of resource scarcity.

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