

Harnessing the Transformative Power of Service: A Resource-Challenge Perspective to Service Design for Vulnerable Service Users

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Recently, designing transformative services that can improve the well-being of disadvantaged consumers and communities has been identified as a priority for service researchers (Field et al., 2021). As a fundamental constituent of Transformative Service Research (TSR), service design plays a significant role in materialising well-being outcomes such as access, inclusion, health, and reduced inequalities (Anderson et al., 2013). The central function of service design is to explore the overall activity that the service user is trying to perform, understand their resources and challenges in deriving value out of service interactions, and create the appropriate conditions for certain forms of interactions and flow of resources to happen (Fisk et al., 2016). To embrace the above-mentioned research priority, this paper investigates how design elements of a service system enhance well-being and reduce disparities between service outcomes for disadvantaged consumers and other consumer groups. Drawing upon the resource-challenge model of well-being (Dodge et al., 2012; Finsterwalder & Kuppelwieser, 2020), a qualitative enquiry was conducted by employing a multiple-case design approach to unravel service design factors influencing well-being outcomes for vulnerable service users. Data was collected through five case studies of refugee-support services in the UK. Refugees are an exemplar of vulnerable service users who may suffer from multiple vulnerabilities, making them susceptible to lower levels of value whilst interacting in a service setting. Therefore, the chosen setting provides a rich empirical context to study design characteristics through which service can address consumer vulnerability and trigger uplifting changes that warrant transformative well-being outcomes. The study investigated services provided by community groups, not-for-profit organisations, local authorities, and the national government. To address the research questions, 75 semi-structured in-depth interviews with service providers (managers, frontline practitioners, volunteers, etc.) and refugee service users, together with complementary focus groups and field observations, were carried out. Through within-case and cross-case analysis, the components of a transformative service design for disadvantaged service users were identified, and a resource-challenge-informed service design framework was devised. Furthermore, a transformative organisational capabilities framework has been developed by inspecting the organisational characteristics of various service providers in the study and their commonalities and idiosyncrasies. This study responds to the call for service research on service issues affecting disadvantaged individuals and communities. The findings provide a comprehensive perspective of a transformative design that can improve the well-being outcomes of service for vulnerable service users. Moreover, the study offers insight for service organisations working with vulnerable consumers regarding the capabilities required to foster a transformative service design to further deliver services that can address consumer vulnerability and enhance their well-being.