

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Aging Consumers' Characteristics on Store Selection and Food Shopping: A Review

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Abstract: The human population is aging faster and faster than in the past. As a result, it can be demographically proven that there will be more people older than 60 worldwide in the next 35 years. According to the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA's) India Aging Report 2017, the proportion of people over 60 could increase from 8% in 2015 to 19% in 2050. The Indian government in particular states in its report that there will be 340 million people over 60 by 2050, creating new challenges due to specific characteristics and needs. However, this often overlooks the group of older consumers who make up a significant part of the world's annually growing population. Therefore, this paper explores the general characteristics of older consumers, their latent needs, and factors that influence their food choices. This is done through thorough literature review using secondary sources to identify factors influencing food shopping and shop selection among older consumers in India.

Keywords: aging consumers, consumer characteristics, food choice, store selection, India

Introduction

According to the United Nations report (2015), the aging population has emerged as one of the most vital aspects in social transformation today. The aging population is globally increasing, resulting in the constant change in the day-to-day dynamics (Meiners, 2016). These consumers are experiencing several fluctuations as they try to remain healthy and adapt to recent inventions and new medicines (Irving, 2014). Particularly, India is also going to evidence a drastic increase in its aging population, by which the

percentage of people who are aged 60+ is predicted to increase from 8% to 18% by 2050 (United Nations Population Fund, 2017). It was further added that by the year of 2050, the overall population of India is expected to increase by 56%, pinpointing that the 60+ population will grow by 326% and 700% in the 80+ age group.

Older adults form a vital customer segment given their overall percentage, trend in growth, and high spending ability (Doets & Kremer, 2016; Song et al., 2016; van der Zanden & van Trijp, 2017). This also indicates that the aging consumer segment is a dynamic market segment in emerging markets and

should not ignored by marketers to increase business growth (Meiners, 2014; Meiners & Seeberger, 2010). The more significant aspect of aging consumers is the percentage of the population is also attached to food; in fact, a major part of senior shoppers' total expenditures is spent precisely on food (Hare et al., 1999). Unlike younger consumers, who have been the focus of marketers, aging consumers are being significantly overlooked (Carrigan & Szmigin, 1998; Long, 1998; Marrin, 1998; Silvers, 1997). Many researchers have analyzed and concluded that age affects food choice decision and it has been a less examined variable over the years (Bermudez & Dwyer, 1999; Bridge & Dowling, 2001). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that consumers' food shopping behavior is significantly influenced by age in terms of nutritional dietary needs, food preparation, and consumption behavior (Parment, 2013). As people age, they experience a decrease in appetite and food intake (Hughes et al., 2004; Simpson et al., 2005) and, further, decline in their ability to chew, taste, and smell (Popper & Kroll, 2003). Therefore, it is recommended that food retailers are well aware about such consumer attributes, to tailor their offerings to this consumer segment.

Moreover, older consumers are still considered to be consistent in taste as they avoid trying new brands. Yet, such a perception is largely undermined by active senior buyers who are willing to experiment and are actively interested in new products and brands (Silvers, 1997; Szmigin & Carrigan, 1999). In previous studies, it was concluded that the aging population is considered a disadvantaged consumer segment with respect to food choice (Leighton & Seaman, 1997) and also in planning and setup of supermarket (Kirkup et al., 2004; Leighton & Seaman, 1997). However, considering the range and significance of differences identified, food retailers need to pay serious attention to serve this consumer segment in better ways.

Characteristics of Aging Consumers

Previous studies have explored aging consumers over the years and have concluded that they differ from younger consumers by price sensitivity, their attitude in taking purchasing decisions, their persistent desire to buy quality goods, and their higher degree of loyalty to certain stores (Kohijoki, 2011; Miller & Soyung,

1999; Moschis & Mathur, 1993; Tongren, 1988; Whelan et al., 2002). These antecedents play a significant role on aging consumers' shopping behavior and level of satisfaction (Meiners & Seeberger, 2010). Therefore, a better insight of consumer behavior can strengthen retailers' decisions to enrich their service to aging consumers (Angell et al., 2012). Oates et al. (1996) in their research study on psychographically segmenting older consumers concluded that demographics are adequate enough in better understanding consumers; thus, it may impact the marketer's decision with respect to the segment (Cooper, 1984). The consideration of psychographic information with demographics will help the marketer better understand the needs and wants of customers.

On the other hand, Fitzgerald-Bone (1991), in his study on senior citizens, reveals that chronological age seems to be an inappropriate variable for segmentation variables. Others agree as they emphasize the significance of lifestyle and psychographics in identifying different types of buyer behavior (Oates et al., 1996). However, it is worth mentioning that people above the age of 50 are collectively the wealthiest segment as they have more assets than younger individuals (Marmon, 2003). Elderly shoppers who are aged 55–74 hold 70% of nations' assets as their spending is primarily on apparel, dining, entertainment, and household furnishings (Lahue, 2000; Meiners, 2014). Furthermore, elderly counterparts can also be described as "New Age Elderly" (Sherman et al., 2001). Gollub and Javitz (1989) said that psychology, socioeconomics, and health are vital factors to understand how an older adult wants to live. Fox and French (1985) interviewed 200 gerontologists about older consumers' adjustment patterns and identified two factors:

- I. Enjoyment of the after retirement living and
- II. The secured feeling in adjusting to that lifestyle ignites types of behaviors and attitudes among the elderly.

Furthermore, Oates et al. (1996) stress the significance of store attributes and the lifestyle differs significantly while considering store and personnel qualities. To elaborate further, the following section will provide an overview of the types of aging consumers in a target group.

Types of Aging Consumers

Some studies have already examined different groups of aging consumers and differentiated between them. Researchers need to understand their different lifestyles and value orientations in order to generate practical implications that may assist retailers in adapting their strategies. Therefore, the following is an overview of the research findings in this area. For example, the research area of sociometrics has identified three types of 50+ target groups: the “passive old,” the “culturally active,” and the “experience-driven” (TNS Emnid, 2004). On the other hand, the Ernst Dichter Institute differentiated four types: “Trend-Blockers,” “Trend-Acceptors,” “Trend-Setters,” and “Trend-Jumpers” (Ernst Dichter Institut, 2000). Moreover, the research institute GfK differentiates between eight types: the “Dreamers,” the “Cozy,” the “Demanding,” the “Adventurous,” the “Critical,” the “Down-to-Earth,” those seeking “protection,” and those “open to the world” (GfK, 2005). The Senior Scout study focused on 50+ consumers pointing out four types: the “Trend-Oriented,” the “Individuals,” the “Preservers,” and the “Practical” (Reidl, 2007). Dychtwald splits seniors into four groups: the “Ageless Explorers,” the “Comfortably Contents,” the “Live for Today,” and the “Sick and Tireds” (Tsai, 2009). Furthermore, the Federal Association of the German Advertising Industry (ZAW) categorizes the 50+ generation into the following five types: the “Clever Cosmopolitans,” the “Hedonists,” the “Illiquid Traditionalists,” the “Moderate Xenophobes,” and the “Apathetic Aged” (ZAW, 2010). The Meyer-Hentschel Institute also differentiates between age groups as these three types: “pre-senior 50-plus,” “young seniors 60-plus,” and “older seniors 70-plus” (Meyer-Hentschel & Meyer-Hentschel, 2009). Finally, Sinus Sociovision presents the heterogeneity of the 50+ target group with the following types: “Homely Pensioners,” the “Resigned Old,” the “Precarious, Old Kids,” the “Wellness-Focused,” the “Avantgarde,” “Vital Intellectuals,” and the “Demanding Epicures and Seniors” (Sinus Sociovision, 2005).

Each of these and other typologies (e.g., Booz & Company, 2008; Grey, 2005; T.E.A.M., 2004) is surely justified and has particular relevance. In part, the description among the types of aging consumers may seem similar, which is not surprising considering

that the quantitative and qualitative description of a population at roughly the same time (Reader's Digest Deutschland, 2006). However, companies should choose typologies according to their ability to provide pragmatic contributions to the target segment in question. Meyer-Hentschel and Meyer-Hentschel (2009) emphasize that a purely age-based three-way split of 50+, 60+, and 70+ can even be suitable for a first sensitization.

Aging Consumers in India

The aging population of India is emerging as a vital consumer segment in the country, and it has been stressed in many research studies that their financial status has improved (Verma et al., 2020). As per “Changing Patterns of Income and Expenditure of Older People in India: An Assessment,” a study by the Agewell Foundation, the aging cohorts are showing their purchasing power by spending the accumulated savings. According to research done by Antony et al. (2011), research on aging consumers is restricted because they have been traditional shoppers as they purchase necessary items from nearby shops instead of shopping malls (Patel & Sharma, 2009). Not to mention that many of them reside in joint families with their siblings and do not have sufficient financial independence.

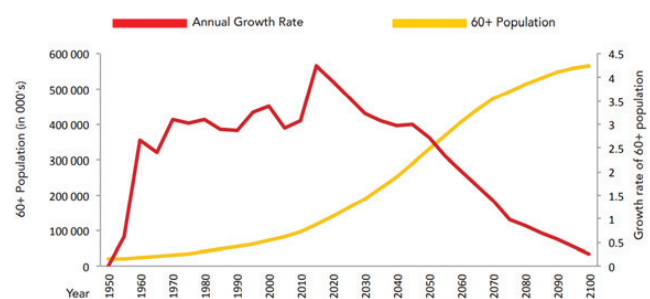


Figure 1. Size and Growth Rate of the Elderly Population in India, 1950–2100

Note. Reprinted from *India Ageing Report - 2017* (p. 6), by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2007. Copyright 2017 by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Consumption Pattern and Food Choice

Aging shoppers are conscious towards buying and consuming food as they refuse to easily try new products (Meiners & Seeberger, 2010). Eating is basically considered a social behavior and this is why in case of losing a partner, aging individuals fall into depression. Therefore, moral and social support becomes vital to maintain healthy food habits. Champagne (2006) expresses that food shopping and consumption have a close relationship to people's healthy body weight. It was also said that depression is one of the vital factors that affect food intake in aged people due to neurochemical changes and hunger signals (Booth et al., 2004).

Aging brings several changes at different levels, which affects the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, endocrine, nervous, endocrine, and respiratory systems (Saxon et al., 2014). However, most of the changes that happen with the aging process are reversible and can be managed by a healthy food diet and physical pursuits (Krinke, B. 2007). Food choice has been considered as a multidimensional issue in relation to the product and aging consumers and context. For instance, in their research, Antin and Hunt (2012) explain that people prioritize health when making food choice decisions. This is particularly important later in life due to increased risk of various nutritional matters associated to illness like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer as well (Eyre et al., 2004). Meneely et al. (2009) carried out a study on aging consumers and revealed that aging retail buying behavior changes with food shopping behavior. In fact, customers try familiar food rather than trying new to avoid adverse effects on their existing ailments (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019; Verma & Gupta, 2014). Aging shoppers tend to shop for food to have dietary variety, buying experience, and healthy food lifestyle to avoid further health issues (Chambers et al., 2008). Aging consumers choose healthy and traditional meals enriched with high protein (Song et al., 2019). In a specific study in Northern Ireland, the researchers expressed that aging people are potentially vulnerable customer groups (Furey et al., 2001) and are paid less attention in the market (Evason et al., 2004). Mori et al. (2000) conducted a research in Japan using the cohort analysis approach to examine food consumption of people and concluded that food consumption

is regulated by age, cohort, and consequences of influences that vary accordingly.

Key Concerns for Aging Consumers

In the study conducted by Lambert (1979), needs and problems were identified by directly asking open-ended questions to 55+ consumers, in respect to the actions that retailers might consider to better serve elderly consumers. Approximately 60% of respondents expressed their wish for the senior citizen discounts to be offered to a large variety of products and services. Of people aged 65 and older, 19.8% wanted store staff to treat elderly shoppers with more dignity, courtesy, and patience. Approximately 18% of respondents also asked for the availability of assistance while locating the merchandise in store. The responses were basically centered towards assistance by store staff, clear and complete store directories, and proper grouping of the products. There was a need for transport to and from the shop among 11% of aging consumers aged 55–64, and 20% of them also wanted a retail delivery service. Few respondents also reported the difficulty in reading labels due to numbers appearing small and blurred. People also felt discomfort and fatigue due to slow moving checkout lines and urged faster checkout services to be provided to aging consumers. About 9.4% of respondents also wished for small packages for the products that are highly perishable in nature. Few respondents also said that stores should fix certain hours especially for elder consumers and aisles containing boxes may create problem of tripping. Therefore, it is important to note that as people age, they become more conservative and prefer familiar foods (Horwath & Worsley, 1989).

Store Accessibility

Physical access is a fundamental determinant of store patronage behavior for elderly consumers, especially in case of grocery shopping (Hare, 2003; Whelan et al., 2002). Increasing age deteriorates personal mobility, and accessibility to stores is a crucial for mature consumers (Moschis et al., 2004). Research studies on aging consumers suggest that mobility problems and transportation issues may limit their shopping activities (Barnes & Peters, 1982; Gelb,

1978; Sherman & Brittan, 1973). Therefore, they prefer to visit stores which are located near to their homes (Mason & Bearden, 1978a). It was also found in the study that consumers shop for the purpose of having some sort of recreation and also for exercise. Mature consumers tend to have a shopping list of products locally or in nearby stores (Bawa & Ghosh, 1999; Caraher et al., 1998; Mason & Bearden, 1979). This may be connected to the disability that comes due to aging (Mason & Bearden, 1979). Location plays a crucial role in deciding criteria for store choice (Bevan, 2005).

Convenience and Comfort

Peters et al. (1982) found that convenience is a significant factor in making a decision on where to shop. Convenience can be attributed with respect to faster checkout and package carryout (Lambert, 1979), knowledgeable sales staff (Gelb, 1978), and easy entrance and exit (Mason & Bearden, 1978b). In a study, it was also discovered that they would avoid stores that lacked chairs and benches inside and/or deal with inferior products and poor business practices. Recreation was found as a major nonmonetary driver for visiting a regional shopping center (Terblanche, 1999). Goodwin and McElwee (1999) investigated that store attributes such as “Senior Citizen checkout,” “Senior Citizen discounts,” “assistance in locating goods,” and “value for money” as well as “product quality” seem to be more important to the “old” segment than to other segments. Well-known brands were also found to be an important store characteristic for preretirement groups. Tongren (1988) revealed that older consumers are likely to accept substitute products, when the desired product is out of stock, opposing the belief that elderly consumers are only loyal to specific brands and stores. They also prefer stores that offer reduced risk such as return goods privileges (Mason & Smith, 1974).

Product Packaging

Duizer et al. (2009) conducted research on packaging requirements for aging consumers and found that price, pack size, safety, and recycling are concerns for them. The package color, material used,

and shape were found insignificant. The researchers also emphasized in their findings that containers that have large lids are preferable as they are removed easily. Duizer et al. (2009) further added that resealable bags with sliding closures were preferred by consumers when buying food products. Maaskant et al. (2013) in their study on food packages for senior consumers stated that all sorts of packaging labels are equally appealing as they prefer eco-friendly packaging. Laguna et al. (2016) expressed a sentimental point regarding product packaging that considers the requirements of aging consumers and how it would grant them with a sense of freedom and control.

Price Sensitivity and Quality Consciousness

Aging consumers are price conscious, and they search for alternative sources to get the “best” price of the products (Mason & Bearden, 1978a; Gelb, 1978). Older consumers are also found to be sensitive to taking the time to compare price and quality of products offered by the store (Moschis et al., 2004; Goodwin & McElwee, 1999; Keillor et al., 1996). Corlett (1999) and Kesner (1998) concluded in their study that offers to senior citizens and special personal services, approach of relationship marketing, and customer education can be effective strategies to build better store loyalty, increase purchase frequency, and promoting mall patronage. In fact, elderly consumers’ retail needs show that they prefer senior citizens’ discount for a wider variety of products and services (Lambert, 1979). Therefore, it is concluded that price and services are vital aspects of shopping sought by older consumers (Curasi, 1995).

Concern for Mobility and Transportation

Mobility is very crucial for aging consumers especially given that decay in the bone strength makes walking around for a long time an issue in grocery stores. Goodwin and McElwee (1999) conducted a study on aging consumers and found that the transportation to stores, car parking availability, public transport, and ability to reach stores by foot were major concerns for considering a store when shopping. In another study by the Welsh Consumer Council (2006), it was reported that aging people experience a form

of difficulty in carrying heavy merchandise to their house when depending on public transport. Therefore, when deciding on various needs of aging consumers, mobility and transportation should not be ignored by the retailers to retain and attract consumers.

Aging Consumers and Advertising/Engaging Aging Consumers

In terms of their perception of advertising and the effect of advertising, elderly people differ greatly from younger people, which in turn has an effect on the layout of adverts regarding content, format, and limited-time special offers (Meiners et al., 2011; Meiners et al., 2012; Meiners & Seeberger, 2012). Literature indicates that aging consumers are more vulnerable to information overload than younger consumers (Walsh & Mitchell, 2005). Aging consumers are not part of homogenous groups, which is a major hurdle for advertisers when focusing on ads that suit their requirements. Bradley and Longino (2001) and Featherstone et al., (1991) express that many aging consumers consider themselves younger than their actual age making it more difficult to reach and connect with older consumers. However, Greco (1988) and Balazs (1995) found that it is more applicable to reach aging consumers by using older models. In another research, it was reached to conclusion that impersonal media were greatly used to acquire new food product information. Mason & Bearden (1979) revealed that majority of older consumers also are not inclined towards food advertised specifically to elderly people.

Social Interaction and Store Crowding

As people age, they tend to be lonely due to either the loss of a partner or the children settling elsewhere, bringing a drastic change in their lives (Robertson, 2019). There are many aspects of food shopping that can be associated with age such as pleasure of shopping (Cox et al., 2005; Dennis et al., 2007). Food shopping has been found as a way of social interactions for people living alone (Myers & Lumbers, 2008). Hare et al. (2001) conducted a study using CIT (critical incident technique) to identify different factors that have impact on food shopping and gain insight towards quality of shopping. The three factors were identified

relating to retail practices and staff issue. However, customer service was found as a vital factor to mature consumers as they have specific needs based on their health and prosperity levels. Gelb (1978) suggests that mature consumers enjoy being assisted by salespeople in their own age group as they have a more positive attitude towards older customers. Dychtwald (1997) states that grocery store staff need to be trained to learn how to deal with mature shoppers. Crowding is also a major concern for the aging consumers since they feel it as a burden. It has been described as a state of psychological stress. Generally, mature consumers avoid shopping in stores that are highly crowded and prefer to shop in morning hours. Michon et al. (2005) said that consumers reduce shopping time to adjust with higher retail densities, buy less to be in express checkout lanes, delay purchases, and depend more on shopping lists, decreasing interpersonal behavior.

Conclusion and Future Research

This paper focuses on aging consumers and their shopping behavior for food products in retail stores. Through an extensive review of existing research worldwide, deep insight about their characteristics and expectations of these consumers were established. The results of this research reveal that aging consumers are not a homogeneous set of consumer groups, making their consumption of food different from the younger shoppers. The present research review assesses the range of potential factors that are taken into consideration by aging consumers when selecting a store especially for food shopping. It is also worth mentioning that it was found that aging consumers are very conscious and loyal shoppers. Aging consumers seek helpful store personnel with professional knowledge about the merchandise in the store. Therefore, food retailers should train store staff to be more helpful and kind. There is a need for special attention by the food retailers as aging shoppers experience problems due to decay in physical health, particularly more in internal store environment like display of merchandise and facility of faster checkouts. As a result and since there is minimal research regarding aging consumers in India, this research provides valuable practical implications that may assist food retailers in India to establish better in-store and marketing strategies. Furthermore, in order to provide

benefits for all generations, marketing activities for aging consumers must address the following pinpoints in the future: what are the appropriate distribution channels for older consumers, what products and services should be offered to aging consumers, what are the business models that suit the aging consumer segment, and, finally, what changes need to take place to address the needs and wants of the aging consumer?

Declaration of Ownership

This report is my original work.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by my institution.

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