

Understanding the silver experience: needs, expectations, and food product niches



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BACKGROUND: Seniors are one of the most important food consumer segments in the developed countries. Understanding this segment, their **needs** and **expectations**, is important to **develop successful new products which meet their requirements**.

OBJECTIVE: Developing a tool to identify **food interests**, and the **potential relationship** between **seniors' food preferences** and the different **physiological changes** occurring during aging.

METHODS

FOCUS GROUPS (n = 70) To explore senior consumers' habits and needs

National SURVEY (n = 258) To design a questionnaire to identify different population clusters: 1) food preferences, 2) groceries, and 3) cooking/processing habits.

QUESTIONNAIRE Improvement Results of the survey were used to filter and reduce the questionnaire, and to assess the relevance of each question.

VALIDATION (n = 400) The reduced questionnaire was validated identifying the same clusters with different preferences and habits.

RESULTS

- The clusters related to preferences clearly described 3 groups, linked with 'following or not' the general health recommendations (sugar and alcohol consumption)
- Health was also a driver for the identified food habit clusters.

For the 'food habit' segments health was a guideline. **Cluster 1)** people having healthy habits associated to suffering some pathology, **cluster 2)** people who invest more money in groceries, have great information about food/health and have no health issues, and **cluster 3)** people who are not worried about food or health issues.

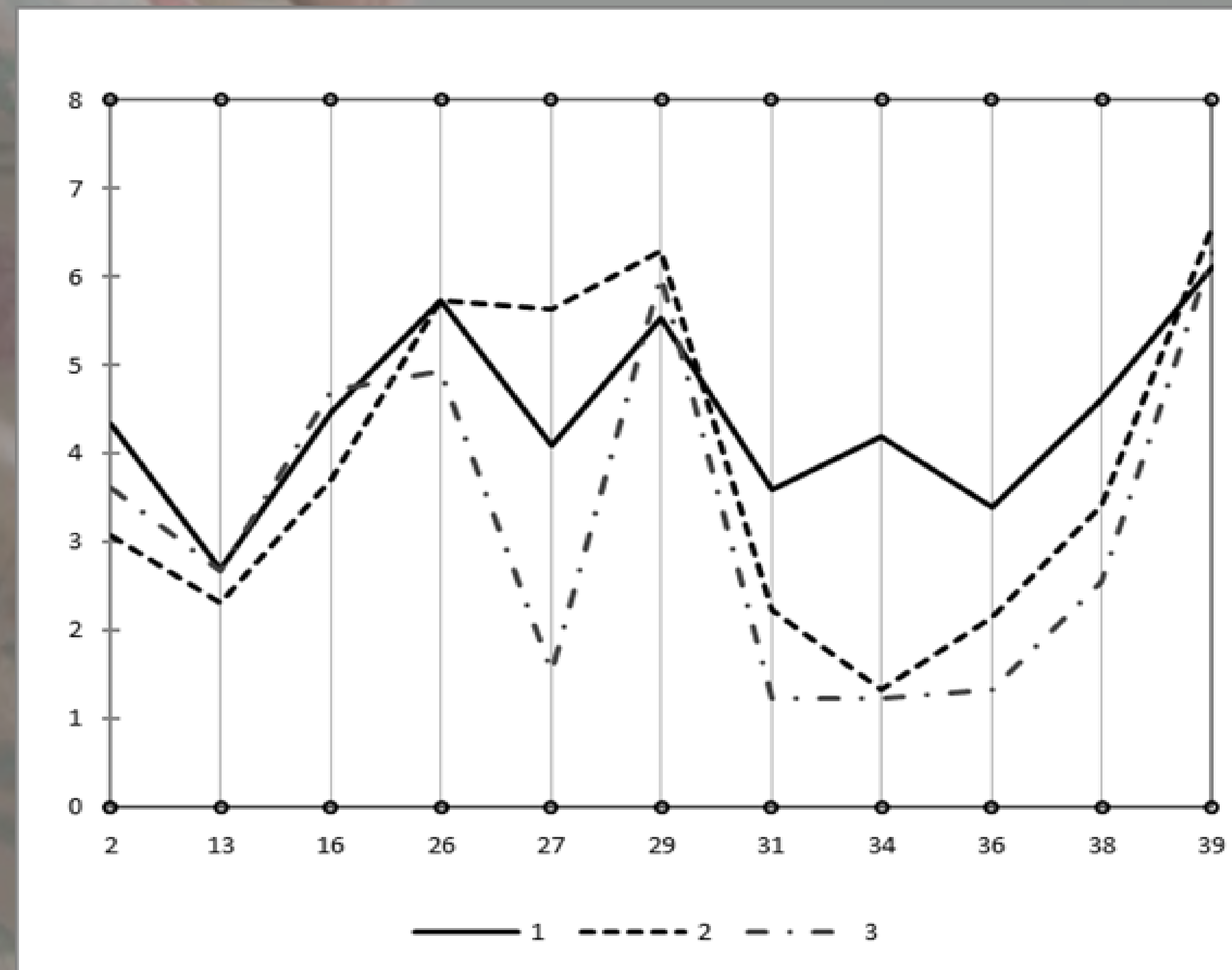


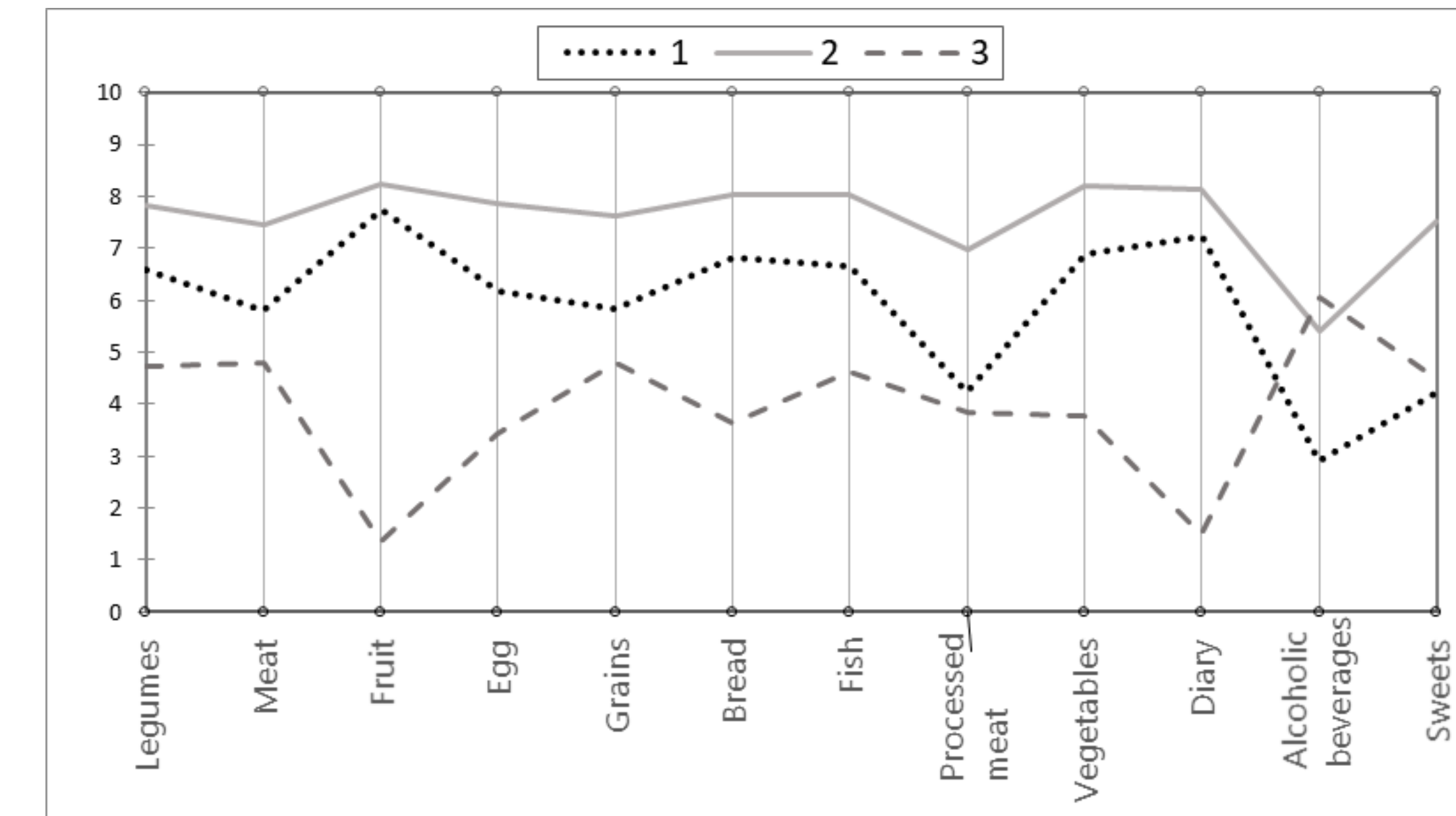
Figure 1. Classes profile of the different consumers' clusters for the 11 significant terms of the questionnaire

N.	QUESTION
2	I usually consume whole grain products
13	I usually buy moderately pre-prepared food
16	I usually do my shopping in big supermarkets
26	Buying healthy and nutritious food accounts a huge part of my monthly income
27	I generally cook only for myself because I eat alone
29	In general, I am clear about what to eat to have a healthy diet
31	I have involuntarily lost weight in the last 3 months
34	I have difficulty (with/without pain) swallowing, which causes me to consume less variety of foods than I would like
36	I have difficulties to perceive flavors, so I add more spices, salt, sugar, or cook dishes with sauces
38	There are foods that, even though I like them, I don't eat because they make me feel bad
39	I believe that eating healthy is very important for the maintenance of my health today and in the future

Table 1. Items of the final and validated questionnaire for identifying the 'food habits' clusters.

Considering the results, the developed questionnaire is a powerful tool to obtain information about: the **processing degree of foods** consumed by seniors, the **healthy profile of foods** demanded by the silver segment, and the presence of some **alterations related to food consumption** which may influence foods acquisition.

FOOD PREFERENCE CLUSTERS

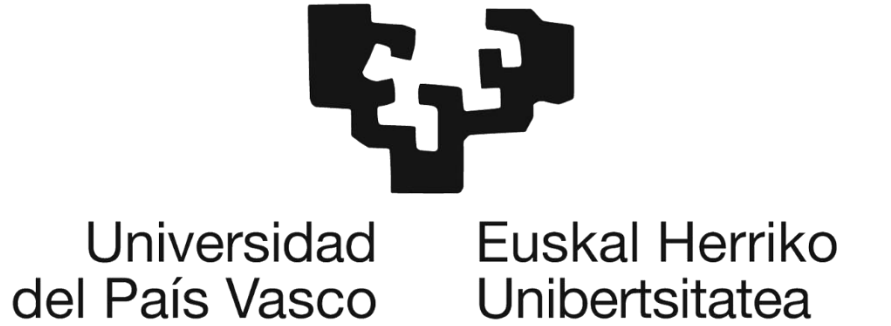


Group 1 did not like alcoholic beverages, processed meats and sweets products, compared to other foods.

Group 2 liked all foods equally but alcoholic beverages.

Group 3 reported lower liking scores for all food products but liked alcoholic beverages significantly more than the other foods.

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