Old Dogs Learning New Tricks? The Effect of Age and Generation on Shopping Behaviour

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that both age and generational cohort membership affect shopping orientation and store choice criteria, although the results are mixed. This study applied a longitudinal research setting to investigate the choice orientations of six generational cohorts and seven age groups, respectively, in the context of non-grocery shopping trips. The study was based on data collected through four household surveys conducted in the Turku area, Finland, over 17 years. An exploratory factor analysis was used to identify six choice orientation dimensions that appeared as sufficiently similar in all four cross-sectional surveys. The results show that although both age and generation, if used as sole independents in a model, only explain 0.1 to 13 per cent of the variation between the categories (one-way ANOVA), in most cases, the differences are statistically significant. Age performed slightly better when the models were run for each year separately. However, in line with the underlying assumption of the generational theory, the relative importance attached to each of the choice orientation dimensions in early adulthood remained somewhat stable when the generational cohorts aged.

Keywords: age, generations, shopping orientation, longitudinal research, generational marketing

Introduction

A generational cohort refers to a consumer segment that consists of individuals who come of age during a particular period and therefore have similar life experiences during their formative years (Mannheim 1928; Taylor 2018, 137). In contrast to chronological age, which is ‘a temporal location in time’ (Ryder 1965, 847), cohort membership is determined at birth. Each cohort is unique, with its makeup and personality formed in part by its point of origin and place in history (von Freymann 2006). As the generations are not alike by experiences,

they have been found to be different by values, attitudes, preferences, and consumer behaviour as well (Williams and Page 2011; Parment 2013). It is important to note, however, that all members of a generation are not similarly exposed to all of the events, or do not experience them in the same way (Järvensivu and Syrjä 2014, 42; Taylor 2018, 138).

Previous research has shown that both chronological age and generational cohort membership affect shopping orientation and store choice criteria, although the results are mixed (e.g. Anselmsson 2006; von Freymann 2006; Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley 2011; Parment 2013; Nilsson et al. 2015). Arguably, this is partly attributable to the point of time when the data has been collected, implying that, e.g. consumers aged 24–35 or 55+ in studies conducted during the 1980s and 2000s, respectively, are members of different generational cohorts. Much of the literature does not explicitly state the year of data collection, thus making it impossible to retrospectively link the age and generational cohort. Besides, the context of the study (e.g. groceries, apparel, shopping centre) and geographical location both affect the results and their implications.

This study applies the generational cohort theory to investigate the choice orientations of six generational cohorts and seven age groups, respectively, in the context of non-grocery shopping trips. In cross-sectional settings, the simultaneous effects of chronological age and cohort membership cannot be adequately assessed and formally tested for statistical significance. Therefore, in the current study, we have utilized four data sets covering a period of 17 years in pursuit to better understand and, thus, predict the behaviour of different generational cohorts as they age. Choice orientation was selected as a dependent variable because of its well-documented importance within retail marketing research as well as the stability of the concept (Laaksonen 1993, 52; Rindfleisch et al. 2008) if compared to actual choices (like choosing a specific store or buying an item), which are conditioned by the prevailing retail environment. In the current study, choice orientation was measured by six

latent variables, constructed separately for each point of measurement from a set of twenty store choice criteria when selecting a destination for a non-grocery shopping trip.

The paper is organized as follows. First, the conceptual grounding covering the choice orientation and the generational approaches is introduced, including a brief description of the generational cohorts under study, categorized under the labels of Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X (Gen X), and Generation Y (Gen Y or Millennials). Next, the research data and methods are introduced. Thereafter, the findings concerning the effects of age, generation, and period on choice orientation are reported. Finally, the generational cohesiveness of the Finnish Gen Xers is assessed in light of the current study. We conclude by discussing the implications of the study and directions for future research.

Conceptual Grounding

Choice Orientation

Orientation is an interactive component controlling the tendency of behaviour. Thus, choice orientation can be defined as the consumer's tendency to select a place to shop, which he/she expresses by evaluating the importance of various retail-outlet characteristics. These characteristics can also be called patronage-influencing factors (see e.g. Pinson and Roberto 1988). While object-related choice criteria can vary according to the object (retail outlet), choice orientation is a more general tendency towards the retail-options available to the consumer. It develops during the long-term interaction between a consumer and the retail environment; the environment affects the consumer's behaviour through conditioning and reinforcement (e.g. Laaksonen 1993). As each generation is exposed to unique retail innovations (e.g. self-service, superstores, out-of-town shopping centres, online retailing, and digitalization) in their formative years, their responses to current retail stimuli (representing a period effect) are expected to be influenced by their experiences in early adulthood.

Generational Approach

In generational segmentation the consumers are divided into generational cohorts roughly by their year of birth. The characteristics of these birth-cohorts are related to the events (e.g. wars, economic fluctuations, technological innovations) prevailing at certain points in their lifespan, especially when they are coming of age at around the age of 17–23. Shared life event experiences are believed to create cohesiveness in values that remain relatively stable throughout the lives of the cohort members (Mannheim 1928; Strauss and Howe 1991; Egri and Ralston 2004; Brosdahl and Carpenter 2012; Parment 2013). In the earlier literature, there is little agreement about the years encompassing individual generations (for a recent review, see Taylor 2018), but in most studies the 'length' of a generation is about 20 years. In addition to a core group, in every generation, there is a first and last wave comprising five to seven years at each end of it (Smola and Sutton 2002; Taylor 2018).

As early as in 1928, the social scientist Karl Mannheim proposed a theory on the generation concept in his seminal essay, *The Problem of Generations*. From the 1950s on, the generational approach has gained interest both among researchers, popular media, and consultants (Tapscott 2009; Chaney, Touzani, and Slimané 2017; Taylor 2018). Many of the recent research defines the generations based on Strauss and Howe (1991), who in the early 1990s developed the Strauss-Howe generational theory, suggesting that the history of the United States can be understood as a succession of generational biographies.

The generational approach has been used widely in social sciences, especially in management, human resources, and information system science, whereas studies from the retail perspective have been less numerous (Parment 2013; Chaney, Touzani, and Slimané 2017). Judging from the number of studies published in the 2000s, however, there is a growing interest in this area of research among the retail scholars. A very recent example of this is the special issue of the Journal of Strategic Marketing (JSM), which is devoted to

generations, and more particularly, to how marketing researchers and managers may benefit from a generational approach in strategic and operational marketing (Chaney, Touzani, and Slimané 2017).

Who Are the Generations?

Members of the Silent Generation, also called the Builders, Traditionalists, Swing, or Mature were born around 1920–1945 (e.g. Littrell, Ma, and Halapete 2005; Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley 2011; Williams and Page 2011; Brosdahl and Carpenter 2012) and thus, were youths either during WWII or the rebuilding period after it. As they grew up in tough times, they have been found to value discipline, self-denial, hard work, obedience to authority, and financial and social conservatism (Smith and Clurman 1997, 8).

The Baby Boomers (aka the Boomers) is perhaps the most well-known generation with the strongest generational cohesiveness. According to the definitions commonly used in Finland, the Boomers were born either in 1945–1950 or around 1945–1956 (Erola, Wilska, and Ruonavaara 2004), whereas in many countries, around 1945–1964 (e.g. Littrell, Ma, and Halapete 2005; Williams and Page 2011; Parment 2013). Most of the Finnish Boomers were youths in the 1960s when profound changes in the Finnish society, culture, and political climate occurred, and thus, they were the members of the first commercially oriented youth culture in Finland (Wilska 2004). Thus, they are representatives of a national subculture that reflects the value priorities prevalent during their adolescence and early adulthood (Egri and Ralston 2004). The Boomers have also been referred to as the ‘Me’ generation, having a sense of entitlement considering all the possessions, wealth and options they have had access to (Smith and Clurman 1997, 10). As they are approaching retirement, they are looking for new opportunities for personal growth and self-expression (Marjanen, Kohijoki, and Saastamoinen 2016).

Internationally, the birth dates of the Gen Xers range from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, and they came of age between the late 1970s and the late 1990s (e.g. Littrell, Ma, and Halapete 2005; Brosdahl and Carpenter 2012). Gen X is often depicted as neglected and forgotten, a generation in-between the Boomers and the Gen Y (Wilska 2004; Markert 2004), and even their start date is defined by the end of the Baby Boomer generation (Taylor 2018, 139). Thus, in Finland the first Gen Xers were born either around 1951 or 1957 (Erola, Wilska, and Ruonavaara 2004; Järvensivu and Syrjä 2014). Therefore, what is said about Gen Xers in the international literature only applies to the younger Finnish Gen Xers, i.e. those born around 1965 or later. As many of the Xers lived through uncertain formative years, they have been found to embrace some of the values of the Silent Generation (Smith and Clurman 1997, 10). More recent studies have described them as tech-savvy, well educated, family oriented, and multicultural (Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley 2011; Williams and Page 2011). As they are often stuck between supporting their ageing parents and young children, they have focused on striking a balance between work and family.

Gen Y currently dominates the aged 18–35 category on the consumer market. They were born between the late 1970s and early 2000s (Williams and Page 2011; Brosdahl and Carpenter 2012; Parment 2013; Taylor 2018), and as the first of them came of age around the Millennium shift, they are often referred to as the Millennials (Tapscott 2009). Some authors still leave the Millennial generation without end dates stating they were simply born after 1980 (Taylor 2018, 139), but in most of the recent classifications they are followed by Gen Z (aka Homeland Generation), born either in the early 1990s (Williams and Page 2011; Parment 2013; Järvensivu and Syrjä 2014), late 1990s (Tapscott 2009), or around 2005 (Howe and Strauss 2007). Having spent their lives surrounded by and using the tools of the digital age, the Millennials are also referred to as ‘digital natives’ in contrast to the earlier generations who, in turn, are ‘digital immigrants’ (Prensky 2001). The Millennials are described as highly

consumption-oriented individuals with sophisticated taste and shopping preferences (Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley 2011; Marjanen, Kohijoki, and Saastamoinen 2016; Taylor 2018). However, as the youngest of them are still to experience their formative years, their future consumption habits and preferences remain to be revealed.

Data and Methods

Data Collection

Although the majority of studies on generational differences are cross-sectional in nature, there are many who argue that generational research can only be conducted via repeated measurements (Toivonen 1999; Järvensivu 2014, 22). Thus, for the purposes of the current study, we constructed a longitudinal research design comprising of four consumer surveys, conducted during a period of 17 years (see Table 1). Random samples from the study area, the city of Turku (Finland) with neighbouring smaller cities and rural areas, were drawn by the Population Register Centre. In 2001–2011, the questionnaires were addressed to the eldest female (if any) in a household, with a request to the person who did most of the grocery shopping to fill it in. Because of technical reasons, in 2017 the questionnaires were addressed to the oldest person in the household. The majority of respondents were female in all samples.

[Table 1. near here]

Generational Cohorts and Age Cohorts

As the life events shaping the generations are both global and local, it is not possible to create universal definitions or age-brackets to define them. In the current study, we apply a classification based on Järvensivu and Syrjä (2014), which divides the Finnish generations born 1945–1999 into generations of economic boom and depression (see Table 2).

[Table 2. near here]

As the wide range of birth dates of the Finnish Gen Xers results in heterogeneous experiences at the time of coming of age, their generational affinity has been questioned (e.g. Wilska 2004; Markert 2004; Järvensivu and Syrjä 2014). Thus, as economic recessions can cause social trauma similar to wars and catastrophes, Järvensivu and Syrjä (2014) split Gen X into three sub-generations according to the economic conditions prevailing at the time when coming of age. The sub-generations were labelled accordingly: the generation of the oil crisis, the generation of welfare, and the generation of recession. At the Millennium shift, each of them was of considerable size. In contrast to the Boomers, the oldest Gen X cohort, born in 1955–1964, is a generation of depression, as many of them were affected by the international oil crisis in 1973. It should be noted that in many international (western) classifications, they would form a sub-generation of Baby Boomers, sometimes referred to as the 'Late Boomers' (Markert 2004) or 'Young Boomers' (Reisenwitz and Iyer 2007). The Xers born between 1965 and 1972, in turn, were young adults during the rapid economic growth in the 1980s. This is in sharp contrast with the adolescent years of the youngest Gen Xers during the early 1990s when the hitherto deepest economic recession rocked the entire Finnish society. The international downturn affected particularly the youngest Xers, who were in the early phases of building their careers and families (Wilska 2004; Williams and Page 2011). A sub-generation with birth years roughly similar to the youngest Xers but defined by different criteria (Taylor 2018), the Xennials (born around 1977–1983), has been proposed by several researchers and widely discussed in media whereas academic research on it remains scarce.

Concerning media consumption in general and the digital divide in particular, the Boomers were the generation that saw television become dominant, whereas Gen X experienced a computer revolution, and Gen Y grew up in an age where the Internet became a new way of life. The Xennials/the youngest Finnish Gen X, on the cusp of the Gen X and Gen

Y demographic cohorts, are unique because of their experience of the unprecedented technology transformation (Taylor 2018).

We formed the age cohorts using ten-year intervals between the ages of 18 and 75+, the oldest respondents in each sample being aged 81–86. The frequency distributions of the generational cohorts and age groups are presented in Table 3. The colours used in the table are applied throughout the study to denote the generations. In the lower part of the table (chronological age), the colours refer to the generational cohort membership of the majority of the respondents in each cell. Table 4 depicts the exact generational construction of each age category at the time of the respective cross-sectional sample, most of them being mixtures of two or more generational cohorts. Considering the varying birth years of the generational cohorts found in the literature, the categorizations presented in Table 3 were considered as valid operationalizations of generational cohort and age for the purposes of the current study. The Silent Generation was defined and added by the authors. Additionally, departing from Järvensivu and Syrjä (2014), but following the frequently used international classifications, those born between 1991 and 1999 are included in Gen Y. In 2011, their share of Gen Y was 5.5%, rising to 43.5% in 2017.

[Table 3. and 4. near here]

Choice Orientation Dimensions

A set of around 30 store choice criteria adopted from the literature was applied in the questionnaires, 23 of them appearing in all four surveys. To produce the choice orientation dimensions (see Table 5), a principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted on these 23 items separately for each year. Three items were stepwise deleted as they had rotated factor loadings of less than 0.5 on a single factor in one or several solutions. To ensure that each factor would have only one dimension, items with cross-loadings greater than 0.4 should in general be eliminated from the analysis. Based on this rule, items

‘convenient store hours’ and ‘high-quality products’ should have been eliminated. As this would have caused considerable alterations in the factor structures, and thus, made the longitudinal comparison extremely complicated, the items were kept in the analysis. This procedure yielded a logical choice orientation construct for each year, each consisting of six fairly similar dimensions. All retained items had communalities greater than 0.4, indicating a sufficient contribution to explaining the variance (Hair et al. 2010). The factors had α values for reliability estimates between 0.7 and 0.9, suggesting reliability levels from acceptable to high. Together the factors explained 68–69% of the total variation in their respective years. The dimensions were labelled *leisure, quality and selection, locational convenience, parking, service,* and *price* (see Table 5).

[Table 5. near here]

As Table 5 shows, the item ‘high-quality products’ has high loadings both on *quality and selection* and *service,* suggesting that a wide/unique selection does not necessarily equal high quality in the minds of the consumers. On the other hand, high-quality products are often associated with skilled personnel and high level of service, with enjoyable store environments creating a ‘pleasant atmosphere’, an item that has rather high loadings both on *service* and *leisure* dimension. In turn, the item ‘convenient store hours’ has high loadings on *locational convenience* and *parking,* assumedly reflecting the multidimensional character of the item.

Anselmsson (2006) found location as the most important choice criterion for a shopping centre but he did not detect any statistically significant difference between the younger and older customers. It should be noted, however, that Anselmsson included parking facilities in the location dimension. More recently, Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley (2011) claimed that members of different generational cohorts possess different attitudes towards location attributes of a shopping mall, locational convenience being more important for the Boomers and Silents than for the Gens Y and X.

Several studies support the suggestion that older consumers value customer service more than their younger counterparts (Cox, Cox, and Anderson 2005; Seock and Sauls 2008; Parment 2013; Kohijoki and Marjanen 2013; Nilsson et al. 2015). The declining physical and cognitive abilities of aging people reduce their self-sufficiency as shoppers and thus make them appreciate personal service. Furthermore, the oldest consumers have grown up in an era when stores offered more personal service (Cox, Cox, and Anderson 2005). In the context of shopping centre patronage, however, Anselmsson (2006) reported that the service level in terms of friendliness and helpfulness of the personnel was not more important to those aged 45−74 (in his study, Boomers and Silents) than to those aged 16−44 (Gen Y and Gen X).

Previous studies also indicate that younger consumers more often prefer a wide and versatile selection, and are committed to activities including elements of recreational shopping (leisure), while older consumers tend to be more interested in product quality and prices (e.g. Littrel, Ma, and Halapete 2005; Anselmsson 2006; Kohijoki and Marjanen 2013).

Findings

Stability of Choice Orientations

Despite the fundamental changes in the retail environment following our first survey in 2001, including the introduction of the out-of-town/edge-of-town shopping centre concept and the German discount chain Lidl, and the ageing of the population evidenced in the study area during the 17-year-long study period, the structure of the shopping orientations appeared very similar at each of the four points of measurement. This is clearly visible in Table 5. Based on earlier research, this was expected (e.g. Laaksonen 1993, 52), although seldom empirically tested in longitudinal settings like ours (for a rare exception, see e.g. Clarke et al. 2006). Recently, based on data collected in 2006 and 2016, Bäckström and Johansson (2017) reported that despite the profound changes in the retail sector during their ten-year-long study

period, the in-store experiences were largely created by the same aspects in both of their studies.

As Table 6 shows, the absolute means of the items forming the choice orientation dimensions exhibit only a modest variation with no detectable trend during the study period. In 2017, *quality and selection*, *service*, and *price* ranked equally high (3.9 on the scale 1–5), *parking* and *locational convenience* receiving only slightly lower rankings. In turn, compared to the other dimensions, *leisure* was ranked markedly lower (2.8) at all points of measurement.

If digging deeper, for example for the item 'convenient store hours', the mean ratings were around 3.9 for all points of measurement (not reported in the paper) even though the legislation regarding shop opening hours has been one of the most discussed retailing-related topics in Finland during the past two decades. The series of gradual changes, starting in 1969, resulted in the abolition of all restrictions (except the legislation regulating the hours of sale of alcoholic beverages) in 2016. In contrast to our expectations, in 2017, no statistically significant differences were found between the ratings of the middle-aged (who were more likely to be constrained by fixed working hours and family obligations), the young (often students), and the retired (65+), whereas in earlier measurements the opinions were more varied although with no detectable trend.

Effects of Generation and Age

The factor scores by the categories of age and generation are presented in Table 6. The between-groups differences across age groups were all significant at the 0.05 level (one-way ANOVA) except *locational convenience* in 2006. Regarding generations, the differences between categories were significant at the 0.05 level except for *locational convenience* in 2006 and 2011, and *price* in 2011 and 2017. Judged by the statistically significant differences between the categories of independents and variance explained, age appeared to perform

slightly better than generation. However, as expected, the variance explained either by age or generation as a sole independent is low (Järvensivu and Syrjä 2014). If we were to produce more powerful models with practical relevance, independents such as household size, income level, and car ownership should be added. This was, however, out of the scope of the current study.

[Table 6. near here]

As Table 6 shows, many of the respondents considered location important, but not the most important store choice criterion. This is arguably due to the high amount of car-borne shopping trips, which is reflected in the high ratings of easy and free parking. Similar to Anselmsson (2006), the differences between generations were modest to non-existing until 2017, when the item 'convenient store hours' was added to this dimension. Although the differences were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, in line with Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley (2011), locational convenience was more important for the younger generations, especially to those aged 18–24. As this dimension includes the item 'good traffic connections', the results are at least partly explained by the more frequent use of a car for shopping among the older generations. In 2017, the increased share of 75+ consumers owning and regularly using a private car was reflected in the increased importance of parking among this age group. Another explaining factor is the omission of the item 'convenient store hours' from the parking dimension.

For the younger consumers shopping centres are, in addition to commercial transactions, places to hang out and meet friends (Sit, Merrilees, and Birch 2003; Anselmsson 2006; Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley 2011). In line with previous studies, until 2017, the *leisure* dimension was more important to those aged 18–24 (Gen Y and Gen X3). In 2017, however, the balance shifted radically as the aged 75+ (the Silents) appeared the most leisure-oriented. From the generational point of view, until 2017, the Gen X1 showed the lowest interest in

leisure, followed by the Boomers. Interestingly, when the Gen X2 reached the age of 45–54, they turned out to be the least leisure-oriented generation, followed by the middle-aged Gen X1.

In line with earlier research (e.g. Cox, Cox, and Anderson 2005; Kohijoki and Marjanen 2013), the current study portraits the younger consumers as less service-oriented than their older counterparts. Although the differences between the oldest and youngest respondents diminished by 2017, at every point of measurement, Gen Y was the least service-oriented generational cohort. In turn, the Silents were the most service-oriented generation until 2017 (when all of them had reached the age of 75+), followed by the Boomers who then took the lead.

Littrell, Ma, and Halapete (2005), in the context of apparel shopping, reported that the Baby Boomers (at ages 41–59) and Silents (at ages 60–75) differed from Gen X (at ages 29–40) in their greater focus on quality. The present study suggests that younger age cohorts until the age of 45 (representing mainly the Gens X and Y) express more *quality- and selection-*oriented behaviours than the older age groups/generations. However, as the item 'high-quality products' has high loadings also on the *service* dimension, the results are somewhat blurred in this regard.

Compared to younger age cohorts, older consumers have been depicted as more price sensitive (Littrell, Ma, and Halapete 2005; Anselmsson 2006; Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley 2011; Kohijoki and Marjanen 2013). Our findings reveal a substantial shift in price consciousness between the oldest and youngest age cohorts/generations. Until 2011, the Silents aged 65–74 were the most price-sensitive generation. After reaching the age of 65, the Silents have become less price-oriented, and even more so when reaching the age of 75+. Since 2011, the differences between the generational cohorts are no more statistically

significant. Simultaneously, those aged 18–24 express increased price sensitivity, although the differences between the age groups in general diminished.

Generational Cohesiveness

To further investigate whether it is justified to separate the oldest Gen X members from the Baby Boomers, and to divide the rest into two separate sub-generations, Mann-Whitney U-tests on the original items forming the choice orientation dimensions were applied.

The results were somewhat controversial. Regarding the items forming the *quality and selection* dimension, few statistically significant differences (<0.05) were detected between the sub-generations of Gen X, whereas differences between Gen X1 and the Boomers were more frequent. Regarding *locational convenience*, the Boomers and Gen X appeared rather similar, but some differences between the oldest and youngest Xers were detected. The same applies to the *price* dimension, whereas for *service*, there were a substantial number of statistically significant differences between the sub-categories of Gen X, but only a few between the Boomers and Gen X1. Based on individual items, the choice orientation dimensions where the generational cohorts differed most were *parking* and *leisure*.

Based on our findings, we suggest that whenever the number of subjects under study allows, a more fine-tuned categorization should be utilized. If the number of categories needs to be restricted, the oldest Gen Xers might rather be attached to the Boomers instead of the younger Gen X sub-generations. That is in line with Reisenwitz and Iyer (2007), who divided their Boomers sample into two groups, born 1946–1955 and 1956–1965, but, regarding a large number of salient behavioural variables, did not find any statistically significant differences between the younger and the older.

Old Dogs Learning New Tricks?

To investigate the simultaneous effects of age, generational cohort, and period, new dependents were formed by selecting the items with no cross-loadings higher or equal to 0.4 (see Table 5 for factor solutions). The rationale for this was to create more powerful independents by extracting the items with high loadings on multiple dimensions. Thus *leisure* was constructed from the means of items 16, 17, 19, and 20; *quality and selection* from items 1, 2 and 3; *locational convenience* from items 7, 10, and 11; *parking* from items 14 and 15; *service* from items 5 and 6; and *price* from items 12 and 13. To eliminate the period effect, instead of using the absolute values, we divided the means of the ratings of each age group with the total mean of the respective dependent for each year. Then, each of the values was multiplied with 100. The results are presented in Table 7, which enables us to follow the generations as they grow older.

If we take Gen X1 and follow it from the age of 35–44 (2001) to 55–64 (2017), or the Baby Boomers from the age of 45–54 (2001) to 64–75 (2017), we notice that, in relation to the other generations, the choice orientations of both groups remain rather stable during the study period. However, when investigating Gen X2 and Gen X3, the results are getting more mixed, suggesting that choice orientations are more likely to alter before the age of 35 than at later points in life. In general, Table 7 indicates that as the generational cohorts age, they become more service-oriented. Regarding leisure, the youngest and the oldest appear to be the most leisure-oriented, the high ratings among the 75+ being worth noticing. All Gen X sub-cohorts show stronger quality and selection orientation than the Boomers and Silents, at least until to the age of 55. Free and easy parking was most important for the Boomers and Silents (until the age of 75) throughout the study period. However, parking became increasingly important also to all the Gen X sub-generations as they aged. To sum up, analysing Table 7 by columns reveals that the relative importance attached to each dimension varies inside the

categories of age according to the generational cohorts that mainly occupy the respective category.

[Table 7. near here]

In pursuit of examining our research problem from a new angle, longitudinal importance profiles of the choice orientation dimensions by generation and by age group were created. In Figure 1, the dimensions have been created following the same logic as in Table 7, but, here, the absolute means of the independents have been applied. In the figure, the profiles of selected independents (*service, price, parking,* and *quality and selection*) for the Boomers (aged 45–64 in 2001) and Gen X3 (aged 18–34 in 2001), and, respectively, for those aged 55–64 and 25–34, are presented to illustrate our findings.

Considering *service,* both the generational effect and period effect are clearly visible. The existence of the generational effect is further supported by the steep decline in the importance of service in 2011, when the 25–34 age cohort had become mainly occupied by the Gen Y. A very strong period effect is detectable when examining *price,* as its importance increased notably during the study period, especially among the younger respondents. The age effect and generational effect, both clearly visible in 2001, nearly disappeared by 2011. Turning to *parking,* in 2001, the ratings of the Boomers and Gen X3 were markedly different but became more similar when Gen X3 reached middle age. The age-based investigation presents a very different picture of the phenomenon as the ratings of those aged 55–64 and 25–34, respectively, remain rather stable throughout the study period.

Regarding *quality and selection,* the shapes of the profiles for Baby Boomers and Gen X3 resemble each other but are at different levels, implying a period effect combined with a generational effect. However, the inspection of the ratings given by those aged 25–34 and 55–64 offers only weak support for the existence of a generational effect, as the changing generational composition of the age groups is not reflected in the profiles.

[Figure 1. near here]

Discussion

Previous research has shown that chronological age and generational cohort membership affect shopping orientation and store choice criteria. As age and generational cohort are highly correlated, their individual effects are impossible to separate in cross-sectional settings. According to some researchers, the simultaneous effects of age, generational cohort, and period are so challenging that it is not even worth trying to disentangle them (Järvensivu 2014, 21). To our knowledge, the current study is the first to apply a longitudinal approach to compare the simultaneous effects of age and generation in the context of shopping orientation. Thus, it makes a significant contribution to the existing literature.

Although more rigorous statistical analysis might be suggested, we have chosen mainly descriptive methods because of their illustrative value. To start with, principal component analyses based on 20 store choice criteria extracted from earlier research were used to elicit the latent dimensions of store choice at four points of measurement over 17 years. In the rapidly changing retail environment, the stability of the choice orientation dimensions is an important finding per se. Moreover, it enabled the longitudinal analysis of the choice orientations of six generational cohorts and seven age groups in the context of non-grocery shopping trips.

According to the generational approach, shared life event experiences in early adulthood are believed to create a cohesiveness in values that remain relatively stable throughout the lives of the cohort members. As the earlier literature finds little agreement about the years encompassing individual generations, the comparison of the results of different studies is complicated. Because the data used in the current study was collected in Finland, the generational cohorts defined by Järvensivu and Syrjä (2014) were selected as a basis for the study. Compared to the international categorizations referred to in the literature

review section, the most striking difference is the length of generations, which in most studies is about 20 years but only 7–10 years in that of Järvensivu and Syrjä (2014). However, it closely resembles the classification created by Parment (2013) in the neighbouring Nordic country of Sweden. Our results indicate that in the context of store choice, the birth years around 1945–1964 would be applicable to define the Baby Boomers also in Finland, making the Finnish Gen X more comparable with its international counterparts. As our aim was to investigate the existence of the generational effects vis-á-vis age and period effects, our results are not restricted to any particular location or generational categorization. The results are, however, to some degree conditional to the store choice criteria used in the respective studies.

When the factor scores were used in a cross-sectional setting to compare the performance of age and generational cohort in explaining the between-category differences, both performed equally well. However, further investigation revealed notable period effects combined with strong generational effects. Their existence was further supported by the finding that the importance attached to each of the choice orientation dimensions varies between the categories of age according to the generational cohorts that mainly occupy the respective category. From the modelling point of view, this implies that when attempting to predict future consumer behaviour, information on generational cohort membership is assumed to increase the predictive power of the model. If multilinear models like MANOVA are used, the best results might be obtained by using generational cohorts as an independent (among other factors specified by the purpose of the study) and age as a covariate.

The results indicate that as the generational cohorts age, they become more service-oriented. In turn, those aged below 55 found a wide and versatile selection more important than their older counterparts. Interestingly, the youngest and the oldest appear the most leisure-oriented. From the managerial point of view, the growing leisure and service

orientation of those aged 75+ is worth noticing. Additionally, their access to service facilities seems to be increasingly defined by their car-borne mobility. On the other hand, our results indicate that the importance of a car (and thus, parking facilities) for the middle-aged is expected to decrease when the Gen Y enters this segment. That might be addressable either to the increased share of single person households/couples without children (less need for a car), to environmental concerns, or both. Like parking, in addition to age and generational cohort, many of dimensions are closely connected to a consumer's stage of life. As many are still single and/or students until 25, we should refrain from drawing overly strong conclusions from the behaviour of any emerging generation before it has reached early middle age.

As Parment (2013) states, within generational research, 'insider knowledge is likely to be different from that which is available to the outsider'. In the current study, a personal flavour was added by the coincidence that the authors were representatives of the Finnish Gen X1, Gen X2, and Gen X3. Our parents, in turn, represented the Silents and the Baby Boomers, and our kids Gens Y and Z. This combination occasionally led to rather enjoyable conversations about the generational differences proposed by the literature.

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Table 1. The number of respondents, response rate, and the share of female respondents.

	2001*	**2006***	**2011****	**2017****
N	2 633	2 242	1738	1 451
Response rate	42%	47%	28%	21%
Female	84%	85%	85%	64%

* mail only; ** mail survey, additionally a link to the digital version provided

Table 2. Finnish generations born 1945–1999 divided into generations of economic boom and depression (Järvensivu and Syrjä 2014), and their share of the total population in 2001 and 2017 (Official Statistics of Finland).

Finnish generations (born in 1920–1999)	Years of birth	17 years old at	Generation of Economic Boom or Depression	% of the total pop. in 2001	% of the total pop. in 2017
Silent Generation*	1920–1944	1937–1961		21	11
Baby Boomers	1945–1954	1962–1971	Boom	16	13
Generation X: oil crisis	1955–1964	1972–1981	Depression	15	13
Generation X: welfare	1965–1972	1982–1989	Boom	10	10
Generation X: recession	1973–1979	1990–1996	Depression	9	9
Generation Y: (Millennials)	1980–1990	1997–2007	Boom	14	14
Generation Z	1991–1999	2008–2016	Depression	11	11

* added for the purposes of the current study

Table 3. Frequency distributions by generational cohorts and age groups.

Generational cohort	2001	2006	2011	2017	Total
Gen Y (1980–1999)	73	198	311	366	948
Gen X3, recession (1973–1979)	387	183	153	107	830
Gen X2, welfare (1965–1972)	373	248	168	141	930
Gen X1, oil crisis (1955–1964)	500	416	322	230	1468
Baby Boomers (1945–1954)	533	489	384	362	1768
Silent Generation (1920–1944)	738	678	349	209	1974
Chronological age	2001	2006	2011	2017	Total
18–24 years	235	123	118	105	581
25–34 years	499	285	269	214	1267
35–44 years	483	335	192	154	1164
45–54 years	540	448	317	184	1489
55–64 years	409	465	351	255	1480
65–74 years	324	374	307	359	1364
75+ years	114	182	133	144	573

Table 4. Generational construction of age categories.

	2001	2006	2011	2017
18–24	31% Y / **69% X3**	100% Y	100% Y	100% Y
25–34	45% X3 / **55% X2**	26% Y / **64% X3** / 10% X2	**72% Y** / 28% X3	100% Y
35–44	20% X2 / **80% X1**	**66% X2** / 34% X1	40% X3 / **60% X2**	30% Y / **70% X3**
45–54	21% X1 / **79% BB**	**67%** X1 / 33% BB	17% X2 / **83% X1**	**77% X2** / 23% X1
55–64	27% BB / **73% SG**	**74% BB** / 26% SG	16% X1 / **84% BB**	**73% X1** / 27% BB
65–74	100% SG	100% SG	30% BB / **70% SG**	**82% BB** / 18% SG
75+	100% SG	100% SG	100% SG	100% SG

Table 5. Construction of the choice orientation dimensions in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2017.

	Leisure				Quality & Selection				Locational convenience				Parking				Service				Price			
	2001	2006	2011	2017	2001	2006	2011	2017	2001	2006	2011	2017	2001	2006	2011	2017	2001	2006	2011	2017	2001	2006	2011	2017
1 Unique products	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.07	**0.79**	**0.74**	**0.72**	**0.73**	0.02	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	-0.03	0.03	-0.03	-0.05	0.03	0.15	0.15	0.13	0.04	0.07	0.14	0.03
2 Specialty stores	0.17	0.13	0.12	0.16	**0.83**	**0.85**	**0.84**	**0.79**	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.13	0.01	0.06	0.10	0.14	0.07	0.05	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.01
3 Wide selection	0.06	0.11	0.09	0.09	**0.75**	**0.81**	**0.84**	**0.77**	0.22	0.19	0.13	0.21	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.22	0.14	0.04	0.05	0.10	0.11	0.08	0.18
4 High-quality products	0.06	0.11	0.07	0.08	**0.64**	**0.65**	**0.63**	**0.64**	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.01	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.01	0.53	0.52	0.50	0.51	-0.01	-0.01	-0.05	-0.01
5 Skilled personnel	0.17	0.18	0.16	0.21	0.10	0.12	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.14	0.15	0.12	0.09	0.07	0.11	0.13	**0.81**	**0.83**	**0.84**	**0.83**	0.21	0.18	0.19	0.09
6 Good customer service	0.13	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.22	0.28	0.19	0.19	0.12	0.12	0.14	0.13	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.09	**0.85**	**0.84**	**0.86**	**0.85**	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.13
7 Convenient location	0.04	0.06	0.01	0.15	0.06	0.15	0.09	0.08	**0.67**	**0.72**	**0.74**	**0.71**	0.13	0.15	0.07	0.16	0.26	0.14	0.14	-0.02	0.15	0.13	0.08	0.09
8 Convenient store hours	0.12	0.17	0.18	0.14	0.20	0.22	0.21	0.12	0.48	0.52	0.48	**0.60**	**0.55**	**0.53**	**0.56**	0.42	0.09	0.04	-0.02	0.11	0.05	0.09	0.06	0.06
9 Easy to move around	0.24	0.27	0.23	0.21	0.32	0.39	0.04	0.05	**0.61**	**0.50**	**0.60**	**0.62**	0.27	0.38	0.44	0.40	0.03	-0.10	0.20	0.25	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.12
10 Good traffic connections	0.10	0.17	0.19	0.14	0.11	0.05	0.00	0.06	**0.75**	**0.74**	**0.74**	**0.73**	-0.02	-0.10	-0.11	-0.12	0.03	0.10	0.15	0.22	0.08	0.06	0.11	0.08
11 Shopping & other errands	0.20	0.19	0.30	0.23	-0.02	0.02	0.10	0.09	**0.65**	**0.61**	**0.54**	**0.65**	0.05	0.08	0.09	0.03	0.03	0.10	-0.05	-0.03	0.18	0.22	0.25	0.17
12 Special offers	0.15	0.18	0.19	0.13	0.05	0.08	0.07	0.11	0.18	0.19	0.16	0.15	0.13	0.14	0.14	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.13	**0.88**	**0.89**	**0.87**	**0.88**
13 Low prices (value for money)	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.23	0.23	0.20	0.20	0.17	0.18	0.16	0.09	0.12	0.09	0.10	0.07	**0.87**	**0.88**	**0.87**	**0.89**
14 Easy parking	0.07	0.13	0.08	0.12	0.04	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.09	0.07	0.13	**0.92**	**0.92**	**0.91**	**0.93**	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07
15 Free parking	0.13	0.16	0.14	0.11	-0.04	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.04	0.02	-0.03	0.12	**0.88**	**0.87**	**0.87**	**0.93**	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.21	0.22	0.21	0.11
16 Cafés & restaurants	**0.70**	**0.72**	**0.66**	**0.62**	0.05	0.12	0.19	0.20	0.16	0.11	0.13	0.28	0.06	0.04	0.11	0.09	-0.02	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	0.00	0.07	0.07	-0.01
17 Other customers	**0.73**	**0.74**	**0.75**	**0.76**	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.05	0.11	0.12	0.03	0.10	0.07	0.04	0.00	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.04	0.10	-0.01	0.06	0.11	0.04
18 Pleasant atmosphere	**0.63**	**0.67**	**0.68**	**0.61**	0.19	0.17	0.09	0.17	0.18	0.21	0.25	0.27	0.03	0.14	0.11	0.12	0.37	0.32	0.29	0.30	0.13	0.01	0.05	0.05
19 Interesting place to shop	**0.70**	**0.72**	**0.72**	**0.69**	0.27	0.22	0.20	0.27	0.14	0.15	0.17	0.14	-0.01	0.13	0.07	0.05	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.16	0.12	0.01	0.03	0.08
20 Popular place to shop	**0.73**	**0.70**	**0.74**	**0.79**	0.05	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.12	0.14	0.15	0.08	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.16	0.19	0.08	0.14
Cronbach's Alpha	0.79	0.80	0.79	0.80	0.81	0.82	0.80	0.77	0.71	0.69	0.71	0.77	0.80	0.80	0.79	0.94	0.86	0.88	0.83	0.84	0.86	0.88	0.83	0.84

Number of valid cases (N): 2001=2244; 2006=1913; 2011=1529; 2017=1273

Variance explained (%): 2001=67.7; 2006=69.1; 2011=68.1; 2017=68.3

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 2001= 0.829; 2006=0.845; 2011=0.825; 2017=0.833

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Sig: 2001–2017=0.000

Table 6. Means of items forming the dimensions, factor scores by categories of age and generational cohort.

		Mean	Age Cohorts							Anova		Genarational Cohorts						Anova	
		(scale 1-5)	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	Sig.	R^2	Gen Y	Gen X3	Gen X2	Gen X1	Boomers	Silent	Sig.	R^2
2001	Leisure	2.8	0.14	0.08	-0.11	-0.08	0.06	0.06	-0.10	.005	.008	0.06	0.12	0.09	-0.14	-0.06	0.04	.001	.009
2006		3.0	0.18	0.17	-0.14	-0.11	-0.03	0.07	0.12	.000	.014	0.12	0.20	-0.02	-0.21	-0.02	0.08	.000	.016
2011		2.9	0.38	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	-0.08	-0.02	0.12	.000	.016	0.09	0.05	-0.02	-0.10	-0.10	0.04	.041	.008
2017		2.8	0.09	-0.02	-0.11	-0.21	-0.04	0.08	0.32	.001	.018	-0.01	-0.07	-0.26	-0.01	-0.04	0.38	.000	.025
2001	Quality & Selection	4.0	0.22	0.19	0.08	-0.09	-0.08	-0.33	-0.53	.000	.033	0.12	0.24	0.14	0.08	-0.12	-0.23	.000	.030
2006		4.1	0.04	0.17	0.18	0.04	-0.12	-0.12	-0.31	.000	.020	0.07	0.19	0.17	0.09	-0.02	-0.21	.000	.021
2011		4.0	0.17	0.18	0.24	0.11	-0.04	-0.35	-0.39	.000	.047	0.20	0.21	0.19	0.07	-0.11	-0.37	.000	.043
2017		3.9	0.08	0.25	0.23	0.16	-0.08	-0.17	-0.37	.000	.040	0.21	0.20	0.19	-0.09	-0.11	-0.35	.000	.037
2001	Locational convenience	3.7	0.11	0.06	0.04	0.00	-0.08	-0.18	-0.09	.028	.006	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.02	0.02	-0.14	.014	.006
2006		3.8	0.10	0.05	-0.06	0.06	-0.08	0.00	0.05	.303	.004	0.06	0.04	0.02	0.03	-0.05	-0.02	.743	.001
2011		3.7	0.23	-0.06	0.02	0.07	-0.02	-0.14	0.06	.033	.009	-0.05	0.10	0.05	0.05	-0.04	-0.06	.516	.003
2017		3.7	0.25	0.07	0.11	0.02	0.08	-0.19	-0.23	.000	.021	0.13	0.10	0.05	0.04	-0.14	-0.19	.001	.015
2001	Parking	3.6	-0.36	-0.13	0.15	0.14	0.16	-0.05	-0.72	.000	.043	-0.37	-0.29	-0.03	0.20	0.16	-0.04	.000	.033
2006		3.8	-0.37	-0.20	0.15	0.12	0.06	0.11	-0.46	.000	.034	-0.31	-0.26	0.11	0.13	0.08	-0.01	.000	.022
2011		3.8	-0.20	-0.18	-0.03	0.21	0.05	0.05	-0.23	.000	.021	-0.18	-0.18	0.17	0.17	0.02	-0.03	.000	.019
2017		3.8	-0.46	-0.19	0.01	0.21	0.09	0.04	0.13	.000	.032	-0.25	0.03	0.20	0.13	0.04	0.10	.000	.026
2001	Service	3.7	-0.44	-0.14	0.00	0.12	0.15	0.22	0.08	.000	.035	-0.42	-0.31	-0.05	-0.01	0.18	0.15	.000	.034
2006		3.9	-0.56	-0.41	-0.18	0.02	0.27	0.24	0.34	.000	.079	-0.52	-0.37	-0.32	-0.02	0.24	0.26	.000	.083
2011		3.8	-0.72	-0.49	-0.17	0.06	0.23	0.36	0.51	.000	.130	-0.61	-0.37	-0.04	0.06	0.27	0.43	.000	.133
2017		3.9	-0.23	-0.44	-0.22	0.12	0.17	0.24	0.11	.000	.062	-0.36	-0.18	0.11	0.10	0.28	0.13	.000	.062
2001	Price	3.8	0.11	-0.17	-0.04	0.00	0.09	0.22	-0.01	.000	.013	0.10	-0.04	-0.20	0.00	0.02	0.15	.000	.011
2006		3.7	0.14	-0.19	-0.15	-0.02	0.03	0.18	0.12	.000	.016	0.02	-0.19	-0.20	-0.09	0.05	0.15	.000	.016
2011		3.8	0.29	-0.05	-0.07	-0.01	-0.07	0.11	-0.04	.012	.011	0.06	-0.05	-0.07	0.01	-0.07	0.08	.299	.004
2017		3.9	0.32	0.00	-0.09	0.02	0.00	-0.07	-0.08	.033	.011	0.08	-0.08	0.08	-0.02	-0.04	-0.13	.248	.005

Table 7. Relative importance (%) of choice orientation dimensions by categories of age and generation.

		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
2001	Leisure	**103**	100	96	98	**102**	**107**	92
2006		**102**	**103**	95	97	99	**104**	**108**
2011		**111**	98	**102**	97	97	100	**108**
2017		**103**	99	97	95	99	**101**	**110**
2001	Quality & Selection	**105**	**104**	**102**	99	99	93	84
2006		99	**102**	**103**	**101**	99	99	93
2011		**104**	**102**	**105**	**102**	99	95	93
2017		**103**	**103**	**104**	**104**	99	97	93
2001	Locational convenience	**102**	100	100	**101**	**101**	99	93
2006		**100**	98	96	**101**	99	**103**	**105**
2011		**105**	97	100	**101**	98	99	**105**
2017		**106**	100	**101**	100	**101**	98	99
2001	Parking	85	94	**104**	**105**	**109**	**101**	79
2006		86	91	**102**	**103**	**102**	**107**	92
2011		94	92	100	**107**	**101**	**104**	94
2017		85	92	98	**107**	**102**	**103**	**106**
2001	Service	91	97	100	**103**	**104**	**103**	96
2006		89	92	97	100	**104**	**104**	**107**
2011		88	89	98	**102**	**103**	**106**	**110**
2017		97	90	96	**103**	**104**	**104**	100
2001	Price	**102**	96	100	**101**	**103**	**101**	93
2006		**103**	95	95	100	**101**	**105**	**101**
2011		**106**	97	99	**101**	99	**101**	99
2017		**107**	100	98	**101**	**101**	99	97

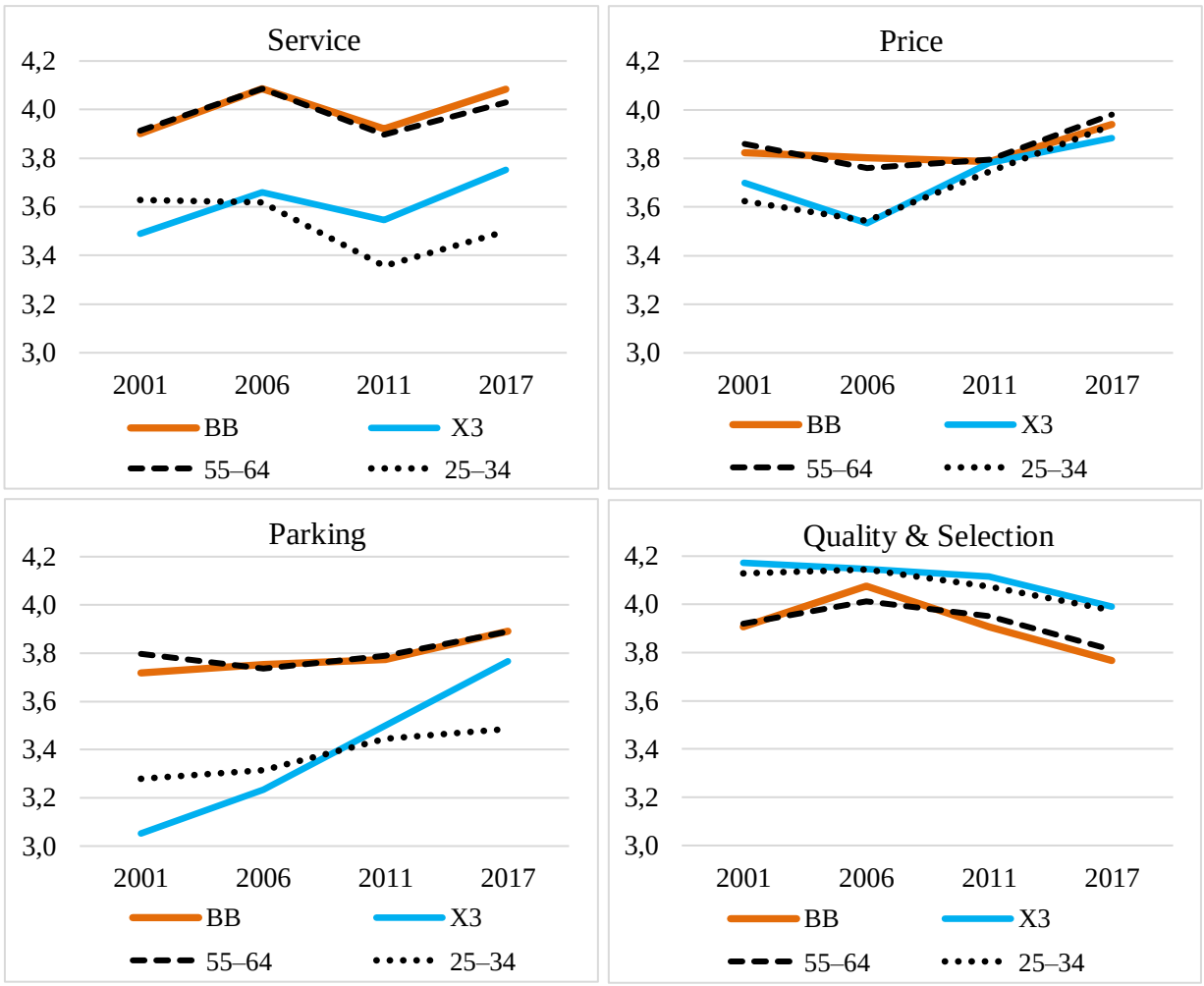

Figure 1. Importance profiles of service, price, parking, and quality and selection for the Baby Boomers and Gen X3, and for the aged 25–34 and 55–64.