



Research report

It is not just a meal, it is an emotional experience – A segmentation of older persons based on the emotions that they associate with mealtimes [☆]



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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, the group of older persons is growing fast. To aid this important group in their food and meal requirements, a deeper insight into the expectations and experiences of these persons regarding their mealtimes and snack times is needed. In the current study, we aim to identify consumer segments within the group of vital community-dwelling older persons on the basis of the emotions they associate with their mealtimes and snack times (from now on referred to as mealtimes). Participants ($n = 392$, mean age 65.8 (years) ± 5.9 (SD)) completed an online survey. The survey consisted of three questionnaires: emotions associated with mealtimes, functionality of mealtimes, and psychographic characteristics (health and taste attitudes, food fussiness, and food neophobia). Consumer segments were identified and characterised based on the emotions that the respondents reported to experience at mealtimes, using a hierarchical cluster analysis. Clusters were described using variables previously not included in the cluster analysis, such as functionality of mealtimes and psychographic characteristics. Four consumer segments were identified: *Pleasurable averages*, *Adventurous arousals*, *Convivial indulgers*, and *Indifferent restrictives*. These segments differed significantly in their emotional associations with mealtimes both in valence and level of arousal. The present study provides actionable insights for the development of products and communication strategies tailored to the needs of vital community-dwelling older persons.

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Introduction

Older persons are the consumers of the future as they are an increasingly growing and heterogeneous part of the world's population (RIVM, 2013; United Nations, 2002). Currently available commercial food products do not always meet the needs and wants of these persons (Moschis, 2003; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007). When products are better aligned with the requirements of older persons, an adequate nutrient intake is more likely. The latter can prolong the independence of older persons in the long term. Surprisingly, older persons have often been neglected in the past few decades of product development and marketing. Also, segments within the elderly food

market have received little attention, despite the diversity in meanings of food and eating for these subgroups (Morgan, 1993; van der Zanden, van Kleef, de Wijk, & van Trijp, 2014). These diverse meanings result from long and divergent experiences and memories regarding food and eating occasions. Consequently, products targeted at a generic older population, neglecting subgroups, have a high chance of failing on the market (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). Hence, it is essential to tailor healthy and tasty foods to subgroups of older persons in order to better meet their food requirements (van der Zanden et al., 2014).

In previous segmentations of older persons, various approaches were applied. McCann's (1974) early attempts to segment older persons were based on chronological age: young old (age (years) 55–64), mature old (age (years) 65–74) and old old (age (years) > 75). However, age alone did not sufficiently explain differences in behaviour, and segmentation models based on socio-demographic factors were introduced (Leventhal, 1991; Lumpkin, 1985; Moschis & Mathur, 1993). Later studies showed that psychographics (e.g. values, attitudes, and personality traits) and gerontographics (e.g. life changing events and experiences) gave a more actionable basis for segmentation (Morgan, 1993; Moschis, 2003; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007; Tynan & Drayton, 1985a, 1985b). For example, Morgan (1993)

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segmented older persons based on general attitude statements towards food and eating, such as 'I'm willing to pay more for easy-to-prepare foods,' 'I am trying to cut down on the amount of salt I consume,' and 'Eating at restaurants is too expensive.' Three segments were described: 'Nutrition concerned', 'Fast and healthy' and 'Traditional couponers'. Later, comprehensive segmentation models, using gerontographics of older Americans, were used by Moschis (2003) and Sudbury and Simcock (2009). Moschis divided the group of older persons into four segments that differed in level of financial independence, healthiness, isolation, socially withdrawnness, solitariness, activity, and acceptance of being 'old.' Sudbury and Simcock (2009) segmented 650 older persons (age 50–79 years) based on variables reflecting the major dimensions of ageing and behavioural variables relevant for older adults. Five segments emerged that differed in, for example, general consumer behaviour and behaviour towards marketing campaigns.

Segmentation based on mealtime and snack time (from now on referred to as mealtimes) experiences could give additional insights into the needs and wants of older subgroups (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). This approach has been suggested as most suitable for the nutrient-enriched food market targeted at older persons, and is referred to as a 'preference-based approach' (van der Zanden et al., 2014). We believe that psychographics and gerontographics are too general to provide such specific insights. Various factors may influence the experience of mealtimes, such as emotions related to mealtimes, functionality of mealtimes (e.g. energising, calming), attitudes towards health and taste, food neophobia, and food fussiness. So far, little is known about the influence of these factors on the mealtime experiences of older persons.

Older persons may vary in the emotions that they associate with their mealtimes, due to long and divergent experiences with and memories of these occasions. Segmenting older persons based on these emotions can give valuable insights into the meal experience of subgroups. King and Meiselman (2010) suggest that the emotions that foods elicit after consumption may help to elucidate product choice and consumer behaviour, beyond liking alone. Besides, it is known that, as people grow older, they more often seek emotionally meaningful goals, and they tend to rely more on emotions and heuristics than their younger counterparts (Fung & Carstensen, 2003; Perry & Wolburg, 2011). Consequently, older persons might also rely more on their emotions when it comes to food consumption and meal experience.

Meal functionality – the functions that persons ascribe to specific mealtimes, e.g. energising or relaxing – seems to be another concept that provides a deeper understanding of food consumption motives. Thomson, Crocker, and Marketo (2010) recently discussed this topic and emphasised the use of conceptualisations, such as 'will refresh me,' 'will make me happy,' and 'will annoy me,' to understand consumer behaviour. These conceptualisations seem to be inevitably connected to food experience, since we react not only to the product itself but also to the associations that we assign to that product.

Psychographic characteristics, such as health and taste attitudes (Roininen, Lahteenmaki, & Tuorila, 1999), food neophobia (Pliner & Hobden, 1992), and food fussiness (Wardle, Guthrie, Sanderson, & Rapoport, 2001), may provide insight into the meal experience as well. The health and taste attitude scales measure the impact of health and taste in the food choice process. When the relative importance of these two aspects is understood, a deeper insight into the meal experience of older persons is gained (Roininen et al., 2001). Food neophobia scores and food fussiness scores indicate the willingness of a person to accept both known and unknown foods. This acceptance is important for new product development, as low product acceptance can occur when food neophobia and food fussiness are high. Early studies showed that people become less neophobic as they grow older (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). However,

in more recent studies, the opposite was observed (Dovey, Staples, Gibson, & Halford, 2008; Henriques, King, & Meiselman, 2009; Meiselman, King, & Gillette, 2010). This age dependency, either positive or negative, underlines the importance of including a food neophobia questionnaire when mealtime experiences are being assessed.

In the current study, we aim to identify consumer segments of vital community-dwelling older persons on the basis of the emotions that they associate with their mealtimes. We describe these segments using the functionality of mealtimes, health and taste attitudes, food neophobia, and food fussiness.

Materials and methods

Participants

Table 1 provides the participants' characteristics. Three hundred and ninety-two vital independently living older persons (158 males and 234 females, mean age 65.8 (years) \pm 5.9 (SD)) completed an online survey. The participants were all members of the SenTo panel (Dutch abbreviation of *Senioren van de Toekomst*: Seniors of the Future). The SenTo panel is a panel initiated by Wageningen UR of 769 healthy community-dwelling Dutch older persons. The criteria for membership of the SenTo panel are: being at least 55 years old, being capable of working online with a computer, being able to go out for, e.g., grocery shopping independently, and being fluent in Dutch.

Procedure and questionnaires

Participants filled out an online survey consisting of three questionnaires emailed to them with at least a week in between (Table 2). The questionnaires included a total of 243 questions, all scored on 9-point Likert scales. The social ethical committee of Wageningen University approved the current study.

The first questionnaire contained emotions relating to mealtimes. Participants rated 15 EsSense Profile® emotions (King & Meiselman, 2010) for three traditional mealtimes (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) and four additional eating occasions (snack morning, snack afternoon, snack evening and dessert) (Table 2). Before the participants rated their emotions for each mealtime, they were

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the vital community-dwelling older persons (n = 392).

Factor	Level	% of sample
Gender	Male	40
	Female	60
Age	55–65 years	46
	65–77 years	47
	75–85 years	7
Marital status	Single	9
	Married/living together	81
	Divorced	5
	Widowed	5
Living arrangements	Living independently alone	24
	Living independently together	74
	Assisted living	2
Educational level	Low	23
	Middle	20
	High	38
	Unknown	19
Consumption of a meal/snack	Breakfast	98
	Lunch	96
	Dinner	99
	Snack morning	52
	Snack afternoon	55
	Snack evening	52
	Dessert	55

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