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## Seniors and their food shopping behavior: an empirical analysis

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### Abstract

The focus of our research was to provide an empirical evidence for determining the behaviour and satisfaction of older customers during their food procurement process and to propose some recommendations to retail managers aiming at better consideration and meeting the expectations of the older people. Data collection involved two focus groups with older customers aged over 60 years. The findings from group interviews were supported by the results from a questionnaire distributed among 468 seniors. Both qualitative and quantitative results have indicated that age dimensions influence perceptions and behaviour related to store evaluation.

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### 1. Introduction

Seniors have been usually viewed as an unattractive market due to the perception that they had limited spending power and the image of old people being frail. However, this perception seems to be short-sighted, because not only will be this market growing for the near future, but new pensioners with higher income will come to the segment. To justify studying the seniors' age group, there are a number of factors that differentiate them from other segments. These factors depend on changes in health, lifestyle and psychographic characteristics resulting in specific marketplace needs.

The purchase behavior of older consumers differs somewhat from that of their younger counterparts. Many authors (Moschis, 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2005; Petterson, 2007) have specified such differences, which include: expecting personal attention and special services, considering shopping to be a social event, perceiving brand and

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retailer reputation, longer time in purchase decision-making, increased store loyalty, etc. Given the range of differences noted, retailers need to give them serious consideration and use them to differentiate their services to different consumer segments.

Satisfaction with an activity is a necessary precondition for repeat behavior (Nagyova et al., 2014). With regard to food retailing, consumers face an array of stores in which to shop and the level of choice that exists is immense. In order to guarantee satisfaction, consumers' wants and needs must first be recognized.

With advancing age seniors experience a decline in appetite, food intake and dietary adequacy (Hare et al., 2001) as well as a decreasing ability to taste and smell, chewing difficulties and limited dexterity. Food product developers and retailers should be aware of these changes and tailor their products and services to their customer needs.

Several areas of seniors' satisfaction with the shopping have been identified. Within the store environment, problems have been reported with the use of some facilities, such as large trolleys or large baskets. Also problems with reading price displays and labels on shelves were found to be important to satisfaction (Oates et al., 1996). Several studies found respondents had difficulties reaching high and low shelves and to use deep freezers (Leighton et al., 1996). Seniors suggested that in such cases they either did not purchase the item or had to find staff to help. Older consumers would like to have seats in stores when they feel tired or good lighting within the store.

Display of products has been found to be very important (Oates et al., 1996; Lumpkin et al., 1985). Changing displays of products around a store as a part of retailers' display policy has been frequently criticized by older consumers.

One aspect of dissatisfaction identified in numerous studies has been the service at check-outs (Goodwin & McElwee, 1999; Johnson-Hillery et al., 1997). Long queues at check-outs and overcrowding causes dissatisfaction in older consumers.

Products-related aspects are very important for older consumers (Moschis, 1991). One aspect which is frequently reported to be dissatisfying is the quantity in packaged food. The quantities of food normally packaged were reported as being too large for older people with smaller appetites, particularly when the food is bought for one person (Lumpkin, 1985). Price is also recognized as being decisive factor to older people, particularly for those with low incomes.

Finally, staff and service are important in ensuring satisfaction among older consumers (Johnson-Hillery et al., 1997). This is particularly relevant in availability of staff ready to help with locating products, information on products and advising (Goodwin & McElwee, 1999). Just as staff can bring satisfaction, it can also cause dissatisfaction when they are unfriendly and unhelpful.

Hence, there appears to be a broad range of factors influencing the satisfaction of older consumers when shopping for foods. These factors will be explored and recommendation presented to improve satisfaction level.

## **2. Methodology and goals**

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed for the purpose of this study, whereby each played a distinct yet complementary role. Criteria for inclusion in the research were elderly people aged over 60 years, living independently and carrying out their household shopping. Participants for the research were recruited through senior clubs and age-specific organizations.

Qualitative data was initially obtained with the aim to focus the study and to construct the questionnaire. The data was collected using focus group interviews. Focus groups were used as they are particularly suited to the study of peoples' knowledge, attitudes and experiences. Two focus group interviews were held with 10 participants each, of both gender and aged 60+ years.

The purpose of the interviews was to identify the main food shopping issues experienced by older people and to find out whether or not they were satisfied by the current food retail service.

The focus group interviews were recorded and analyzed according to principles of content analysis, where substantive statements were identified from individual transcripts (Stewart et al., 2007).

The analysis was conducted in more stages. In step one, texts were presented as a whole, a so called naive reading. Statements were then made based on the impressions of and reflections about the wholeness and important elements in the text that had emerged during the naive reading. Then all parts of the text relating to the aim of the study were divided into meaning units that seemed to be similar. In next step the meaning units were coded. The

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