
The Seniors' Assessment of Functioning of Special Hours for Person 65+ in Polish Stores During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Anna Bartkowiak¹, Łukasz Kuźmiński², Piotr Maśloch³

Abstarct:

Purpose: During the COVID-19 pandemic, several restrictions were introduced, which implied changes in the functioning of institutions, companies, schools, shops, etc. One of the solutions introduced in Poland was to set the hours (10am-12pm) in retail outlets where only people over 65 could shop. The issue of this article is a continuation of the topic undertaken in another article which included the results of the conducted research on the functioning of special hours for seniors in stores from the perspective of traders. This current article presents the results of the same research taking into regard the perspective of seniors on the research subject undertaken.

Design/Methodology/Approach: In order to verify the effect of the functioning of senior citizen hours in Poland, the analysis of data on transactional traffic and revenue of retail outlets, mainly food stores, was reviewed, and a survey was conducted among retail outlets as well as people aged 65+.

Findings: Older people in Poland are starting to signal their shopping needs, which traders should start to respond to become competitive in the stationary retail market.

Practical Implications: There is a low level of trader involvement in the search for facilities for the elderly, from which it can be concluded that they are not yet aware of the growing importance of this customer segment, as confirmed by another research.

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Originality/Value: The survey included opinions on economic and psychosocial factors. The results of these studies and suggestions for facilities for elderly people in the area of shopping are presented. A comparison of the two perspectives, seniors and traders is also included in this article.

Keywords: COVID-19, retails outlets, senior citizens, senior hours, elderly.

JEL Codes: D11, D12, D16.

Paper type: Research study.

¹University of Wroclaw, Institute of Economic Sciences, Department of Statistics and Operations Research, anna.bartkowiak@uwr.edu.pl;

²Wroclaw University of Economics and Business, lukasz.kuzminski@ue.wroc.pl;

³War Studies University, Management Institute, Management and Command Department, p.masloch@akademia.mil.pl;

1. Introduction

Older customers are becoming a larger and more significant consumer group, so researching the needs of this group is very important. „The role satisfaction plays in shopping varies with age, becoming more important for older consumers, who are generally more engaged in the shopping process than younger consumers. (...) the store patronage of older consumers (accessibility of the store and the products within the store, pricing and product-related attributes, and atmosphere), and its antecedents, is still underresearched in the marketing, consumer behaviour and retail literature, despite that segment’s considerable and growing importance” (Teller *et al.*, 2013: 21-22). The time when restrictions were introduced due to the pandemic was a period when consumer habits changed (Sheth, 2020) and it became possible to test solutions on a national scale, such as online work or education, telehealth, appointments at a fixed time, shopping with home delivery or hours for seniors (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland, regulations were issued establishing certain restrictions, orders and prohibitions, also relating to trade and the functioning of retail outlets. “Pursuant to the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 31 March 2020 on establishing certain restrictions, orders and prohibitions in connection with the occurrence of the epidemic state (Journal of Laws 2020, item 566, 658) in retail and service outlets from 1 April to 19 April 2020, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. hours, only persons over 65 years of age could shop. In media and public opinion the hours functioned as "senior citizen hours", which the trade industry, including the Polish Organisation of Trade and Distribution, criticised and suggested moving them to the first two hours after opening hours when there is less traffic and, moreover, it is safer due to disinfection carried out before opening. Another Council of Ministers Regulation of 19 April 2020 (Journal of Laws 2020, item 697) introduced a single change in hours for persons over 65 years of age, such as they operate only from Monday to Friday until 3 May 2020. The Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 2 May 2020 (Journal of Laws 2020, item 792) abolished "hours for seniors"” (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021, p. 1082).

It is noted that older people have problems with shopping, including grocery shopping, getting to shops, carrying items into the home and putting them away (Purdam, Esmail, and Garratt, 2019). Additionally, the anxiety over one’s health that accompanied the pandemic, exacerbated the problem. „The Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating this situation further for them. Steps have been taken to address the issue of the elderly and vulnerable accessing food by the major supermarkets. Dedicated shopping hours in store are now being introduced for them and for NHS staff after one critical care nurse posted an emotional video online calling for people to stop panic buying”. (*The UK food ...*, 2020). In many countries around the world, shops, especially grocery stores, have introduced special shopping hours for seniors, people with disabilities and those with compromised immune systems, usually one hour after opening, sometimes more than one, but still during the first hours, unlike

in Poland. In some shops, these dedicated hours have worked only on certain days of the week. In some countries, certain grocery store chains have offered free deliveries for senior citizens, but this solution was not applied in Poland. "Given, on the one hand, criticism of the functioning of the special hours for senior citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic by trade organisations and, on the other hand, the observed dynamic process of population ageing and the need for the economy to adapt to it, research of the actual effect of the introduction of 'hours for senior citizens' from the point of view of both senior citizens and traders was undertaken in this area of trade" (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021: 1083). This article presents only the perspective of people aged 65+ and compares it with the traders' perspective, which can be found in the other article (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021).

2. Research Methodology

The research was conducted on 9.05-9.06.2020 and the diagnostic survey method was used. The survey was anonymous. For safety reasons, the survey among seniors was conducted using CAWI technique only. The questionnaire addressed to senior citizens contained 20 questions, and to traders 25 questions, 14 of which were analogous questions for both groups of respondents, which gave the opportunity to compare the points of view of both groups of respondents on the same issues. The city of Leszno is a former voivodeship city, of medium size whose residents are "aging" faster than the general population of Poland, was chosen as the research site (for detailed explanation see Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021). The survey among seniors, due to the health safety concerns of persons in the group of increased risk, was conducted using CAWI method. It should be emphasized that using this method the group with the lowest representativeness by age is achieved (Wood and Kunz, 2014; Kagerbauer, Manz, and Zumkeller, 2016; Staniszevska, 2013) due to the high coverage error (coverage: 26% according to the Communication from the CBOS Internet Use, No. 95/2019).

However, at this particular time, it was probably the best method of obtaining information with the least amount of missing data. Moreover, the sample selection was made using the snowball method, which is a non-random method, and a low percentage of respondents (0.5% of the population) was obtained. Ultimately, the sample consisted of 81 respondents. Due to these facts, the conclusions resulting from the survey of people aged 65+ are for illustrative purposes and refer to those who actively use the Internet and not to the senior population.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of Respondents

The majority of respondents aged 65+ lived in Leszno (70%), the rest around Leszno. However, some of them did their shopping outside their place of residence, hence 75% of the respondents did their shopping in Leszno in the surveyed period.

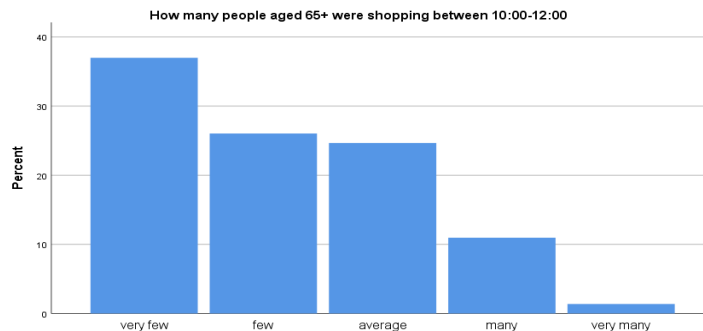
The majority of the respondents were women (62%, in the surveyed population it is 60%⁴). During the pandemic, 62% of seniors did not work professionally, 15% worked professionally at home and the rest worked professionally outside the home.

3.2 Research Results

3.2.1 Using hours dedicated only for persons 65+

The frequency of using special hours only for people aged 65+ is slightly different in the assessment of employees of retail outlets compared to the assessment of seniors. The median for commercial workers is "few" and for seniors "average". The majority of employees (63%) noticed that very few or very few older people shopped at a time specially set for them, and very rare and rare use was declared by 43% of seniors (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021).

Figure 1. The distribution of the number of people 65+ using hours for seniors, according to traders Source: author`s compilation



Source: Own study.

Figure 2. The frequency of using hours for people 65+ , according to senior citizens Source: author`s compilation

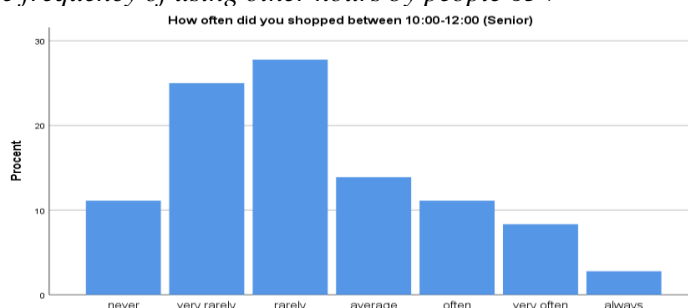


Source: Own study.

⁴Based on data from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office.

Only 3 of the seniors surveyed always used these hours and declared that they felt more comfortable then. There is a weak correlation between the size of the area ($V\text{-Cramer}=0.23$) and location of the retail outlet ($V=0.38$) and the frequency of use of hours for seniors. The frequency of use of retail outlets by older people in the remaining hours also varies. In the case of the assessment by traders, there is a positive skew and a negative skew in the case of senior citizens' declarations. This difference may be due to the unrepresentativeness of the surveyed group of seniors.

Figure 3. The frequency of using other hours by people 65+



Source: Own compilation.

In the group of people aged 65+, no statistically significant correlation was observed between the frequency of shopping both in and out of hours for seniors and variables such as place of residence, gender or age. The distribution of answers to the question of whether elderly people were eager to shop during the hours specially designed for them is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency of willingness using senior citizens' hours

	Traders(%)	Seniors (%)
hard to say	13	37
less willing	23	14
I didn't notice the difference	53	----- ⁵
more willingly	11	49

Source: Own compilation.

It is observed that according to traders' feelings, slightly more than half of them saw no difference in the willingness of older people to shop during senior hours and 23% felt that seniors shopped less. On the other hand, almost half of the seniors declared that they were more willing to use special hours for seniors, while 14% were less willing to. A correlation was observed between the willingness to use hours for seniors and age; the older the people were, the more willing they were to use the hours ($\gamma =0.36$, $p=0.062$). People who were more willing to use hours for seniors, used the hours more frequently.

⁵ In the questionnaire for persons 65+, there was no such answer in the cafeteria.

3.2.2 Impact of hours for persons 65+ on the revenue of retail outlets and consumer behaviour

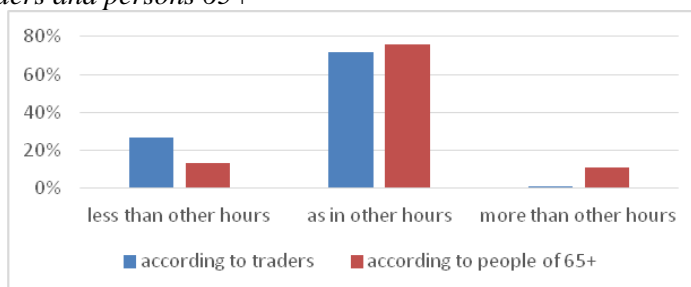
The aim of the research was also to determine the relationship between revenue during a pandemic between 10:00-12:00 on days with hours for seniors and revenue during a pandemic in the same hours in the period without hours for seniors, and the average daily revenue during a pandemic with and without hours for 65+ (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021). The traders declared that older people spent the same amount and bought a similar amount of goods in hours dedicated for seniors as in other hours. However, respondents aged 65+ when asked about the same issues concerning spending and quantity of purchased goods while shopping during the hours intended for them as compared to shopping during the other hours at the same percentage as traders, declared that on average they bought the same amount of goods (p-value=0.89) and that the average expenses (p-value=0.58) were similar. Clear differences are evident in terms of 'less than other hours' and 'more than other hours' both in terms of average expenditure and goods quantities (Table 2).

Table 2. Spending and buying goods by senior citizens shopping between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. according to seniors

Senior citizens, according to seniors, shopping between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. on average			
Spent:	%	Bought:	%
less than other hours	13	less goods than other hours	13
as in other hours	76	a similar quantity of goods as other hours	73
more than other hours	11	more goods than other hours	14

Source: Own compilation.

Figure 4. Comparison of assessment of average spending during hours for seniors between traders and persons 65+



Source: Own compilation.

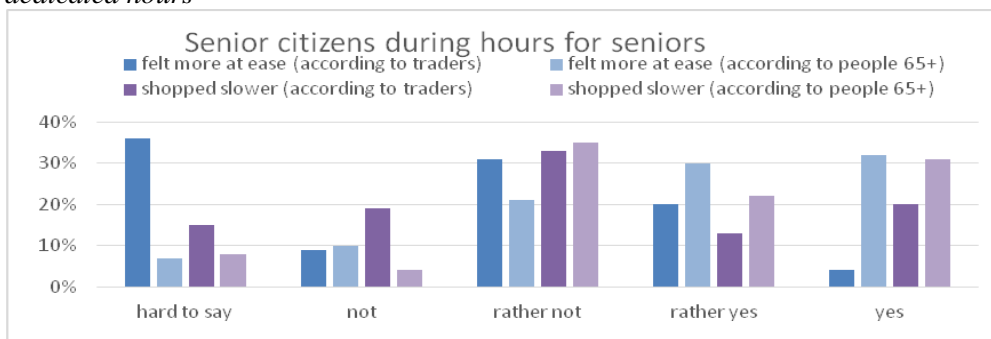
There is almost a *sui generis* inverted symmetry, i.e., more salespeople than seniors would say that seniors spent and bought less, and seniors would say the opposite, that they spent more. However, it should be remembered that the population of 65+ is not representative and that the survey was not based on quantitative data but on the feelings of respondents of both groups in terms of spending and quantity of goods (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021). It can be observed that the more people aged 65+ shopped, the more they spent money ($\gamma=0.46$, $p=0.04$) and the more goods they

bought ($\gamma=0.6$, $p=0.005$). However, no correlation was observed with other variables, including the average spending and the attitude of retailers towards seniors.

3.2.3 Customer comfort assessment

The assessment of both the ease and speed of shopping by older customers when using hours dedicated to them compared to other hours according to salespeople and according to 65+ clearly differed.

Figure 5. Opinion on the ease and tempo of shopping for older people during dedicated hours



Source: Own compilation.

One in three traders was not able to assess the ease of older people to shop at the appointed hours, while the other respondents were mostly of the opinion that they “did not feel”, or “rather did not feel” more comfortable, while seniors mostly felt more comfortable. Similarly, when assessing the pace of shopping by older people during senior hours compared to the remaining hours, half of the traders did not notice that older people shopped more slowly, while half of people aged 65+ stated that they shopped more slowly. 15% of salespeople and 8% of seniors could not comment on this issue. These differences may result from the non-representation of the population of 65+, or from the generally negative attitude of traders to seniority hours, or from the difference in subjective feelings of the groups surveyed. Less than 30% of people aged 65+ felt that the attitude of the salesmen during seniority hours was more friendly than during other hours, and 70% saw no difference.

Seniors shopping in outlets located around Leszno more often described the attitude of retailers as more friendly. Seniors feeling more comfortable on average spent more ($\gamma=0.31$, $p=0.05$) and bought more goods ($\gamma=0.35$, $p=0.03$). Similar correlations become apparent when older people shop slower ($\gamma=0.45$, $p=0.02$ and $\gamma=0.38$, $p=0.03$, respectively). In those stores where the attitude of shoppers to older people was perceived as friendly, they more often spent more money ($\gamma=0.44$, $p=0.1$, however, from the point of view of verifying significance of the gamma coefficient, p-value is high and close to assuming no statistical significance). Research by Teller

et al. (2013) shows that the atmosphere in shops has a moderately positive effect on shopping satisfaction.

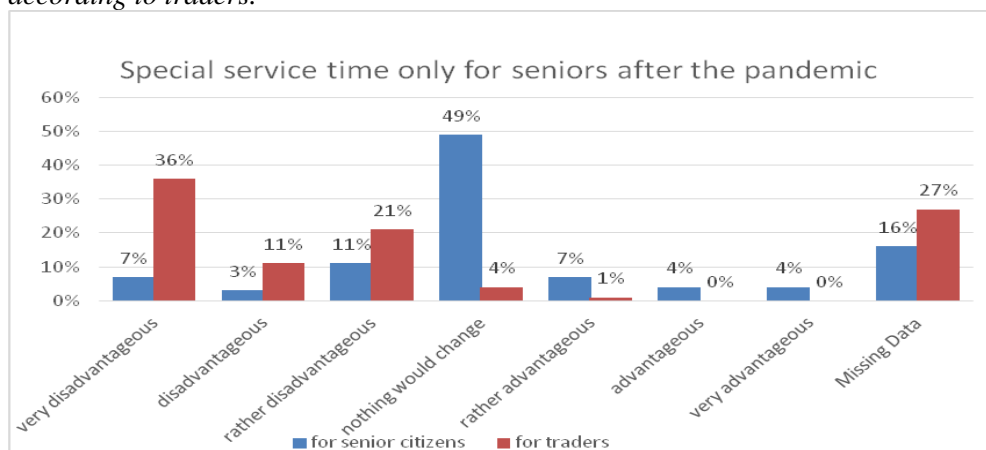
3.2.4 Opinion on dedicated hours for seniors and proposals for other facilities

In the period when the introduction of hours for senior citizens was announced and after its introduction, the trade sector, including the Polish Organisation of Trade and Distribution (POHiD), criticised and opted for their postponement to the first two hours after the opening of retail outlets. Through a survey (questionnaire), traders were asked to what extent they agree with the opinion that the selected hours for only 65+ people are not used for traders. A large majority decidedly agreed with this opinion. A statistically significant negative correlation was observed between compliance with the opinion and the change in income ($\gamma=-0.80$, $p=0.000$) and the frequency of shopping during the designated hours by elderly people ($\gamma=-0.42$, $p=0.04$) (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021).

There was also the question of which hours would be more advantageous. Almost half of people aged 65+ declared that they would prefer retail stores to be open for them in the first two hours after opening. Every tenth senior and every fifth salesman decided that the best would be only the first hour after opening (mainly grocery stores and pharmacies). Among seniors, 17% of them gave the hours 10:00-12:00, which in no case coincides with the hours indicated by traders. Only one senior citizen, a man aged 71-75, working professionally at home, stated that special hours for seniors make no sense.

Due to demographic changes and the search for various solutions for the silver economy, the respondents were asked whether it would be beneficial to introduce a special service time for older people only. This question was marked by a lot of lack of answers, which is also illustrated in Figure 6.

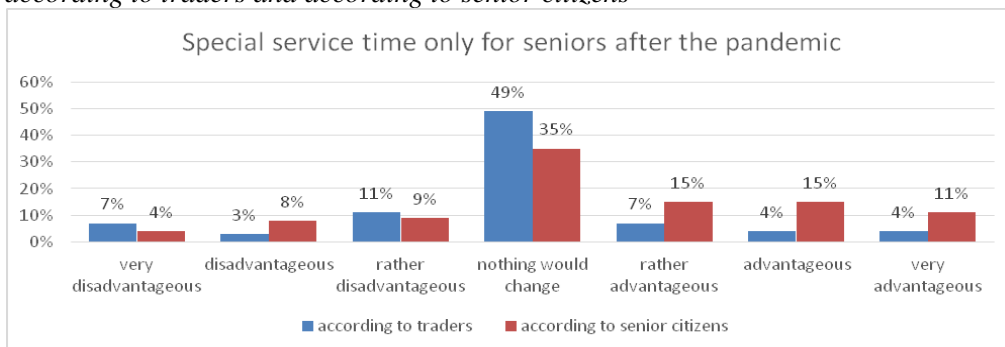
Figure 6. Opinion on the special service time only for seniors after the pandemic according to traders.



Source: Own compilation.

Opinions about setting special hours for seniors, according to traders, would not change anything for seniors, the distribution of their responses is symmetrical. However the distribution of responses of the seniors themselves is left-handed skewed, but one in three opinions is the same as half of the traders, and 41% of the respondents indicated as advantageous.

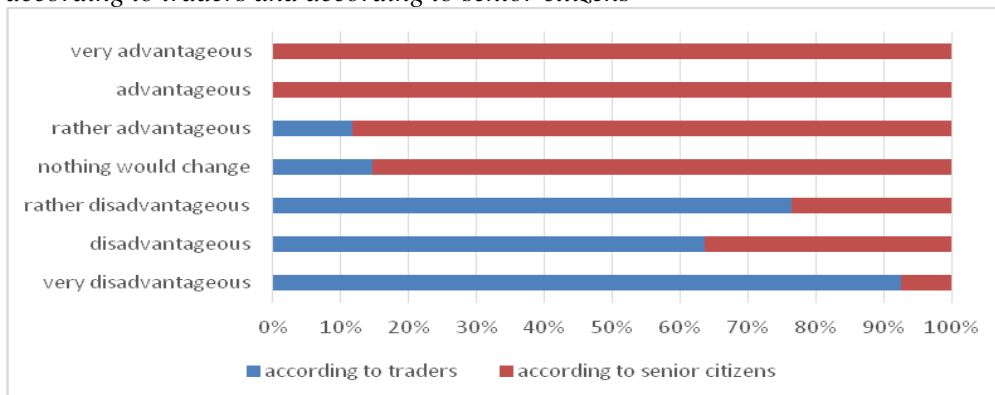
Figure 7. Opinion on the special service time only for seniors after the pandemic according to traders and according to senior citizens



Source: Own compilation.

Comparing the assessment of traders' benefits for traders (92% of valid assessments - disadvantageous) with the assessment of seniors' benefits for seniors (41% of valid assessments - advantageous) extremely different needs (an asymmetry of need) are observed.

Figure 8. Opinion on the special service time only for seniors after the pandemic according to traders and according to senior citizens



Source: Own compilation.

There is a moderate positive correlation between the assessment of the benefit of introducing hours for seniors with age ($\gamma=0.43$, $p=0.003$). Also, the more often older people declared that they used these hours more frequently, the more often they declared that they were advantageous ($\gamma=0.38$, $p=0.002$). A similar observation is

made in the case of declarations of willingness to use hours for seniors during a pandemic ($\gamma=0.63$, $p=0.000$).

Respondents were asked what facilities for seniors could be introduced at the retail outlet in the future, regardless of the pandemic. The majority of traders did not answer this question at all, 8 declared that there was no need to introduce any facilities, 7 suggested service out of the queue and one even a separate cash register, two respondents considered that the facility would have lower prices for seniors (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021). There were also suggestions such as, handrails at the entrances to retail stores, a separate sitting area, a senior citizen's stand where you can spend more time, an hour for seniors, shopping on the phone without any charges for delivery. Thirteen people aged 65+ indicated that they did not need any facilities (mostly men living in Leszno), five indicated that it would be more convenient to introduce clearer product descriptions in Polish, five also would like a separate cash register for seniors, four would like special hours for seniors, three said bonuses, promotions or discounts.

Older people also pointed out suggestions such as, displaying advertisements and information about promotions at the store entrance, lighter shopping trolleys, help with packaging, more smile, shopping trolleys with hand rest for people with physical and motor defects, shopping trolleys with a magnifying glass for reading labels. On the one hand, the respondents formulated opinions indicating the need for facilities for the elderly: "Providing the elderly with adequate time and peace of mind at the checkout while removing items and packing the chosen goods. The pressure on older people waiting in line to speed up these activities is very stressful", "Loneliness in older people is a very common phenomenon not only in Poland and EU countries. This fact inspired the Dutch local supermarket "Jumbo" in Vlijmen to implement two exceptional initiatives, namely the "chat box" and the "coffee corner". In my opinion, this is an interesting initiative", "In the hours for seniors, you buy quietly.

There are no children or young couples in a hurry" or "It's good that seniors can also come to the store at other times. Seniors feel anxious and are not harassed for being slow". On the other hand, however, there have also been several opinions that the introduction of facilities for the elderly is stigmatising, e.g: "I believe that the preference for special privileges for people 65+ is a kind of labeling of these people and I think that these privileges would not benefit everyone especially from the point of view of society's psyche. Personally I like to "mix with the crowd", "i.e., people of different ages, then I do not have the feeling of time slipping by after 65+. I think it is good how it is when we all do our shopping at the same time", or "In the nearest future /2-3 years / do not divide the society. For now too much aggression in society" and "Leave the trade so as not to divide society. There is too much aggression in human relations already", "Drawing people by age is degrading". The persons expressing the latter opinions were exclusively men. A similar position is confirmed by the work of Moschis (2017) „Generally speaking, older people do not

like to be singled out; they do not like to be stereotyped, and they do not identify with other older adults. (...) Rather, older adults like to think that their needs are similar to those of younger adults, and they tend to identify with adults much younger than their chronological age”.

4. Conclusions

Older people shopped at their specified time “rather not too often”, but also “not too often” (according to seniors) at other times (which may be characteristic of pandemic time). The elderly declared that they were eager to use the hours dedicated to them. Moreover, the older they were and the smaller the retail outlet, the more eager the seniors were to use this facility.

Most seniors did not see any difference in the attitude of the traders. Seniors shopping in facilities around Leszno more often described the attitude of shoppers as more friendly. In those shops where the attitude of salespeople towards older people was assessed as friendly, older people were more likely to spend more money. Surveys by Verma and Gupta (2016), Lesakova and Dano (2016) show that older people, if they are not specially treated, are not satisfied with the service and consequently, in the long term perspective, give up shopping in such a store.

“The majority of both traders and seniors considered that the first hours of shopping would be more advantageous for older people during the pandemic, which coincides with the opinions of trade organisations and transactional traffic analysis” (Bartkowiak *et al.*, 2021).

The traders rarely gave suggestions for facilities for seniors. They suggested for example: service outside the queue, a separate cash register, lower prices for seniors, handrails at the entrances to the points of sale, a separate sitting area, a stand for seniors where you can devote more time to such people, an hour for seniors, shopping on the phone without any charges for delivery. The elderly pointed out examples of facilities such as: the introduction of clearer product descriptions in Polish, a separate cash register for seniors, special hours for seniors, bonuses, promotions or discounts, displaying advertisements and information about promotions at the store entrance, lighter shopping trolleys, packing aids, shopping trolleys with a hand rest for people with physical and motor defects, trolleys with a magnifying glass for reading labels. In many countries, traders have already implemented many solutions for seniors and are looking for further innovations in this area. In Poland, the needs of seniors are still not noticeable enough, which should change as this is an increasingly growing and significant customer group.

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