Older shopper types from store image factors

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to characterise the older shopper by exploring unobserved heterogeneity within the segment and developing an older shopper typology from an empirically derived store image scale. Store attribute theory informed a two-stage research design. Firstly, a 'pool' of salient store attributes was identified through in-depth interviews. Scales were then developed and quantitatively tested using data collected through a household postal survey. Seven store image factors emerged, forming the basis of the typology. Five clusters were subsequently profiled using behavioural and demographic variables: Prudent neutrals, All-Round demanders, Reluctant casuals, Demanding sociables, and Affluent utilitarians. A discussion of the resultant classification's utility in terms of retail strategy, including opportunities for better targeting through adjustment of the retail offer, is presented. This study develops a store image scale that reflects the importance of store choice decisions of older shoppers, extending store image research by providing contemporary insights into the requirements of older shoppers in a changing retail environment.

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1. Introduction

Older consumers (60+ years) are now commanding greater academic and practitioner attention, with businesses and researchers recognizing that this group possesses the key characteristics to justify targeted selection in the marketplace (Chaston, 2011; Yoon et al., 2009). Official national statistics indicate that 23% of the UK population will be 65 years and above by 2034, an increase of 8% from 1984 (ONS, 2011). Retailers responsive and adaptable to the needs of older customers are thought able to leverage increased financial benefits from their considerable spending power (Thompson and Thompson, 2009). However, in order to do so effectively, retailers are increasingly being required to consider older consumers as a heterogeneous group (Yoon et al., 2009). Similarly, researchers are being encouraged to identify the similarities and differences in retail engagement (Lumpkin, 1985) within this segment, particularly unobserved heterogeneity (Ahmad, 2002; Teller and Gittenberger, 2011). Despite limited research, many believe the current older generation to be significantly different from its predecessor (Myers and Lumbers, 2008; Thompson and Thompson, 2009) and, consequently, worthy of more attention and study.

Yoon et al. (2009) investigated heterogeneity in older consumers on the basis of understanding how ageing affects consumer decision making. Through developing a person-context fit framework of consumer decision making they concluded that older people with greater consumer experience and expertise are often competent in making decisions. However where competence is affected by greater environmental demands older consumers may apply strategies to mitigate these effects i.e. they adapt themselves (Yoon et al., 2009), determined by emotional responses to situational conditions (Carstensen, 2006; Labouvie-Vief, 2009). Where it is not possible for such adaptations to take place there is a call for marketers to assist decision-making through the use of appropriate marketing mix tools, based on a profound understanding of consumer needs (Yoon et al., 2009) and recognition of the contextual factors which interact with age (Yoon et al., 2005).

Consumer decision making styles can be characterised by the consumer typology approach (Sproles and Sproles, 1990). Classifying shoppers into subgroups by developing typologies has been, for several decades, a common procedure when modelling consumer heterogeneity (Reynolds et al., 2002). This has enriched the wider development of consumer behaviour, consumer decision-making and shopping theories, whilst enabling practitioner's greater scope for targeting and positioning strategies (Westbrook and Black, 1985). A number of studies have developed typologies on the basis of decision-making traits (for a literature review, see Mitchell and Bates, 1998). Sprotles and Kendall (1986) devised the Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI) for their studies of student shopper decision making traits in the US. Further studies applied this scale to test multi-cultural applications (Canabal, 2002;

Fan and Xiao, 1998; Lysonski et al., 1996), however many of these investigations also used student samples and there is little evidence of the CSI being applied to older age segments. The applicability of a scale designed with a view to younger consumers has obvious limitations, particularly as the language used and dominant resultant typologies (Chase et al., 2007) are unlikely to reflect older consumer's experiences and language, and therefore scales for specialist population segments are recommended (Mitchell and Bates, 1998).

An alternative approach to establishing shopper typologies has been built on the solid foundations of store attribute theory in which consumers form an assessment of a retail store by ascribing varied levels of importance to components of its wider formation—otherwise known as store image (Bellenger et al., 1977; Darden and Ashton, 1975; Ganesh et al., 2007; Karande and Ganesh, 2000). Consequently, theories of store image have retained an established position in retailing and shopping theory, where the emphasis has predominantly been on the classification of store image attributes and factors (Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Lindquist, 1974–1975; Martineau, 1958; Zimmer and Golden, 1988). Whilst a handful of seminal studies have both formed the foundations of, and enriched, a plethora of empirical investigations, it is unknown how robust these theories stand when applied (1) in contemporary retail settings, and (2) with specific groups of consumers. The latter issue is progressively important with researchers stressing the need for greater illumination of smaller and more defined segments (e.g. Breazeale and Lueg, 2011; Reynolds et al., 2002).

The current study is positioned in the UK grocery sector. As the previous comments demonstrate, a new distinct store image scale is required in order to measure the attributes that match older consumer's distinctive shopping 'needs' and 'wants' (see Goodwin and Mcelwee, 1999; Lambert, 1979; Meneely et al., 2009; Pettigrew et al., 2005). A combination of 'store image' and 'older consumer' research informs the empirical development of a new scale, which is subsequently used to satisfy the requirement for an age-based typology, namely for older shoppers (Breazeale and Lueg, 2011; Sudbury and Simcock, 2009). This builds upon previous research within this context that has focused on a creating a qualitative typology from the literature and in-depth interviews (Angell et al., 2012). This extends this work using a more rigorous and scientific procedure.

This article begins by reviewing both shopper typology and store image literature before presenting the empirical research process employed in this study. A series of conclusions are drawn from the findings, providing implications for theory, retail practice and future research.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Shopper types

A number of studies have successfully constructed shopper typologies in a range of settings (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Darden and Reynolds, 1971; Reynolds et al., 2002), utilising a mixture of methods (Moschis, 1976; Westbrook and Black, 1985) and sampling groups (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Breazeale and Lueg, 2011). The earliest example of customer profiling originates in the work of Stone (1954) who identified different types of urban shopper. This trend continued in the work of other researchers who used motivational attributes as the basis for segmentation (e.g. Guiot and Roux, 2010; Jarratt, 1996; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999; Tauber, 1972; Westbrook and Black, 1985). In variations of this approach, other studies have used store image attributes as an alternative to motivational items with the intention of locating aspects of the store having higher (or lower) importance to different customers (Hansen and Deutscher, 1977–1978;

Memery et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2002). The objective is to classify shoppers into meaningful groups by assessing variations in a series of focal attributes. For instance, Reynolds et al. (2002) identified six traditional and mall shopper types from 17 store attributes; namely Basic, Apathetic, Destination, Enthusiasts, Serious, and Brand. In recent years, research has started to consider the development of profiling for more specific groups of customers e.g. cultures (Jin and Kim, 2003; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009), genders (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1993) and age groups (Breazeale and Lueg, 2011). Sudbury and Simcock (2009) categorised 50–79 year old shoppers in the UK using a wide range of ageing and behavioural variables derived from gerontology literature and consumer research. They found five clusters in the older consumer market—solitary sceptics, bargain hunting belongers, self-assured sociables, positive pioneers and cautious comfortables. However, three of these clusters had an average chronological age of under 60 years and few of the scales used were associated with store image attributes, thus inhibiting meaningful marketing management decision making for specific aspects of the retail offer.

2.2. Store image

Store image has appeared in the extant literature since the seminal work of Martineau (1958) who described it as fusing functional qualities and psychological attributes comprising the retail store. Despite its rich heritage, there remains little clarity in how store image should be conceptualized (Hartman and Spiro, 2005). Most definitions confirm that store image is a holistic measurement in which the shopper assesses components forming constituent parts of their store evaluations (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974). It is therefore a multi-attribute construct (James et al., 1976; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) where the overall impression is greater than the sum of the parts (Oxenfeldt, 1974–1975).

Debates have centred on the appropriate construction and measurement of store image (Buttle, 1985; Samli et al., 1998). In the seminal article by Martineau (1958), four key attributes were identified: layout and architecture, symbols and colour, advertising, and sales personnel. Kunkel and Berry (1968) later developed this to include 12 dimensions, each comprising between three and seven attributes. Lindquist (1974–1975) reviewed 26 research papers representing the most commonly cited store image studies. He compiled a list of nine factors: merchandise, service, clientele, physical facilities, convenience, promotion, store atmosphere, institutional factors and post-transaction satisfaction. He suggested that these comprised various attribute-level considerations, but confirmed that previous research, on which his article was based, showed merchandise to be the most salient dimension of image when viewed through a consumer lens. Hansen and Deutscher (1977–1978) extended earlier research to produce a quantitative instrument that yielded a list of 41 variables, constituting the most important variables to shoppers when selecting a grocery and department store. These were subsequently ranked and compared across both types of retailer.

Zimmer and Golden (1988) later attacked the lack of empirical, inductive research in previous developments of store image theory. Following a rigorous qualitative content analysis procedure 47 attributes were derived, representing seven dimensions. They argue that this more deeply captured retail store image than past studies, claiming their taxonomy was unique in terms of its inquiry, particularly in light of the fact that previous research had been dominated mostly by deductive applications.

The evidence presented thus far is compelling in its implications for store image research. However, in common with the body of consumer typology research, previous store image research has tended to ignore older consumers' use of 'specific' attributes to evaluate retail experiences (e.g. Bearden and Mason, 1979; Hare