

Food Shopping Behaviour in Older Consumers' Segment

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Abstract

The focus of our research is to provide a theoretical rationale and empirical evidence for determining the behaviour and perceptions of older customers during their food shopping process. Perceptions of older shoppers are in contrast to younger shopper, affected by their biological ageing, reduction of mobility, declining vision, chronic illnesses, etc.

Two principal aims are formulated in our paper: to identify the factors with positive and negative impact upon food shopping experience in older customers segment 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 65 years. Both focus groups consisted of twelve adults. 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 analyzed according to principles of thematic content analysis, where substantive categories were identified from individual statements. The findings from group interviews were supported by the results from a questionnaire distributed among 468 seniors. To determine the food shopping experience, respondents were asked to evaluate 12 substantive categories impacting on their food shopping satisfaction.

Both qualitative and quantitative results have indicated that age dimensions influence perceptions and behaviour related to store evaluation. Older people experience a range of distinct positive and negative factors in their food shopping. Negative factors identified by this segment include several in-store design and layout factors, in-store assistance, product-size of foods and also promotion of multi-purchase products. Positive factors associated with food shopping include variety and quality of products. Based on the findings, areas to improve the service for older shoppers' segment have been recommended to retail management.

Keywords: Shopping behaviour, shopping satisfaction, seniors.

JEL classification: M 20

1. Introduction

The paper presents the findings of research into the development of shopping satisfaction of older people. We find that there are still segments of elderly consumers dissatisfied when shopping for foodstuffs, which cannot be ignored.

Seniors have been traditionally viewed as making up an unattractive market due to the perception that they have low income and spending power and are frail. However, this perception is a sign of myopia, because not only is this market constantly growing, but also new pensioners with higher income and pensions will move into the segment (Lesakova, 2013). There are a number of factors that differentiate the elderly population from other age groups, and justify studying it. These factors depend on changes in health and psychographic characteristics which result in special shopping and interior store needs (Sandor, 1994; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2001). Within the existing literature there is agreement that lower prices, behaviour of the service staff, avoiding long queues at checking points and product accessibility on the shelves are particularly important to senior shoppers. Older people also consider as important that shopping places are clean and easily accessible (Moschis, 2003; Moschis et al., 2004).

In the following chapters the factors influencing seniors' satisfaction with food stores are presented, based on the results of empirical research.

2. The attributes of shopping satisfaction

The core of marketing strategy and an essential goal in business is to identify effective ways of serving customers and satisfying their needs. Companies that satisfy their customers achieve better results, while those with dissatisfied customers fail. These findings are valid across the consumer goods, services markets and also when individuals are choosing a store to shop at (Giese & Cote, 2000; Lesakova, 2009).

Customer satisfaction in general is the customer's evaluation (from good to bad, pleasant to unpleasant) of a specific purchase or shopping experience. This means, satisfaction is how the customer feels about a specific product, store or shopping experience.

Customers evaluate shopping experiences and arrive at „satisfaction judgments“ by comparing what they actually received against their expectations (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Research confirms that satisfaction is an important variable driving positive word-of-mouth recommendations and loyalty. The tendency of customers to stick with a store or brand, loyalty is closely tied to firm profitability. Consumer dissatisfaction can result in negative word of mouth and lost sales. Building satisfaction is especially important in the retail sector.

Several areas for building satisfaction in the shopping process have been identified in the existing literature: product-related aspects, internal store environment, staff service, and store accessibility. Within the store environment, critical aspects have been reported in the use of facilities including large trolleys or large baskets (Pettigrew et al., 2005). Difficulties with product labels and price displays on shelves were also identified as being important for satisfaction (Moschis, 1991; Goodwin & McElwee, 1999). Several studies have revealed that seniors have problems reaching high and low shelves and using deep freezers (Moschis, 2003; Moschis et al, 2004). In fact, older shoppers indicated that in such cases they either did not purchase the item or had to ask the staff for help. Research aimed on the oldest seniors found that they expect stores to provide seats they can use when they feel tired.

Product location on shelves and ease of finding products are very important. Retailers often move products around the store as a part of their business and display policy in order to force customers to walk around the whole store. This tactic has come under criticism from both older and younger consumers (Oates et al., 1996; Lesakova, 2013). Numerous studies have also found that long queues at checking points are another source of dissatisfaction among older consumers (Goodwin & McElwee, 1999). Product-related aspects are in general very important for both older and younger consumers (Lumpkin et al., 1985; Schewe, 1988). However, differences exist in the importance attached by various segments to particular product aspects.

Price is recognised as one of the most important attributes to older people, particularly for those with low incomes (Lesakova, 2013). In fact, price is the most influential attribute for oldest seniors, and is central to the vast majority of seniors for their store choice. Seniors are focused on price and actively seek out products with lowest possible price. They are prepared to do a considerable amount of traveling to find the lowest prices. The importance of the price goes up with age. Older people like to use discount stores and stores with frequent and sales. Lambert reported that people with low incomes were forced to compromise quality for price (Lambert, 1979).

Another frequently reported cause of dissatisfaction was that the quantity of packaged food. It is not efficient for older people with smaller appetites to buy family packaging, especially when a purchase is made for a single individual (Moschis et al., 1997).

On the other hand, an important area in ensuring satisfaction among older consumers is staff knowledge and courteousness (Lesakova, 2013), particularly the availability of staff ready to help with locating products, providing information on products as well as advice on product attributes (Goodwin & McElwee, 1999). Just as staff can bring satisfaction, they can also cause dissatisfaction, when they are unfriendly and unhelpful (Peterson & Wilson, 1992).

Differences exist between the various branches of retail in the factors influencing older individuals' trust and satisfaction. Moschis et al. found such factors as store distance from home, brands familiar to seniors and fast check-outs to be important considerations in food shopping (Moschis et al., 1997). Factors such as hygiene, cleanliness, familiarity of layout, quality and low prices have been revealed as important for both older and younger age segments (Lumpkin et al., 1985; Lambert, 1979).

Hence, there appears to be a broad range of factors influencing the satisfaction of older consumers. In the following chapters these factors will be explored in relation to the level of their importance on satisfaction and the differences among the age subsegments will be explored.

3. Methodology and goals

Two principal aims are formulated in our paper: to identify the factors with positive and negative impact upon food shopping experience in older customers segment 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.

Specifically, we measure the satisfaction level with the shopping experience, discuss the areas of satisfaction and perceived dissatisfaction of older consumers in food shopping and explore the influence of age and seniors' health on their level of satisfaction. The central aim of the paper is to uncover those areas in which seniors perceive either satisfaction or dissatisfaction when food shopping.

A three-step approach was used to discover and formulate the areas of seniors' shopping satisfaction. First, a literature review was conducted to indicate general consistencies and specific inconsistencies in the attributes influencing shopping experience (Stewart et al, 2007). Second, focus group interviews delivered introductory data to provide deeper insight into development of satisfaction specific to foodstuffs / grocery stores. Two focus groups, each consisting of eight seniors, were used.. After a brief description of the research project, participants expressed their opinions about attributes important to store choice. Respondents were first asked to recall previous purchase situations and to describe when / where they felt good (or did not feel good) and to use their own words to describe the situation. This was done to generate many responses across various situations and to determine similar and typical features (Hayley et al., 2008). Focus group interviews provided the basis for the third phase, developing the questionnaire. A total of 468 questionnaires were collected from respondents aged 65+ who shopped for food. A profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Finally, in order to determine the general outcomes from the research, differences between the seniors regarding their perceived health and chronological age were examined.

To measure satisfaction, 12 factors were selected and respondents were asked to rate the factors according to the food-store in which they regularly/most frequently do their shopping. A five-point scale was used to evaluate the factors, ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Using a scale of this type to measure satisfaction is common, as it enables opinions grading.

The indicators of median and interquartile range were used to measure the central tendency and spread and to present an overview of the results. The interquartile range provides a more detailed picture of the sample's satisfaction levels. The minimum and maximum values are also mentioned in the research in order to identify whether respondents used the full range of the scale. In order to evaluate the levels of satisfaction accurately, frequencies were used. This means that the levels of dissatisfaction were not „hidden“ by most of the positive data. Mann-Whitney-U test was employed to explore the impact of the age and perceived health condition of seniors. This is a statistical test for a variable measured on an ordinal scale, and compares the differences in the mean values of two populations based on observations from two independent samples. The comparison between two samples based on the sum of the ranked scores indicates the number of times a score from one of the samples is ranked higher than a score from the other sample.

4. Results and discussion

In order to present an overview of the data, the median and inter-quartile range of the satisfaction ratings were calculated (see Table 2), where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied. Point 3 on the scale indicates „neutral“, meaning „neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied“.

Characteristics		n=468 %
Age	65 -74 years	48
	75 + years	52
Health	Health limits in my shopping	55
	No health limits in my shopping	45

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Source: the author's own calculations

The results were spread across the full range of the 5-point scale, but fell predominantly in the 4 range, indicating a serious degree of satisfaction. However, Table 2 shows that the full range of scale values was used for all factors included in the assessment process except for price and quality of products, where the minimum and maximum were 2 and 5. This reveals that the respondents used the full 5-point range and also that dissatisfaction was expressed, despite the majority indicating satisfaction, which is documented in the inter-quartile range.

Observing the frequency of responses seems to be the best method for analysing the actual results of the data. Table 3 presents details of the frequencies for each factor and it indicates that there are some areas, such as price, store facilities, product quality or staff courteousness that cause dissatisfaction for more than a quarter of respondents. Price was found to be the most critical factor, with nearly 50 percent of respondents indicating they were „very dissatisfied“ or „quite dissatisfied“.

4.1. Attributes of satisfaction

Satisfaction is spread across all the factors explored. Ranked highest among the product-related aspects, the choice of products was found to be satisfying, though the tendency was more often „quite“ satisfying than „very“ satisfying. Similar patterns were found in some aspects of the internal store environment, especially in tag readability on shelves, with 65 percent of shoppers indicating they were satisfied. Two aspects of the internal store environment were found to be very satisfying (hygiene and cleanliness, with 77 percent indicating they were „very“ and „quite“ satisfied shoppers; and fast check-outs, with which 77 percent were „very“ or „quite“ satisfied shoppers), with the highest ranking and median value of five. Differences in the rates between the first and third quartile in both the factors “store facilities (trolleys, baskets)” or “display of products” indicate that there are different age subsegments within the sample that have different expectations and perception of satisfaction. Two aspects of staff service are perceived differently, with knowledge assessed mostly as „quite“ and „very“ satisfying, while courteousness received lower satisfaction ratings, with 30 percent of shoppers saying they were „very“ or „quite“ dissatisfied. These aspects have been identified as important in other studies (Oates et al., 1996; Lumpkin et al., 1985; Moschis et al., 1997), suggesting that they have a crucial impact on a positive shopping experience in the older consumers segment. Courteousness appears to be an area requiring more attention and staff training, as it is important to seniors.

Surprisingly, and in contrast with problems cited in the literature, store accessibility was seen in a positive light. However, satisfaction with this factor may vary depending on the type of store.

Main factor	Individual factor	Median	Inter-quartile range			Min-max
			25	50	75	
Product-related aspects	Choice of products	4	3	4	5	1-5
	Quality of products	3	2	3	4	1-4
	Price	3	2	3	3	1-4
	Promotions / sales	4	3	4	4	1-5
Internal store environment	Display of products	4	2	4	4	1-5
	Store facilities (trolleys, baskets)	4	2	4	4	1-5
	Legible tags on shelves	4	3	4	4	1-5
	Hygiene and cleanliness	5	4	5	5	1-5
	Fast check-outs	5	4	5	5	1-5
External store Environment	Accessibility	4	4	4	5	1-5
Staff	Knowledge	4	4	4	5	1-5
	Courteousness	3	2	3	4	1-5

Table 2. Summary of satisfaction data

Source: the author's own calculations

Main factor	Individual factor	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neutral	Quite dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Product-related aspects	Choice of products	27,3	44,8	21,8	4,3	1,8
	Quality of products	-	27,8	45,6	17,6	9,0
	Price	-	13,4	37,6	26,6	22,4
	Promotions	7,9	23,1	48,0	10,8	10,2
Internal store environment	Display of products	11,1	40,4	19,1	23,7	6,7
	Store facilities (trolleys, baskets)	11,6	29,2	20,1	29,3	9,8
	Legible tags on shelves	12,6	52,3	18,1	10,9	6,1
	Hygiene and cleanliness	55,8	21,7	14,0	5,5	3,0
	Fast check-out	19,2	22,2	34,8	14,2	9,6
External store environment	Accessibility	28,2	30,4	22,9	11,2	7,3
Staff	Knowledge	31,5	36,8	17,1	8,0	6,6
	Courteousness	14,0	21,3	34,3	15,2	15,2

Table 3. Percentage of respondents rating satisfaction performance

Source: the author's own calculations

4.2. Attributes of dissatisfaction

While the general trends in the research findings show a medium level of satisfaction, a number of areas cause dissatisfaction and have been strongly criticized. A remarkable area of dissatisfaction can be found within two product-related factors: product quality and price. Less than 14 percent of respondents expressed little satisfaction with price. Two aspects cause a high level of dissatisfaction in this area: the low incomes (pensions) of the seniors (especially of the oldest age segments 75+) and high taxes on foodstuffs. Nearly half of all respondents expressed a high or medium level of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction was expressed about the poor availability of cheap foodstuffs. However, this may be attributable to the type of store selected for shopping.

In the internal store environment category, display policy was an area that was identified to be dissatisfying. Moving goods around a store is a part of common retail strategy, forcing customers to walk through the whole store. However, because of mobility problems, such a strategy came under strong criticism by seniors.

4.3. Differences among age subsegments

The research data were tested for differences in satisfaction across two factors of perceived health and age. Mann-Whitney U-tests were carried out to determine the differences. Significant results were found regarding both factors. As for health, three factors were of significance, as Table 4 indicates.

Seniors who experienced some problems in their food shopping due to health problems, more often expressed dissatisfaction with the internal store environment and store access than those seniors whose health did not limit them. We have expected this to be the case, as people with health problems usually require special facilities, such as seats to rest for a while, or smaller, more manageable trolleys. It also indicates that satisfaction may vary according to different age subsegments of the senior population (Abdel-Ghany & Sharpe, 1997).

Factor	Mean rank		Significance of Mann-Whitney U-test
	Limitation in health status	No serious limitation in health	
Store facilities	28,91	39,04	0,031*
Display of products	26,90	39,32	0,015*
Access to stores	27,36	37,18	0,019*

Table 4. Significance of „limitations of health“ and „ratings of satisfaction“

*Significant at the 0,05 level

Source: the author's own calculations

This was also found to be true for the access factor, which was rated as satisfying by seniors with no health limitations more often than by seniors who had health problems. The research results indicate clearly that people who are limited by health are more likely to have a dissatisfying shopping experience, mainly due to the store environment and store access.

Comparing the mean rankings of younger (65-74) and older (75+) shoppers leads to the conclusion that two factors are significant, as can be seen in Table 5. Older consumers were more likely to be dissatisfied with the legibility of tags on shelves and with the price level of foodstuffs.

Factor	Mean rank		Significance of Mann-Whitney U-test
	65-74 years	75+ years	
Readability of tags	23,17	31,98	0,022*
Price level	27,13	43,69	0,009*

Table 5. Significance of „age“ and „ratings of satisfaction“

*Significant at the 0,05 level

Source: the author's own calculations

5. Conclusion

The results of the research reported in this paper reveal dissatisfaction with some factors influencing the shopping experience of seniors and indicate that not all expectations of older people are met. Five out of twelve factors in the research were identified as not fully meeting the needs of older shoppers. Even though there was a general trend towards satisfaction, seniors were „very“ satisfied or „quite satisfied“ with only a few factors, indicating the need for improvement. Retail managers should pay attention to the price policy and internal environment of their stores if they want to gain seniors' trust.

The findings indicate that the critical areas of dissatisfaction vary according to age subsegments of older people. It is therefore important that retailers pay attention to the different needs and expectations of various age subsegments and not simply see seniors as a homogeneous group. Areas that were particularly positive, were: choice of food products, store hygiene and cleanliness, accessibility and knowledgeable staff. Aspects of dissatisfaction included prices, display policy, store facilities and staff courteousness. These areas should be addressed by retailers.

Seniors' special needs need to be recognised not only by retailers, who seek to increase their business success, but also by policy makers who seek to improve retail as an industry.

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