

## **ATTRIBUTES OF SATISFACTION WITH FOODSHOPS AMONG OLDER SHOPPERS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The paper presents the findings of research into the development of shopping satisfaction of older people. I have concluded that there are still segments of elderly consumers, and neglected areas of dissatisfaction, 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 shortsighted, 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 particular shopping and interior store needs [Sandor 1994]. Within the existing literature there is agreement that lower prices, attitudes among service staff, avoiding long queues at check-out points and product accessibility on the shelves are particularly important to senior shoppers. They also consider it important that shopping places be clean and easily accessible [Moschis 2003, Moschis et al. 2004].

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

### **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 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 and 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.

Four key 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 [Mogelonsky 1995]. Difficulties making out product labels and price displays on shelves were also identified as being important for satisfaction [Moschis 1991, Goodwin et al. 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 focussing 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 in for criticism from both older and younger consumers [Oates et al. 1996, Lesakova 2013]. Numerous studies have also found that long queues at check-outs are another source of dissatisfaction among older consumers [Goodwin and McElwee 1999]. Product-related aspects are in general very important for both older and younger consumers [Lumpkin 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 factors to older people, particularly for those with low incomes [Lesakova 2013]. In fact, price is the most influential factor, 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 sales events. In a 1979 study, 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 could be too large for older people with smaller appetites, especially when a purchase is made for a single individual [Moschis 1997].

On the other hand, an important area in ensuring satisfaction among older consumers is staff knowledge and courteousness [Lesakova 2013], pertaining particularly to the avail-

ability of staff ready to help locate products, provide information on products as well as advice on product attributes [Goodwin et al. 1999]. Just as staff can bring satisfaction, they can also cause dissatisfaction when they are unfriendly and unhelpful [Peterson 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 [Lambert 1979, Lumpkin 1985].

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

## **METHODOLOGY AND GOALS**

The purpose of this paper is to propose a framework that can be used to assess older people's satisfaction with the shopping experience. In order to serve seniors effectively, retailers need a clear understanding of seniors' needs and wants [Buttle 2004].

Specifically, I measure the satisfaction level with the shopping experience, discuss the areas of satisfaction and perceived dissatisfaction of older consumers in the shopping process and, finally, 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. Second, focus group interviews delivered introductory data to provide deeper insight into development of satisfaction specific to foodstuffs/grocery stores. The group interview sample consisted of eight seniors. 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. Focus group interviews provided the basis for the third phase, the questionnaires, a total of 165 of which were collected from respondents aged 65 and over who shopped for food. 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 shop. 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 to be graded.

The indicators of median and interquartile range were used to measure the central tendency and spread 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 influence 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.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

TABLE 1. Respondent characteristics

Characteristics	n = 145 (%)
Age (years)	
65–74	48
75+	52
Health	
health limits in my shopping	55
no health limits in my shopping	45

Source: the author.

The results were spread across the full range of the five-point scale but fell predominantly in the four range, indicating a degree of satisfaction. However, Table 2 also 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 five-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".

## ATTRIBUTES OF SATISFACTION

Satisfaction is spread across all the factors explored. Ranked highest among the product-related aspects, the choice and promotion of products was found to be satisfying, though they tended to be “quite” satisfying more often than “very” satisfying. Similar patterns were found in some aspects of the internal store environment, especially in tag

TABLE 2. Summary of satisfaction data

Main factor	Subfactor	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	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

Source: the author.

TABLE 3. Percentage of respondents rating factors as satisfactory

Main factor	Subfactor	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	63.1	17.5	10.3	1.2
Internal store environment	display of products	11.1	40.4	19.1	23.7	6.7
	store facilities (trolleys, baskets)	11.6	39.2	20.1	19.3	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	54.8	22.2	15.2	4.2	3.6
External store environment	accessibility	30.2	45.5	7.9	9.1	7.3
Staff	knowledge	31.5	44.8	17.1	3.0	3.6
	courteousness	14.0	21.3	34.3	15.2	15.2

Source: the author.

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 the factors store facilities or display of products indicate that there are different subsegments within the sample that are approached with 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 1997], suggesting that they have a crucial impact on a positive shopping experience in the mature 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.

#### **ATTRIBUTES OF DISSATISFACTION**

While the general trends in the research findings show a medium level of satisfaction, a number of areas did come in for criticism. 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 policy. Two aspects cause a high level of dissatisfaction in this area: the low incomes (pensions) the seniors themselves have 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 viewed with dissatisfaction, as stock was moved around the store and the store facilities. This criticism may also be ascribed to store type.

#### **DIFFERENCES AMONG THE 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. One would expect this to be

the case, as people with health problems likely require special facilities, such as seats to rest on, or smaller, more manageable trolleys. It also indicates that satisfaction may vary according to different age subsegments of the senior population [Abdel-Ghany and Sharpe 1997].

This was also found to be true of the access factor, which was rated as satisfying by seniors with no health limitations more often than by their counterparts 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 ranks 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.

TABLE 4. Significance of “limitations of health“ and „ratings of satisfaction”

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*

\*Significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: the author.

TABLE 5. Significance of “age” and “ratings of satisfaction”

Factor	Mean rank		Significance of Mann-Whitney U-test
	65–74 years old	75+ years old	
Readability of tags	23.17	31.98	0.022*
Price level	27.13	43.69	0.009*

\*Significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: the author.

## CONCLUSIONS

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 being 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: promotions on food-stuffs, store hygiene and cleanliness, fast check-out and knowledgeable staff. Aspects of dissatisfaction centred around 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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**Summary.** The purpose of this paper is to propose a framework that can be used to develop a clear and conceptually consistent, context-specific system for assessing older people's satisfaction with the experience of food shopping. In particular, I suggest a method for identifying their satisfaction level with the shopping experience and discuss areas of satisfaction and perceived dissatisfaction in this segment of the population. I pose the question: "What are the areas in which seniors perceive dissatisfaction when shopping for foodstuffs?". I also explore the influence of age and health condition on satisfaction levels. To identify satisfaction, 12 attributes of the internal and external store environments were reviewed by a sample of senior respondents, who were asked to rate the attributes for the food store where they regularly/most frequently shop. While the results indicate a general trend towards satisfaction, areas of dissatisfaction do exist, including with the aspects of price policy, internal store environment and staff courtesy. This suggests that retail managers should pay more attention to seniors, as not all older consumers perceive their needs to be satisfactorily met.

**Key words:** satisfaction, retail store, seniors, shopping experience

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