

Habit and Sodium Major Factors for Seniors in Restaurants

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ABSTRACT

Restaurants are always seeking to better understand their customers. As the population of senior citizens (65+) continues to grow in the U.S., they represent a significant customer group for restaurants. In order to better understand this group, focus groups were conducted to explore the factors affecting the restaurant food choices of Seniors. At the same time, Moms (women with at least one child 10 or under) were studied. Several interesting differences between the groups emerged. When presented with health information (calories, fat grams, fiber, and sodium), Seniors were influenced by the sodium level while Moms were most interested in calories. Both Moms and the female Seniors showed themselves to be caretakers for others' food choices. The Senior women were focused on helping their husbands to manage health concerns; Moms sought to influence both husbands' and children's food choices. Another big difference from the study was that Seniors were strongly influenced by habit. They enjoyed consuming the same foods multiple times and often would go to the restaurant chain in this study for particular foods, ex. soups, which were offered on certain days. Examining differences like these will help restaurants to better satisfy customer groups such as Seniors.

Keywords: seniors, restaurant food choices, sodium, habit, health information, decision-making.

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: Restaurants are faced with more and more competition and are also being pressured to assist with other initiatives such as the increasing health crisis in the U.S. Better understanding what motivates customers will enable restaurants to provide more satisfying experiences to customers. As the U.S. population continues to age, attracting seniors is very attractive to restaurants. Also, seniors face many health issues and learning how to assist seniors with making healthier decisions can be very useful to restaurants, agencies, and other stakeholders.

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