Silver shoppers and food shopping challenges: an analysis using critical incident technique approach

Abstract: The quality of the relationship between the sales staff and customers determines the sustainability of long-term relationships which is crucial for the companies. In the previous researches, the authors analyzed elderly consumers’ experiences while food shopping in order to reach a deeper understanding of their thoughts. In those studies it was found that older consumers’ problems with staff of retailers which are very big and crucial. In order to provide satisfied shopping experience trips for especially elderly consumers, this is vital to be aware of their needs and wants. In this study, we tried to determine the staff of food retailers’ opinions to compare with the previous researches and increase its dimensions for clarification. However, the population of the study is included all the managers and the staff of food retail stores in Lucknow (Spencer Retail Ltd, Big Bazar, Easyday, Family Bazar, and etc.), The sample for the research was minimized due to some limitations. We’ve collected the data through the days of 1st January and 21st January 2016. The respondents were chosen from the major food retailers lists. 156 valid respondents and their thoughts & experiences were analyzed by using quantitative (CIT). 61 positive (%59) and 43 negative (%41) incidents were gathered by CIT.

Keywords: Elderly Consumers, Retailing, Food Shopping Experience.

Introduction

Globally the population of elderly consumers is increasing with the advent of development in better medicines and medical facilities. Food also plays a crucial role in this regard. As per the Office of the National Statistics (ONS) (2011) this customer segment accounts for more than a fifth of the UK population along with different developing countries in coming times. India's elderly population will increase dramatically over the next four decades.

The number of older persons has tripled over the last 50 years; it will more than triple again over the next 50 years In 1950, there were 205 million persons aged 60 or over throughout the world. The market opportunities with regard to global demographic changes are evidenced by growing research in area of older consumers.

Literature review

This paper deals with the perspective of retail personnel about food shopping experience of their elderly consumers. According to the literature, there are not so many studies that has been on this topic in India. [1] concluded their research that, special attention should be given to elderly consumers and retail sales personnel should make themselves available to help elderly consumers. Also, market analyses are similarly repeated with other segments for the elderly [2] suggest, that hotel manage-
ments have to balance the needs and wants of the older customers\(^3\) found that, retailers should improve their retail offerings and serve better for older population.

This study starts by outlining a theoretical framework built on literature about food shopping experiences for the elderly. Afterwards, retailing sector in India will be discussed and in the last part, findings of the study will be indicated. For analyze of this study, SPSS program is revealed.

Shortly the objectives of this study are;

- Understanding of food shopping experiences of elderly people with regard to retailing staff.
- Analyzing the factors that influence the older consumers’ preferences to decide which food retailing company should be preferred for shopping.
- To find the problems both positively and negatively which may affect elderly shopping experience according to the perspectives of sales managers/people.
- Seeking their suggestions to make elderly consumers be more satisfied and loyal.
- To suggest and recommend retailers to better satisfy needs and wants of older people.

We admit that there are not enough studies in India, so this study will be helpful for marketing scholars, researchers and retail store managers. In our opinion, advices & experiences of sales team will be very helpful for making better decisions for management level. Therefore, based on these opinions, analytical recommendations may occur.

Critical Incident Technique Approach

The CIT was coined by Flanagan in the year 1954\(^4\). It is basically used for conducting qualitative research using interview technique. It provides insight on events perceived as critical by the respondents\(^5\).

Factors affecting the food choice decisions

**Sensory appeal**

Food is not only taken for the nutrients but it is also considered as a way of pleasure and even an activity which provides comfort\(^6\). Food choice and consumption is basically depends on taste, texture, quality, appearance and smell it has. These are the vital attributes which influences selection decision of the food. Many researchers have found that sensory factors have great impact in determining eating behavior. In Europe, survey on consumer attitude of food, concluded that nutrition, quality and health was found to be most important attribute and taste was in first three.

**Familiarity and habit**

Food habit as ‘the way people select, consume, and utilize portions of available food supply in response to social and cultural pressures\(^7\). Food habits are shaped by learned experience which finally develops attitude towards food. In a Dutch study it was found that habit is a vital determinant for intake and consumption of boiled vegetables, fruits and salad. In a study\(^8\) said that people eat the way they were told at home and continued intake of food to those habits when they separated from their parents to go and live with their family.

**Social interactions**

Food is way to socialize. A study conducted in Germany that pleasure from food was partly determined by sensory attribute of the food items\(^9\) found that other factors such as atmosphere, the table, mood and people were all vital aspects of pleasure gained from different eating occasions. Mature consumers enjoy among the older aged mature people\(^10\).

**Monetary cost of food**

Cost of the food is also a major factor affecting food choice decisions. In a a study on ongoing shift in fruits and vegetables market from loose to pre packed and ready to cook food and concluded that over 60% expenditure in the vegetable sector is on pre packed foods. These products are a bit costly but due to convenience consumers have been willing to pay extra cost for it.

**Availability**

Availability refers to the food within the shop and also the physical effort one needs to put to obtain the food. This factor plays a crucial role in relation to fruit and vegetable consumption, it could account for big proportion of food choice process. For people dependent on public transport or walking to shops, fruits and vegetables becomes heavy to carry.

**Personal ideology**

Personal ideology may also have an impact on food choice decision, especially in case of affluent class of consumer\(^11\). Many factors like organic produce, genetically modified foods, and even the king of packaging done can have influence an individual’s food choice decisions.

| Positive and Negative Recommendations from Respondents’ Experiences |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Negative Incidents**                                                                             |
| “Most of this aged group are the retired ones and they have enough time to visit other retailers to compare the prices, the quality, etc. of every product. They are a difficult age group to persuade” (age between 35–49, Male, floorwalker). |
“It is difficult to persuade them mostly because they are very rigid, brand loyal and does not change brand easily” (age between 20–34, Male, salesperson).
“Problems by reading the labels over product if they are smaller” (female, aged between 20–34, floorwalker).
“Complained about no area to sit inside store” (Male, aged between 35–49, floorwalker).
“High volume music in store was also not liked by them” (Male, aged between 35–49, salesperson).
“They think that they know everything and they feel that they have always better opinions than everyone” (Male, aged between 35–49, salesperson)
“They expect friendly staff inside to assist them while shopping” (Female, aged between 20–34, cashier)
“They also complained about the size of the basket, and problems in their functioning ” (Male, aged between 35–49, floorwalker)
“In store, shelf placements of products sometimes occur problems for customers to access in a difficult way to the higher shelves” (Male, aged between 35–49, floorwalker).

Positive Incidents
“They like the light inside the store to search products as per requirement..” (Male, aged between 20–34, salesperson).
“They always prefer and look for the person whom they are wellversed and wants them to be there while visiting the store.” (Male, aged between 35–49, floorwalker).
“The most of our clients ages are above 60 years old and they feel that shopping is very good activity not only to purchase items but better way of socialization” (Male, aged between 35–49, manager of the store).
Comparing to younger clients, they were found more conscious, polite and patient” (Male, aged between 35–49, manager of the store).

Recommendations
“They should be complaint boxes.” (Male, aged between 20–34)
“Discount hour implementation can be a good opportunity for this age group” (Male, aged between 20–34)
“Separate sections for senior consumer are needed to be setup” (Male, aged between 20–34).
“Staff should be especially trained just for dealing with these people & their problems” (Female, aged between 20–34, Salesperson)
“Senior consumers cash counter should be there to make it easy for them for faster service”. (Female, aged 19 & below, cashier).
“Since due to ageing they feel tired easily therefore the store may provide some places to make their shopping trip comfortable and longer by resting for a while (Female, aged between 20–34, cashier).

Conclusion
This study shows that people aged 60 years and above have different orientations and perspectives towards shopping in store. They are very loyal towards brands and easily donot change. As per the results, it can be observed that they are highly concerned towards retail store staff behaviour.
At that time, their relations with the staff was mainly the best effective part of their decision process. They demand extra specialty in serving to them, they want to feel themselves special and feel the interest in themselves and if vice versa, they are not satisfied and in the long term they give up shopping from there.
In conclusion, by this study, the problems are identified by thoughts of workers. It is important to be aware of consumers’ feelings and the difficulties they face during shopping to determine in an analytical way. By this study, they have a chance to make empathy for these customers, and it is beneficial for them to think twice before making anything be more difficult for them and analyze their behaviors before and after empathy as well.
Shortly, managers of the stores can make a number of simple adjustments to enhance the shopping experience for elderly consumers. The issues that we found in this study (trolley types, labels, prices, sitting places, green places, relationship with the store staff) are important features for elderly.

Limitation
This research study was conducted in Lucknow city. It was limited to an identified number of staff in the regions. However it does not consider the whole retailing staff in India. Further the study can be conducted taking major cities of India to have more better representation.

Managerial Implications
The retailers may organize special campaigns just to adress to these age groups, provide special staff to help them, obtain enough number of wheelchairs and provide
sitting places in and out of the stores, special cashiers just address them specifically to ensure their relationship in the long term.

This study again displayed that the age group of people over 60 years old must be taken into account more than before, because their portion in the aggregated population is going to increase. Also, as retired people, they have more time to go shopping and their experiences lead them to go to the same retailing more than one time.

References:

1. Hillery-Johnson, J., Kang, J., Jan Tuan, W., (1997), “The Difference Between Elderly Consumers’ Satisfaction Levels And Retail Sales Personnel’s Perception”, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, – Vol. 25, – No. 4, P. 126–137.
2. Wei, S., Ruys, H., Muller, E. T., (1999), ‘A Gap Analysis of Perceptions of Hotel Attributes by Marketing Managers and Older People in Australia”, Journal of Marketing Practise: Applied Marketing Science, – Vol 5, – No. 6/7/8, – 1999, P. 200–212.
3. Meneely, L., Burns, A., Strugnell, C., (2008), “Food Retailers’ Perceptions of Older Consumers in Northern Ireland”, International Journal of Consumer Studies 32, 341–348.
4. Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. Psychological bulletin, 51 (4), 327.
5. Gremler, D. D. (2004). The critical incident technique in service research. Journal of service research, 7 (1), 65–89.
6. Clark, J. E. (1998). Taste and flavour: their importance in food choice and acceptance. Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 57 (04), 639–643.
7. Khan, M. A., & Hackler, L. R. (1981). Evaluation of food selection patterns and preferences. Critical Reviews In Food Science & Nutrition, 15 (2), 129–1.
8. Brug, J., Debie, S., van Assema, P., & Weijts, W. (1995). Psychosocial determinants of fruit and vegetable consumption among adults: results of focus group interviews. Food Quality and Preference, 6 (2), 99–107.
9. Westenhoefer, J., & Pudel, V. (1993). Pleasure from food: Importance for food choice and consequences of deliberate restriction. Appetite, 20 (3), 246–249.
10. Leventhal, R. C. (1997). Aging consumers and their effects on the marketplace. Journal of consumer Marketing, 14 (4), 276–281.
11. Holt, G. C. (1993). Ecological eating, food ideology and food choice (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Bradford).