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HOW SINGLE COLLEGE STUDENTS SHOP FOR FOOD

by

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Considerable research concerning retail food store shopping behavior has been conducted in the past. Such research has primarily pertained to low income persons, senior citizens, and family consumers. There are a large number of young singles, under 30 years of age, that constitute a substantial portion of the total food market. Many of the young singles are college students; and there are differences in their buying practices as compared to the buying practices of young singles working full time and other types of food buyers.

The purpose of this study is to identify important attributes of retail food store shopping behavior for single college students who prepare their own meals. This is a part of a larger study examining the food store shopping behavior for all types of singles under the age of 30.

Cluster sampling was used in the study; 355 completed questionnaires were obtained. This is approximately five percent of the total number of single college students living in apartments and mobile homes near the Central Michigan University campus in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Commuter students from outside of Mt. Pleasant were not included in the study. Dichotomous, multiple choice, ranking, and open questions were utilized in the questionnaire instrument.

The findings from the research are reported in the complete study, and

also the findings are compared to the results of a retail food store shopping behavior study which was completed in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, and Bozeman, Montana, in 1980. A few of the findings are:

1. Prices are the most important criteria for students when selecting a store, just as prices are most important for family shoppers. However, prices are not as strong in importance for students. Selection of products is second in importance, with store layout and atmosphere being third for students. This is different from the family shopper. There are significant differences between the two groups for the store selection criteria.
2. Meat is the most important advertised special for both groups of consumers. However, milk and dairy products are much more important advertised specials for students. The family shopper placed considerably more importance on advertised specials when selecting a particular place to shop as compared to the students.
3. Students exhibit a lower level of store loyalty than family shoppers. The key factor may be that students are residents of the community for only eight months of the year.
4. Students will do less shopping at a second and third store each week as compared to the family shopper. This may be due to paying less attention to advertised specials and also the buying of smaller quantities of food.

5. There are significant differences between the two groups in terms of several shopping practices and the mix of products purchased. These differences are of sufficient importance that different merchandising strategies may be needed to reach students.

6. There is a considerable difference between male and female single students for certain types of shopping practices

and also the product mix being purchased.

The study indicates that single college students are a definite market segment with specific needs and requirements which differ from family shoppers. Food retailers need to be aware of these differences when planning their marketing strategy. It may be necessary to make changes in merchandising practices to appeal to the college single's consumer market.
