

Saudi Consumer's Shopping Behaviour: Descriptive Analysis

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Abstract

Studies that link customer service to factors such as demographic, psychographic characteristics and store format choice are rather limited and under studied despite the fact of the discovery that individual characteristics of consumers influence their shopping behaviour. Despite its importance and its contribution toward better understanding of consumer purchasing behavior, there is still lack of research in this area especially in the retail sector. In validating the measurements and investigating 408 questionnaires were filled by shoppers. The research concluded with a discussion on management implications as well as recommendations that suppliers should supply the good in shopping malls through considering their demographic and psychographic responses.

Keywords: Demographic, psychographic, shopping behaviour, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

On the same note, customers expected certain value when shopping thus where they shop plays a major role in their buying decision. As the market in the retailing industry are driven by “value focus” customers (Levy, 1999). Several researchers have suggested that customer value is influenced by individual characteristics of consumers. With regards to research in retailing however, few retailing topics have captured the interest of researchers and practitioners alike and have examined the patronage behaviour (De Juan, 2004; Dellaert et al., 1998; Finn and Louviere, 1990; Ganesh et al., 2007). Many of prior researches on retailing gave attention to store image and significance of store attributes in considering the concept of store choice and patronage behaviour (Medina and Ward, 1999; Outi, 2001; Sinha and Banerjee, 2004, Sinha et al., 2005; Sinha and Uniyal, 2005; Carpenter and Moore, 2006). Studies that link customer service to factors such as demographic, psychographic characteristics and store format choice are rather limited and under studied despite the fact of the discovery that individual characteristics of consumers influence their shopping behavior (Medina and Ward, 1999; Fox et al., 2004; Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007). Monroe (2003) asserts that behavioural characteristics of customers affect which benefits they want and how important these benefits are, as well as their willingness to pay for them.

Unfortunately, the findings of consumer characteristics have not been validated in a cross-cultural setting (Yang and Jolly, 2009). Given the importance and efforts to identify the important determinants of consumer value in service delivery suitable for all service companies, it is argued that the global application of the conceptualization of concept developed in the West without consideration of the influence of culture reflects “a degree of naiveté” (Chui, Lewis and Dong, 2004).

2. Literature Review

Individual Characteristics

Several researchers have suggested that customer value is influenced by individual characteristics of consumers. This may include factors such as their personality and attitude; “knowledge and experience; personal values or demographic characteristics, such as age, education and income (Grewal, et al., 2003; Huber, et al., 2001; Lai, 1995). Demographic features which contain of age, gender, marital status, income, female working status, education, occupation and family size” have posed tremendous effect on the selection of store format in grocery retailing (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Zeithaml, 1985; Kopp et al., 1989; Sampson and Tigert, 1992; South and Spitze, 1994; Stone, 1995; East et al., 1995a; East, 1997; Mason, 1996; McGoldrick and Andre, 1997; Arnold, 1997; Bawa and Ghosh, 1999; Sinha and Banerjee, 2004; Fox et al., 2004; Carpenter and Moore, 2006).

Monroe (2003) asserts that behavioural characteristics of customers affect which benefits they want and how important these benefits are to them. Among those who have included individual characteristics in their studies, Bolton and Drew (1991) found that customers’ personal characteristics are important when they assess value, but not when assessing service

quality. Therefore, they conclude that “customer value seems to be a ‘richer’, more comprehensive measure of customers’ overall evaluation of a service than service quality” (p. 383).

Customer characteristics in their study of perceived customer value of telephone services included, among other things, age, usage rate, and household size. In a more recent study of customer value and satisfaction, Hsu et al. (2006) compared a model between female and male bank customers and found significant differences in all measured relationships except one. Among other things, men seemed to perceive product and service quality as more important in their value assessments than women did. Value also was more strongly related with satisfaction for men than for women.

Calls for studies adding customer characteristics to the picture have come from several researchers. For example, Grewal et al. (1998), who studied customer value in a price-comparison advertisement framework, suggest that their model should be tested on different segments of buyers in terms of, e.g., value consciousness. Furthermore, they add that it “would be useful to look at the individual characteristics of subjects more closely and assess such variables as involvement, price consciousness, knowledge, and inclination to take risks” (Grewal et al., 1998).

In addition, based on a study of relationships between service value, quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions, Cronin et al. (2000) suggest further research into the influence of individual consumer characteristics. Specifically, they point to the “possible moderating effects of such individual characteristics as risk aversion, involvement, and product category experience/expertise” (Cronin et al., 2000) as areas for future research. The potential influence of risk perceptions also is acknowledged by Sweeney et al. (1999), who suggest that there is a “need for segmentation studies to identify the potential for different model solutions” (p. 101).

Shoppers’ Socio-Economic and Geographic Factors

Socio-economic category refers to a number of individuals who share same characteristics in their actions as a result from their economic status such as education, occupation and income in the market place (Engel et al., 1990). Substantial studies in consumer behaviour discipline depicts that consumers from all social strata tend to demonstrates characteristically distinguished psychological and behavioural patterns that ultimately decide the store preference behaviour (Monroe and Gultinan, 1975; Shęth, 1983; Gupta and Chintagunta, 1994; Brown and Fisk (1965); Kohn et al., 1990; Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1993; Shim and Bickle, 1994; Morganosky, 1995; East, 1997).

Overall, the nearer the consumers are to a store or marketplace, the greater the possibility to purchase from the store. Vice versa, the farther the consumers are from a store, the greater the number of intruding factors therefore reduce the possibility to utilize the store (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993). The journey time to a store is believed to evaluate the effort, both physical and psychological, to arrive at a retail outlet. Nevertheless, the outcome of the journey time differs by product. In certain products, consumers are keen to travel extremely far (Runyon

and Stewart, 1987; Hawkins et al., 1998).

Psychographic Factors

Psychographics is a psychological way employed to describe and determine the consumers' lifestyles through their activities, interests and opinions (Tam and Tai, 1998). Psychographics dimensions represent the evaluations of consumer's mind in which it identifies how a person thinks, feels, reacts and reflects (Roy and Goswami, 2007). Researches on psychographic problems are utilized to establish extensive understanding of the market segments based on their activities, interests, opinions needs, motives, perceptions, lifestyles and attitudes (Goswami, 2007). Conventional demographic variables failed to recognise the absolute characteristics of consumers in the retail market as they poses tremendously different psychographic features though they come from a similar demographic group (Sinha, 2003). Psychographics or lifestyle studies also consider attitudes or evaluation on people, place, ideas, and products in assessing consumer buying behaviour (Hawkins et al., 2002; Gonzalez-Fernandez and Bello, 2002).

Prior studies have tried to cluster or segment customers according to their values (Rokeach, 1973; Kahle, 1983), activities, interests and opinions (Blackwell and Miniard, 1994). Cosmos (1982) affirmed that entire classification or arrangement of goods and services consumed by a customer indicates the truth of his lifestyle through his activities, interests and opinions (AIO) variables. Keng et al., who studied the learning and reading related way of life of user and non-users segmented customers into seven groups based on their diverse patronage/support or favourable intentions and reading habits.

Wu (2003) verified that there is a significant connection between consumer lifestyle and online shopping behaviour. Similarly, Nijmeijer et al. (2004) who examined the association amid food lifestyle and vegetable consumption using personal values, lifestyle components, food beliefs and attitudes, ascertained that personal values had considerable effects on purchase customary and consumption frequency. In latest study by Roy and Goswami (2007), they asserted that the psychographics showed a clear association between product or service categories with similar buying frequencies among the consumer.

3. Measurements of demographic and photographic variables

Demographics Characteristics are measured by adopting survey of Prasad, C.J. and Aryasri, A.R. (2011) and Geographic distance is measured by adopting survey Wilson, L.C., Alexander, A. and Lumbers, M. (2004). Finally psychographics activities, interest and opinion are measured by adopting survey Gonzalez-Fernandez, A. and Bello, L. (2002).

4. Results and discussion

The descriptive statistics of the respondents is illustrated in Table 1. Based on the respondents' description, majority of the sample comprises of male gender (93.4 percent of the sample). This is considered normal as Saudi Arabia is a male dominated society and due to cultural restrictions, it is almost near impossible to interview the female gender "on the street". The highly skewed male sample is reasonable as Saudi Arabia is known as a

patriarchal society and on most daily activities; normally the male decides or conduct the activities on behalf of the members of the family and that includes “traditionally” female task-related activities such as shopping for groceries. Nevertheless, the enumerators managed to give questionnaires to 27 female respondents which comprises of a meagre 6.6 per cent.

In terms of marital status, the sample is dominated by married couples where it comprises of 93.1 per cent (380 respondents). The skewed turnout is sensible as most of the patrons at the shopping malls in Saudi Arabia are married couples. There are two explanations to this scenario. Initially, grocery shopping is deemed as a family affair where the shopping trip is liken to a family outing as groceries retailers are normally house in big shopping malls. It is typical that shopping malls include all sorts of facilities and services such as children amusement, restaurants or food centres and other shopping outlets. Therefore it is reasonable that the grocery shopping is accompanied with various other activities. Meanwhile, due to the strict “segregation” policy between the opposite genders, malls in Saudi Arabia restrict male youngsters or bachelors from loitering malls which are throng by female patrons. Hence, that explains the exceptionally high number of respondents comprising of married couples.

With regards to age, most of the respondents are within the mid-age bracket which is between 25 to 34 years consisting of almost half of the sample. Trailing behind the group at 25.5 per cent is respondents between the ages of 45 to 54 years. These two groups which represent about three quarter of the sample can be considered as “mature” age group where they are at the heights of their career and family life stage. As the subsequent paragraphs in this chapter lucidly discussed the remaining findings of the respondents characteristics showed, their age group correlates with their number of family, monthly income, social class and their shopping characteristics.

Education wise, the sample represents a relatively “educated” group where almost half of the sample possessed an undergraduate degree and 7 per cent owns a postgraduate qualification. The remaining 37.5 per cent has a certificate or diploma which entitles them to work in private and government positions such as teachers alike. In Saudi Arabia, the remuneration for an intermediate government positions like teacher offers relatively decent salary. Consequently, this is illustrated in the respondents reported monthly income. Almost 40 per cent of the sample has an income within SAR5001 to SAR10, 000 per month while the next subsequent group at 30.9 per cent earns between SAR10, 001 to SAR15, 000 monthly. Meanwhile, the sample also comprises of the relatively higher income bracket at 26 per cent which earns a “gross” monthly income between SAR20, 000 and above. It is interesting to note here that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia do not impose any personal income tax on its residents regardless of their residency status. Therefore, any “gross” income earn is in fact a net income.

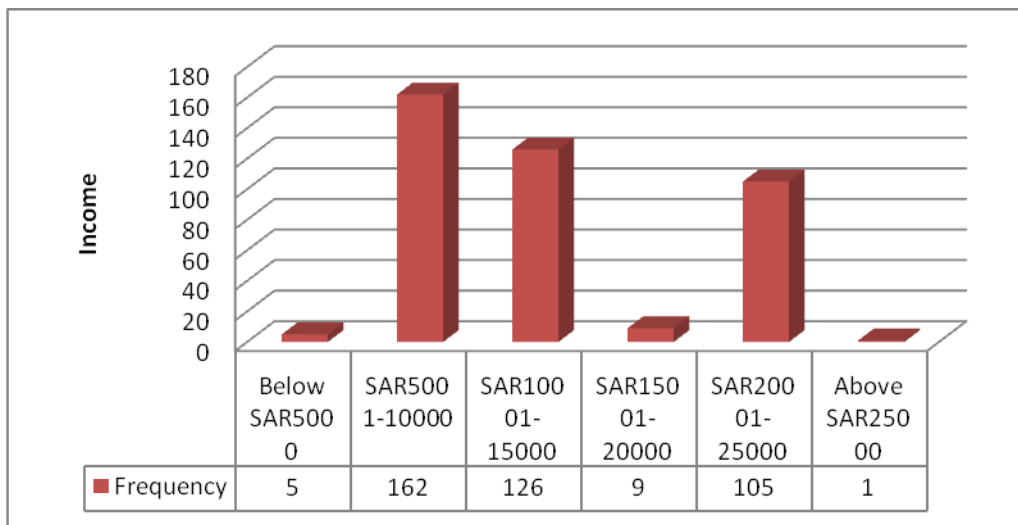


Figure 1

Monthly Income

Initially, a question was asked in the pilot study requesting the respondents to dictate their social classes either lower, middle or high class. However, almost all of the respondents stated their social class as middle class regardless of their income. This phenomenon showed that self-reflection tends to inflate its size, since many respondents in the upper and lower tiers are prone to say that they are middle class. In fact, the salary range of those so describing themselves in the pilot study covers a wide range income bracket from SAR10,000 to more than SAR25,000. Therefore, the question asking the respondents to dictate their social class was eliminated.

To compensate the question on social class, the researcher approximate the social class based on the descriptive statistics. Lower social class is categorized as figures below the one standard deviation of the mean while high social class as income figure above one standard deviation of the mean. Based on this argument, the researcher transformed the data to these three categories. Therefore, lower social class was categorized as monthly income below SAR10,000, middle social class as respondents with a monthly income between SAR10,001 to SAR20,000 while high social class as monthly income from SAR20,000 onwards. The social class data generated from this formula depicts that the sample is represented by a relatively equal number of the three social class strata at 40.9 per cent (lower), 33.1 per cent (middle) and 26 per cent (high).

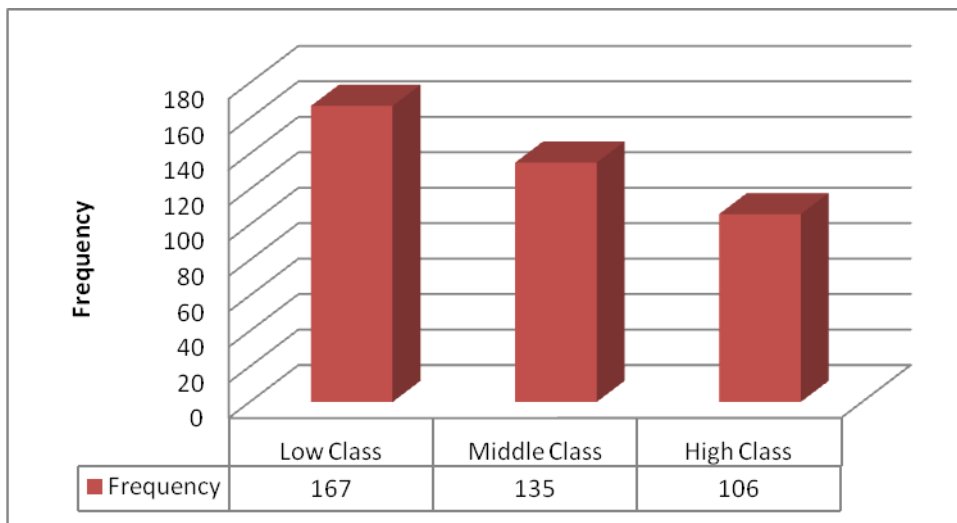


Figure 2

Social Class

Based on this new categorization, the researcher further compares the social class data with the respondent’s information on monthly income and level of education. The findings demonstrate that there is “consistency” in the new category. The following figure illustrates our comparison on the related information towards the development of social class data.

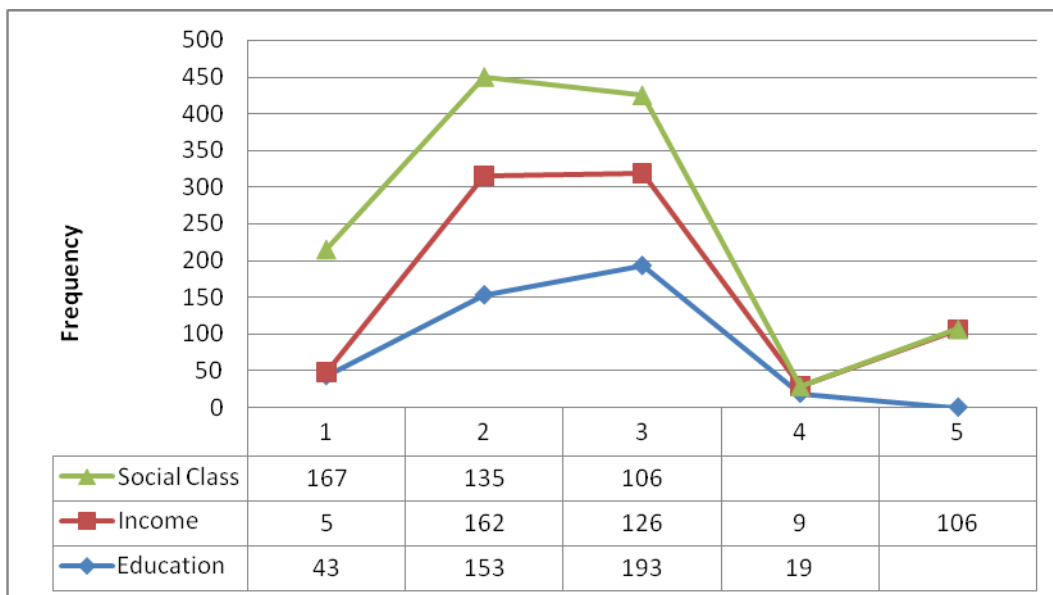


Figure 3

Composition of Social Class

Finally, a question was asked to determine the number of family members residing in the same residence. By this, it means the number of dependent under the care of the respondent in his/her residence. The results reveal the “long-established” impression of Arab families where the respondents dictate their family members consist of a figure between 1 to 12

members. This is clearly visible where 68.4 per cent reported that they have family members of more than five. Interestingly, 22.1 per cent of the respondents said that they have a dozen family members under their custody. Again, this is very much influence by the local Arab culture where it is normal to have large number of children. In addition, female siblings are not allowed to stay away from their family or on their own due to religious restrictions known as “mahram”. It is also customary that “grown up” children continue to stay with their parents until the day they are married. In summary, the demographic statistics of the respondents represent the typical characteristics of the Saudi Arabia population. The following table after this paragraph summarizes the discussions of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1

Respondent Demographic Statistics

Characteristics		Frequency	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	381		93.4
	Female	27	408	6.6
Marital status	Single	28		6.9
	Married	380	408	93.1
Age	18-24	50		12.3
	25-34	191		46.8
	35-44	52		12.7
	45-54	104		25.5
	55-64	11	408	2.7
Education	Secondary	43		10.5
	Certificate/Diploma	153		37.5
	Degree	193		47.3
	Postgraduate	19	408	4.7
Family Members	1	1		0.2
	2	2		0.5
	3	10		2.5
	4	116		28.4
	5	22		5.4
	6	8		2.0
	7	6		1.5
	8	140		34.3
	9	3		0.7
	10	3		0.7
	11	7		1.7
	12	90	408	22.1

Monthly Income (SAR)	Below 5000	5		1.2
	5001- 10000	162		39.7
	10001- 15000	126		30.9
	15001- 20000	9		2.2
	20001- 25000	105		25.7
	Above 25000	1	408	0.2
Social Class*	Low Class	167		40.9
	Middle Class	135		33.1
	High Class	106	408	26.0

*Data were recomputed into new categories

Groceries Shopping Behaviour

In terms of the groceries shopping behaviour, the findings from the sample depicted interesting facts. Table 2 illustrates the shopping behaviour of the respondents of their normal groceries shopping. Generally, the respondents can be categorized as high/heavy patrons or “grocers” where 24.3 per cent shop on a daily basis, 34.6 per cent shop between 3 to 5 times a week and 32.8 per cent shop on a weekly basis. Again, this illustrates the “typical” impression of Arabs that they loved to shop although understandably, this could be due to family requirements as they have a large number of dependents. Their frequent visits to do grocery shopping could also be encouraged by the fact that their choice of grocers or grocery retailers are mainly within the close radius of their residence.

This phenomenon could be justified where 22.1 per cent of the respondents stated their regular grocery retailer is less than 3 kilometres from their residence. Correspondingly, 23.5 per cent estimates that their “favourite” grocery retailer is between 4 to 7 kilometres and 44.4 per cent stated it is between 7 to 10 kilometres. Nevertheless, about 10 per cent of respondents stated that their regular grocery retailer is over than 10 kilometres. The information revealed that the choice of grocery retailers may be influence by the location or distance from their residence. Subsequently, the relatively “light” grocery shoppers that shop every 8 to 10 days could be explained by their remote distance from their normal grocery retailer. Figure 4, figure 5 and figure 6 draws the “correlation” between the respondents’ frequency of grocery shopping, the distance of their residence to their typical grocery retailer and the time it took to reach there on an average basis.

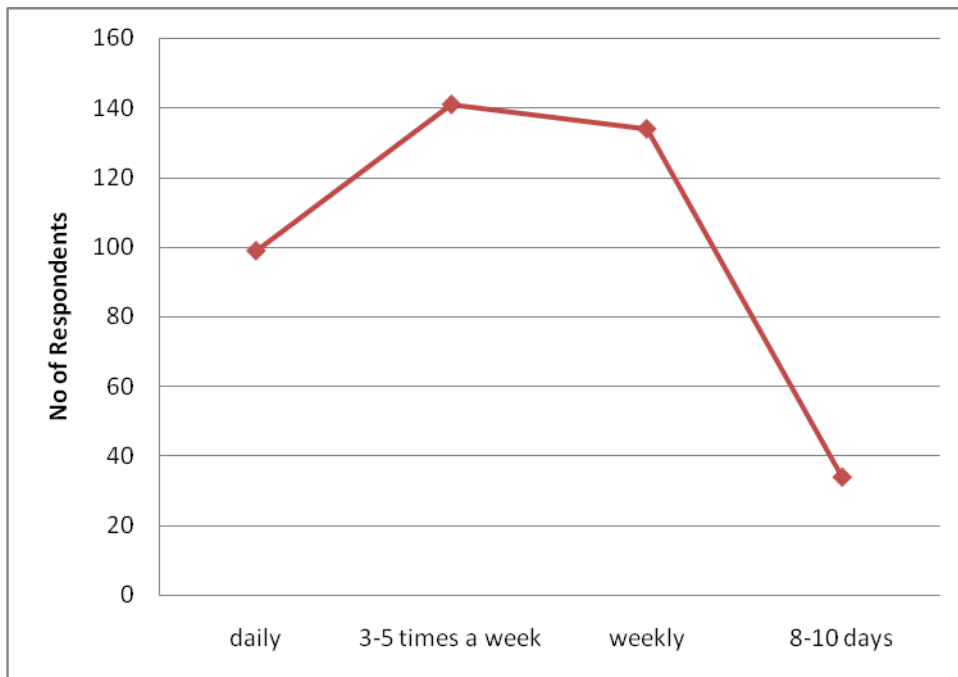


Figure 4

Shopping Trips

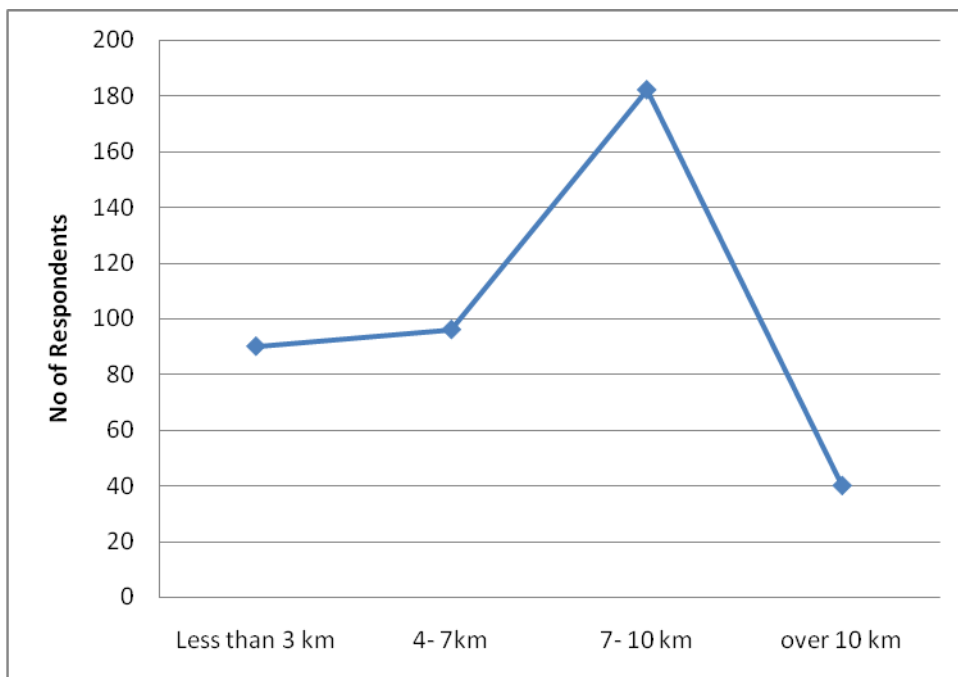


Figure 5

Distance from Retailer

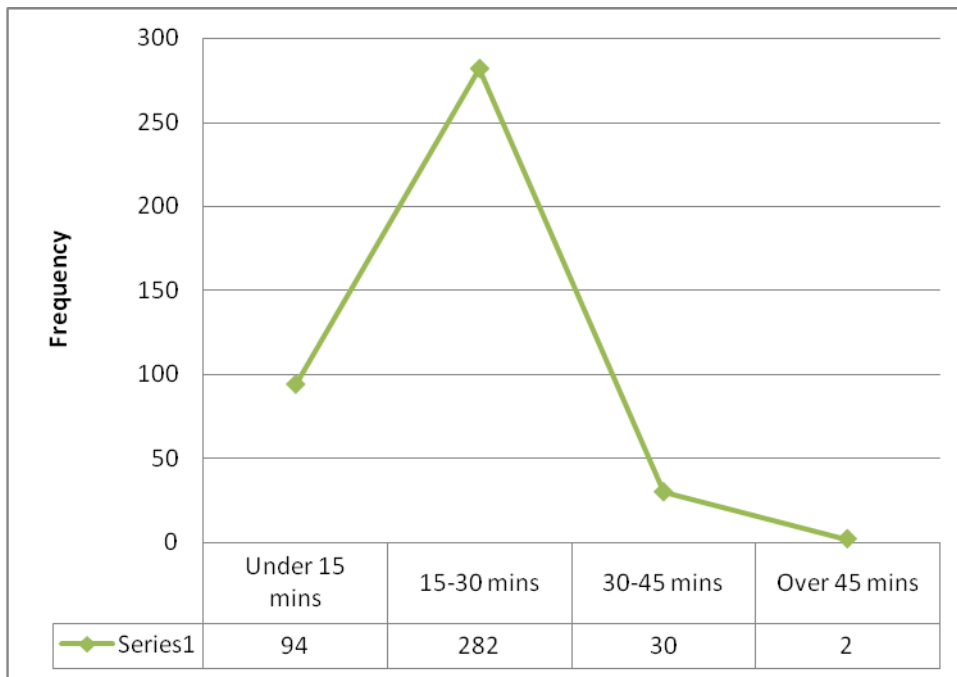


Figure 6

Travel Time

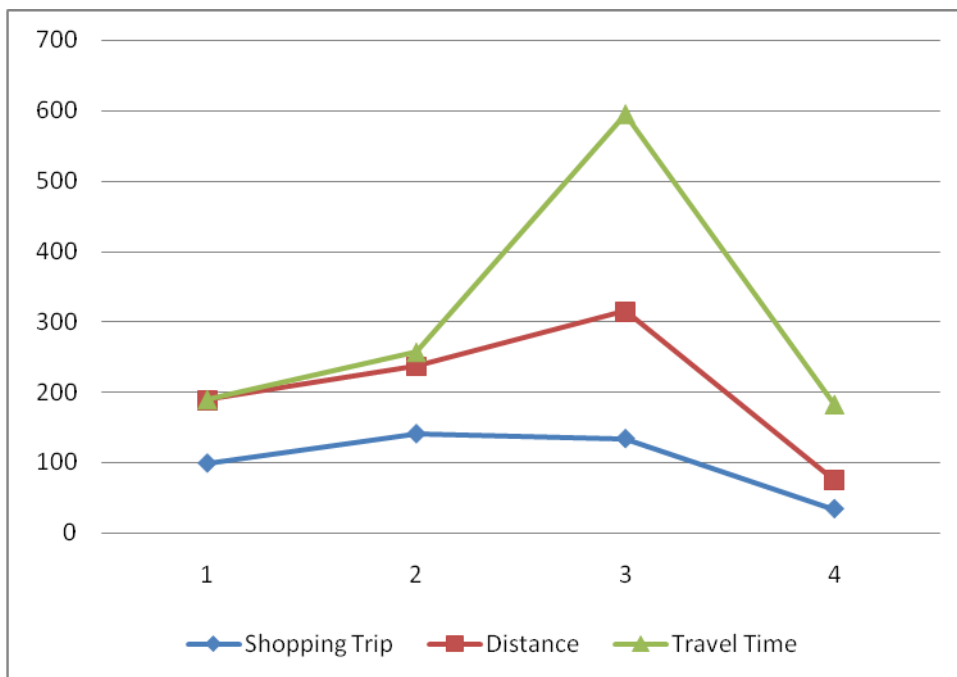


Figure 7

Locational Influence

On the same breath, the respondents’ information regarding the time it takes to travel between their residences to their typical grocery retailer corroborates the previous information on the

distance of grocery retailer to their residence. 23 per cent of the respondents stated that it took them less than 15 minutes while almost 70 per cent estimates that it took them between 15 to 30 minutes. The remaining 8 per cent of the respondents took them over half an hour to reach their normal grocery retailer. This group of respondent could be the similar group that stays the furthest to the grocery retailer. To demonstrate our point, the three data of shopping habits where are the respondents' frequency of grocery shopping, the distance of their residence to their typical grocery retailer and the time it took to reach there on an average basis were plotted in a single graph. Pertinent information that relates to the frequency of the respondents shopping pattern is their view of the journey to their regular grocery retailer. 68.4 per cent said that the journey to their regular grocery retailer is considered as “normal” – meaning it is not burdensome for them to travel to each time to shop for grocery. In fact, 26.4 per cent elaborated that they travel with ease each time they went for shopping. On the other hand, 5.1 per cent of the respondents argued that the journey to their regular grocery store is troublesome – correlating with the earlier information on the (8 per cent) group that shop every 8 to 10 days and stayed over 10 kilometres (10 per cent) from their normal grocery store. Obviously, some of the members of this group accepted the fact that it is normal to travel over half an hour to shop for grocery considering their location and the heavy traffic in big towns such as Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. Hence, that explains the much lower percentage of the respondents who complained that their travel to their normal grocery retailer is troublesome. Figure 8 illustrates the response to the questions that the journey to their normal grocery store is easy and not burdensome.

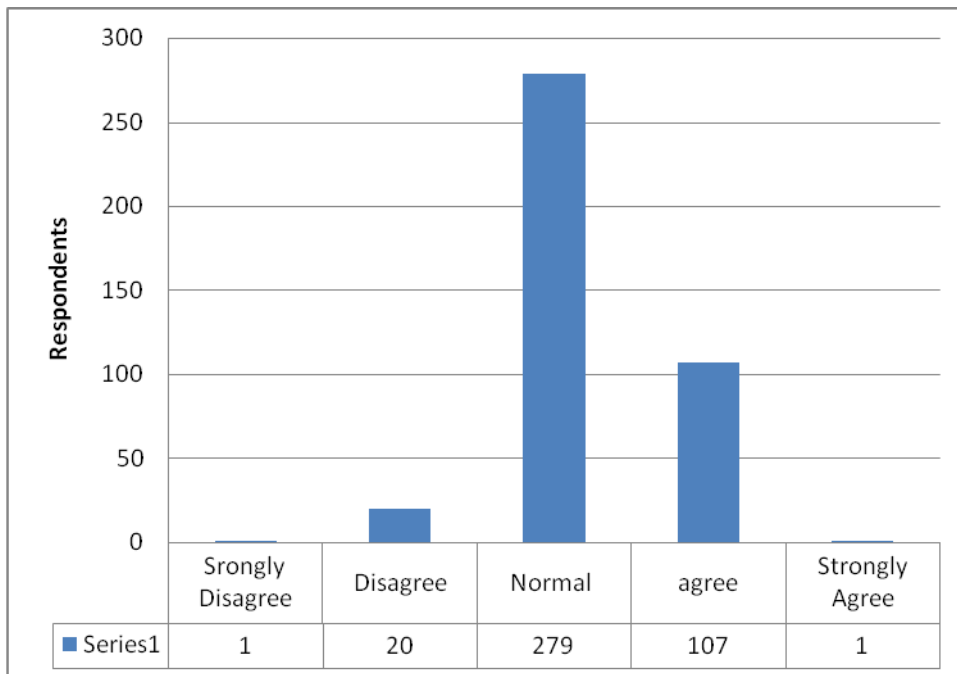


Figure 8

Ease of Travel

Subsequently, a question was asked requesting the respondents to estimate their monthly

grocery expenses. The findings appear to strengthen their earlier response on the frequency of shopping and the number of family members living with them. The data glaringly shows that the amount is relatively high which represents between 16 to 35 per cent of their monthly income. 36.5 per cent spends between SAR3001 to SAR3500 monthly, 31.4 per cent between SAR3501 to SAR4000 while 26 per cent spends over SAR4000 a month on groceries. Only 6 per cent of the respondents spend less than SAR3000 a month. Figure 9 illustrates the monthly spending of groceries by the respondents.

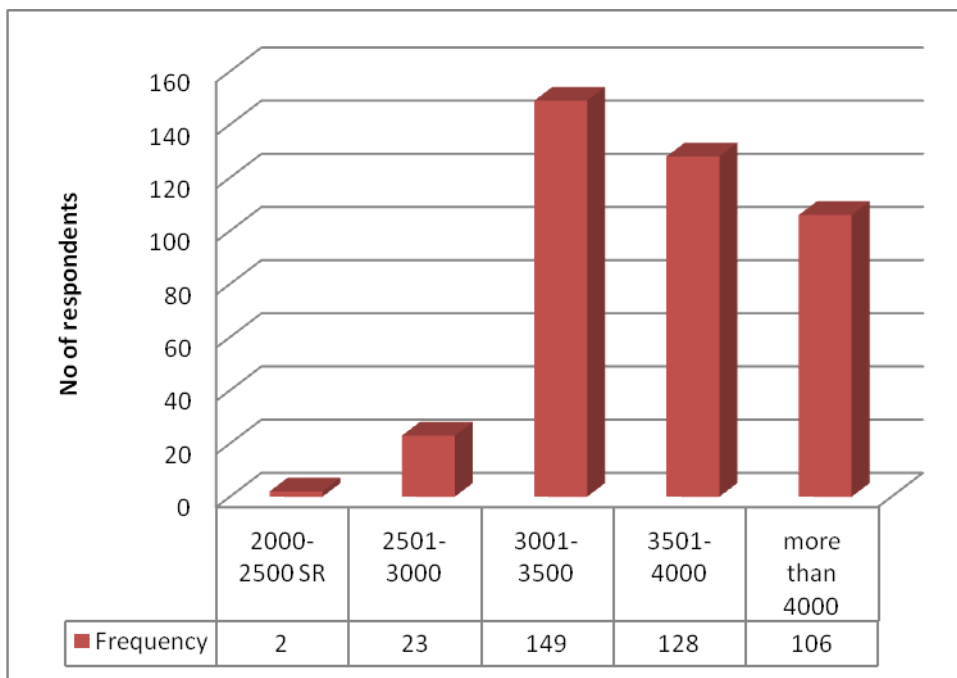


Figure 9

Monthly Spending of Groceries

While it is obvious that Saudi Arabia residents spend a lot on grocery, it is interesting to know which grocery retailer benefits or gets the largest portion of the pie. Hence, the respondents were asked to name their regular or favourite grocery retailer where they did most of their grocery shopping. Othaim tops the list with 40 percent of the respondents chose to shop there for grocery with Hyper Panda trailing at 32.8 per cent. Meanwhile, the respondents tend to be segregated at Tamimi Market with 12.7 per cent, Danube supermarket at 7.8 per cent and Carrefour hypermarkets at 4.7 per cent. In general, it looks like the Saudi Arabian residents tend to shop at local retailers. On the other hand, the international retailer Carrefour performs badly in comparison with the rest of the retailers. Local retailers have a “local traditional” image which carries local produce products or products that mirrored the local needs. Figure 10 presents the choice of grocery shopping among the respondents.

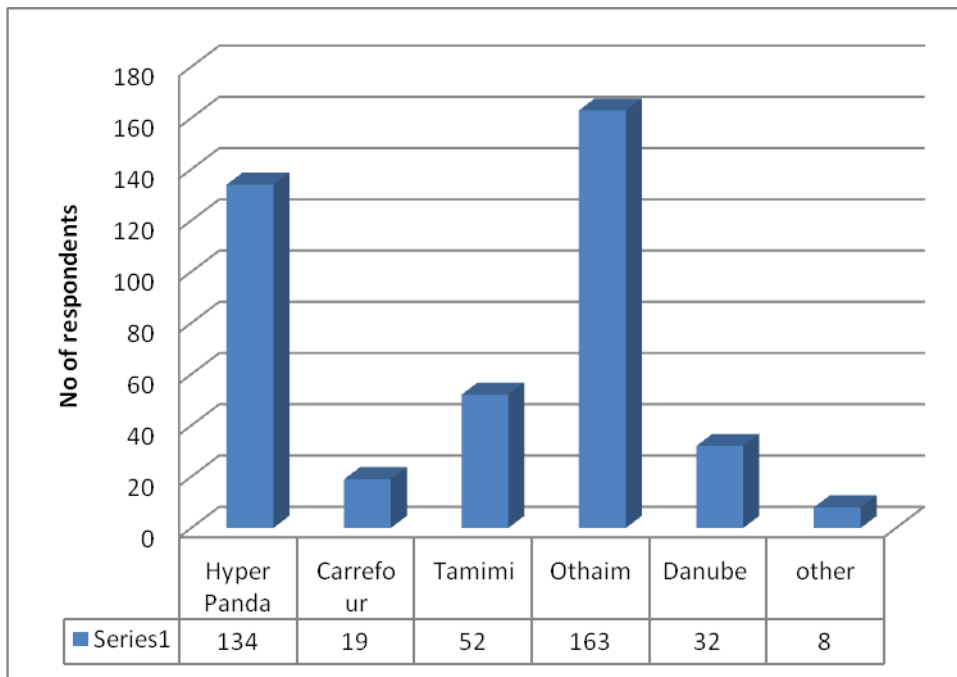


Figure 10

Top Choice of Retailers

The good news for Othaim, Hyper Panda and the other local retailers do not stop there. Almost 70 per cent of the respondents have been shopping there for more than two years where 45.8 per cent have been a loyal customer for more than 4 years. A quarter of the respondents have been shopping at their regular supermarket between 1 to 2 years while a meager 5.6 per cent began shopping at their current retailer in less than a year. While the decision to shop at local grocery retailers seem a rationale option which seems to reflect cultural preferences or nationalistic allegiance – the findings on who influence the choices on their regular grocery retailers are quite surprising. 36.8 per cent of the respondents stated that their children decide their choice of grocery shopping while their father influences 30.6 percent. Meanwhile, 11 per cent of the wives of the respondents decide where to shop followed by their mothers at 9.1 per cent. Only 6.4 per cent of the coffer (husband) make the decision on where to shop with friends influencing at 6.1 per cent. The findings demonstrate that parents have a substantial influence on the Saudi Arabian consumer decision making. It is worth to mentioned here that in Saudi Arabia, the parents still have a large influence in the decision making of their offspring although their children’s have already family of their own. In fact, it is not peculiar to see three generations of a family (grandfather, father and son) congregated to decide a purchase decision for a highly involvement product/service. Table 2 presents the grocery shopping patterns and behaviour of the respondents in this study.

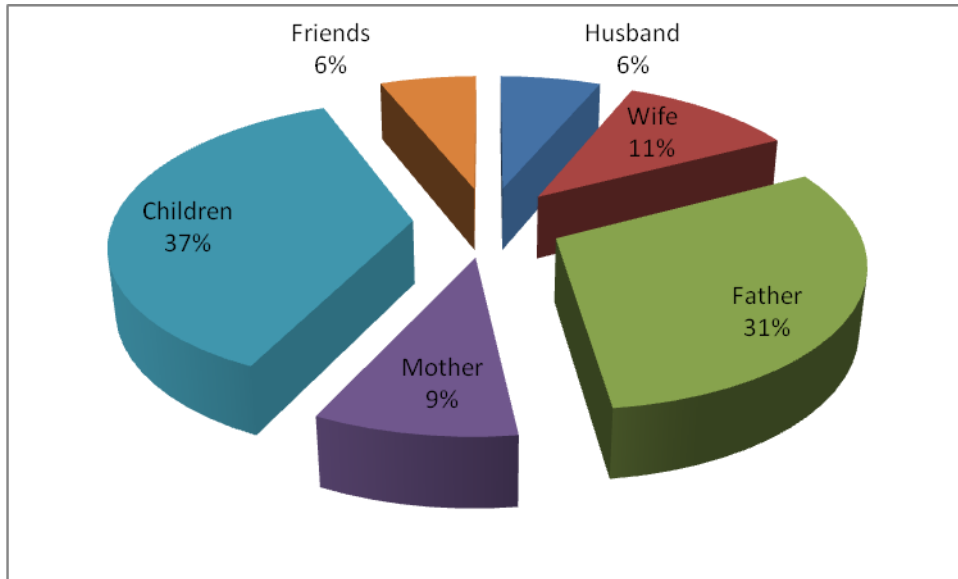


Figure 11
Deciders of Grocery Retailer

Table 2
Respondents Grocery Shopping Behaviour

Characteristics		Frequency	Total	Percentage
Shopping Frequency	Daily	99		24.3
	3 – 5 times a week	141		34.6
	Weekly	134		32.8
	Between 8 – 10 days	34	408	8.3
Shopping Store	Hyper Panda	134		32.8
	Carrefour	19		4.7
	At Tamimi	52		12.7
	Al Othaim	163		40.0
	Danube	32		7.8
	Other	8	408	2.0
Shopping Since	6 months – 1 year	23		5.6

	1 – 2 years	102		25.0
	2 – 4 years	96		23.5
	More than 4 years	187	408	45.8
Shopping Per Month	2000 - 2500	2		0.5
(SAR)				
	2501 - 3000	23		5.6
	3001 - 3500	149		36.5
	3501 – 4000	128		31.4
	More than 4000	106	408	26.0
Shopping Decision	Husband	26		6.4
Maker: Where to shop				
	Wife	45		11.0
	Father	125		30.6
	Mother	37		9.1
	Children	150		36.8
	Friends	25	408	6.1
Average Distance of	Less than 3 km	90		22.1
Grocery store and				
House				
	4 – 7 km	96		23.5
	7 – 10 km	182		44.6
	Over 10 km	40	408	9.8
Journey Time	Under 15 minutes	94		23.0
	15 – 30 minutes	282		69.1
	30 – 45 minutes	30		7.4

	Over 45 minutes	2	408	0.5
Travelling to grocery store is not troublesome	Strongly Disagree	1		0.2
	Disagree	20		4.9
	Normal	279		68.4
	Agree	107		26.2
	Strongly Agree	1	408	0.2

5. Conclusion

To start with, the sample was represent-able of the Saudi Arabian population. The sample was dominated by male respondents which is a manifestation of the patriarchal society. Although the study uses female enumerators to solicit data from female respondents, it was difficult due to the fact that they need to get the permission from their husband to “cooperate” with the enumerators. On most occasions, the husband refused to let their wives to talk to “strangers” which is acceptable as it conforms to the local culture.

The sample seems to “conform” long held views that Arabs comprises of big families. The statistics showed that 96.8 per cent of the sample has more than four family members with 22.1 percent has a dozen family members under their custody. While it was not clear the relationship of the family members, it is customary that parents, grandparents and at times, cousins live under the same roof. Family is usually defined in extended context within the Arab culture.

The kingdom’s population wealth can be observed by the respondents reported monthly income. The respondents monthly income tend to clustered around three income range which are SAR5001-10000 (39.7%), SAR10001-15000 (30.9%) and SAR20001-25000 (25.7%) with a mean average income of SAR10000-15000. This income bracket is equivalent to the middle class income classification based on our calculation in this study. This net income or disposable income is relatively higher than in comparison with the United States of America 2011 average monthly disposable income of around SAR13,136 (en.wikipedia.org, 2012).

The finding depicts interesting discovery on Saudi Arabian grocery shopping behaviour. Initially, the data shows that Saudi Arabian residents tend to shop at their grocery stores on a frequent basis. The average shopping trip of 3 to 5 times a week resonate various possibilities. Initially, the large family members imply that groceries need to be replenish on a “shorter” time period basis. Secondly, it is a conventional habit that city dwellers shop on a daily basis to buy fresh products. This shopping behaviour resembles the shopping behaviour of other

countries such as Japan and the Y Generation in the US (Miller, 2012) where they shop on a frequent basis to buy products that are still “fresh”. Considering that Arabs dietary contains lots of vegetables, fruits and meat, the justifications is plausible. Finally, the frequency of grocery shopping trip could be aided by the fact that their ‘normal’ grocery store is mostly close to their residence. Majority of the respondent’s quote that their favourite retail store is less than 10 km and the time it took to reach there is less than 30 minutes.

In terms of the value of their grocery shopping, most of the respondents shopped between the ranges of SAR3000 a month to more than SAR4000 a month. Only a meagre 6 per cent of the respondents shop less than SAR3000 a month. The average monthly spending was between SAR3501 to SAR4000 a month. A gross calculation of the percentage of the shoppers “consumption” as per their monthly income (assuming SAR12000 as an average income), and SAR3700 as their monthly grocery spending equates to around 31 per cent. This amount is relatively high compared to the developed economies such as 6% in USA and 9% in Australia although the amount is comparatively lower in Middle East and African countries – 43% in Egypt and 55% in Ethiopia.

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