



## The role of food shopping in later life



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### ABSTRACT

By the time they reach retirement, individuals are typically highly experienced in sourcing food products and they have strong familiarity with food retailing environments. To investigate the ongoing role of food shopping in later life, the present study explored seniors' attitudes to food shopping and their food-selection behaviours through the lens of their broader lifestyles. The aim was to provide insights of relevance to the development of future efforts to optimise seniors' food shopping experiences and nutrition-related outcomes. Interviews were conducted with 75 Western Australians aged 60 + years to discuss food shopping in the context of their day-to-day lives. The sample was comprised mainly of women ( $n = 64$ ) and the average age was 74 years. In general, food shopping was perceived to be a manageable but mundane part of life. The findings suggest that there has been an improvement in food retailing practices because many of the numerous areas of concern identified in previous research conducted in this geographical location a decade ago were not nominated as relevant by the interviewees. Instead, food-related issues reported to be most problematic included the difficulties associated with sourcing affordable food products that had been produced locally and that did not contain unacceptable food additives. Seniors' food shopping concerns thus appear to have changed from functional aspects of the physical store environment to product attributes that reflect the increasing industrialisation of the food industry.

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### 1. Introduction

Rapid population ageing makes it important to ensure older food shoppers' marketplace needs are met to optimise individuals' health-related outcomes and ensure the viability of food retailers attempting to accommodate age-related needs and preferences (Cameron, Richardson, & Siameja, 2016). Work to date in this area has tended to focus on just one of the two different aspects of the food procurement process: food shopping experiences in retail stores or specific food choices (i.e., at the product or brand level). The present study investigates the intersection between store- and food-related decisions and behaviours among community-living seniors to understand how these factors combine to contribute to the nature and quality of older people's diets. The results may inform the further enhancement of retail stores to better accommodate older people's needs and the development of interventions

designed to encourage modifications in food selection behaviours in accordance with changing dietary needs with advancing age.

#### 1.1. Store factors

Much previous research on food retailing for seniors has focused on older people's (dis)satisfaction with various aspects of the physical store environment, including the food products available, the accessibility of items, and interactions with store personnel (Moschis, Curasi, & Bellenger, 2004; Munoz-Plaza et al. 2013; Pettigrew, Mizerski, & Donovan, 2004, 2005). Specific areas identified in past studies as needing attention have included the functioning of equipment (e.g., trolleys), the receptiveness and helpfulness of store staff, and transport issues such as parking availability, public transport options, and home delivery services (Meneely, Burns and Strugnell 2009; Meneely, Strugnell and Burns 2009; Omar, Tjandra, & Ensor, 2014; Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2010; Pettigrew et al., 2004, 2005; Teller, Gittenberger, & Schnedlitz, 2013). This research provides valuable insights into those aspects of the retail environment that can be modified to enhance the shopping experience and make it manageable for older customers who can have different physical limitations and psychological needs relative to those in

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other age groups.

Other work has focused on store-related decision criteria. Factors that have consistently been found to impact on older people's choice of food store include the reputation of the store and the brands it carries, the range of products available, and perceived value for money (Angell, Megicks, Memery, Heffernan, & Howell, 2012; Meneely, Strugnell et al., 2009; Teller et al., 2013; Worsley, Chun Wang, & Hunter, 2011: for a review see; Pettigrew & Moschis, 2012). Older people have been found to undertake a larger number of shopping trips and purchase fewer items on each trip relevant to younger age groups (Meneely, Strugnell et al., 2009; Nilsson, Gärling, Marell, & Nordvall, 2015), and to be less likely to patronise fast food restaurants because of their concerns about the healthiness of the products sold (Thompson et al. 2011). A related stream of work has focused on older people's shopping-related motives. Over and above the primary motive of product procurement, visiting food stores has been found to provide social and physical benefits for seniors by facilitating interaction with others and constituting a form of physical exercise (Meneely, Strugnell et al., 2009; Meneely, Burns et al., 2009; Moschis et al., 2004).

### 1.2. Food choice criteria

Work to date on older people's food choices has often focused on frail or institutionalised populations because of the critical nutrition needs of these groups (e.g., Kim, 2016). By comparison, the evidence base relating to food choice processes among community-living older people is limited (Host, McMahon, Walton, & Charlton, 2016a). Existing research relating to community-living seniors highlights the importance of sociocultural factors, cost, convenience, quality, health status, health beliefs, and sensory factors in older people's food choices (Falk, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1996; Host, McMahon, Walton, & Charlton, 2016b; Payette & Shatenstein, 2005). In this sense, seniors' decision criteria reflect those included in food choice models developed for the general population (Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, & Falk, 1996; Sobal & Bisogni, 2009), indicating that the differences between age segments may be more a matter of emphasis than substance. For example, while healthiness and freshness can be important attributes for shoppers of all ages (Lappalainen, Kearney, & Gibney, 1998), older consumers have been found to make healthier food purchases than their younger counterparts and to mainly buy products that enable them to prepare meals from scratch rather than relying on processed meals (Anderson, Winett, & Wojcik, 2000; Hunter & Worsley, 2009).

Food choices in later life are especially important because of the increasing prevalence of various nutrition-related illnesses at this stage of life (e.g., diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer: Eyre et al. 2004). Due to the paucity of current evidence relating to food choices in older age, there is a recognised need for more work with older community members to inform efforts to encourage the intake of specific foods and nutrients that protect against age-related decline (Keller, 2007; Rodriguez & Miller, 2015). Such efforts need to accommodate the heterogeneity of the senior segment resulting from older people's longer lifespans relative to other population segments and hence their more varied accumulated experiences that influence their attitudes and behaviours in diverse ways (Lowsky, Olshansky, Bhattacharya, & Goldman, 2013; World Health Organization, 2015). Other considerations are that nutrition-related confidence can be lower among seniors relative to younger population segments and that nutrition needs change with age, which results in an ongoing need to reassess and modify nutritional intake in the later years (Giacalone et al., 2016; Meneely, Burns et al., 2009).

The aim of the present study was to extend the limited evidence base relating to how older people approach the shopping process to

inform efforts to ensure good dietary intentions translate into healthy instore purchases. Both their store- and product-level cognitions and behaviours were of interest. Given the multifactorial nature of this topic, an exploratory methodological approach was adopted that involved incorporating conversations about food shopping within older people's broader discussions about diet and nutrition.

## 2. Method

The study received ethics clearance from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. As part of a larger longitudinal project designed to assess seniors' food-related behaviours over time, interviews were conducted with 75 Western Australians aged 60 + years who were participating in the larger study. The recruitment and interviewing process was novel in that numerous strategies (e.g., flyers, community newspaper advertisements, and community radio advertisements) were used to recruit a small group of seniors ( $n = 8$ ) to take on the role of data collectors. These participants were asked to invite friends, acquaintances, and word-of-mouth contacts to be interviewed as part of the study, with the only criterion for participation being at least 60 years of age. This approach to interviewing is consistent with suggestions to involve older people in data collection to facilitate higher levels of rapport and empathy (European Research Area in Ageing, 2008; Pettigrew & Moschis, 2012).

The eight data collectors received a semi-structured interview guide, a document outlining recommended interviewing techniques, and a face-to-face training session on how to conduct the interviews. The interview guide covered a wide range of related topics including favourite foods, mealtime routines, typical shopping behaviours, and familiarity with nutrition guidelines. Consistent with an inductive approach (Huberman & Miles, 1994), the data collectors were encouraged to ask open-ended questions wherever possible and to provide general prompts that allowed their interviewees to spontaneously mention topics that were of particular interest and relevance to them. They were also encouraged to ask follow-up questions and probe for further information where possible. This emergent approach has the potential to identify a larger range of relevant variables (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), thereby providing deeper insight into which aspects of the food procurement process are most important to seniors. The data collectors were then interviewed according to the interview guide as an example of how to conduct the interviews and they retained a copy of the audio recording to consult later if needed as a reminder. These initial interviews were included in the final data set that was subsequently analysed. The data collectors were given a smart phone with digital audio-recording capability to use as a recording device during their interviews, which they were able to retain at the conclusion of the study as a form of compensation for their time and commitment. The value of the device was approximately 80 Australian dollars.

Data collection occurred from February to December 2015. The data collectors and all their interviewees received an information letter about the study and a consent form that was completed prior to commencement of the interview. The interviews were conducted in interviewees' homes, which enhanced their physical and psychological comfort and facilitated observations of their food preparation areas. In some instances, interviewees took advantage of the opportunity to go to their fridges or cupboards to bring out food products to discuss during the interviews. Most of the interviewees were female ( $n = 64$ ) and the average age was 74 years (range 60–101 years). Among the majority ( $n = 71$ ) who reported their living situation, around half ( $n = 34$ ) lived alone and half ( $n = 33$ ) lived with a spouse/partner. Two lived with a spouse/

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