

## THE INFLUENCE OF SUPERMARKET ATTRIBUTES ON CONSUMER SELECTION OF A SUPERMARKET: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Growth of the middle-income group in South Africa has motivated international supermarket retailers such as Walmart to enter the local market. Local retailers have also expanded. For instance, Fruit and Veg City Holdings has expanded by including supermarket offerings under the Food Lover's Market brand. Large supermarkets are expanding into new markets in townships and rural areas. Supermarkets in South Africa (SA) are facing competition from other retailers, locally and internationally. Therefore, supermarket need an understanding of the supermarket attributes that consumers consider when selecting a supermarket in order to position their supermarkets against their competitors. For this study, an online survey was conducted among 3494 internet users; 104 responded. A convenience sampling method was adopted and internet users listed in the database collected for research purposes were targeted. To achieve the objectives of this study, various statistical analysis were conducted such as descriptive statistics, factor analysis, a t-test and the ANOVA test. The majority of consumers buy from Pick n Pay, followed by Checkers, as revealed in this study. The majority of consumers buy groceries once a month, followed by those who buy once a week. Consumers were found to buy some products from one supermarket while also buying other products from another supermarket. The five groups of attributes identified through factor analysis were: personnel, convenience, product, service and price. The study has also found that the attributes most important to consumers do not differ across gender, age and income groups. The findings of this study are valuable to retail supermarkets and should be incorporated in their marketing strategies.

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### BACKGROUND

South Africa's retail industry is one of the most profitable and largest industries in the country, and it is the largest in sub-Saharan Africa (PwC, 2012). It has grown by 1.9% in 2016 despite the impact of the recession in 2009 (IDC, 2017). The growth in the retail industry is a result of an increase in shopping malls and retail spaces in the country, and also domestic economic

conditions such as interest rate levels, the country's gross domestic product and the availability of credit (PwC, 2012). In 2011, the South African food retail market was worth R220 billion; by 2016 it was worth an estimated R460 billion (Trade Intelligence, 2016). It has therefore more than doubled in five years. The five major players that dominate South Africa's retail industry are Pick n Pay Holdings Ltd, Shoprite Holdings Ltd, Spar Group Ltd, Woolworths Holdings Ltd and Massmart Holdings Ltd (Gauteng Provincial Treasury, 2012). Presently in South Africa, a staggering 22.5% of total consumer spending on food and groceries is made at informal or independent retailers and not at supermarkets (WandR Seta, 2011), which creates competitive pressures for supermarkets. In 2017, the numbers showed that Shoprite had a 33.2% market share, while Pick n Pay had 13%, Spar 9.5% and Woolworths 12% (702, 2017, PMA, 2017).

The Global Powers of Retailing reports that South Africa's top five retailers are ranked among the 250 top retailers globally (Business Tech, 2017). It further reports that Shoprite Holdings Ltd is the leading supermarket group in South Africa and also the cheapest when compared to other retailers (Fastmoving, n.d.). The growth of middle-income groups in South Africa, has therefore led to the escalation of rivalry amongst major retailers, further intensified by Walmart's 51% acquisition of Massmart. The entry of Fruit and Veg City (FVC) within retail market and even more so under the Food Lover's Market brand has seen the Food Lover's Market Group and FVC international expand within and across South African borders.

Weatherspoon and Reardon (2003) state that there has been a shift in supermarket formats. An attendant shift is evident in supermarkets' service to new markets in townships; supermarkets have been able to achieve this by means of "adapting their offering as well as investing in more efficient procurement and distribution systems" (Das Nair, 2015). Hence the rise of independent retailers as they often target low income consumers within township, industrial and central business district (CBD) areas of cities within the country (Das Nair and Chisoro, 2015). For retail stores to survive in the market, retail managers need an understanding

of the attributes that consumers evaluate when selecting a supermarket from which to purchase goods and services. In the highly competitive retail market in South Africa, only those retailers that understand consumers' needs will survive. Beneke *et al.*, (2012) observe that owing to the fierce competition that supermarkets have to confront, both locally and internationally, it is important that supermarkets uncover attributes that will attract and keep consumers at their stores. Beneke *et al.*, (2012) further suggest that supermarkets' focus should be on improving their existing attributes in order to attract new customers and keep current customers. Previous research has also suggested that supermarket attributes affect the image of a store (Das, 2014), which determines whether consumers will select a supermarket or not.

Existing studies have identified a variety of supermarket attributes, such as personnel, cleanliness of the store, product availability, product prices, product quality, atmosphere, convenience of store location and the friendliness of staff (Marx and Erasmus 2006; Purushottam 2011). However, only a few of these studies have been conducted in South Africa (Terblanche and Boshoff, 2004; Marx and Erasmus, 2006; Du Preez *et al.*, 2008). A study by Makhitha (2014) investigated the supermarket attributes among university students and listed attributes such as personnel, services, products, location and economy. Makhitha (2014) study targeted university students while this study has targeted SA consumers. In general to determine which supermarket attributes influenced supermarket choice. Since South Africa is a developing country, it is important to investigate supermarket attributes from a developing country's perspective, as supermarket attributes may differ across different countries, types of stores and demographic profiles of consumers. The objectives of the study are therefore:

- To identify the attributes consumers, consider most important when choosing a supermarket; and
- To determine whether the importance of supermarket attributes differs across demographic factors (gender, age, income level and marital status).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on supermarket selection, supermarket attributes and demographic factors that influence supermarket selection will be reviewed in this section.

### Supermarket selection

Supermarket selection has been a subject of investigation for many decades. Various authors have investigated the topic across different types of stores, and their findings often differ (Yoo and Chang, 2005; Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009; Cooper, 2010). According to Alhemoud (2008), store selection focuses on studying the attributes that influence consumers' buying decisions. The assumption is that consumers have a set of attributes that they consider important when they select a supermarket. Therefore, it is important for supermarket management to identify the attributes that consumers consider important and incorporate them into a retail marketing strategy. The set of store attributes incorporated into a retail marketing strategy influences the image of a supermarket, which in turn influence consumers to patronise the supermarket (Ness *et al.*, 2002). A clear understanding of the attributes that consumers take into consideration when selecting a supermarket would enable supermarket managers to position the store using these attributes that are most important to consumers.

According to Mafini and Dhurup (2015), the attributes consumers consider important when selecting a supermarket influence the images they form about the supermarkets. The images consumer form about the supermarket determines whether they will shop from that supermarket or not. This is supported by existing studies that found that store image is influenced by store attributes (Cooper, 2010). According to Prinsloo (2016) the shopping behaviour of consumers has changed, resulting in an increase in the number of supermarkets they buy from. While traditionally consumers would shop in at least two supermarkets, this number has increased to at least five different supermarkets. Furthermore, Prinsloo (2016) reports that consumers conduct convenience shopping twice or three times per week at a

more convenient, local supermarket that offers high-quality fresh products and individual meals. This requires that supermarket managers meet consumers' requirements concerning the attributes most important to them.

### Supermarket attributes

Supermarket attributes are important factors taken into account by consumers when they decide where to shop (Michon *et al.*, 2015). The supermarket attributes include various dimensions such as merchandise options and quality of service (Ghosh *et al.*, 2010). It is important that retailers take into account the supermarket attributes that consumers want when they attempt to create sustainable competitive differentiation and design marketing strategies that would enable them to achieve customer satisfaction (Martínez-Ruiz, *et al.*, 2010). According to Ofori-Okyere and Kweku (2016) supermarket attributes are attributes of a supermarket that consumers perceive through their experience of the supermarket, and are part of the overall image of the supermarket (Skippari, *et al.*, 2017). Consumers patronise the stores that best meet their needs after they have evaluated the supermarkets using the set of attributes they consider important in store selection (Nair, 2018). Understanding the set of attributes consumers consider important when selecting a supermarket helps supermarket owners to position their supermarkets using the attributes important to consumers (Steinhofer, 2005).

Studies of supermarket attributes conducted by Watanabe *et al.*, (2013) and Ghosh *et al.*, (2010) reveal that consumers select a supermarket based on convenience, the merchandise mix (product variety), personnel, store atmospherics and services, as well as product and price. According to Hosseini *et al.*, (2014) the services provided by supermarket personnel have a significant influence on a customer's store preference and play a vital role in the customer's repurchase intention. Personnel refers to the employees of an organisation and is important in establishing the supermarket's goodwill with patrons, which then results in the patrons' revisiting the supermarket (InfoService Blog, 2016)

Convenience refers to an individual's ability to continue or proceed with something with ease, without problems, convenience is therefore an important factor in this day and age because it influences the supermarket selection of consumers who seek convenience (Hosseini *et al.*, 2014). Aspects such as parking, accessibility, transportation, additional services such as product availability and in-store card payment, and store location and store operation hours are important and should be considered by retailers when they seek to open a supermarket (Martínez-Ruiz, *et al.*, 2017). Wel *et al.*, (2012) have found factors such as the friendliness of store personnel and helpfulness as important factors that determine whether consumers will select a supermarket or not.

According to Stafford (2014) the merchandise mix (product mix) refers to ;)all the products, such as food and produce, that the retailer offers to patrons. Product influences consumers' supermarket selection (Carpenter and Moore, 2006). Product variety, product quality and brands carried by the supermarket have been found to be the key attributes of customers' choice (Ghosh *et al.*, 2010). Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) report that supermarket selection is influenced by various attributes, including price and product. To attract consumers, supermarkets offer a broad range of high-quality products and services (Terblanche and Boshoff, 2004). Lower prices and a variety of merchandise, as noted by Neven *et al.*, (2006) and Ali *et al.*, (2010), are the most important attributes according to consumers at supermarkets.

Service refers to intangible products, such as cleaning, taking food orders and transportation, that are perishable, instantly consumed and cannot be stored nor transported (John, 1999). Basically the service factor involves the interaction between an organisation's personnel and its patrons, and is therefore an important brand touchpoint (Hosseini *et al.*, 2014).

According to Hosseini *et al.*, (2014), value for money plays a vital role in any purchasing decision. Kotler (2009) defines price as the monetary value ascribed to a product or service. Essentially, it is the amount a customer pays for a product or service, ordinarily an economic cost. Hosseini *et al.*, (2014) state that price is

governed by the demand and supply curve in the market and, in view of that, price varies.

There are contrasting findings about the most important attributes for supermarket selection, as shown in Table 1 below.

From Table 1 below, it is clear that personnel, convenience, product, service and price are attributes consumers use to select a supermarket since researchers from different countries use these attributes to determine their influence on supermarket selection. However, it is important to note that some of the researchers use different attributes, which have been grouped together into five attributes for the purposes of this study. These five attributes are personnel, convenience, product, service and price, as described in this section. In the studies mentioned above, researchers have determined the importance of different supermarket attributes in supermarket selection. It is therefore hypothesised that:

H<sub>1</sub> Supermarket attributes differ according to the order of importance.

### **Supermarket attributes and demographic factors**

According to Prasad and Aryasri (2009), the demographic factors of consumers, such as age, gender, education, occupation, income and family size influence supermarket attributes. These findings are supported by Gunaseelan and Chitra (2014), who state that some demographics factors such as age, education, occupation, family size and income influence consumers' perceptions of store attributes, while other factors such as gender has no impact on supermarket attributes. Mortimer and Clarke (2010) state that male and female consumers agree on certain attributes and differ on others, indicating that supermarket selection attributes may differ across gender. Mortimer and Weeks (2011) as well as Williams (2002) reported that male consumers place less emphasis on price. Mortimer and Weeks (2011) further found females to place more emphasis on the price and quality of products, followed by the cleanliness of the supermarket while males place more emphasis on services. The study further reported that males and females consider convenience as an important attribute,

**TABLE 1: SUPERMARKET ATTRIBUTES**

Authors	Type of store	Country	Store attributes
Watanabe <i>et al.</i> , (2013)	Supermarket	Brazil	Personnel, product, price, promotion, convenience and atmosphere
Makhitha (2014)	Supermarket	SA	Personnel, services, products, location and economy
Ali <i>et al.</i> , (2010)	Food and grocery marketplace	India	Freshness, cleanliness, price and quality
Alhemoud (2008)	Co-operative supermarkets	Kuwait	Quality of merchandise, fairness of price, range of merchandise selection, friendliness of staff, variety of merchandise and fast checkout
Marx and Erasmus (2006)	Supermarket	South Africa	Customer service, in-store temperature, in-store layout, location of parking bays, cleanliness of store, store appearance, convenience of store location, quality of products, personnel
Ghosh <i>et al.</i> , (2009)	Retail outlets	India	Convenience, merchandise, store atmospherics and services
Johnson <i>et al.</i> , (2015)	Apparel stores	USA	Product, price, service, location, faculty, design, atmosphere and leisure
Koul and Mishra (2013)	Traditional stores	India	Store image, product assortment, product availability, retailer's attitude, discounts and other services
Wong <i>et al.</i> , (2012)	Shopping mall	Malaysia	Mall/store quality, quality of merchandise, convenience, enhancement and price orientation
Martínez-Ruiz <i>et al.</i> , (2017)	Multiple stores	Spain	Customer service, convenience, quality image and economic value of purchases
Wang and Ha (2011)	Department stores	USA	Direct mail, post-transaction, interpersonal, preferential treatment, store atmosphere and merchandise
Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009)	Supermarket	Greece	Personnel, atmosphere, product, pricing, merchandising and in-store convenience

although female consumers rate it more highly than male consumers. These findings are supported by Wong *et al.*, (2012), who have found that store attributes differ across gender and race, and that females are more price-oriented than males.

Moschis *et al.*, (2004) state age plays no role in supermarket selection since attributes change very little with age. However, Moschis *et al.*, (2004) findings contradict those of Prasad and Aryasri (2011) who found age to play a role in supermarket selection. Consumers' income levels influence the supermarket attributes they consider when selecting a supermarket. Higher-income consumers expect a higher level of service than low-income consumers, who pay attention to price when selecting a supermarket (Carpenter and Moore, 2006), which means that supermarket attributes differ across income level. The marital status of consumers has been found to influence supermarket selection. According to Ramprabh (2018) the marital status of consumers has an influence on the

personnel and convenience attributes of supermarket selection. Married consumers are more influenced by these supermarket attributes than unmarried consumers. Other studies have found that supermarket selection attributes differ across age, gender and distance travelled (Sinha *et al.*, 2002). Distance travelled will not be measured as distance travelled does not form part of the scope of study at hand. It is therefore hypothesized:

H<sub>2</sub> There are significant differences between supermarket attributes across the demographic characteristics (gender, age, income level and marital status) of supermarket consumers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Study design

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, a survey research method was deemed appropriate. Prior studies on supermarkets attributes adopted a survey method to determine

the attributes most important to consumers (Ghosh *et al.*, 2010; Hosseini *et al.*, 2014; Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2010; Watanabe *et al.* 2013). A survey requires a respondent to choose a response from those provided and allows a researcher to compare responses. It was appropriate for this research to determine the level of importance of supermarket attributes.

### Sample population and sample design

The sample population for the study was retail consumers of food and grocery supermarkets in South Africa. The sampling frame for the present research comprised adult retail consumers of food and grocery supermarkets in South Africa who have access to the internet. A database of 3 494 individual internet users in South Africa was generated for research purposes by professors in the marketing department of the university and included pre-recruited internet users from all nine provinces in South Africa. The department hosted training workshops in marketing and a database of attendees was generated from the workshop participants who had internet access. Participants were made aware that the database was being generated for research purposes. Convenience sampling was used and a link to a self-administered online survey was sent via email to all 3 494 users in the database. Of the 3 494 targeted users, 104 responded, culminating in a response rate of 2.97%. Online surveys have a low response rate, which could be due to the non-delivery of email and/or respondents may experience some form of anxiety (Cooper and Schindler, 2011).

### Questionnaire construction

The questionnaire was developed using the scales of prior research studies: personnel (Balta and Papastathopoulou, 2003; Yoo and Chang, 2005; Beneke *et al.*, 2012; Wel *et al.*, 2012; Watanabe *et al.*, 2013); convenience (Yoo and Chang, 2005; Marx and Erasmus, 2006; Purushottam, 2011); product (Terblanche and Boshoff, 2004; Alhemood, 2008; Van der Vyver, 2008; Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2017) service (Hosseini *et al.*, 2014); and price (Ali *et al.*, 2010; Neven *et al.*, 2006; Hosseini *et al.*, 2014). Eight demographic questions were included in the questionnaire. In addition, 22 statements of

the questionnaire covered supermarket attributes considered by consumers when visiting a supermarket. The consumers were asked to rate each of the supermarket attributes on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 measuring “not important at all” and 5 measuring “extremely important”.

### Data collection and data analysis

Data were collected online from June 2015 to October 2016 due to the slow response from internet users. Internet users listed in the database were sent an email link to the survey, which was hosted on Survey Monkey. Users were reminded over the period to complete the survey. The email explained what the research was about, and made it clear that it was an anonymous survey and that respondent details would not be made public. Respondents were made aware that completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and that no compensation would be offered to consumers who completed the questionnaire, that was ethically approved by the academic institution. 104 questionnaires were completed for the study.

The data were analysed with the aid of IBM SPSS for Windows, version 24. Various statistical analyses were conducted to achieve the objectives of this study, including descriptive analyses, such as mean and standard deviation, factor analysis, and ANOVA.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic information

After compiling the data, findings indicate that there were slightly more female (51%, n=53) than male (49%, n=51) respondents. Almost two thirds (56.7%, n=59) of the respondents are 25 to 39 years' old which implies that the businesses are owned by the younger generation. Married respondents (55.8%, n=58) were more than the unmarried respondents (44.2%, n=46). A little over 37% (n=39) of the individuals received a monthly income of more than R20 000; 27.9% (n=29) that received a monthly income ranging from R12 501 to R19 999 and 11.5% (n=12) that received a monthly income between R7 501 and R12 500. The majority of adults purchase their groceries

from Pick n Pay supermarket (35.6%, n=37), followed by those who purchase from Checkers (13.5%, n=14). The majority of adults probably purchased from Pick n Pay supermarkets because it is an affordable option for adults that receive a monthly income of more than R20 000. The majority of adults purchased their groceries once a month (26.9%, n=28), followed by those who buy once per week (22.1%, n=23). In addition, the consumers are not completely loyal to one supermarket, as a majority of the adults (66.3%, N=69) purchased some products from one supermarket and other products from another supermarket.

### Reliability and validity

Although the questionnaire was designed using the scales of prior research studies to satisfy content validity, Cronbach's alpha was employed to test instrument reliability. The reliability analysis yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.821 for the five supermarket attributes. The individual Cronbach's alpha of each factor within the supermarket attribute was between 0.637 and 0.847, which shows reliability across attributes studied in this research. According to Malhotra (2010), a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of less than 0.50 is deemed unacceptable; those between 0.50 and 0.69 are considered adequate, whereas those above 0.70 are regarded as acceptable.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with VARIMAX rotation was conducted to assess discriminant validity. To determine the validity of the instrument, the threshold of 0.500 to 0.790 was maintained on the communalities, as well as a cut-off point of 0.30 on the Pearson's correlations, as suggested by Kim and Mueller (1978). Content validity was established by using questionnaire items from previous studies (see Table 1). The questionnaire was also pre-tested and approved by two academics. Several minor modifications of the wording and the question item sequence were done based on the comments of the two academics.

The threshold of factor loading was 0.5. Based on the loading of 0.5, three of the 23 items used to determine supermarket attributes that consumers consider when selecting a supermarket were omitted for further analysis since their loadings were below 0.5. That is, 20

items were used to obtain an overall score of supermarket attributes, as shown in Table 2 below. The 20 items remaining yielded five factors that were labelled: "Personnel", "Convenience", "Product", "Service" and "Price".

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy indicates the proportion of variance in the variables of the study that may be caused by underlying factors. Values that are close to 1.0 generally show that factor analysis may be suitable for the data (Field and Miles, 2010). The KMO value is 0.825, which is close to 1, therefore the factor analysis is suitable for the data. The Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis of all correlations in the correlation matrix. The significance level (p-value) is  $p < 0.001$ , which is less than 0.05, indicating that the factor analysis was deemed suitable for the data (Hair *et al.*, 2010:92). In addition, the Bartlett's test yielded a chi-square value of 1002.025, which indicates that the data were suitable for analysis.

As seen in Table 2 below, factor 1, labelled *Personnel*, loaded four attributes, namely *friendliness of staff*, *knowledge of staff*, *overall store service* and *pleasant atmosphere in store*. The first factor, *Personnel*, had the highest percentage of variance, namely 38.72%. The Eigenvalue of this factor is the highest, namely 7.745. The factor was rated the 4<sup>th</sup> most important attribute that influences supermarket selection (M=4.09). The rating for this attribute lies between very important and extremely important.

Factor 2, labelled *Convenience*, loaded highly on *product availability* (no stock-out), *convenience of store location*, *store operating hours* and *in-store card payment facilities* (ATM). This factor accounted for 9.63% of the variance. Convenience is the most important factor that influences supermarket selection (M=4.25) as it was considered as very important and extremely important.

The third factor, named *Product*, explained 7.48% of variance and comprised four items, namely *brands carried in the supermarket*, *store brands/private brands selection*, *product variety* and *frequent sales/specials*. The product factor was rated as moderately and very important attribute influencing consumer selection of a

**TABLE 2: FACTOR ANALYSIS OF IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES FOR SUPERMARKET SELECTION**

Supermarket attribute	Personnel_1	Convenience_2	Product_3	Service_4	Price_5
Friendliness of staff	.868				
Knowledge of staff	.749				
Overall store service	.706				
Pleasant atmosphere in store	.632				
Product availability (no stock-out)		.718			
Convenience of store location		.712			
Store operating hours		.705			
In-store card payment facilities, ATM		.567			
Brands carried in the supermarket			.822		
Store brands/private brands selection			.780		
Product variety			.652		
Frequent sales/specials			.649		
Easy payment				.656	
Accuracy of scanning prices at the checkout				.635	
Fast checkout				.614	
Availability of parking space				.555	
Ability to buy most items at one place				.506	
Low prices					.812
Clear price labelling of products					.677
Product quality					.530
<b>% of variance explained (Total = 67.59)</b>	<b>38.72</b>	<b>9.63</b>	<b>7.48</b>	<b>6.57</b>	<b>5.17</b>
<b>Cumulative % of variance</b>	<b>38.723</b>	<b>48.355</b>	<b>55.842</b>	<b>62.420</b>	<b>67.593</b>
<b>Eigenvalues</b>	<b>7.745</b>	<b>1.926</b>	<b>1.497</b>	<b>1.316</b>	<b>1.035</b>
<b>Cronbach alpha</b>	<b>0.847</b>	<b>0.757</b>	<b>0.788</b>	<b>0.807</b>	<b>0.637</b>
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>4.099</b>	<b>4.250</b>	<b>3.866</b>	<b>4.178</b>	<b>4.187</b>

Note: Factor loadings  $\geq 0.5$  were considered.

supermarket (M=3.86).

The factor on which most of the attributes were loaded was the fourth factor, *Service*. *Service* is closely related to *easy payment*, *accuracy of scanning prices at the checkout*, *fast checkout*, *availability of parking space* and *ability to buy most items at one place*. The factor, *Service*, accounted for 6.57% of variance explained and is the third most important (M=4.17), rated as very important and extremely important).

Factor 5, labelled *Price*, had a high coefficient in *low prices*, *clear price labelling* and *product quality*. This factor explained 5.17% of variance and is the second most important supermarket attribute (M=4.18). Respondents considered this attribute as very important and extremely important.

#### Demographic factors and supermarket attributes

To test the hypothesis whether there are significant differences between supermarket attributes and demographic characteristics (gender, age, income level and marital status) of supermarket consumers, the t-test and ANOVA were used.

The Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to determine whether gender has an effect on the extent to which personnel, convenience, service, product and price influence supermarket selection. Although previous research indicates that gender does not have a significant effect on the extent to which personnel, convenience, service, product and price play a role in supermarket selection (Gunaseelan and Chitra, 2014), the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test was used to validate the findings of the t-test. The results showed that gender does not have an effect.



The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance test was used to determine whether age has a significant effect on the extent to which personnel, convenience, service, product and price play a role in supermarket selection. No significant differences were found among any of the five factors. The age of respondents therefore does not have a significant effect on the importance that respondents attach to the five classes of supermarket attributes when they select a supermarket for their shopping.

In addition, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance test was conducted to determine whether the respondents from different income groups differ significantly pertaining to the importance they attach to personnel, convenience, service, product and price. The test found that income does not have a significant effect ( $p > 0.05$ ) on the extent to which personnel, convenience, service, product and price play a role in supermarket selection.

In order to determine whether the importance attached to the five factors of supermarket attributes differs significantly between married and unmarried respondents, a Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted. According to the Mann-Whitney U-test, whether a respondent is married or not does not have a significant effect on how important they consider convenience, product, service and price to be when they select a supermarket for their shopping ( $p > 0.05$ ). The difference between the marital status groups is marginally significant for the personnel attribute ( $Z = -1.993$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with married people ( $MR = 57.23$ ,  $n = 57$ ) attaching higher importance to it than those that are unmarried ( $MR = 45.52$ ,  $n = 46$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide insight into the supermarket attributes used by consumers when they select a supermarket from which to purchase their groceries. Factor analysis yielded a total of five factors, namely *Personnel*, *Convenience*, *Product*, *Service* and *Price*. The findings in this study differ slightly from the findings of Makhitha (2014) which listed location as one of the five factors influencing supermarket selection. The differences in these two findings demonstrate that supermarket attributes differ across demographic groups. The

most important factor in this study was *convenience* ( $M = 4.250$ ), followed by *price* ( $M = 4.187$ ), *service* ( $M = 4.178$ ), *personnel* ( $M = 4.099$ ) and *product* ( $M = 3.886$ ) respectively, as shown by the mean scores. Therefore, marketers and supermarket managers or owners when marketing to consumers should place emphasis on these factors. It appears that consumers prefer to shop at a supermarket that is conveniently located, has favourable operating hours and uses in-store card facilities. This suggests that supermarket managers or owners should include convenience, price and service as part of their marketing strategies when seeking to market to current and potential customers. Existing studies (Yoo and Chang, 2005) also indicate that consumers consider convenience and personnel to be important determinants of store loyalty. Watanabe *et al.*, (2013) conducted research into the relationship between store image attributes and consumer satisfaction in supermarkets. Their study found that personnel, product and price, combined with environment and promotions, have a positive impact on store selection and customer satisfaction.

This study has found product to be the moderately important supermarket attribute. However, similar studies by Carpenter and Moore (2006) have found that product is an important attribute when consumers select a supermarket from which to purchase their groceries. The findings by Balta and Papastathopoulou (2003) reveal that consumers are concerned with the properties and characteristics of the product. In a study by Alhemood (2008) and Purushottam (2011), respondents considered product most important. Contrary to the findings of other studies (Van der Vyver, 2008; Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2017), *frequent sales/specials* are deemed as less important for consumers. The results of this study contradict existing findings, which support that supermarket attributes differ across customers, types of stores and countries. Therefore, retail managers must determine attributes that will influence consumer patronage behaviour positively.

The above findings support the notion that consumers differ in what they rate as the most important attributes of a store, since what one consumer considers important might not be

important to another (Moye, 1998). Existing studies were used to identify supermarket attributes such as personnel, product, merchandise mix, cleanliness, price, store atmosphere and crowding (Arnold *et al.*, 1983; Ness *et al.*, 2002; Heller and McTaggart, 2004; Larson and Steinhofner, 2005; Alhemoud, 2008; Oghojafor *et al.*, 2012). Some of these attributes differ across types of store such as supermarkets, hypermarkets, supercentres and speciality stores (Paulins and Geistfeld, 2003; Carpenter and Moore, 2006). The findings of these studies also differ regarding the most important attributes for supermarket selection. It is important for retail managers to determine the supermarket attributes their targeted consumers consider when buying from a supermarket and use these attributes to position their supermarkets in the market.

The findings of this study indicate that there are no significant differences between supermarket attributes and demographics such as age, gender and income. This implies that marketers need not emphasise different supermarket attributes when marketing to male and female consumers of different age groups and income. Existing studies support the findings of this study. Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) and Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, (2017) have found no significant differences between males and females pertaining to supermarket attributes. Previous studies (Alhemoud 2008; Mortimer and Clark, 2010) have not found significant differences across gender, but they have found significant differences across age groups (Alhemoud, 2008). Studies by Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, (2017) and Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) have found no significant differences between males and females regarding supermarket attributes. Furthermore, the results reported by Carpenter and Moore (2006) indicate that income does not influence the supermarket attributes sought by consumers when selecting a supermarket. The above findings from existing study support the findings of this study. Retail managers should therefore adopt supermarket attributes important to their targeted consumers regardless of gender, age and income.

The study has found significant differences among married and unmarried consumers – married consumers are more influenced by

service while the unmarried consumers are influenced by price. Marketers should therefore focus on service when they target married consumers and price when they target unmarried consumers. The findings are supported by Paulins and Geistfeld (2003) and Ramprabha (2018), who have also found that marital status influence supermarket selection. Therefore, retail managers should not assume that attributes consumers consider when selecting a supermarket are similar since this study has proven that they differ across marital status. According to Larson and Steinhofner (2005), supermarkets stock larger, “family-size” packages and use more multiple purchase promotions, which might not be suitable for unmarried consumers. This suggests that retail managers should use different supermarket attributes that will attract both the married and unmarried consumers.

This study had some limitations that have the potential to be addressed by future research. First, concerning the interpretation of the findings, a convenience sample collection of adult consumers restricts the generalisability of findings to other customer segments. Therefore, future research could focus on samples that are more representative of the entire consumer population. Second, this study centred on one particular retail setting, a supermarket, but store attribute factors differ in other retail environments. Future research could explore other retail environments, such as clothing stores, online stores or shopping complexes/malls. Researchers could take the study a step further by studying store attributes when shopping at high-end stores compared to low-price stores. The final limitation was the low response rate (2.97%) – the study targeted 3 494-internet users, but only 104 responded. A possible reason for the low response rate could be the use of an online survey, which meant that researchers could only reach those respondents listed in the database and those with access to the internet. Other studies could reach respondents with different characteristics, for example by using the mall intercept method.

## CONCLUSION

This study has found that *convenience of the store* is the most important attribute that consumers consider when selecting a

supermarket, followed by *price* and *service*. The findings imply that supermarket owners and managers can influence consumers' supermarket choice by incorporating these important attributes in their supermarket marketing strategy. Although the product attribute was considered as moderately important and very important, supermarket managers should still incorporate this attribute into the supermarket strategy. The study has also found that demographic factors such as gender, age and income do not influence supermarket selection. Since the marital status of consumer's influence supermarket selection, supermarket managers must adopt attributes that attract consumers who are married and those that are unmarried. It is important for retail managers to ensure that their marketing strategies attract both married and unmarried consumers by incorporating the different supermarket attributes that the different groups take into account when selecting a supermarke.

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