Examining older consumers' loyalty towards older brands in grocery retailing

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the buying behaviours of older and younger consumers of older and newer brands in grocery retailing. We analysed 88,000 purchases of 60 brands from six categories. Behavioural loyalty measures for different consumer age cohorts were calculated and compared relative to each brand's launch date. Results showed older consumers do not buy older brands more often than newer brands. Older consumers also do not principally buy older brands. Therefore, brands of all ages compete for consumers of all ages. Findings indicate that for newer brands, older consumers should not be ignored as a market for growing the brand. For older brands, despite the default advantage of long-term exposure of older consumers, such advantage will fade if these brands fail to maintain a competitive presence in the market, as older consumers trial and become loyal to newer brands.

1. Introduction

Declines in fertility and mortality rates underpin the demographic shift to an aging global population. In the United States, it is predicted that by 2030 the population aged 65+ years will outnumber children under 18 years, and one in five residents will be at retirement age (Bureau, 2018). The potential financial gains from selling to this older segment has consequently captured the attention of marketers. Age is one of the basic classification variables for segmenting consumers, a practice that has been common among marketers for decades (Kennedy et al., 2013; Smith, 1956). Brands have attempted to explicitly appeal to the mature market, some with apparent success (e.g., "Welcome to Life After 50" by SunLife UK), others less so (e.g., Crest removed mentions of "selected for ages 50 plus" from their dental products).

Despite the growth and importance of the older consumer segment, limited research has examined the buying habits of this cohort to identify how it might be dis/similar to younger cohorts. Studies do show that older consumers tend to consider and/or purchase fewer brands (see Lambert-pandraud and Laurent, 2010a for a summary). Of the brands bought, there is also some evidence that older consumers seem to prefer long-established (older) brands over newer brands (Lambert-pandraud and Laurent, 2010a, 2010b). Considering that older consumers have extended recurring exposure to long-established brands, either through direct purchase experience and/or an accumulation of advertising exposures, it is reasonable to assume some form of loyalty will prevail towards those more familiar brands over newer ones. This suggests that older brands have an inherent advantage to retain this segment of customers when faced with new brands entering the market.

Research that has examined the purchase behaviour of different age groups relative to expected brand performance metrics provides another perspective. These studies predominantly report few important differences in the brand purchasing patterns of older and younger consumers across a range of product or service categories (Singh et al., 2012; Uncles and Lee, 2006). That is, bigger brands have higher penetration and purchase frequency among all age groups, and the biggest brands in the market is consistently the same across age groups. These patterns indicate that customers of different ages are broadly similar (on average) in their brand choices (Singh et al., 2012; Uncles and Lee, 2006). Such studies, however, did not consider brand age, which means the crossover of brand size and brand age remains to be investigated.

Generally the area of older consumers' preferences and behaviour is under-researched (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010b), as is the initiation and evolution of brand buying as consumers age. There is a need to better understand how buying behaviour develops and endures over time to determine the influence of time passing (i.e., brand age) on consumer behaviour and the implications for marketing strategy, including the selection of consumer target markets.

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2. Background to the research

2.1. Brand buying behaviour of older consumers

As people age and their living circumstances and tastes change, it is expected that their consumer behaviour will change. What is of interest here is whether older consumers show differing proclivities to older brands compared with younger consumers.

Lambert-Pandraud and colleagues (2010b, 2005) have investigated brand preferences across age groups. In one study in France, they found 74 percent of new car buyers aged 75+ years purchased from established national brands, compared to 49 percent of new car buyers aged 18–39 years (Lambert-Pandraud et al., 2005). Similarly perfume brands introduced before 1962 received 37 percent share among consumers over 80 years, and only 11 percent share among those 29 years and younger (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010b). These studies provide some support for the idea that older consumers prefer older to newer brands; the potential explanation for which is discussed in the following section. A takeaway is that newer brands may be more likely to growth by targeting younger consumers, who are newer to the market. However, Anderson and Sharp (2010) warned that the notion of unwillingness of older consumers to try new brands is overstated. They suggested that newer brands have a slightly higher proportion of younger buyers as this cohort provides a disproportionate representation of consumers 'available' to acquire (they are inexperience buyers and are still establishing their repertoires). Anderson and Sharp (2010) concluded that older consumers still purchase new brands and that the brand loyalties of older consumers are not as entrenched as commonly believed.

These studies (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010b; Lambert-Pandraud et al., 2005) are not without limitations, including the use of claimed brand purchase data. Collecting purchase data that spans decades is immensely challenging, with surveys commonly the most viable option (especially for categories like cars). However, claims made by respondents of past activities are often subject to significant memory errors (Nenycz-Thiel et al., 2012). While there are question techniques that can mitigate misreporting, it is unclear whether these were applied to these past studies.

Further, both studies are restricted to a single, high-involvement category, which gives limited indication for the generalizability of the brand and consumer age relationship across varied contexts. Low-involvement products, including unfamiliar or new grocery purchases are inherently low-risk (generally due to low cost) and so present few barriers for older consumers to trial. Another interesting consideration is the rate of innovation and therefore the pace of change in the perfume and toothpaste markets compared with the grocery sector which has many new brands and variants introduced annually. New products represent around 15 percent of available products to purchase in CPG in a given year (Victory, 2017). Such frequent changes in product offerings can disrupt consumers buying patterns (e.g., older brands get moved to different position on shelves, become unavailable in a shopper's usual supermarket, or are delisted and replaced by new products). These factors inherent to low-involvement purchases may undermine older consumers' potential bias towards older brands.

Meanwhile, studies that have examined brand purchase and performance by age groups are predominantly based on low-involvement products (Uncles and Ehrenberg, 1990; Singh et al., 2012) with a few exceptions (e.g., Uncles and Lee, 2006 included credit cards). These studies did find some differences in category-level buying between across age groups, for example, more older consumers buy newspapers and do so more often (Uncles and Lee, 2006), whereas fewer older consumers buy bottled tea and do so less often (Singh et al., 2012). However, purchase rates (loyalty) between brands within a product category showed no notable differences based on consumer age, indicating brands are equally bought by people of all ages (Uncles and Lee, 2006; Singh et al., 2012). The overarching pattern is that behavioural loyalty, is strongly linked to brand size irrespective of consumer age.[1]

However, these studies did not consider brand age, and specifically whether there is a secondary pattern where older consumers tend to exhibit more loyalty towards older brands. Consequently, the findings are not directly comparable to those of Lambert-Pandraud and colleagues.

The next section discusses some possible mechanisms for why older consumers may skew towards familiar brands.

2.2. Possible underlying mechanisms for older consumers loyalty

2.2.1. Satisficing tendencies

Older adults are more inclined to show more 'satisficing' tendencies than younger adults (i.e., meeting minimum requirements rather than maximising satisfaction) (Drolet et al., 2010; Cole and Balasubramanian, 1993). Satisficing is a heuristic decision-making process where consumers select an option that is 'good enough' (Simon, 1955); logically resulting in choosing familiar, previously purchased brands. One study that compared brand purchases across consumer groups for margarine and shampoo found that the desire to purchase unfamiliar brands (which may actually be higher performing) decreases with age (Helm and Landschulze, 2013). Older consumers claim to be reluctant to switch to unfamiliar brands, especially once they have established their preferred brands (Karani and Fraccastoro, 2010).

2.2.2. Early learned brands are more memorable

Researchers have suggested that later acquired concepts build upon earlier learned concepts in memory (Steyvers and Tenenbaum, 2005; Brysbaert et al., 2000). Early learned knowledge is more strongly embedded in the knowledge system (the semantic memory) compared to later learned concepts (Steyvers and Tenenbaum, 2005); and it tends to have more and stronger memory associations than later learned concepts (Brysbaert et al., 2000). As per the Associative Network Theory, the strength and number of connections influences the propensity of memory retrieval (Anderson, 1983) and hence likely consideration in a brand relevant situations. Early learned concepts, having more established connections are more readily accessed and retrieved first. Knowledge (or brands) learned early in life may therefore have advantage over those learned later in life (i.e., retrieving brands with bigger mental networks is less mentally taxing), especially for older adults. This suggests there may be a window period of opportunity for brands to establish a lasting 'presence' in consumers' memory, as evidence suggest memories encoded between adolescence and young adulthood seem to endure through time (e.g., Rubin et al., 1998).

2.2.3. Attachment and nostalgia towards familiar brands

Some psychological effects also provide insights into older consumers potential bias towards older brands, such as attachment and nostalgia. Attachment requires time, repeated interactions, and the development of memories (Park et al., 2010). Older consumers, having more category experience, are more likely to have established attachment with brands than less experienced, younger consumers. Noting that consumers can commence an attachment at any point in life (Park et al., 2010) separates the concept from nostalgia. Nostalgia is the preference towards objects or experiences of the past (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989). In this context, nostalgia is defined as a preference towards items that were popular during the early periods of an individual's life (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989). Preferences are typically

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[1] It is worth noting that (e.g., Uncles and Lee, 2006; Singh et al., 2012) used the Juster scale to collect claimed usage, and then subjected the data to nbd-Dirichlet modelling. Their findings reveal consistent patterns with analyses of actual purchase data (e.g., Uncles and Ehrenberg, 1990) which gives confidence in the accuracy of the findings.

developed during formative periods, from late teens to early twenties (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989). Previous research, for example, has found that consumers developed preferences in their taste in automobiles when consumers were about 26 years (Schindler and Holbrook, 2003). Nostalgic preferences are suggested to endure for the rest of one's life (Schindler and Holbrook, 2003; Holbrook and Schindler, 1989). Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent (2010b) found support for the role of attachment in perfume buying, but only limited support for nostalgia.

2.2.4. Habit formation

In a similar vein, people tend to repeat past behaviours, forming habits. Some habits become ingrained over time as the associations between the sequence of behaviours are consistently reinforced (du Plessis, 2005). Given the high frequency of brand consumption and purchase in our lives, consumer behaviour is typically repetitive (Wood and Neal, 2009). Consumer behaviour is particularly predictable on aggregate, as people tend to choose the same brands across different shopping trips (Seetharaman, 2004); buy predictably from a range of brands (Ehrenberg et al., 1990); buy similar quantities from a given retailer over different visits (Vogel et al., 2008); and consume similar types of foods across days (van't Riet et al., 2011). Such habitual purchases most likely occur with low-involvement goods, which are predominantly bought in supermarkets, and bought more frequently than high-involvement goods (Drolet et al., 2010).

It has been suggested that older consumers have more established habits compared to younger consumers, by virtue of having more purchase and consumption experience (Drolet et al., 2010). Older consumers may continue to repeat their brand choices from their repertoire of brands that was established after they become category buyers (Lambert-pandraud and Laurent, 2010a). A consequence of repeated behaviours over time can be observed where older consumers are more prone to buy familiar brands (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010b; Lambert-Pandraud et al., 2005). Familiar brands are typically mature or established brands which have been in the market for a long time, hence allows for a higher cumulative frequency of brand exposures and a longer history of past usage compared to newer brands.

2.3. Age segmentation as a marketing strategy

Segmenting the consumer market has long been regarded as an essential aspect of effective marketing strategy (Zhu et al., 2009; Dibb et al., 2002; Smith, 1956; Goodman and Remaud, 2015; Sirieix et al., 2011). Markets are frequently segmented by marketers, including grouping people according to demographic factors (including age, employment, socio-economic status), behaviours, and/or personal values. Segmentation is based on the expectation that consumers within a segment are homogenous, and consumers across segments are heterogeneous, resulting in different brand preferences across segments (Mcdonald and Dunbar, 2012). Consumer age as a segmentation variable is also a means to examine consumers' life stages and how that might affect choices. People of a similar age frequently share comparable life events (e.g., many young adults aged 18 to 24 move out of home). Cohorts also experience similar events at a similar age such as historical events, and are shaped by the particular period with its trends, and developments (Walker, 2003). However, the assumption that consumers within a segment behave homogenously has been challenged, (e.g., Harris et al., 2018 on shopper journeys, i.e., the channels people used before a purchase in a range of product categories showed very little evidence of homogeneity).

Regardless, the notion that different consumer segments may have different brand preferences can be evaluated by investigating the brand user profiles of competing brands (Kennedy and Hartnett, 2018). If attempts to segment and target consumers on the basis of age have been successful, we should observe that those particular brands have a disproportionate representation of older or younger users among their

customer bases. Specific to this investigation, newer brands should have more younger customers and older brands more older customers.

Research that studies the composition of brand customer bases support a lack of brand-level segmentation among different age cohorts. This stream of research has found that competing brand user profiles seldom differ (Hammond et al., 1996). This is a robust finding across a broad range of categories, including durables, services, and consumer goods (Uncles et al., 2012; Kennedy and Ehrenberg, 2001; Hammond et al., 1996), in both developed and emerging markets (Tanusondjaja et al., 2015; Uncles et al., 2012), which remains stable over time (i.e., over a period of three to six years, Anesbury et al., 2017). Deviations in these studies are rare, (e.g., Kennedy and Ehrenberg, 2001 showed only about eight percent of deviations were larger than five percentage from the average, and fewer deviations over 10 percent, and Anesbury et al., 2017 found similar patterns over periods of three to six years). Age related deviations were not specifically quantified in past studies, hence it is unclear if deviations associated with consumer and brand age existed.

Given that older consumers may have a higher likelihood of choosing familiar brands, it is worth investigating if older brands tend to skew towards older consumers when compared to competing newer brands.

3. Research questions

This paper builds on prior research by investigating the buying behaviour of groups of consumers of different ages linked to brand age for a number of low-involvement product categories. Two perspectives are considered to answer the following questions:

RQ1. Do older consumers buy older brands more often than younger consumers?

We compare competing brands' loyalty metrics for different consumer age groups; and.

RQ2. Do older brands have a disproportionate number of older buyers?

We compare competing brands' user profiles according to brand and buyer age.

This paper uses household panel data and a many sets of data approach. The goal is to identify the repeating patterns across conditions as a foundation of identifying and build empirical generalisations (Ehrenberg and Bound, 1993). This study applied the same analysis across data from six categories.

4. Data and method

4.1. Panel data

This study used Kantar World Panel data. The datasets analysed contain purchasing behaviour from 15,000 households from 2010 to 2014, for a total of about 88,000 purchases of almost 70 brands from six grocery categories. Speaking to the quality of the data; the panel contains large samples, providing a robust representation of buyers across all ages at brand-level. The data is demographically and regionally balanced to reflect the UK population (Kantar, 2015). Purchases of deodorant, shampoo, skin care, yellow fats, cooking sauce, and dog food brands were examined because they consist of brands with an extended range of launch years. Table 1 provides an overview of the data.

4.2. Identifying the relative age of brands and consumers

To determine how old or established a brand is we researched the brand's launch year, from reliable sources such as company websites. This was then compared with the consumer's birth year, to provide an estimate of which brands consumers have had more exposure to

Table 1
Description of panel data.

Categories	Years	Total category purchases	Brands analysed
Deodorant	2010	23 657	7
Shampoo	2010	26 783	13
Yellow fats	2010	4806	11
Cooking sauce	2014	4462	10
Dog food	2014	1552	10
Skin care	2014	27 541	17
Total purchases		88 000[a]	68

[a] Buyers from the same year may overlap across categories (i.e., buyer of deodorant may also have bought shampoo).

throughout their lives. Because the datasets are from two points in time (four years apart), brand age was calculated based on the year of the specific dataset. For example, Pantene (shampoo) was launched in 1945 making it 65 years old in 2010 in 69 years in 2014.

To isolate the age of consumers, only single-person households were included in the analysis. Shampoo, deodorant and skin care buyers were divided into six age groups: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65+ years. Yellow fats, cooking sauce and dog food buyers were classified into three age groups: 18–34, 35–54, and 55+ due to a lower number of households and purchases in the panel. Having three age groups for the latter categories ensured that each group had sufficient purchases for brands included in analysis. Brands with too few buyers (under 10 buyers in any group) were excluded.

As we are comparing brand metrics across consumer age groups, brand age is treated as relative to the individual age of each respondent. To illustrate, for respondents aged under 25, and for brands that existed before they were born (e.g., brand age is 25 years and older) are considered older brands; and for those respondents aged above 50, only brands that are above 50 years old are considered older. 18 of the 60 brands have been around for a *long* period of time (e.g., more than 65 years). These brands were considered older brands for everyone because those brands have existed throughout all consumers' entire adult lives. All results in the following sections are ordered by brand age (from newest to oldest) within each category.

4.3. Analysis

The first analysis investigates how consumers of different age groups behave in the market. To achieve this, brand performance measures, which include average purchase frequency and share of category requirements, were observed to see if any age groups showed higher repeat purchase behaviour for particular brands.

The second part measures the degree of brand differences by calculating deviations for each brand's user age profiles from the average brand user age profile. Then, average scores for each deviation within the brand were quantified to summarise the divergence in absolute values (ignoring the ± signs), which is known as the average absolute error [2] (AAE). AAE is an effective method to observe discrepancies of each brand across the category (Anesbury et al., 2017; Uncles et al., 2012; Kennedy and Ehrenberg, 2001).

Each brand's user profile was compared against the average brand profile of the category. User age profiles (in percentages) for each brand were calculated by taking the number of brand buyers, along with the profile of the average brand of the category. Brands with low number of buyers in an age group (fewer than ten) were excluded.

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[2] Also known as mean absolute deviation (MAD)

5. Results and discussion: comparing older consumers' loyalties across brands

5.1. Older consumers do not purchase older brands more frequently

Average purchase frequency (APF) is used to identify if older consumers tend to purchase older brands more frequently compared to younger consumers. APF is calculated as the total purchases of the brand divided by number of buyers who bought the brand at least once in the given period (i.e., here one year).

Results for the deodorant category, as an example, are presented in Table 2. Each brand's APF is presented in the rightmost column (i.e., read horizontally to compare the APF for each age group against the brand's average). Each age group's category APF is presented in the last row of the table (i.e., read vertically to compare the APF of each brand against the age groups' average). Higher APF indicates higher occurrence of repeat purchase. The key is to read APF within each age group across the brands (i.e., read vertically), as there is the confounding effect of weight of category purchases when reading across rows (i.e., older consumers look more loyal than younger consumers, but that is a consistent pattern across brands of different ages). The table also specifies the brands' market shares (MS), as this is an important variable when interpreting brand performance metrics.

Across the categories, the average purchase frequency (APF) results showed no signs of older consumers displaying unusually higher behavioural loyalty (more repeat purchase) towards older brands. In Table 2, we might anticipate the biggest deviations for the oldest brands (i.e., higher APF for Old Spice or Imperial Leather from older consumers). In fact, we see do not see higher APF among older consumers for the oldest brands. For all of the older age groups, the APF for Old Spice and Imperial Leather are below average.

In most cases, the APF within a consumer's age group for any brand follows the group's average APF. Consumers aged 18–24 had the lowest APF among all groups at 1.7 occasions, this is reflected in the APF of this age group for every brand. Those aged 45–64 had highest APF (2.6 times) – they buy all brands slightly more often irrespective of the brand's age.

When compared to the category purchase rate, bigger brands, such as Lynx and Sure, have higher repeat purchases from buyers of all ages– a widespread phenomenon in consumer behaviour known as the Double Jeopardy (DJ) where bigger brands systematically enjoy higher behavioural loyalty (Ehrenberg, 1993). This is present is all category tested.

5.2. Older consumers do not principally buy older brands

Share of category requirements (SCR) is another loyalty measure. SCR shows how much (i.e., what percentage) a brand fulfils of a buyer's category purchases. SCR is calculated as the total purchases of a specific brand divided by the total category purchases made by buyers of that brand.

In repertoire markets, including CPG, brands seldom score above 50% SCR (Sharp et al., 2002). That is, a typical CPG brand is bought by its buyers less than half the time; the other half of the purchase occasions are shared among competing brands. Hence, in this paper, 50% of SCR is used as a benchmark to identify brands with an unusually high proportion of purchases from any age group.

Results for the skin care category, as an example, are presented in Table 3. Each brand's average SCR is presented on the rightmost column (i.e., read horizontally to compare across age groups), and each age group's average SCR are presented on the last row of the table (i.e., read vertically to compare across brands).

There was no pattern of brand loyalty towards any particular newer/older brand based on consumers' age profiles. In the six categories, SCR scores typically move in line with market share (i.e., bigger brands, such as Simple and Nivea in the skin care category, have a higher SCR across all age groups as illustrated in Table 3). We found

Table 2
Average purchase frequency for deodorant brands in the United Kingdom, 2010.

Deodorant	Brand age (years)	MS (%)	Age of consumers						Brand APF
			18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	
Sanex	22	4	1.6	2.1	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.5	**2.3**
Lynx	25	12	2.1	2.7	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.5	**2.7**
Impulse	31	3	1.7	2.5	2.9	2.7	2.9	3.2	**2.7**
Rightguard	39	10	1.5	1.8	2.2	2.5	2.3	1.9	**2.2**
Mitchum	40	2	1.9	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.4	**2.3**
Sure	45	20	1.9	2.7	3.1	3.3	3	2.6	**2.8**
Mum	52	1	1.4	1.6	1.8	2	2.4	2.4	**1.9**
Dove	53	7	1.7	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.4	**2.2**
Old Spice	72	1	1.4	2.8	1.8	2.1	2.3	2.3	**2.1**
Imperial Leather	80	1	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.8	**1.8**
APF of cohort			*1.7*	*2.3*	*2.5*	*2.6*	*2.6*	*2.4*	*2.3*

Table 3
Share of category requirements for skin care brands in the United Kingdom, 2014.

Skin care	Brand age	MS (%)	Age of consumers						Ave SCR
			18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	
St Ives	23	1	15	19	13	11	9	9	**13**
Palmers	43	1	16	19	17	16	15	13	**16**
Neutrogena	52	1	28	16	14	10	9	13	**12**
Simple	54	8	37	33	30	26	29	28	**29**
Dove	57	3	24	23	19	18	18	20	**19**
Oil Of Olay	62	3	17	17	16	14	15	16	**15**
L'Oreal	101	1	7	13	10	10	12	13	**11**
Nivea	103	10	28	22	20	20	21	23	**21**
Garnier	110	5	28	23	20	19	19	17	**20**
Vaseline	129	4	28	19	18	15	17	19	**17**
Average SCR of cohort			*27*	*23*	*19*	*18*	*19*	*19*	*19*

consumers of all ages have brands of different ages in their repertoire, suggesting that older consumers do not show systematically higher loyalty toward older brands.

Categories that are purchased less frequently tend to show higher SCR scores as consumers have smaller repertoires in any time period. Table 3 showed lower SCR scores for older consumers in the skin care category, which is a reflection of their higher category purchase rate. However, at brand level, brand age is not an indicator for brand preference as we do not see older consumers purchasing older brands more so than others.

6. Results and discussion: comparing user profiles for older and newer brands

Table 4 and Table 5 (in appendix) are examples for user profiles comparisons in two categories. All individual deviations over ten percentage points (+10) are marked in bold, and deviations below negative ten percentage points (−10) are marked in italics. This highlights

larger differences (i.e., 10 percent from the 'average brand') as deviations smaller than this are unlikely to be managerially significant (Kennedy and Ehrenberg, 2001). Results showed that brand user profiles across all six categories seldom differ. Table 4 gives an example from the shampoo category of using AAE scores to compare each brand's user profile to the average brand profile of the category.

Overall the incidence of deviations of more than 10% from the category profile is as follows:

- 10% of older brands had a higher number of older consumers.*
- 7% of older brands had a lower number of younger consumers.
- 10% of newer brands had a lower number of older consumers.
  * Here older consumers are > 55 y/o, older brands are > 50 y/o.

In each category, deviations were rare and largely inconsistent, with the one exception being deodorant. Older deodorant brands (> 50 y/o) skewed towards buyers of 65+ y/o and away from those 25–34 y/o, see Table 5 in Appendix.

Table 4
AAE scores for shampoo brands in the United Kingdom, 2010.

Shampoo	Brand age	PEN (%)	Age of consumers						AAE
			18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	
Tresemme	6	*12*	−1	−2	5	4	−1	−6	**3**
Aussie	15	*4*	0	0	4	−1	0	−3	**1**
Timotei	25	*10*	−1	1	5	3	−3	−5	**3**
Herbal Essences	38	*17*	0	2	5	3	−2	−7	**3**
Head & Shoulders	49	*21*	−1	0	3	3	−1	−4	**2**
Dove	53	*11*	−1	−6	−3	3	5	2	**3**
Vosene	61	*4*	−2	−1	3	0	0	0	**1**
Pantene	65	*19*	−2	−3	−1	2	0	3	**2**
Average AAE of cohort		*12*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*2*	*2*	*4*	*2*

There were skews among older or younger brands (8 out of 60 brands tested). When deviations exist, they are small (i.e., only five percentage point above/below cut-off point) and unlikely to warrant marketers to action for their brand. Our findings show insufficient evidence to generalise that older brands tend to have higher number of older consumers compared to newer brands. The lack of differentiation in user profiles across brands within a category is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Hammond et al., 1996; Anesbury et al., 2017; Uncles et al., 2012; Kennedy and Ehrenberg, 2000).

7. Implications and conclusions

In the United States, a recent estimate finds only 5% of advertising is aimed at older consumers (Nielsen, 2012). Yet this group (born between 1946 and 1964) controls 70% of disposable income, and contributes almost 50% of the country's retail sales (ICLP, 2017).

Results from this paper provide positive news for marketers. While we observed that older consumers purchase more of some older brands, they are still purchasing from a range of brands. Despite common beliefs that older consumers are 'set in their ways' in their brand buying (Sikkel, 2013; Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010b; Lambert-Pandraud et al., 2005), older consumers should not be overlooked.

This paper shows their brand choices are not as inflexible as perceived, suggesting that newer CPG brands have the opportunity to enter (older) consumers' buying repertoires. This finding reflects the long-standing observation by Ehrenberg and Scriven (1997) that consumers habitually buy several brands (their repertoire), and though brand loyalties are reasonably long-standing, consumers do occasionally pick up a new brand or abandon old ones.

In most instances, older consumers still buy a number of competing brands—new and old—to fulfil their category requirements. It would be a missed opportunity to refrain investment in brand communications or product development relevant to older consumers, especially when they contribute such a large share of retail sales. In particular, brands are encouraged to be mindful of older consumers in regard to the likes of product packaging design. (e.g., lids that can be opened with arthritic hands or handles that allow packs to be more easily carried, etc). Older consumers have reported feeling vulnerable when faced with consumption difficulties that occur with advancing age (e.g., small fonts on pack) (Ford et al., 2016).

Even though there is some evidence that early entry brands enjoy benefits (i.e., early mover advantage such as higher market share and perceived as higher quality (Bronnenberg et al., 2009)), such advantage fades if these brands rely on their legacy and fail to maintain a competitive presence in market. This is especially the case for markets with low barriers to entry, where new competitors are introduced frequently.

Brands compete with other brands in their category predictably, consumers of all ages seem to *not* exhibit distinct preferences for older or newer brands. It is therefore advisable for brands to build their presence and reach across the broad market. That is, they must develop physical and mental availability to ensure brands are included in the purchase repertoire for *all* category buyers (Sharp, 2010).

8. Limitations and future research

This research is not without limitations. The Kantar panel data utilised does not have the level of precision and control that primary data collection could have accomplished (Neuman, 2011; Zikmund et al., 2011). We assumed that all respondents were exposed to the brands tested since those brands were launched in the market. However, it is almost impossible to ensure with absolute certainly that all respondents had exposure to all brands. Such information (i.e., knowing if respondents had seen the brand with some regularity since its launch) was not available. Furthermore, it would be impractical for elderly respondents to remember when they first saw each brand or estimate all subsequent exposures, especially for older brands.

The findings in the present paper are limited to a subset of brands and categories. Further research could look at replicating and expanding the research method into other categories, such as service brands (e.g., airlines) that have yet to be examined in age-related research of this vein. One potential avenue worth exploring is to compare the mental representation of newer/older brands of younger/older consumers. Some research has indicated that brand exposures during childhood can influence biases in product evaluation in adults (Connell et al., 2014) and foster stronger brand memories and associations that could last for decades (Braun-latour and Latour, 2004).

Acknowledgement

Appendix

Table 5
AAE scores for deodorant brands in the United Kingdom, 2010.

Deodorant	Brand age	PEN (%)	Age of consumers						AAE
			18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	
Sanex	22	*15*	−1	0	4	2	−1	−4	**2**
Lynx	25	*26*	−1	−1	4	3	0	−5	**2**
Impulse	31	*12*	−1	−2	6	3	−1	−5	**3**
Rightguard	39	*17*	−2	−1	4	5	−1	−5	**3**
Mitchum	40	*6*	−2	0	5	4	−2	−4	**3**
Sure	45	*37*	−1	0	4	2	−1	−4	**2**
Mum	52	*3*	−2	−9	−4	1	4	11	**5**
Dove	53	*32*	−1	−3	1	2	1	0	**2**
Old Spice	72	*1*	−2	−10	−9	4	7	10	**7**
Imperial Leather	80	*2*	−2	−13	−3	3	7	8	**6**
Average AAE of cohort		*15*	*2*	*4*	*4*	*3*	*3*	*6*	*3*

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