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SILVER GENERATION RUNNERS: SELECTED MOTIVATIONS AND RUNNING EVENT ENGAGEMENT

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Purpose: The Silver generation is becoming increasingly active and aware of the benefits of physical activity, particularly running, as a way to improve their health and well-being. This study aims to explore the key factors motivating older people to engage in physical activity and how these factors influence their participation in running events.
Design/methodology/approach: The research method involved surveying a sample of 400 respondents, all representatives of the silver generation. These individuals declared regular engagement in physical activity, including running.
Findings: Motivations for running among the Silver generation differ based on running experience. Individuals with 5+ years of experience are more driven by health and social factors than those with less experience. Additionally, longer running experience increases participation in events. To encourage less experienced runners to participate, age-specific rewards are recommended.
Research limitations/implications: The study's limitations include a sample that may not represent the silver generation due to reliance on online questionnaires, potentially excluding those less comfortable with technology. Future research should use alternative data collection methods and ensure a more representative sample to better understand the motivations and barriers to running in this population.
Practical implications: The article presents the most important motivational factors for the silver generation regarding running and participating in mass running events. This allows organizations within this market to utilize statistically tested solutions to create value for silver generation runners.
Originality/value: This study fills a gap in the literature by identifying the motivations for running among older people, a topic not previously explored. It highlights how running experience shapes these motivations and influences participation in running events.
Keywords: silver generation, running market, mass running events, customer motivations.
Category of the paper: Research paper, conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

Demographic changes in the global economy indicate an ongoing process of societal aging. Data and forecasts from the Central Statistical Office in 2023 show that, by 2060, the 65+ age group in Poland will increase by over 2.5 million people compared to 2022 (GUS, 2023), constituting a 34.2% increase.

Age and aging are key factors influencing individual activity across various life domains. Life stages are marked by biological, psychological, social, and professional transformations (Panasiuk, Panasiuk, 2021). Typically, the final years of professional activity and the phase of preparation for retirement—alongside changes in lifestyle and physical activity levels—occur between ages 55 and 64. In literature, individuals aged 50+ nearing the end of their careers and making lifestyle adjustments are often referred to as the Silver Generation.

Defining the exact age range for the Silver Generation is challenging. This generational group differs significantly from younger groups and is also internally diverse (GUS, 2020; Karani, Fraccastoro, 2010; Kohijoki, Marjanen, 2013; Lesáková, 2016a; Najdený et al., 2019; Kovács, 2019). Members of this group vary in terms of gender, place of residence, and education level (Panasiuk, Panasiuk, 2021). Additionally, they exhibit unique lifestyles, shopping habits, travel preferences, and levels of sports activity. Contemporary market trends empower people aged 50+ to remain active, pursue passions, expand their knowledge, and travel. This shift has led to a change in how the Silver Generation consumer segment is perceived; as one of the fastest-growing segments, it warrants increasing attention (Eusébio et al., 2015; Lesáková, 2016b; Najdený et al., 2019).

The Silver Generation redefines traditional perceptions of older age. Consumers within this generation, even post-retirement, generally maintain purchasing power and are less impacted by the cessation of professional duties (Zalega, 2015; Kovács, 2019; Trembošová, Kramoliš, Dubcová, Nagyová, Forgáč, 2022). Moreover, this generation emphasizes social engagement, contrasting with the passive lifestyles of previous generations (Człapiński, 2017; Kim, 2017).

A 2018 study by CBOS, involving a representative random sample of 1,066 Polish adults, revealed that nearly 50% of respondents aged 55+ engage in physical activity. Additionally, this study showed that one of the most common activities among Poles is running or jogging, with over 55% of participants reporting regular practice. These findings suggest that this generation may choose running as a means of maintaining mental and physical health, as well as fulfilling emerging social needs. Taking the above into consideration, it can be concluded that the growing interest in physical activity among the discussed generation, combined with the purchasing power of the silver generation driven by their professional activity, will contribute to an increase in expenditures on sports-related goods. These may include sports equipment, recreational trips, sports classes, or participation in sports competitions.

The specific objectives of this study were:

- To identify motivating factors for engaging in physical activity (specifically running) among the Silver Generation.
- To examine conditions influencing older consumers participation in running events.

2. An overview of the literature

Running is a sport that almost anyone can practice. It does not require formal training, as it is a natural form of movement (Grabus, Szymański, 2017). The rise in the popularity of running began in the mid-1960s, when a training method based on long, slow runs—jogging—gained widespread appeal (Galloway, 2011, p. 13). Since then, the popularity of running has continued to grow, and the sport has developed in economic, managerial, and social dimensions. This inclusivity of running contributes to the internal diversity of the social group that runners comprise. Runners vary in terms of sports skills, duration of physical activity, knowledge of sports brands, interest in running, training methods, and sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, residence, and income. This diversity influences the visible differentiation in the needs and preferences of these consumers (Jasiulewicz, Waśkowski, 2017; Zawadzki, 2015) as well as their motivations for running (Schwarz, Hunter, 2008).

Given this diversity, it can be assumed that conclusions drawn from research into runner motivation will differ depending on age, particularly for the Silver Generation, i.e., runners aged 50+. The heterogeneity of runners may indeed be a factor influencing motivations to begin running. One of the most important factors determining people's decisions to start running, as described in the literature, is increasing societal awareness of the benefits of regular sports activity. Research by Parzonko and Szuba (2017, p. 67) found that the most frequently cited reason for starting to run was the desire to improve physical condition (34%). About 26% of respondents indicated weight loss as their primary goal, and 16% noted that they chose running because it was the most accessible sport when they were seeking a form of physical activity. Factors such as persuasion from friends and fashion trends were selected by 7% and 3% of respondents, respectively, indicating these were minor motivations. Thus, internal motivation is a key determinant for deciding to run, with a focus on achieving physical and mental health and deriving enjoyment from the activity.

Running experience also influences changes in a runner's motivation. Therefore, the authors developed the following hypothesis, stating that running experience determines the primary motivation for running among the Silver Generation. The first hypothesis is:

H1: Among the Silver Generation, motivations to run vary depending on the length of running experience.

- H1a: For people who have been running longer, a key motivator is the possibility of socialization, including gaining social recognition through running.
- H1b: For people who have been running for a shorter period, a primary motivator is taking care of their health.

A running event is an event aimed not only at runners but also fans and supporters of the sport. In 2019, a report titled "The State of Running 2019" was published by RunRepeat.com and the International Association of Athletics Federations (2019). This study provides a comprehensive analysis of a database covering 96% of races held in the USA and 91% of races in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America from 1986 to 2018. The report reveals that, between 2008 and 2019, participation in mass races increased by as much as 49.43%.

In 2016, a global decline in the number of runners participating in events was recorded, with a 13% drop over a three-year period. At the peak of participation in global running events, 9.1 million runners crossed the finish line, but by 2018, this number had fallen to 7.9 million. A marked decline was observed in the number of people participating in street races in the US and Europe, the primary markets for running worldwide. The global running market reflects trends not only in participant numbers but also in preferred race distances. It is apparent that runners are increasingly opting out of half-marathons and 5 km races, as shown in figure 1.

Training experience, even at the amateur level, is strongly correlated with one's endurance over time. With longer training, individuals gain confidence in their physical condition and mental endurance in facing temporary discomfort associated with physical exertion. Through consistent training, runners have the opportunity to build self-confidence based on a long-term, planned process of implementing training units.

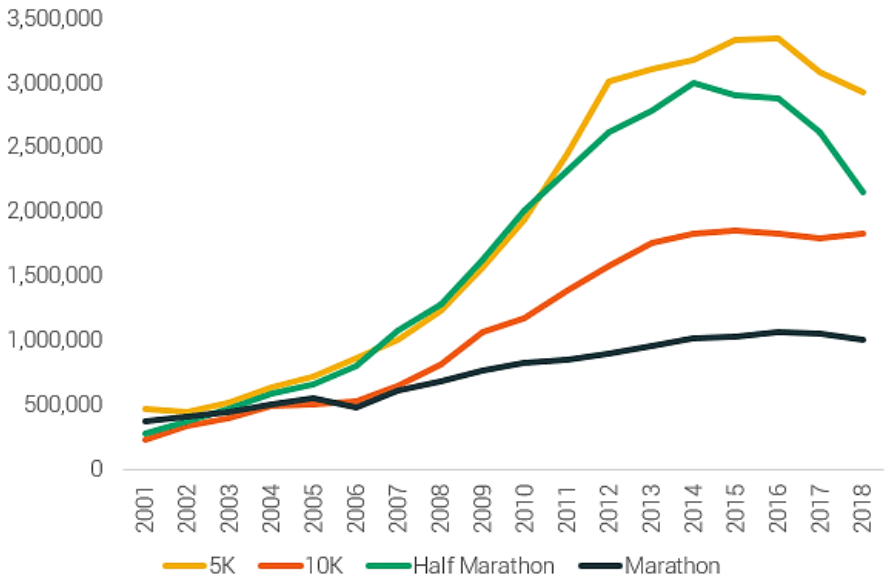

Figure 1. Number of participants in mass running events by distance worldwide.

Source: The State of Running, 2019.

Taking the above into account, the authors decided to develop a second hypothesis, which is as follows:

H2: Among the silver generation, a person with longer running training experience is more likely to participate in a running event than someone with less experience.

The motivations for beginning running training or later deciding to participate in a mass event may vary. There is no single, universal factor that motivates all runners to participate in a running event. Each participant has unique preferences and needs that running competitions aim to fulfill. Recognizing the determinants that motivate runners to enter an event should be among the strategies that, if effectively implemented, could positively impact runner participation in such events. Although valuable insights regarding runners' motivations for participating in events have been studied and identified over the years, there is currently a lack of up-to-date research on the reasons for participation in organized sports (Koper et al., 2014; Malchrowicz-Mośko, Fadigas, 2018; Stempień, 2015).

The previously cited research conducted by Parzonko and Szuba (2017) also examined motivations for participating in running events in addition to motivations for running. In their study, 42% of respondents indicated that the atmosphere of the event, the opportunity to meet new people, and the chance to have fun were key motivators for participation. Another 26% cited the opportunity to compete and set personal records as their main motivation. For 21% of respondents, the primary motivator was the desire to assess their training progress, while 11% viewed running events as a way to travel. These findings indicate that, beyond entertainment and enjoyment, competition and self-assessment are important motivators for runners.

The above data align with Dybała's research (2013, pp. 119-124), which found that runners participating in events are driven by motivators related to physical health, as well as social, psychological, and achievement factors. The latter includes competition, with a desire to compete against others to secure the best possible place. Similarly, Romanowska-Tołłoczko and Marciniuk (2012) indicated that the need to achieve a sports result motivates runners to take part in competitions. This suggests that the motivation to compete is also present among silver generation runners.

Taking the above into account, the motivation to participate in sports competitions should be analyzed on two levels: intrinsic motivation, which stems from an individual’s internal desire to engage in sports, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external factors. Extrinsic motivation arises when engagement in an activity—whether sports-related, professional, or social—is influenced by external factors, enabling the individual to achieve specific social outcomes (Kozioł, 2002, p. 59).

The influence of extrinsic motivational factors on an individual, in this case a runner, may directly or indirectly affect their decision-making processes. Recognition of a sports achievement, emphasis on the ranking or placement in a competition, and the opportunity to compete with peers in age-specific categories can serve as significant motivators for participating in sports events. The introduction of age categories facilitates competition within a diverse community of runners by allowing for the categorization of results and recognition of achievements across different age groups.

Considering the interplay between these intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, the authors formulated a third hypothesis, which was subsequently tested in their research:

H3: It is important to offer prizes for individual age categories among runners participating in running events.

3. Research methods

For the survey, authors created a closed-ended questionnaire to explore the respondents' physical activity (silver generation), particularly their running frequency and form. Respondents were also asked about the determinants and barriers to taking up running, as well as their participation in running events. They rated every statements on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree". The authors of the article developed the survey and then commissioned the research agency Biostat, which is well acquainted with research methodology. The study was conducted in 2-21.08.2024.

To achieve the research objectives, a nationwide study was carried out using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) method on a representative sample of 400 respondents, all aged 55 and above (the silver generation), who engage in physical activity.

The cluster analysis aimed to identify distinct groups of runners based on the length of time they had been running, with the variable "How many years have you been running?". This analysis allowed for the division of respondents into two main clusters: those who had been running for a relatively short period (up to 5 years; n = 198) and those who had been running for a longer time (more than 5 years; n = 202). The structure of the research sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Respondents who have been running for a short period (up to 5 years; up5) n = 202		Respondents whohave been running for a longer time (more than 5 years; more5) n = 198	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gender				
Man	78	38.6	109	55.1
Woman	124	61.4	89	44.9
Age				
Between 55 and 60. y.o.	78	38.6	58	29.3
Between 61 and 65 y.o.	47	23.3	58	29.3
Between 66 and 70 y.o.	52	25.7	43	21.7
Under 70 y.o.	25	12.4	39	19.7
Place of residence				
The country	29	14.4	28	14.1
City below 50 thousand citizens	52	25.7	40	20.2
City between 50 thousand and 250 thousand citizens	59	29.2	66	33.3
City between 250 thousand and 500 thousand citizens	26	12.9	31	15.7
City over 500 thousand citizens	36	17.8	33	16.7
Education				
Elementary	0	0.0	4	2.0
Vocational	13	6.4	14	7.1
Secondary	81	40.1	76	38.4
Higher	108	53.5	104	52.5

Source: author's work.

Basic descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were calculated to compare the results for each group, considering the criterion of motivation, determinants and barriers to taking up running or respondents' participation in running events. To analyse the data from the questionnaire survey and compare the answers of up5 and more 5 respondents, a test $\chi 2$ was used. Appropriate statistical tests were conducted to verify of the research hypotheses: the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test for data without a normal distribution. The significance level of 0.05 was adopted as the criterion for hypothesis testing, and hypotheses were accepted or rejected based on this threshold. SPSS Statistics was employed to prepare the analyses.

4. Results of the research

Length of Running Experience and Motivations for Running

According to the adopted assumptions, a person with longer running experience is defined as a respondent who has declared running for at least five years. Those with less than five years of running experience are classified as having a shorter period of engagement.

The first motivators for running analyzed are "social factors, including the possibility of gaining social recognition". This variable was created based on responses to questions about the possibility of sharing achievements on social media and running apps (Z1); making new friends (Z2) and connections through sports apps (Z3); running because "friends run" (Z4); perceiving running to express social status (Z5); and showing family that running contributes to maintaining physical and mental health (Z6).

To verify Hypothesis 1a, the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. The results showed a significant difference between the groups. For runners with longer experience, important motivators for running include social factors, such as the possibility of gaining social recognition through running ($U = 16866.00$, $Z = -2.715$, $p = .007$) (table 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a should be accepted.

Table 2.
Motivations for running (social factors)

Variables	Respondents who have been running for a short period (up to 5 years; up5) n = 202		Respondents who have been running for a longer time (more than 5 years; more5) n = 198	
	x	σ	x	σ
Z1	1.87	1.325	2.13	1.357
Z2	2.19	1.420	2.56	1.427
Z3	1.96	1.311	2.21	1.346
Z4	2.40	1.372	2.65	1.420
Z5	2.02	1.377	2.21	1.346
Z6	2.92	1.401	3.27	1.376

The second analyzed group of motivators relates to the health benefits gained from running. This variable reflects responses to questions regarding maintaining mental health (U1), physical health (U2), physical condition (U3), coping with daily stress (U4), and alleviating negative emotions (U5).

For respondents with longer running experience, health maintenance through running is a significant motivator.

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted, and the results showed a significant difference between the groups ($U = 16846.00$, $Z = -2.743$, $p = .006$). However, respondents with longer running experience demonstrated greater motivation to run in the form of taking care of their own health (more5: $x = 19.49$, $\sigma = 3.25$; up5: $x = 18.57$, $\sigma = 13.49$, respectively) (Table 3). Therefore, Hypothesis 1b should be rejected.

Table 3.
Motivations for running (health factors)

Variables	Respondents who have been running for a short period (up to 5 years; up5) n = 202		Respondents who have been running for a longer time (more than 5 years; more5) n = 198	
	x	σ	x	σ
U1	4.12	1.046	4.25	0.995
U2	4.02	1.117	4.31	1.048
U3	4.34	0.980	4.44	0.942
U4	2.29	1.434	2.41	1.396
U5	3.80	1.271	4.08	1.027

Length of Running Experience and Participation in Running Events

Among the silver generation, most respondents do not participate in running events, with 166 respondents in the "up to 5 years" group and 132 respondents in the "more than 5 years" group. It is worth noting, however, that those who report participating in organized runs are almost twice as likely to have longer running experience (up to 5 years: 36 respondents; more than 5 years: 66 respondents).

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics (H2)

Variables	Respondents who have been running for a short period (up to 5 years; up5) n = 202		Respondents who have been running for a longer time (more than 5 years; more5) n = 198	
	Number	%	Number	%
Respondents who participate in running events	36	17.8	66	33.3
Respondents who do not participate in running events	166	82.2	132	66.7

Source: author's research work.

To verify Hypothesis 2 about the connection between running experience and a consumer's willingness to participate in running events, the χ^2 test was conducted. The analysis confirmed ($\chi^2 = 12.664$; df = 1; $p < .001$) this connection: the longer the training experience of a runner, the more frequently they are willing to take part in a running event. Hypothesis 2 should be accepted.

At the same time, it is worth noting that among the most common barriers/reasons for participating in running events, the respondents indicated that they train for running "only for their own health" (up to 5 years: $x = 4.15$, $\sigma = 1.310$; more than 5 years: $x = 4.27$, $\sigma = 1.132$, respectively) and "for their own satisfaction" (up to 5 years: $x = 4.31$, $\sigma = 1.116$; more than 5 years: $x = 4.39$, $\sigma = 0.963$, respectively).

Length of Running Experience, Participation in Running Events, and Awards for Age Categories

In the next step, the analysis of the conditions for participation in running events was conducted in depth. A motivating factor was considered that did not refer to running "in general", but to the motivation to participate in a specific running event. The examined determinant was the existence of age categories and the possibility of receiving an award for individual categories included in the competition regulations set by the organizer of the mass running event.

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics (H3)

Variables	Respondents who have been running for short period (up to 5 years; up5) n = 202		Respondents who have been running for a longer time (more than 5 years; more5) n = 198	
	x	σ	x	σ
The presence of age categories and prizes for individual categories in the competition rules	3.56	1.319	3.00	1.324

Source: author's research work.

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. The results showed a significant difference between the groups (U = 1466.00, Z = 1.993, p = .046), indicating that for runners with shorter experience, the presence of age categories and awards for individual categories included in the rules of the running event (x = 3.56, σ = 1.319) serves as an additional motivation.

5. Conclusions

The research conducted by the authors and the analysis of existing data indicate that, according to the report titled "Profile of the Polish Runner," carried out at the Poznań University of Economics (PPB, 2014), senior runners (the silver generation) constitute less than 10% of all runners in the running market. Specifically, 5.45% are aged 51-60, and 1.34% are over 61 years of age. Nevertheless, the aging of society, increased awareness of the positive impact of physical activity on maintaining quality of life, and the growing popularity of running as a mass sport allow us to assume that the population of runners over 50 years old will increase. The WHO recommendations (2021) indicate that adults aged up to 64, as well as those over 65, should engage in regular moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, amounting to 150 to 300 minutes per week. Physical activity should align with individual preferences, capabilities, and age-related limitations. Based on the above review of literature and existing data, it can be concluded that this generation may choose running as one of many ways to care for their mental and physical health while meeting emerging social needs.

Additionally, statistical analysis of the conducted research indicates that runners who have been running for over 10 years are more willing to participate in running events and continue their running activity into their silver years. However, it should be noted that a significant portion of the 50+ generation who declare engaging in running have been doing so for less than 5 years. According to the authors, an important action that should be taken in aging economies is to encourage individuals in the last years of working age (45-50 years) to take up physical activity. Started running training earlier may result in a greater desire to continue it later in life, as the barriers to entering the running community tend to increase with age.

6. Limitation and future research

The limitations of this study primarily stem from the characteristics of the research sample combined with the chosen research method. Specifically, the respondents' age and reliance on computer use for completing online questionnaires (CAWI) may have influenced the results. It is important to consider that some members of the silver generation may not be as comfortable or proficient with digital technologies, which could have impacted their participation in research study. In future research, it may be beneficial to explore alternative data collection methods better suited to this age group, such as in-depth individual interviews, which could provide more nuanced insights.

Another limitation arises from the lack of representativeness of the research sample concerning certain sociodemographic factors, such as gender and education levels within the silver generation. This limitation also suggests a valuable direction for future studies. Ensuring a more representative sample would allow for a more thorough examination of the relationships between the variables studied and sociodemographic factors, such as gender or education, which could offer deeper insights into the motivations and barriers related to running in this population.

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