

# **Price and Consumers' Patronage of Food-Type Groceries in Dublin Supermarkets**

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## Abstract

*The grocery retail business has been thriving for many years in Ireland. Yet very few scholarly studies are known to have been carried out in the sector. In this study, price and consumers' patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets was the area of interest. With defined objectives to understand how consumers in Dublin reacts in situations of price instability, whether these consumers are even sensitive to price of food-type groceries considering the fact that same or similar food-type can be sold at different prices in different supermarket, whether there are other factors of patronage that consumers do consider other than price and to establish if consumers in Dublin do use price as a measure of food product quality. A total of 108 respondents who filled an online questionnaire designed for the purpose, participated in the exercise.*

*At the end, it was discovered that although price instability majorly resonates among female consumers who are students and are within the age range of 28 and 37 years, yet there is variations in reaction to its effects based on consumers' food type choice, gender, age and occupation; that consumers are sensitive to prices of same food-type groceries across Dublin supermarkets and it is mostly pronounced among females who are students and are within the age range of 18 and 27 years; that consumers take cognizance of "easy accessibility" and "product quality" as other factors of patronage but are indifferent to product brand and are not willing to patronize higher-priced supermarkets even with the offers of safety and hygiene measures against Covid-19 and that consumers do sometimes use price to identify low quality food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets and are willing to pay extra to buy those perceived as of good quality.*

**Key words:** Price, Consumer, food-type groceries, patronage behaviour, price inference, price instability, price sensitivity, Covid-19

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

For years, marketing scholars and professionals have identified Price as an integral part of the marketing mix. The other elements of the mix are: Product, Person, Place, Physical Appearance, Promotion and Process, all of which make up what is widely known as the 7Ps of the marketing mix. The influence of each of the Ps in the marketing mix is interwoven and some studies have confirmed how their combined effects can influence consumers' patronage behavior (Pour, Nazari and Emami, 2013; Sulaiman and Masri, 2017; Panjaitan, Sinulingga and Wibowo, 2019; Melovic, Cirovic, Dudic, Vulic and Gregus, 2020).

However, there are scholars whose studies have emphasised the significance role Price plays within the marketing mix and how it influences consumers' patronage. Price, according to Mohout (2015) is the "heart of the business" because it affects everything a business owner wants to do and everything he does. Mohout's assertion is reinforced in the findings of Munusamy and Hoo (2008) as well as that of Qalati, Yuan, Iqbal, Hussain and Ali (2019), wherein it is contended that price wields significance influence more than any other elements of the marketing mix in shaping consumers patronage behaviour. The scholastic back and forth argument as to whether price is the sole influencer of consumers' patronage behavior or its influence is subsumed within the combined effect of other elements of the marketing mix, makes further researches into this area of study deserving. The truism in this lies in the disparity that exists in different geographical locations and consumers' social status and exposures, among other factors where some of these studies have been conducted.

Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) portend that understanding consumers' buying behavior is as essential as understanding factors that influence them. In other word, to understand the extent of Price consideration by consumers is to understand the extent of influence on their patronage behaviour. The patronage behaviour itself is linked to human behavioural psychology which Holdershaw and Gendall (2008) contend has become of "particular interest to researchers". Notably, one critical influencer of consumers' behaviour is attitude (psychological factor),

because its understanding helps to know how decisions to buy a product is made (Simbolon, 2015). While explaining a number of what he describes as “psychological constructs” that serve as underpinnings of consumers’ behaviour, Jacoby (1976) also agrees with the critical role attitude plays, emphasizing however that attitude itself is predicated on elements such as, consumers’ cognitive dissonance, belief-expectancy, attitude and behavior as well as intention. Other elements of the psychological constructs as recognized by (Jacoby, 1976) are sensory processes, perception, learning and personality. Whereas consumers’ psychological disposition can take a procedural form, which involves the act of selecting, buying, using and disposing off a product or service, it can also be prompted by personal inquisitiveness or even emotional attachment to a product or service (Solomon, 2005).

Relatedly, price is considered a type of perception – which in itself is one of the psychological constructs that shape consumers’ behavior. Empirical evidences have however established that while in some cases, consumers use price in psychological appraisal of product’s quality, in some other instances, such consideration do not exist, thus having little or no effect on consumers’ purchase behavior (Jacoby, 1976). Expanding the frontiers of the discourse, Asamoah and Chovancová (2011) note that perception is a mental process that does leads to decision-making and which is then followed by selection. When a price-sensitive consumer enters a shop, he or she perceives the price tags on products and consider whether the products are costly or cheap and also determine whether to buy or not. Price perception also does lead consumers to buy on impulse and when there is a perception that the value associated with a product far exceeds the price place on it, chances are that consumers will not hesitate buying such a product, notwithstanding whether it was planned for or not (Asamoah and Chovancová, 2011).

Indeed, the perceived relationship between price and consumers’ patronage behaviour has been put to test in different parts of the world. For instance, Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) in a survey at Al-Hassa region of Saudi Arabia, establish among other things, that there is a positive relationship between price and patronage behavior of consumers irrespective of demographic differences. In United States, Rihn, Khachatryan and Wei (2018) are of the conviction that price can sometimes be the sole determinant of whether or not a product should be bought. This is



because their study reveals that price-conscious consumers are even less likely to purchase a product. In Europe, McGoldrick and Marks (1987) study in Manchester, United Kingdom reveals among other things, the strong relationship between consumers' social-economic status and importance attached to price. This, the study discovers, is prevalent among "down-market larger household, less educated and older shoppers". And in Germany, Kenning, Evanschitzky, Vogel and Ahlert (2007) discover consumers' price knowledge of apparels was quite low and this may not be unconnected with the constant changes in these apparels' prices. Other scholarly works have also affirmed the relationship between price and patronage behavior of consumers (Kim, Nater and Spann, 2009; Chandrashekar, 2011; Grewal, Ailawadi, Gauri, Hall, Kopalle and Robertson, 2011; Lemmerer and Menrad, 2015).

Although there is no consensus as to the number of theoretical frameworks under which price and consumers' patronage behaviour can be situated, scholars have at various times, explored theoretical postulations of Fishbein and Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Actions (1975) as well as Hawkins Stern's Impulse Buying Theory (1962), among others. While establishing the relationship between Theory of Reasoned Action and Consumers' patronage behaviour, Simbolon (2015) asserts that consumers' behavioural tendencies are predicated on prior intention to act in a particular way with supporting variables. Price is considered to be among such variables. But unlike Theory of Reasoned Actions which is anchored on prior intention, Stern's Impulse Buying Theory, as reflected in the study carried out by Zhang, Haiqin, Zhao and Yu (2018) is on consumers' exposure to spur-of-the-moment factors. Usalan (2016) categorises price among factors that influence impulse buying. Other factors include product category, product brand, store environment, promotional activities, among others. It is imperative to state however that whether by prior intention or impulse, researches into price as a factor in consumers' patronage behaviour, have continually evolved with scholars focusing their inquisitive lens in different directions.

Although, rating organisations such as PwC, Kantar, Banda, among others are known to release periodic market surveys reports on consumers and their shopping pattern in Ireland, there are limited known academic or scholastic researches in this area that could be said to have

specifically targeted Dublin supermarkets. Yet, carrying out a study of this nature is remarkable for many reasons.

First, Dublin is not just the political capital of Ireland but also its economic nerve-centre. The Department of Regional and Urban Planning, University College Dublin, in a report (2000) describes the strategic importance of Dublin as one that “dominates the Irish urban, economic and social landscapes”. Also, the Irish Business and Employers’ Confederation (IBEC) data confirms that about 80,000 (28%) of the 285,000 people employed across retail and wholesale businesses in Ireland are based in Dublin alone. Thus, Dublin relevance especially within the Irish Small and Medium scale Enterprises (SME) makes its retail sector a fertile ground for academic enquiry like this.

Secondly, the 2019 Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) puts the population of Dublin at 1.4 million. According the CSO, Dublin population grows at 1.8% even as it controls 28.4% share of the country’s total population of 4.9 million people. With such huge population within its geographical space, it can be argued that whatever affects Dublin residents will directly or indirectly impact consumers’ patronage behaviour elsewhere in the country. The extent of such far-reaching impact also makes this study expedient.

Most significantly, Mercer, the global rating agency in its 2019 rated Dublin as the most expensive city to live within the Euro Zone. Although the city occupies 43rd position in the overall global list, its rent and housing crises is said to have contributed to its expensiveness. Therefore, having a study that seeks to understand price consideration in consumers’ patronage of food-type groceries even as they (consumers) contend with skyrocketing rents will bring to limelight, a critical section of livelihood that research agencies like Mercer have not really been focusing on.

## **1.2 Study’s objectives**

Based on the aforementioned, the study shall seek to establish if instability of prices has effect on consumers’ patronage behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets, if consumers are sensitive to differentiation in prices of same or similar food-type groceries in different

supermarkets, whether there are other factors aside price, that do influence their patronage behaviour and whether or not, they use price as a measure of quality for food type-groceries.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

And in order to make the study focus on specifics, its investigation shall seeks to find answers to the following questions: does price instability has effect on consumers' purchase behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets, how sensitive are consumers to differentiation in prices of same or similar food-type groceries in Dublin supermarket, what are the other factors influencing consumers' patronage of food-type groceries other than price and do consumers in Dublin use price to rate quality of food-type groceries in supermarkets.

### **1.4 Study's methodology**

To get the job done, survey, a variant of cross-sectional research approach is being adopted. The research instrument that goes with this shall be questionnaire, which has been designed with specific questions, aimed at evoking reactions from respondents whose opinions are being sampled in respect of their patronage behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

When completed, the study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on issues relating consumers and their patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin, Ireland and elsewhere. The findings are also expected to help Irish supermarket operators to have deeper insights as to the extent at which prices of grocery products influence their consumers and what needed to be jettisoned or improved upon in this regard. Finally, the outcome of the study would be useful to regulatory bodies in Ireland and elsewhere on whether or not there is a need for improved monitoring of the operating grocery stores.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter shall be examining extant literatures to provide conceptual, empirical and theoretical frameworks for the current study being undertaken. The review is also expected to offer better illumination as to the correlation and/or disagreement that exists between the research focus of the current study and the previous ones.

#### **2.2 The Price Concept**

Price as a key marketing tool has been widely conceptualised by different scholars. While Kotler and Keller (2012) describe price as the only element of the marketing mix that generates revenues when others generate cost, Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) see it as the most recognizable element of the marketing mix, that helps evaluate the success or failure of a given product or service. Olajide, Lizam and Olajide (2016) define price as the payment made in exchange for goods and services, measured in numbers and is determined by price policy. It is also defined as the amount paid by consumers for securing or putting into use, a product purchased or service rendered (Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong, 2005, Dudu and Agwu, 2014). Of unanimity in the cited conceptual definitions of price is the fact that it is an act that takes place in effect of a product or service that has been rendered. And it does not occur in accident, but in the form of a carefully deployed strategy with certain considerations shaping its decisions.

#### **2.3 Pricing strategies and their deployment**

At the heart of its “carefully deployed strategy” is what is known as “pricing strategy”. Pricing strategy is an organization’s carefully designed tactics aimed at managing prices while also remaining competitive in the quest to attain goals and objectives (Smith and Woodside, 2009; Sammut-Bonnici and Channon, 2015). Pricing strategy’s sole aim is to engender an optimal price that guarantees boosting of profit as well as increment in the number of products or services being sold (Dolgui and Proth, 2010). In fact, Tang, Bell and Ho (2001) submit that nothing else

is worthy of being gotten right in business other than pricing strategy. And in devising pricing strategy, Deshpande (2018) explains that organisations must be guided by three business realities - if strategy derails, the product fails; if the price is cheaper than what it should, the firm runs at loss and if the price is higher than what is affordable, then the firm loses customers.

While extant literatures have widely explored different forms of pricing strategy available, scholars fail to agree as to the actual numbers of these variants. This may not be unconnected with varieties of factors that shape different industries, countries and customers (Hinterhuber, 2008). Accordingly, three of the most commonly discussed pricing strategies are: cost-based pricing, customers' value-based pricing and competition-based pricing (Nagle, Holden, Brito and Urdan, 2003; Ingenbleek, Debruyne, Frambach and Verhallen, 2003; Kotler, et al, 2005; Hinterhuber, 2008; Toni, Milan, Saciloto and Larentis, 2017).

Kain and Rosenzweig (1992) posit that cost-based pricing strategy revolves around assigning cost to various units of production and adding it up with a "mark-up rate" (the differential amount between production cost and the product selling price). The mark-up rate pricing strategy and target-profit pricing (a type of pricing essentially driven by organization's fixing its product price at an assumed percentage it thinks will fetch it profit) are variants of the cost-based pricing strategy (Kotler et al, 2005). But while Kain and Rosenzweig (1992) submit that the popularity of the cost-based pricing is based on its simplicity and easy-to understand process, Hinterhuber (2008) describes it as the weakest pricing strategy because it undermines competition and consumers' willingness to pay.

In customers' value-based pricing strategy however, organisations are known to affix prices based on assumed benefits consumers are expected to derive from the product or services being rendered (Netseva-Porcheva, 2011). Approaches to determine such customer-based value pricing strategy can either be through "cost-value" (which has to do with the customer being satisfied with the amount the product is sold) or through "economic value" (which is about satisfaction derived from the use of the product bought) (Netseva-Porcheva, 2011). But while Ingenbleek et al (2003) recognize the positive rating of the customer value-based strategy among scholars who consider it a reasonable alternative to cost-based and competitive-based pricing strategies, Hinterhuber (2008) expresses worry on its susceptibility to driving prices high just as it is tough

to collate and interpret its data. The competition-based pricing strategy on its part uses as yardstick, prices being charged by the firm's competitors (Sammut-Bonnici and Channon, 2017). Kevin, Hartley and Rudelius (2004) explain that in using this strategy, firms can raise their prices high or lower it, depending on the competitors' current prices at that point in time. Although, competition-based pricing has its strength in easy collation and interpretation of data, Dudu and Agwu (2014) reinforce its lack of consideration for customers' value.

Although it may be difficult to assume the type of pricing strategy operators of supermarkets use in Dublin, nonetheless, the above cited works have deepened basic knowledge about their practical application, elements of which can be found in most of the Dublin supermarkets being examined for this study and where consumers purchase their food-type groceries.

Beyond the three aforementioned pricing strategies, there are other known strategies that have been widely explored in literatures. One of such is the *Skimming pricing strategy* which aims at maximum profit by fixing product or service price at the highest level as a result of high market demand (Sammut-Bonnici and Channon, 2017). Another strategy is the "*High and Low pricing strategy*" which basically thrives on the strength of perceived values consumers attached to a particular product. The price may be high if the perception is high, and the price may be low if the consumers' perception of the product or service is low (Dolgui and Proth, 2010). Also, there is *Penetration pricing strategy* which, according to Dudu and Agwu (2014) often sets market entry price, for a new product, quite low but accompany such with heavy promotional effort that will create awareness for the product to gain market share.

Additionally, there is also the *Discount pricing technique*, which involves reduction in unit sales of product when consumers buy larger quantities. It aims at encouraging bigger purchase of products (Shah and Dixit, 2005). There is also *Odd pricing strategy*, which Kinard, Capella and Bonner (2013) refer to as a pricing tactic that places the price of good or service a little below the nearest rounded figure, giving impression that the product or service is cheaper than it is. For instance, selling a product at 3.99€ instead of 4€. *Odd pricing* itself is a type of *Psychological pricing technique*, which according to Wagner and Jamsawang (2011), has other variants such as, symbolic meanings, the first (non-zero) digit in a price, price cuts framed in percentage or euro terms as well as eye-catching sequences.

Again, elements of the practical application of the above cited pricing strategies are what consumers in Dublin come in contact with as they patronize supermarkets for their daily food-type groceries being examined in this study.

#### **2.4 Price referencing and consumers' patronage behaviour**

It noteworthy however, that irrespective of the pricing strategy a firm or a retailer may adopt, the ultimate aim is to influence consumers' patronage behaviour (Hameed, Soomro and Hameed, 2012; Birke, 2013; Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan, 2016). Consumers' patronage behaviour itself has to do with procuring and disposing of ideas, goods, services, or experience in the quest to satisfy needs and wants (Kotler and Keller, 2011). Similarly, Schiffman and Kanuk (1997) define consumer buying behaviour as the processes adopted by people, associations, or organisations to identify secure and dispose products and services as well as the effect such processes have on consumers and the society at large. And for Jansson-Boyd (2010), to understand consumer behaviour is to understand what the needs of the people are as well as how such are processed and how they are acted upon.

Factors influencing consumers' patronage behavior can be viewed from market forces as well as personal attributes (Kotler, 2011). Other scholars see market forces as external factors, while personal attributes of consumers are regarded as internal factors (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010; Steenhuis, Waterlander and Mul, 2011; Widenhorn and Salhofer, 2014). The market forces include but not limited to elements of the marketing mix, such as product, promotion, place and price, among others (Kotler, 2011). On the other hand, personal attributes of the buyers are largely psycho-social factors, which range from cultural to personality, social status, psychological, perceived quality, perceived values, perceived price or otherwise known as internal reference price, among others (Peter and Donnelly, 2003; Singh, Dhayal and Shamim, 2014; Simbolon, 2015; Mashao and Sukdeo, 2018).

Whereas there are have been numerous studies into the relationship that exist between the highlighted (personal and market) factors and consumers' patronage behaviour, of particular interest to this study is the element of perceived price otherwise known as internal reference price as well as the relationship between it and consumer's psychology. Chandrashekar (2011)

explains that the underlying assumption is that consumers do not just act at the sight of seeing a product price; rather their reaction is often based on already-assumed mental price knowledge of what such a product should be. Monroe (1990) also describes reference price as the consumer's yardstick price, with which he compares whether or not the offered price is too high or too low. To offer an insight as to how consumers' apply price reference in their purchase behaviour, scholars have explored theoretical assumptions of Helson (1964) Adaptation level theory (Niedrich, Sharma and Wedell, 2001; Chandrashekar, 2011). Helson (1964) posits that whereas consumer' purchasing behaviour can be linked to initial stimuli (price) of a particular product or service, the newness or initial reaction based on the first time contact with the stimuli evaporates as times goes on and at a point, becomes the standard reference for subsequent similar product or service, a consumer comes in contact with. In other word, consumers' adaption to particular patronage behaviour is hinged on historical prices of same or similar products (Chandrashekar, 2011).

Rajendran and Tellis (1994) whose findings also affirmed that consumers do employ the usage of historical price approach to gain price awareness however move a step further, submitting that price referencing can actually be in two forms – temporal and contextual. A temporal approach is based on the product's older price while contextual approach has to do with situating the current product's price within similar or competitors' brand prices. Niedrich et al (2001) call the consumers' contextual approach, an exemplar model. The authors align with the submission of other scholars on the practicality and consistency of consumers using a wide range of current prices of different brands to form their price reference. Niedrich et al (2001) back up their argument with Volkmann's (1951) range theory as well as Janiszewski and Lichtenstein (1999) experimentation wherein consumers were asked to confirm their "attractiveness to the mean price" among range of product prices. The Janiszewski and Lichtenstein's (1999) experimentation will later confirm sampled responses which tilt at the direction of theoretical assumption of the range theory and exemplar model, both of which anchor consumers' price preference on divergent contextual factors. The failure of Helman's adaptation theory to recognize consumers' divergent perception of prices on contextual basis thus highlights its limitation (Niedrich et al, 2001).



The above cited works have so far helped in understanding price referencing as an element of influence of consumers' behaviour and it is deemed essential to the current study because it provides an insight into how price consideration works within the mental construct of consumers in Dublin before leading them into purchase action.

## **2.5 Consumers' patronage behaviour on food-type groceries**

Whether through adaptation or contextual approach, consumers' patronage behaviour, through price consideration has manifested in different situations with different offered products or services. Within the numerous competing interests for purchase however is the consideration for the famous Maslow (1970) hierarchy of needs. Jansson-Boyd (2010) indeed affirms that human consumption pattern can be measured within Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow himself posits that some needs are more essential than others. Thus, in the five hierarchies of needs Maslow (1970) rates, physiological needs which has to do with water, foods, sleep, among others, as the most basic. The four other needs according to Maslow are: Safety need (security and protection), social need (love, sense of belonging), esteem need (self- esteem, status, self-recognition) and self-actualisation need (self-development and realization). Of the listed needs however, food, which is considered among the basic (physiological) needs is what this study is focusing on.

Significantly, the current study is narrowing its attention on how price influence the purchase pattern of food-type groceries available in Dublin supermarkets. And this becomes imperative because there are limited known researches that have addressed this particular area of human basic need in a city that its residents are already stressed with skyrocketing accommodation expenses and its annual population grows at 1.8 percent, according to the Irish Central Statistics Office (2019).

Interestingly, extant literatures have examined relationship between price and the purchase behaviour of food-type groceries among consumers. In fact, Disantis, Grier, Odoms-Young, Baskin, Carter-Edwards, Young, Lassiter and Kumanyika (2013) submit that price is one of the most important, if not the most important factor of influence in patronage of food items , especially among the low income earners. Similarly, Wiig and Smith (2008) study reveals that

women who are low-income earners have their shopping patronage determined by their “economic and environmental situations”. Also, Chandon and Wansink (2014) identify price as the first among the four cardinal considerations for food purchase pattern, with specific mention of “short and long term” prices as well as pricing strategies being major influencers of how much food is bought and how much is consumed. Relatedly, French (2003) reveals that price incentives has influential effect on individual food purchases.

Instructively, while scholars had explored widely, the relationship between price and purchase of food-type groceries, there appears to be no universal template as to the food-type groceries specifically designed for researches. Sanjur (1982) agrees that studies into food habits have no universal model to appraise factors, influences and eating patterns. Numerous past researches have only focused on selected areas of food choices, using different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds (Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal and Falk, 1996). Bisogni and Sobal (2009) further justify this when they assert that no single theory has complete answer to differential food choices and behaviour.

For instance, while trying to examine types of food stores, availability of food items and cost of foods in a rural community, Liese, Weis, Pluto, Smith and Lawson (2007) focus their study on food-type groceries such as: milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, meat and beans; but Wiig and Smith (2008) concentrate their study on food groups: cereal, meat, fruit, vegetables, dairy, kool-aids, salty snacks, sweet and fats when they seek to understand factors influencing choice of foods among low-income women who struggle to earn a living. Also, when French (2003) launches an investigation into how pricing effect impacts food choices, the focal points were French fries, cereal bars, cheese sauce, cookies, low fat chips, low fat cookies and fresh fruits; but when Anesbury, Nenycz-Thiel, Dawes and Kennedy (2015) carryout observational study of online grocery shopping behaviour, food items such as chocolate bars, milk, microwavable rice, yoghurt, pasta sauce and banana are examined alongside other grocery items that include shampoo, toothpaste, wet cat food and wet dog food.

Notably, having discrepancies in food-type grocery templates are also the same among industry-based studies examined. For instance, while B&A Report on Grocery Shopping and the Discounter (2010) identifies fruit juice, juice and vegetables, biscuits, cheese, frozen foods, alongside other non-food-type groceries as the most commonly bought in Lidl and Aldi supermarkets, another B&A (2018) Trend and Irish Convenience Shopper Trends Report lists milk, bread, snacks, soft drinks, tea/coffee, biscuits and fresh fruits, alongside other non-food-type groceries as the “most frequently purchased” at local/ convenience store.

In view of the discrepancies in templates, this study shall be focusing on the following six selected food-type groceries in recognition of their credible ratings among the cited studies. The six food-types are: bread (B&A, 2018); milk or dairy products (Liese et al, 2007); fruit juices (B&A, 2010); cereal (Wiig and Smith, 2008); chocolate (Anesbury, et al, 2015) and biscuits (B&A, 2018).

## **2.6 Price instability and consumers’ purchase behaviour of food-type groceries**

Simply put, price instability is the fluctuation of the price level (Mills, 1927). It can also be described as the non-stability of product prices based on imbalances in demand and supply (Galtier, 2009). In other words, product or service prices can suddenly be high or low based on differential factors. In the area of food-type groceries, such unpredictability can be influenced by factors such as: repeated poor harvest of crops, increasing exploration of land for bio-fuel related products, reduction in country’s food reserves, weather conditions and adjustment in policies of food exporting nations, rising energy and fertilizer prices, among others (Barker, Sedik and Nagy, 2009; Ahmed, Siwar, Talib, Chamhuri and Islam, 2014). However, Ahmed et al (2014) explain that while instability of prices should not be worrying if it is seasonal and normal historical fluctuation, it should be disquieting to concerned stakeholders if such volatility is of “high degree”. Instability in food prices has direct effect on national economy, especially its inflation rate. If food prices fall, inflation falls, vice versa. Instability in food prices can be regulated through effective storage system, policies that address subsidies, commodity reserves and indirect control of prices (Radukić, Marković and Radović, 2015).

Studies on how consumers react to the fluctuation in prices of food-type groceries have revealed divergence discoveries. For instance, in the aftermath of the global economic meltdown in 2008, Griffith, O'Connell and Smith (2015) initiate a study among the British household, using a demand model research approach to find out the impact of relative price increase on the consumers' preferences and demand for food. The major finding is that the relative price increase does affect negatively, the nutritional quality of food being purchased in majority of the sampled British household (Griffith, et al, 2015). Also, in an attempt to understand how food taxes can be used to discourage purchase of unhealthy foods as well as how subsidy in prices can encourage improved purchase of healthy foods, Waterlander, Jiang, Nghiem, Eyles, Wilson Cleghorn, Genc, Swinbun, Mhurchu and Blakely (2019) conduct a study in New Zealand among 1,132 shoppers in a virtual supermarket where the shoppers are assigned with random numbers and are exposed to different prices of food-types groceries. In the end, the researchers establish that an increase in the tax of food-type groceries: saturated fat, sugar and salt, will indeed reduce purchase and encourage healthy patronage. In the case of "sweetened beverage" however, a tax increase will still not discourage purchase, just as the granting of subsidy on fruits and vegetables prices will still not persuade consumers to buy more (Waterlander et al, 2019). The assumption had been that a tax increase on food-types groceries will lead to hike in prices thus reduces purchase; while a subsidy policy in place should ordinarily engenders low prices of healthy foods and increase purchase.

Two similar studies across 12 selected Secondary Schools and 12 worksites in Minnesota, United States, by French (2003) employ price reduction strategies to experiment whether deliberate slash of prices will resort in higher purchase of snacks. In the first study, the researcher slashes sales of snacks by 10%, 25% and 50%. And with the help of point-of-sale promotional strategies, increase of 9%, 39% and 93% in sales are recorded respectively. In the second study, French (2003) applies 50% price slash to the sales of fruits and baby carrots. At the end, a four-fold increase is recorded in the sales of fruits and two-fold sales increment in the sales of baby carrot respectively.

A reduction of prices on healthy foods will engender high purchases (French, 2003). A cursory look at Griffith, et al, (2015), Waterlander et al (2019) and French (2003) confirm that price

instability is capable of influencing consumers' patronage of food-type groceries and that is the extent of their association with the study at hand.

However, the major gap in the cited literatures in relation to the current study is in the differences in methodologies applied. While for instance, Griffith, et al, (2015) etch their study enquiries on consumers' demand-model of nutritional food items, Waterlander et al (2019) chose to assign random numbers to consumers in a virtual supermarket and French (2003) employ price-reduction experimentation approach. The current study will rather be using administration of survey questionnaire to evoke responses from real-life consumers, patronizing Dublin supermarkets for food-type groceries. The cited works failed to apply survey which is widely respected as a human behavioural research methodology especially when that affects large population of people.

## **2.7 Consumers' price sensitivity to same or similar food-type groceries**

Monroe (1973) describes consumers' price sensitivity as the degree of price perception and the readiness to react to the differences or changes in products and services' prices. While Abdullah-Al-Mamun, Rahman and Robel (2014) define consumers' sensitivity as consumers' understanding of what the price of a particular product or service to be purchased should be; Dominique-Ferreira, Vasconcelos and Proença (2016) simply explain price sensitivity as the price consumers are willing to pay for procurement of product and service. These conceptual definitions have thus thrown more light on the differences between price instability which is propelled by forces beyond the consumers' and price sensitivity which is strictly the consumers' prerogative on what to pay and what not, as well as whether to buy or not to. Yet, price sensitivity and consumers' price reference earlier discussed are interwoven (Abdullah-Al-Mamun, et al, 2014). While price sensitivity is the perception of point measurement within which a product or service price should be and the willingness to pay, reference price is the "perceived normal" price for such product or service (Harmon, Unni, Anderson, 2007).

To have a firm grasp of the consumers' price sensitivity, Westendorp (1976) develops what is known as Price Sensitivity Measurement (PSM), which emphasizes that the sensitiveness of consumers can be better understood when one has an idea of the optimal and the limit price

range they are willing to pay. The optimal and the limit ends of the measurement are both known as thresholds - if a product or service price shoots higher than it, it may be out of the reach of consumers, thus discourages purchases and if it is lower than the limit of the threshold, it may attract suspicion of inferiority, which may as well discourage sales (Harmon, et al. 2007).

There have been empirical evidences of how price sensitivity influence consumers' patronage of food-type groceries. Using dynamic probit and Heckman selection models after conducting survey, Widenhorn and Salhofer (2014) divide Austrian food retail market into two types - "traditional supermarkets" and "discount stores", while investigating how price sensitivity influence consumers' patronage. Their major finding turn out that most households, especially those with low incomes, patronize discount stores more and even increase their spending why buying food items because prices are relatively cheaper. Similarly, household whose heads are not in the workforce show patronage preference for discount stores. However, household with high incomes with highly educated heads, show low preference for discount stores (Widenhorn and Salhofer, 2014). In a related but somewhat differential approach, Gottschalk and Leistner (2012) sample 231 respondents in a survey to ascertain the role being played by price, quality, availability and social influence in the patronage of organic foods in German discount stores. Among other things, Gottschalk and Leistner (2012) establish that price does act as the "ice breakers" for most of the first-time buyers and it does stimulate them to repeat purchases in the discount stores.

In another study, Steenhuis, et al (2011) use questionnaire to sample 159 Dutch consumers on how price and pricing strategies influence their food choice and patronage pattern. Although the researchers confirm that most respondents identify "sensory appeals" and "health reasons" as the most considered motives for food purchase behaviour, nonetheless, among low-income earners, price is identified as "significantly important" for consideration, when compared to the high-income earners who are not so price sensitive. Also, when respondents answered what they considered the best pricing strategies for them, those who chose discount and low tax on food products, are in majority (Steenhuis, et al, 2011). Also, Dunne1 and Wright (2017) conduct a

survey among 14, 646 Irish consumers to confirm whether or not they will consider local Irish foods in conventional supermarkets as well as the prices they are willing to pay for such local foods. At the end, 98.8 percent confirm positive preference for purchasing local foods in conventional supermarkets, just as 76 percent express the desire to pay lower or same prices as conventional foods.

The fact that the cited studies (Widenhorn and Salhofer, 2014; Gottschalk and Leistner, 2012 and Steenhuis et. al, 2011) are carried out in different European countries and all focus their attention on how price sensitivity influence consumers' patronage make them similar to the current study, however, the most noticeable gap in their findings is the inability to generalize such findings owing to geographical differences between the countries where the studies have been carried out and Dublin, the capital city of Ireland where this current study is focusing on. Although, Dunne and Wright (2017) on the other hand focus on Irish consumers and their patronage of food-type groceries in Irish supermarkets, nonetheless, the limit inherent in their findings is the restriction of study objective to local Irish foods which may not be appealing to the emerging diverse of Dublin as an international city with many immigrants. The gap in their study is however being filled by the current study which focuses on consumers' patronage of conventional food-type groceries that transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries.

## **2.8 Price and other consumers' purchase factors of food-type groceries**

Notwithstanding the influence of price, there have been many other factors in the purchase process that also influence consumers' patronage behaviour (Albari and Safitri, 2020). In the PWC (2018) global survey where about 22,000 consumers across 27 nations are specifically asked to state other factors of purchase other than price, "stock availability" secures 37 percent to rate as topmost, followed by "trust in the brand" with 35 percent and "good location" with 31 percent. Other rated factors from the study include: "selling things I can't find elsewhere" at 27 percent, "fast and reliable delivery" at 24 percent, among others. Alongside price, Brata, Husani and Ali (2017) examine three other elements of the marketing mix – product (quality), promotion and place (location) and the influence they wield, they conclude on the positive effect all of the elements wield on consumers' patronage pattern.

There are many other scholarly works that have explored different factors of consumers' patronage behaviour, with certain findings confirming positive effects and in some other cases, revealing less or no significant effects. The non-uniformity of the factors of influence may not be unconnected with what Ramya and Ali (2016) attribute to "many factors, specificities and characteristics" influencing individual consumers in the buying decision process. For instance, Momani (2015) in a study carry out among Jordanian consumers, establishes that whereas brand loyalty, marketing communication and products' country of origin have positive effects on consumers' patronage behaviour, product's quality as well as its historical tradition lack such effect. On the other hand, Hanaysha (2017) study among Malaysian consumers affirm that social responsibility, store environment and perceived value have significant positive effect on consumers' patronage behaviour, sales promotion and social media marketing have no such effect. In Europe, Papafotikas, Chatzoudes and Kamenidou (2014) study among Greek consumers reveals that contextual factors such as product's comfortability usage, corporate image and social status derive from the usage, previous experience, as well as quality have significant positive effect of on patronage behaviour than brand loyalty and brand switching.

Just as there is no uniformity of result of findings on factors influencing general consumers' purchase behaviour as cited above, so there are divergence results on factors influencing food-type purchase behaviour. In a survey among 40 respondents in Montenegro, Melovic, Cirovic, Dudic, Vulic and Gregus (2020), discover that price and promotion are the two most influential factors of marketing that influence consumers towards organic food purchase. A further analysis by the researchers narrows the findings down to the specific impactful factors: people's attitudes towards organic food products, existing price/quality ratio, barriers associated with distribution and new media as promotional tools. But in another Europe-based survey among Polish consumers, Nowak and Trziszka (2006) discover that majority of their respondents show preference for "quality" and "freshness of the poultry meat" and not product price.

Notwithstanding the discrepancies in the findings of various cited works, it remains undisputed that consumers' patronage behaviour is shaped beyond prices attached to products. And to that



extent, food-type quality, brand and location which have been constant in some of the previous works, will form the kernel of other factors of consumers' influence to be considered in this study. However, of significant gap between the examined literatures and this current study is the focus on other factors considered influential to consumers' patronage of food-type groceries without the incorporation of the impact of Coronavirus pandemic on consumers' patronage behaviour. The novel pandemic gripped the world at a time many of the studies have been carried out.

Already, a number of studies on the impact of coronavirus on consumers' patronage of groceries items are however being released. Stanciu, Radu, Sapira, Dumitrache and Florea (2020) in the review of collated bibliographic studies assert that the global pandemic has engendered new consumers' behavioural attitudes even in Romania where the researchers are based, as well as other European countries. Similarly, Sheth (2020) after appraising the situations from four qualitative contexts, submits that the introduction of lockdown and social distancing regulations aimed at curtailing the spread of the pandemic had stamped significant changes on consumers' behaviour such that things will never be the same again even when lives return to normal. Consumptions are time and location bound, and since consumers cannot go to the store, the store now comes to consumers (Sheth, 2020).

While examining the impact of Covid-19 on consumption and indirect tax in Ireland, Doorley, O'toole and Roantree (2020) use data collated by the Central Statistics Office and merge food, beverages and tobacco together in a sub-section of analysis under retails in Ireland between January and March, 2020. The CSO itself had relied on the expenditures obtained through debit and credit cards of residents in Ireland within the period. This is done along other sub-sectors groupings such as clothing, electronic, transport, hospitality, pharmaceutical and entertainment. In the end, the result shows that while there were appreciable declines on spending relating to hospitality, clothing, entertainment and transport, there was actually increased spending on pharmaceutical, electrical goods as well as food, beverages and tobacco within the early stages of the pandemic months (Doorley, et al, 2020). This outcome may not be unconnected with the fact that whereas the lockdown on movements and businesses announced by the government affected

many sectors, the groceries and pharmaceutical stores, considered as essential items for households were allowed to operate.

While Stanciu et al (2020), Sheth (2020) and Dooley et al (2020) share a relationship with the current study on focusing attention on the impact of Covid-19 on patronage of the groceries, the major observed gap between these studies and the current one is their reliance on secondary data. This study is based on primary data being collated directly from the consumers themselves and not an analysis of third party data.

## **2.9 Price and Consumers' measure of quality in food-type groceries**

The discourse as to how consumers use price to form the perception of product's quality or otherwise has been widely examined in empirical studies and literatures. Quality, according to Alfred (2013) is all about how a product or service is perceived before being bought, how it is delivered after being bought, how it is used and how it is disposed. In other word, the degree of meeting and exceeding customer's expectation is what and how quality is determined. However, Zeithaml (1988) submits that while the broader concept of quality is about product or service excellence or superiority, a clear demarcation must be made as to what is known as "actual quality" and "perceived quality". The "actual quality" is about the real features or components a product is made with, while perceived quality largely thrives on consumers' insight (Zeithaml, 1988). In food retailing, perception on what inform quality food item also varies. Ilbery and Kneafsey (1999) focus conceptual understanding of food quality on four strands: regulated quality by the designated authority (certification), where the food item originates from (Association), process of production (specification) and the food's physical qualities – appearance, texture and taste (Attraction). On the other hand, a quality food can also be viewed from the prism of being healthy food. It should be free from germs, with less additives or farm's contaminants, sustainably produced with so side effect, originate from a trusted or certified producer, made up of known constituents (fat, protein) and can be part of balance diet as well as imbued with other qualitative features as such freshness, exotic, traditional, among others (Atkins and Bowler, 2001).

In explaining how price influences consumers' perception of quality, Deval, Mantel, Kardes and Posavac (2012) notes that such perception largely thrives on naïve theory or the application of common sense. That application of common sense is the same as what Shirai (2014) calls "consumers' internal reference and quality perception". Marketers acknowledge consumers' reliance on internal price reference, hence the strategy adoption of "Low price, higher quality". And since consumers will always want to get the best value at the most reasonable price, the strategy does sometimes have reasonable potency (Shirai, 2014).

There are many empirical studies that have examined consumers' use of price to influence their perception of quality of food-types groceries. In the study by Faulds and Lonial (2001) across four European countries: Belgium, France, Germany and Netherlands, alongside United States, price-quality relationship for foods and beverages are collated with other non-durable goods: health and beauty aids and household items. The researchers obtain and analyse data from testing agencies from each of the countries, and in the end, they find out that consumers in these countries (especially the four European countries) see a low correlation between price and quality of food and beverages as well as other products examined. In a similar study, Carlson, Dong and Lino (2014) obtain and analyse the result of a survey conducted by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) between 2003 and 2004 in United States. The researchers use the Healthy Eating Index-2005 (HEI-2005) developed by the USDA to analyse consumers' data obtained and it is revealed that consumers do not perceive healthy food being expensive than less-healthy food, in other word, they do see price as including their perception of food quality. However, in a survey among 450 Malaysian adults, Pondor, Gan and Appannah (2017) use Malaysian Healthy Eating Index (M-HEI) to measure respondents Daily Dietray Cost (DDC). The researchers' findings show that indeed high qualitative dietary take more from consumers' pocket, thus confirming the relationship between price-quality in food patronage behaviour.

The divergence of findings in the above cited works only confirm the growing scholarly interest on how price shape perception of quality in food-type groceries and to that extent, this study has been able to establish an association between its focus and those of previous studies. The major gap in literature observed between the current study and the cited works, especially Faulds and

Lonial (2001) and Carlson et al (2014) is their reliance on secondary data; whereas the kernel of current study is on primary data obtain on the field.

## **2. 10 Literature and methodology**

In examining different empirical studies under the categories of four probable scenarios came up with: price instability and consumers' purchase behaviour of food-type groceries, consumers' price sensitivity to same or similar food-type groceries, price and other consumers' purchase factors of food-type groceries as well as price and consumers' measure of quality in food-type groceries, it is apparent that the scholars found different methodologies considered suitable to arrive at their findings. Most noticeable among these methodologies however, is survey. For instance, in the reviewed primary empirical studies of Nowak and Trziszka (2006), Steenhuis, et al (2011), Gottschalk and Leistner (2012), Widenhorn and Salhofer (2014), Pondor et al (2017), Dunne1 and Wright (2017) and Melovic et al (2020), the adopted research methodology is survey. Also, in the secondary empirical studies of Faulds and Lonial (2001), Carlson et al (2014), Stanciu et al (2020) as well as Dooley et al (2020), the data relied on from various institutions, were product of survey. The wide acceptability of survey among social science researchers may not be unconnected with its potency in examining human behavioural tendencies especially while dealing with large population (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2009). And since this particular study is also about understanding consumers' patronage behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin, Ireland, survey is now being accepted as the research methodology for the current study.

### **2.11 Summary**

This chapter has widely explored extant literatures to reflect conceptual understanding of price and consumers' patronage behaviour, the types and theoretical leaning of pricing strategy as well as different empirical cases through which the relationship or otherwise between price and consumers patronage behaviour (especially in food-type groceries) have manifested. To etch conceptual understanding of price and its pivotal role in human businesses, the works of Kotler and Keller (2012), Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016), Olajide, et al (2016), Kotler et al (2005) as well as Dudu and Agwu (2014) were analysed. The conceptual discourse on price later

dovetailed into theoretical underpinnings of pricing strategies and the various forms with which they manifest. The scholarly works of Smith and Woodside (2009), Sammut-Bonnici and Channon (2015), Tang et al (2001), Deshpande (2008), Hinterhuber, (2008), Kotler et al (2005), Kain and Rosenzweig (1992), (Netseva-Porcheva, 2011), among others prove useful in this regard.

The review then progressed into how price as one, of the several other factors of influence, shape consumers' patronage behaviour. Of interest within the larger concept of consumers' purchase behaviour is the mental and psychological construct known as price inference. Helson (1964) Adaptation level theory and Volkmann's theory (1951), highlighting that while Helman's is emphasizing historical referencing on consumers' awareness of price, Volkmann's (1951) argument is rather on contextual reality of similar products' prices consumers are believed to be aware of. The discourse however submitted to the fact that irrespective of whether historical or contextual, consumers' price references, which manifest in patronage behaviour, will tilt in the direction of pertinent needs at different point in time. The hierarchy of needs as espoused by Maslow (1970) thus assumed focus and food which forms one of the variants of physiological needs (most basic needs), becomes the focal point. A number of studies that have examined food-type groceries were thereafter examined; eventhough it was observed that scholars do not agree on a singular template to adopt anytime food purchase behaviour becomes the focus of academic enquiries. Nonetheless, the discourse singled out six food-types most available in many supermarkets in Dublin - bread, dairy, juice, cereal, chocolate and biscuits as those to be considered by the study at hand.

The discourse thereafter progressed into analysis of empirical studies of different likely scenarios where consumers' patronage behavior in relation to price of food-related groceries can manifest. The four likely scenarios came up with are: price instability and consumers' purchase behaviour of food-type groceries, consumers' price sensitivity to same or similar food-type groceries, price and other consumers' purchase factors of food-type groceries as well as price and consumers' measure of quality in food-type groceries. In each of the scenarios, conceptual definitions, summary of the studies' findings, relationship between the studies and the current study as well as the gaps observed in the literatures were brought to limelight. The chapter closes on how the

reviewed literatures influenced the choice of survey as methodology of research for the current study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE AND AIMS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In carrying out the study, it has become imperative to give it a sense of direction with measurable objectives and specific research questions designed to interrogate whether or not price influence consumers' patronage behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets.

#### **3.2 Purpose and aims of the study**

The overall aim is to enhance understanding of price and consumers' patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets. And to achieve this objective, the following four aspects of patronage behaviour are investigated:

- To establish if instability of prices has effect on consumers' patronage behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets.
- To ascertain if consumers are sensitive to differentiation in prices of same or similar food-type groceries in different Dublin supermarkets.
- To find out if there are other factors of influence on consumers' patronage of food-type groceries other than price in Dublin supermarkets.
- To establish if consumers use price as a measure of quality for the food-type groceries they bought in Dublin supermarkets.

To achieve the above stated objectives, questions have been formulated in the questionnaire, which is to serve as the research instrument for the study. Answers provided by the respondents will thereafter form the basis of research analysis.

#### **3.3 Research Questions**

- Does price instability have effect on consumers' purchase behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets?
- How sensitive are consumers to differentiation in prices of same or similar food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets?

- What are the other factors of influence on consumers' patronage of food-type groceries other than price in Dublin supermarkets?
- Do consumers in Dublin use price to rate quality of food-type groceries in supermarkets?

### **3.4 Gaps in Literatures**

Studies on price as well as its relationship with consumers' patronage behaviour are not new. There are numerous empirical studies, as examined in Chapter 2 that have been carried out in this area. However, there are observed lacunas relating to some of the examined literatures. For instance, while some researchers had sought to understand how consumers use price to measure products' quality (Faulds and Lonial, 2001; Carlson et al, 2014) the strength of their studies were anchored on a secondary data obtained from a third part that gathered, refined and presented collated data to its preference. The same is the situation with Stanciu et al (2020) and Dooley et al (2020) who had to analyse third party collated data to understand how the emergence of Covid-19 is impacting on the retail business and consumers' patronage behaviour.

On the other hand, Nowak and Trziszka (2006), Papavotikas et al (2014) as well as Melovic et al (2020) who even conducted related primary survey studies on price and consumers' patronage in European countries, the findings are still limited in scope because of geographical differences between the location of the studies and Dublin, the capital city of Ireland. And for Dunne1 and Wright (2017) who carried out a study on consumers' preference for local Irish foods in supermarkets, the findings are still with gaps as the focus of the study was more on Irish citizens who enjoy Irish local foods, thus neglecting the growing population of immigrants in Dublin, majority of whom are also consumers of food type-groceries in supermarkets. These identifiable literature gaps are what the current study is seeking to fill.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will be discussing the adoption of survey as the central research methodology adopted for this study. The discourse shall also touch on the study's philosophical underpinning in positivism, the quantitative data approach, questionnaire as instrument of data collection, the purposive sampling technique and the justification for its adoption, the pilot phase, the descriptive and inferential analysis adopted, validity and reliability the study as well as the study's limitations, among others.

#### **4.2 Research Philosophy**

This study has its philosophical root in positivism. Positivism is the opposite variant of interpretivism, both of which are considered as foundational schools of thought in research philosophy (Phillips and Burbules, 2000). A research anchors on positivism according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) is one that is guided by facts and objectivity of what has been observed and not on the basis of sentiment. This study adopts positivist stance and it is based on the fact that it was empirically conducted, its data were quantitatively sourced, while its analysis were based typically on what was gathered without the researcher inputting any form of personal prejudices.

#### **4.3 Research Framework**

Williams (2011) explains that quantitative research framework involves developing statement of research problem, creation of research hypotheses or research questions, a review of literatures and a numeric analysis of data. Similarly, Ahmed (2019) notes that this has to do with developing a research framework, research questions and obtaining the data required to achieve these objectives.

For the study at hand, both Williams (2011) and Ahmed (2019) templates were adopted, thus, chapter one covered the background and statement of problem; chapter two dealt with review of

literatures; chapter three focused on purpose and research questions, chapter four discussed methodology adopted in sourcing, gathering and analyzing the data, chapter five presented outcome of findings, chapter six discussed findings and chapter seven summarized, concluded and provided recommendations.

#### **4.4 Research Approach**

For the study at hand, quantitative research approach was adopted. According to Apuke (2015) a quantitative research approach is the one that thrives on the numeric sourcing, collation of data as well as statistical interpretation of its findings. In conformity with Apuke (2015) assertion, a questionnaire was developed as research instrument. The questionnaire was used to collate responses that were later refined with the help of SPSS software to generate a numeric dataset. The dataset was later analysed using cross tabulation, chi square, simple percentage analysis technique alongside data visualization elements such as: pie chart, bar chart and histogram to enhance basic understanding of the analysed data. The presented data were to be discussed in relation to previous scholarly works as captured in the literature review, to affirm common grounds and highlight divergences. The idea of relating the findings with previous scholarly works run in tandem with the Leedy and Ormond (2001) position that numerically collated data should be related in a way to support or negate other knowledge assertion.

#### **4.5 Research Design**

The research design adopted for this study is survey. It is a research design that places emphasis on the use of descriptive approach to collation of primary data (data collected directly from respondents themselves) from selected representatives of a larger population, through oral or written mode of communication (Mathiyazhagan and Nandan, 2010).

The adoption of survey for the current study is predicated on previous scholarly works in this area of study as revealed in the review of literatures. The fact that the focus of the study is on how price plays its role in the consumers' patronage behavior of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets affirms the suitability of survey as the right research design to carry it out because it is a study on human behavioural tendencies - a pivotal interest area for social scientists.

Trziszka (2006), Steenhuis, et al (2011), Gottschalk and Leistner (2012), among others, who have carried out previous similar studies on price and consumers' patronage behavior have adopted the same research design.

Also, survey suitability for the study can be viewed from the fact that a representative sampled of the larger Dublin city population were the ones approached to offer their views on the influence or otherwise of price in their purchase behaviour of food-type groceries. This runs in tandem with assertion of Ponto (2015) that involvement of sampled representatives is essential to a successful survey study.

#### **4.6 Population and Sample Size**

Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) describe study's population as the totality of a group from which statistical information is expected to be extracted from. For the study at hand, the research population is the totality of consumers patronizing supermarkets in Dublin for the purchase of food-type groceries. The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2019) puts the population of Dublin at 1.4 million. While this cannot be assumed to be the accurate totality population of consumers in Dublin because it may not be everybody that patronize supermarkets for food-type groceries, the fact that food-type groceries are basic consumption items desirable in many household, it is believed that hundreds of thousand consumers could be found across different household in the city.

The non-availability of a reliable consumers' population data however necessitated the researcher to consider a "sufficient sample size" approach for the study. A sufficient sample size, according to Burmeister and Aitken (2012) has to do with having the least number of respondents necessary to identify a statistically significant difference in a study if at all a difference exists. Scholars over the years have however not agreed on the exactitude considered as "sufficient sample size" owing to varieties of factors that may shape population of samples in different studies. For instance, while Kish (1965) promotes a sample between 30 and 200, Sudman (1976) suggests 100 samples. On the other hand, Martínez–Abraín (2014) recognizes

the widely accepted 30 respondents being used as the minimum sample size but calls for caution in its application because of variance in population of different studies.

For this study however, 112 people (a figure well within Kish, 1965; Sudman, 1976 and Martínez–Abraín, 2014 recommendations) were contacted by the researcher to fill the questionnaire through WhatsApp messages, email and Instagram messages. The contacted persons were known to be consumers of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets and the survey was run for ten days (18<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020). And at the close of the survey after ten days, a total of 108 people (respondents) have filled the questionnaire. That represented 96.4% return rate, a little above 95% recommended for management/social science study of this nature (Taherdoost, 2017).

#### **4.7 Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique adopted for this study is known as purposive sampling. It is a biased form of sampling technique where respondents' selection process was not based on equal chances of being nominated but for specific purpose (Singh and Masuku, 2014). It can also be referred to as judgment sampling technique because respondents' selection process is deliberate in recognition of certain qualities they possess (Etikan, Musa, Alkassim, 2016). The adoption of purposive sampling technique for this study is based on the non-availability of the actual population of consumers and the researcher's conviction that respondents selected must meet minimum standard of food-type groceries shopping in Dublin supermarkets. The researcher's position aligns with Etikan et al. (2016) that purposive sampling respondents must possess certain qualities. Indeed, the 112 people contacted by the researcher were known to be consumers of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets. They also possess different demographic characteristics: genders (male and female), age groups (18-27, 28-37, 38-47, 48-57, 58-67, 68 and above), marital status (single, married, divorced, widow/widower and civil partnership) educational backgrounds (secondary school junior, certificate; secondary school senior, leaving certificate; College/University undergraduate; College/University graduate and Post-Graduate) and occupational status (student, self-employment, paid employment and unemployed) (See appendix).

#### **4.8 Why not other sampling techniques?**

Both Singh and Masuku (2014) and Etikan et al. (2016) explored other forms of sampling techniques especially those categorized as “probability or random sampling”. The probability or random sampling is regarded as scientific, systematic and one that gives equal chances of being selected to participate in a study to all potential respondents being considered (Banerjee and Chaudhury, 2010). Notably, Singh and Masuku (2014) identify four types of probability sampling – simple random, systematic, stratified and cluster. However, critical to applying any of this sampling exercise is the need to have in place a standardised and reliable population data that is devoid of guesswork. For instance, if simple random sampling was to be undertaken, respondents to be sampled must first be well identified (Banerjee and Chaudhury, 2010), to give them equal chances of being picked. Potential respondents are expected to be assigned with specific number before selection process takes place by referencing and the use of random table published in statistical books.

The same goes for systematic random sampling, where list of names to be selected has to be within specific ordering or a queue of respondents from where the eventual respondents of the sample size are to be selected. Also, except there is a standard data in place, it may be difficult to appropriately segment different groups whose representatives are to be selected to participate in a study when dealing with stratified sampling approach. And without a good population data in place, it may be difficult to identify a cluster of people and the locations within which they can be sampled. For this study, consumers needed are dispersed in different parts of Dublin, and in a situation where there was no standardized data to explore in administering questionnaire, the researcher considered a non- probability purposive sampling technique as the best sampling technique, hence its adoption.

#### **4.9 Data Collection instrument**

The research instrument employed for this study was questionnaire. According to Roopa and Rani (2012), questionnaire is a standard instrument of collecting data that ensures consistency, uniformity and coherence. For this study, a Google-assisted questionnaire was designed and the weblink for filling it were sent to potential respondents via WhatsApp individual and group

chats, Facebook Messenger private chats and Facebook-based groups, Instagram private chats and E-mail addresses.

In all, a total of 43 items, comprising close and open-ended questions as well as Likert-scale rating questions were drawn up. Structurally, the questionnaire was divided into two: the demographic and thematic sections. The thematic section was further sub-divided into two: background knowledge and research questions scenarios. The questions under demography were focused on respondents' age, marital status, educational background, occupational status and gender. The idea was to be able to obtain demographic data that will help in analyzing the extent at which these demographic variables shaped respondents' answers to questions on price and patronage of food-type groceries. These were five questions in all.

On the other hand, background knowledge questions under "thematic section" were designed for answers that would serve as foundation for questions aimed at answering study's research questions. These were ten questions in all. The sub-section regarded as "research questions scenarios" were filled with questions extrapolated from the focus areas of the four research questions that include: price instability, price sensitivity, other factors of patronage behaviour other than price and using price as measurement of quality. There were a total of 28 questions in this sub-section. Answers to these questions were aimed at meeting the study's objectives. The questions were also supported by previous scholarly works of Waterlander et al. (2019) on price instability; Widenhorn and Salhofer (2014) on price sensitivity; Melovic et al. (2020) on other factors of patronage as well as Faulds and Lonial (2001) on the use of price to measure quality, among others.

#### **4.10 Pilot Study**

In carrying out this study, a pilot study of the questionnaire was undertaken on the questionnaire between 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 among five selected people identified by the researcher of possessing desired demographic qualities and adequate knowledge as consumers of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets. At the end, issues relating to technical accessibility to answering the questionnaire as well as coherence in the wordings were brought out by the pilot

respondents to the researcher. On technical issues, the pilot respondents made known that by the configuration of the questionnaire; it was difficult for them to click the option of “other” in close-ended questions. Also, they raised an issue with inability to type and express their opinions in open-ended section in the questionnaire.

On the wording, a couple of them complained of being confused with the mentioning of “retail stores” and “grocery stores” in different sections of the questionnaire. On the arrangement of the Likert rating questions, a couple of the pilot respondents observed that whereas the question was arranged as from the order of the highest rating to the lowest (5-1), the answers were arranged from the lowest to the highest (1-5). One of the pilot respondents stated that the questionnaire length was longer but was quick to add that the questions were easy to understand. All of the observations collated during the pilot phase were corrected on the final questionnaire which was released on July 18<sup>th</sup>.

#### **4.11 Data Analysis**

A percentage data analysis approach was adopted for this study. This type of data analysis is descriptive in nature, which according to Aggarwal and Priya Ranganathan (2019) aims at describing the distribution of one or more variable without alluding to any causal or other hypothesis. Considering the fact that this study is concerned with different scenarios through which consumers of food-type groceries display their patronage behavior, the use of percentage data analysis in cross-tabulation tables alongside charts or graphical representations was considered appropriate by the researcher because this analytical approach engenders quick understanding of result of data collated in the study.

Essentially, the adoption of descriptive analysis for this study is grounded in literature of past similar studies. For instance, Dunne and Wright (2017) make use of this percentage descriptive analysis approach while seeking to establish the preference of Irish consumers in patronizing local Irish and artisan foods in supermarkets. Similarly, Novixoxo, Kumi, Anning and Darko (2018) use the percentage analysis approach to present and discuss their findings after carrying out a study on the influence of price on consumers’ patronage loyalty at the Shoprite retail outlet

in Accra, Ghana. The acceptability of the descriptive analysis of data may not be unconnected with what Marshall and Junker (2010) refer to as being “the easiest to undertake and interpret” especially when data has to be summarized and offer description of the sample.

To enhance presentation and interpretation of the obtained data for this study, the Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed to arrange, coordinate and analyse all of the data collated through questionnaire. The questionnaire itself was structured into two sections: demographic and thematic (More on questionnaire in “Data collection instrument” above). The presentation and analysis of data followed the structure of the questionnaire.

#### **4.12 Validity and Reliability**

Heale and Alison Twycross (2015) explain that while validity is the extent of accuracy in the study of a concept in a research exercise, reliability is the extent of accuracy of the instrument employed. The concept in this study was about price and consumers’ patronage behavior and the instrument of data collection was questionnaire. To engender the study’s validity, four research objectives were outlined while elements of possible scenarios: price instability and consumers’ patronage behavior, price sensitivity to same or similar food-type groceries in different supermarkets, other factors influence on patronage behavior other than price as well as price perception in measuring quality. The four possible scenarios were focused on to achieve total examination of different aspect of the concept – price and consumers’ patronage behavior.

To ensure accuracy of this study, which is reliability, the questionnaire which serves as the research instrument was subjected to a pilot study so as to ensure that its final output meet the expectation of the respondents and that both the researcher and respondents were on the same page. Some of the observations raised in the course of pilot study were encompassed into the final version of the questionnaire.

#### **4.13 Ethical Considerations**

This study was carried out in full compliance with ethical consideration as expected of any study of this magnitude. Bryamn (2001) raises four grounds through which ethical considerations in a



study could be violated. These are: non-securement of informed consent from the respondents, use of deceptive approach to secure participation in the study, respondents' exposure to harm in any form after participation as well as privacy invasion.

All issues relating to ethics were handled with due diligence starting with securement of respondents' permission to participate in the survey. Also, from the outset of answering the questionnaire, specific issues relating to anonymity of their participation such that their names, address, or other personal details that can be used to trace them were not collected, other than ticking a box in the form to confirm that their consent has been given after reading through the National College of Ireland's (NCI) ethical considerations. The NCI ethical consideration guideline also specified that the data was being collated for academic usage, the NCI storage facility in place and the respondents' right to totally refrain from proceeding with the exercise or quit participation in the study at any stage (See appendix).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **PRESENTATION OF DATA**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

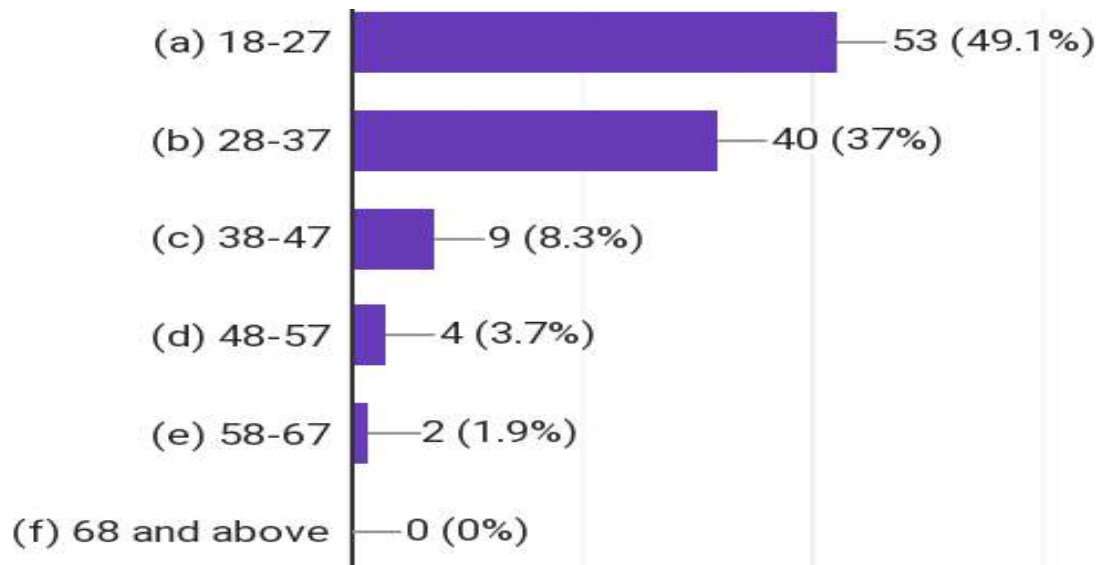
This chapter looks into result of data collated from the questionnaire filled by the respondents. The chapter is patterned along the structure of the questionnaire. It is made up of two main sections: demography and thematic. The demographic section deals with personal attributes data of respondents, while thematic section deals with data collated on consumers' price and patronage behaviour on food-type groceries. Five items in the questionnaire deal with demographic data. The thematic section on the other hand is sub-divided into two: background knowledge and research questions scenarios. The background knowledge sub-section deals test explores respondents' background knowledge with questions meant to provide foundational data for the actual research questions. There are ten items on the questionnaire that addressed this. The research questions scenarios are focused on the questions extrapolated from the four key sub-themes being explored in the study's research questions, that is: price instability, price sensitivity, other factors of patronage other than price as well as price as measure of quality. A total of 28 questions were asked in this regard. Each section and sub-section also offers brief summary of presentation and at the end, there is an overall summary of the key findings. The collated responses were analysed with the aid of simple percentage analysis, some of which are reflected in charts and cross tabulation.

#### **5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC SECTION**

The first section of the questionnaire gathers information on respondents' characteristics that include: age, gender, education, marital status and occupation status.

### 5.2.1. Age

Chart 1: Age-groups



Respondents' age varied from 18 to 68 years and above. The largest age-group is 18-27, representing 49.1%. This is followed by age group 28-37 with 37%.

### 5.2.2. Gender

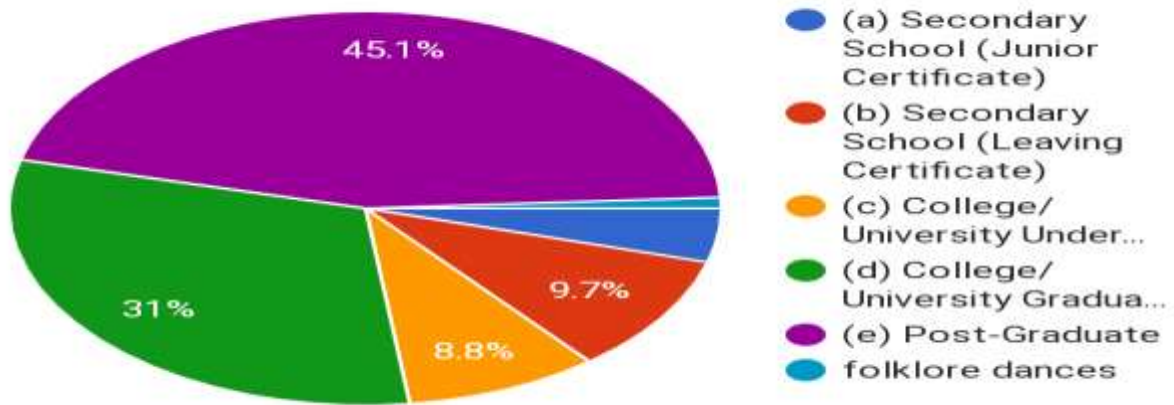
Chart 2: Gender representation



The female respondents are the majority with 51.9%, while the male respondents trail with 48.1%.

### 5.2.3. Education

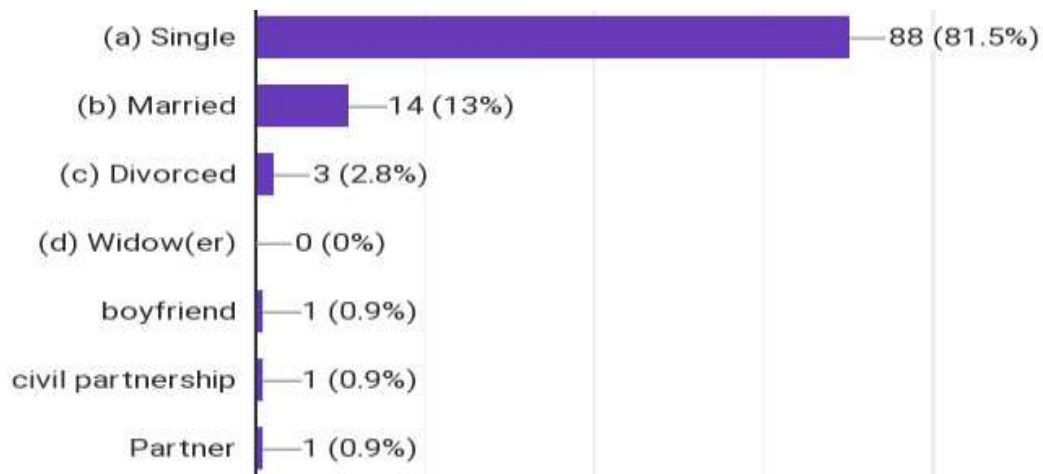
Chart 3: Educational Qualifications



From the Pie Chart above, it could be seen that majority of the respondents are quite educated with 45.1 % having Post-Graduate degrees. Those with College/University graduate degrees follow with 31%.

### 5.2.4. Marital Status

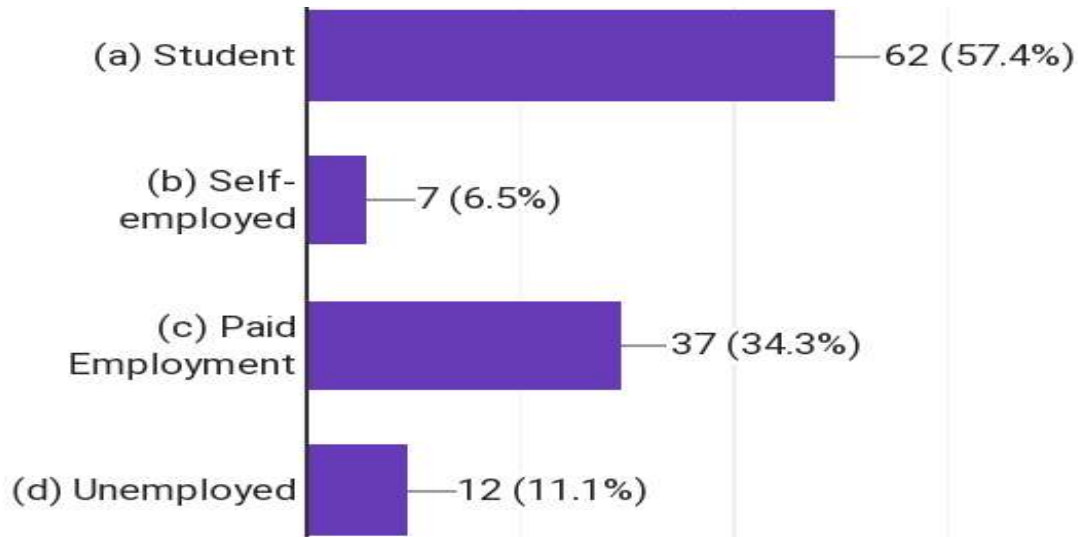
Chart 4: Marital status



The chart 4 reveals that overwhelming majority of the respondents are single with 81.5% indicating so.

### 5.2.5. Occupation

Chart 5: Employment status



Going by the above chart, those who indicate that they are students are the majority with 57.4%.

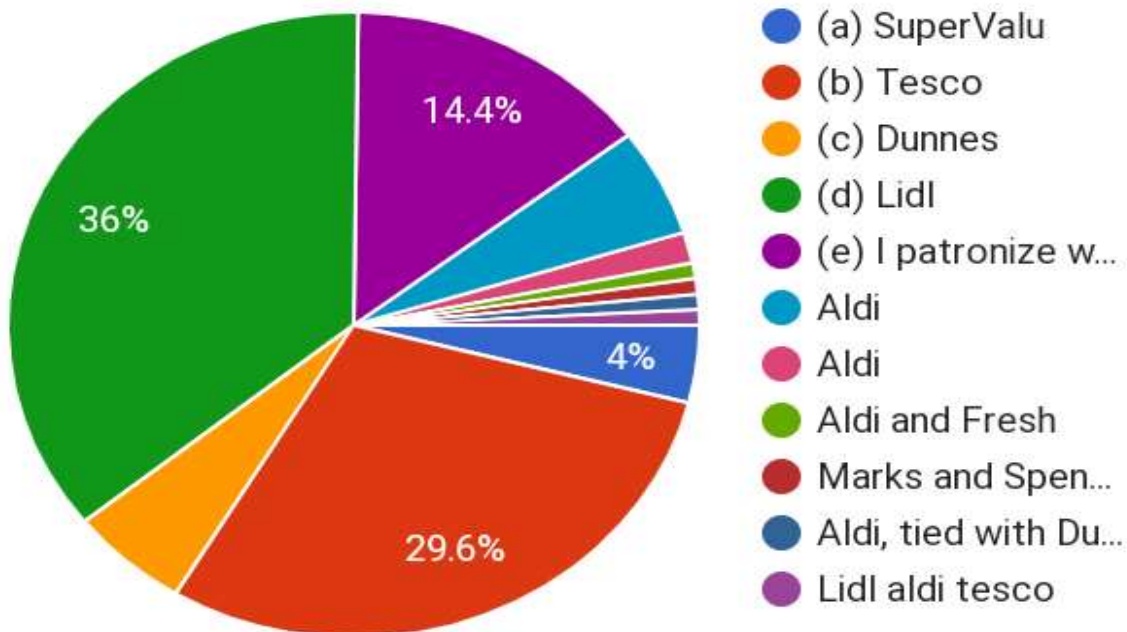
**5.2.6. Summary of Demographic section finding:** From the data gathered above, it can be deduced that respondents who participated in this study are mostly female, majority of whom are well educated, single and are between the ages of 18 and 27 years. That more female consumers participate in patronage of groceries runs in tandem with the findings of Shabbir and Safwan, (2014) and that demographic attributes have on consumers' purchase behaviour is also consistent with the position of Slaba (2020).

## 5.3 PRICE AND CONSUMERS' PATRONAGE BEHAVIOUR'S SECTION

### 5.3.1. Background Knowledge Sub-section

Using questions between item 6 and 16 in the questionnaire, data relating to respondents' background knowledge on price and patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin were collated. As questions differed, so were the responses. For instance, the pie chart below, captures how respondents reacted when asked to state their most preferred supermarket of choice.

**Chart 6: Supermarket preference**



The pie chart above shows that respondents who patronise Lidl supermarket are the largest with 36%, while those patronising Tesco, earn second position with 29.6%.

Other findings under this sub-section are summarised below:

- **Frequency of shopping in a week:** Respondents who shop “one day a week” are in the majority with 28.3%.
- **Minutes spend on shopping:** Respondents who said they spend 30 minutes in a week are the in majority with 31.2%.
- **Time spend considering prices:** Those who said they spend between “1 and 3” minutes to consider prices are the majority with 57.9%.
- **Frequency of specific purchase of food-type:** In Bread, those who chose “Frequently” are the majority with 29.8%. For Dairy, those who indicated “Very frequently” lead with

34.6%; In Juice – those who chose “Rarely” alongside “Very frequently” are tied at 22.1% apiece. For Cereal, 26% who chose “Never” are the majority. In chocolate, 33.7% who rated “Rarely” are the majority and in Biscuit, 25% who chose the “Frequently” option, topped as the majority.

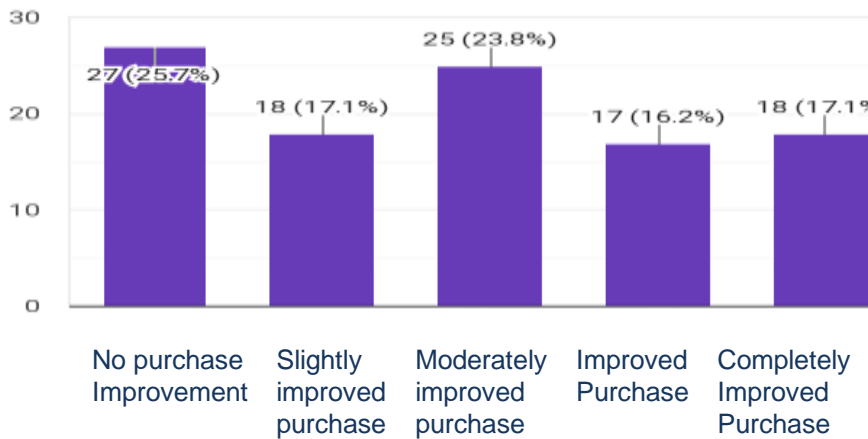
**5.3.1. 1. Summary of the background knowledge finding:** The findings from consumers’ background knowledge had thus established that these respondents have adequate understanding of food-type patronage behaviour in Dublin supermarkets and that majority of them have preference for a supermarket with discount prices such as Lidl (O’Callaghan and Wilcox, 2002) . The sub-section finding also established that majority of the respondents do not shop more than once a week, shop within 30 minutes and spend between 1-3 minutes to consider prices.

**5.3.2. Research Questions’ Scenarios**

After exhausting questions on consumers’ background knowledge, questions on price instability were asked as it may affect any of the six identified food-type groceries (bread, dairy, juice, cereal, chocolate and biscuit) in the likelihood of 20% increase in price and 20% decrease in price. These questions were meant to answer Research Question 1 and they spread across questions 17 and 29 in the questionnaire (See Appendix).

**5.3.2.1. Does price instability have effect on consumers’ purchase behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets?**

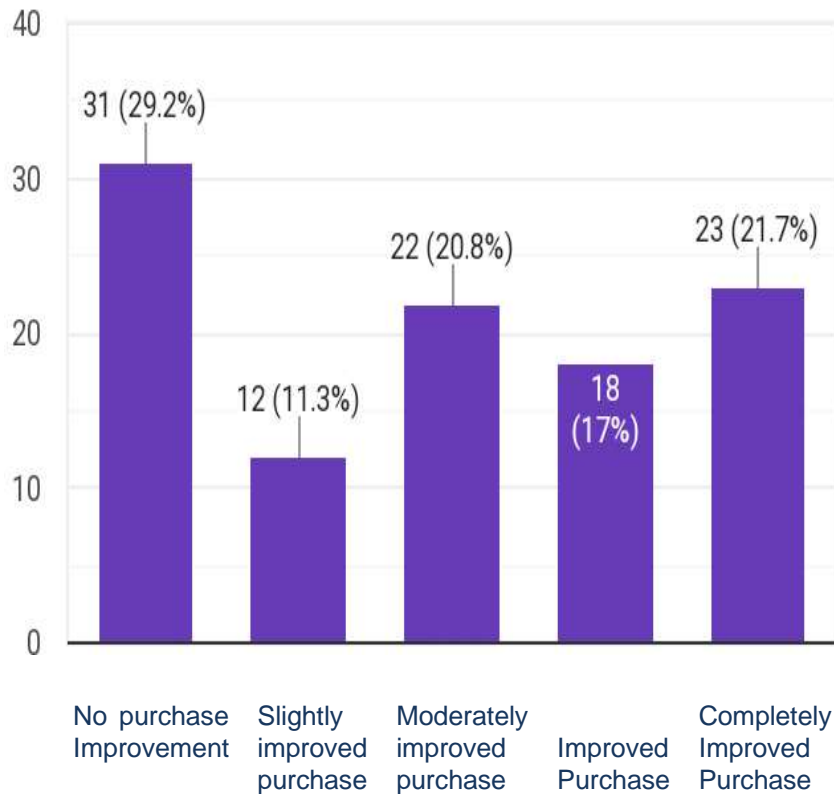
**Chart 7: Responses on 20% increase in the price of bread**



**5.3.2.1 (a)** Questions 18-23 seek to know how respondents will react with their patronage behaviour if there is an increase of 20% in the prices of the six aforementioned food-type groceries. The rating options are: 1-No Purchase, 2-Slightly improved purchase, 3-Moderately improved, 4-Substantially improved and 5-Compeletely improved purchase.

**Result:** For Bread and Dairy, “No Purchase improvement” has highest rating at 25.7% and 23.8% respectfully. For Juice, Cereal and Biscuit, respondents with“Moderately improved purchase” have the highest rating at 30.1%, 30.8% and 26.9% respectfully. And in Chocolate, respondents with “Compeletely improved purchase” led with 29.8%.

**Chart 8: Responses on 20% decrease in the price of bread**



**5.3.2.1(b)** Questions 24-29 seek to know how respondents will react with their patronage behaviour if there is an decrease of 20% in the prices of the six food-type groceries. The rating options were: 1-No Purchase, 2-Slightly improved purchase, 3-Moderately improved, 4-Substantially improved and 5-Compeletely improved purchase.



**Result:** For Bread, “No purchase improvement” has the highest rating at 29.2%, but for Dairy, Cereal, Chocolate and biscuit, respondents who will “Moderately improved purchase” have the highest rating at 25.5%, 33.3% and 25.5% respectively. On juice, those who will “Substantially improve purchase” top with 23.8%, and on biscuits, those who will “Moderately improve purchase” and those who will make “Substantial improve purchase” tied at 26.6% as majority.

**5.3.2.2. Summary of findings for Research Question 1:** The result of findings as demonstrated in the above presentation show that consumers’ reactions to price instability varied from one food-type to the other. While in the case of Juices, Cereal and Biscuits, they showed willingness to “Moderately improved purchase”, in the case of Chocolate, they were willing to “Completely improved purchase” even with 20% increase in price. However, they stucked with “No purchase improvement” in the case of Bread and Dairy.

Also, when price decreases by 20%, they insisted on “No purchase improvement” for Bread. This may not be unconnected with the fact that, bread is a staple food item for many households irrespective of whether or not, price increases or decreases. This position coincides with Waterland et al (2019), that an increase in the price of certain food items may not necessarily discourage purchase. To buttress that reality, in the preceding question, majority had actually chose “frequently” for breads in response to the frequency of purchase. Instructively, majority would be willing to “Moderately improve purchase” if there was 20% decrease in the prices of Dairy, Chocolate, Cereal and Biscuits. In the case of Juices, those who were willing to “Substantially improve purchase” were in clear majority. Ironically, majority had answered “Rarely” for the frequency of Juices purchase in the preceding question. A slash in the price of Juices may encourage more people to purchase. This runs in tandem with French (2003) findings on the improve purchase of groceries when prices are lowered.

The findings had proven that whereas price instability can sway purchase pattern in some cases (Griffith, et al, 2015), in other instances, such may not happen because patronage behaviour to different food types, differ (Waterlander et al, 2019).

A further attempt to understand demographic relationship with price instability is demonstrated in the crosstabulation below:

**Table 1-3 : The cross tabulation tables below reflect respondents’ demographic attributes (Age, Gender and Employment status) when there is “BreadPlus20Increase”, that is, a 20% increase in price of bread.**

		BreadPlus20Increase					Total
		No Purchase Improvement	Slightly Improved Purchase	Moderately Improved Purchase	Substantially Improved Purchase	Completely Improved Purchase	
Age	18-27	11	10	10	11	9	51
	28-37	12	4	11	4	8	39
	38-47	3	4	1	1	0	9
	48-57	0	0	2	1	1	4
	58-67	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total		27	18	25	17	18	105

		BreadPlus20Increase					Total
		No Purchase Improvement	Slightly Improved Purchase	Moderately Improved Purchase	Substantially Improved Purchase	Completely Improved Purchase	
Gender	Female	18	6	13	9	10	56
	Male	9	12	12	8	8	49
Total		27	18	25	17	18	105

		BreadPlus20Increase					Total
		No Purchase Improvement	Slightly Improved Purchase	Moderately Improved Purchase	Substantially Improved Purchase	Completely Improved Purchase	
Occupation	Paid	10	7	8	1	3	29
	Self-employed	0	0	1	2	1	4
	Student	12	10	14	14	10	60
	Unemployed	5	1	2	0	4	12
Total		27	18	25	17	18	105

**Table interpretation:** A 20% increase in the price of bread in relation to respondents’ demographic attributes (age, gender and occupation status) as demonstrated above, shows that respondents who were female, within the age group of 28-37 and were students formed the majority who chose the “No purchase” option for breads. What this means is that the “No

purchase” decision even with increase in the price of breads, resonate more within this class of respondents than others. This finding runs in consistent with the position of Slaba (2020) on demographic attributes rubbing on the buying behaviour of consumers.

**Table 4-6: The cross tabulation tables below reflect respondents’ demographic attributes (Age, Gender and Employment status) when there is “BreadPlus20Decrease”, that is, a 20% decrease in the price of bread.**

		BreadPlus20Decrease					Total
		No Purchase Improvement	Slightly Improved Purchase	Moderately Improved Purchase	Substantially Improved Purchase	Completely Improved Purchase	
Age	18-27	11	6	9	10	15	51
	28-37	14	5	8	8	5	40
	38-47	5	0	4	0	0	9
	48-57	0	1	0	0	3	4
	58-67	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total		31	12	22	18	23	106

		BreadPlus20Decrease					Total
		No Purchase Improvement	Slightly Improved Purchase	Moderately Improved Purchase	Substantially Improved Purchase	Completely Improved Purchase	
Gender	Female	18	7	7	6	18	56
	Male	13	5	15	12	5	50
Total		31	12	22	18	23	106

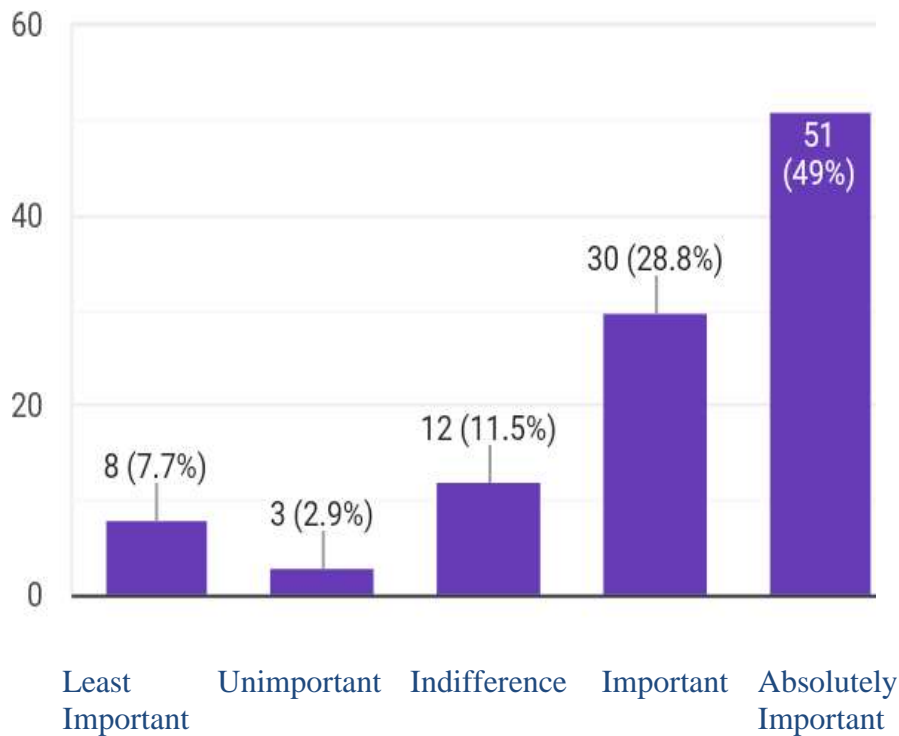
		BreadPlus20Decrease					Total
		No Purchase Improvement	Slightly Improved Purchase	Moderately Improved Purchase	Substantially Improved Purchase	Completely Improved Purchase	
Occupation	Paid	8	5	5	3	8	29
	Self-employed	0	2	0	1	1	4
	Student	19	5	13	14	10	61
	Unemployed	4	0	4	0	4	12
Total		31	12	22	18	23	106

**Table interpretation:** A 20% decrease in the price of bread in relation to respondents' demographic attributes (age, gender and occupation status) as demonstrated above, shows that respondents who were female, within the age group of 28-37 and were students formed the majority who chose the “No purchase” option for breads. What this means is that the “No purchase” decision on breads even with decrease in price, resonate more within this class of respondents than others. Again, this aligns with Slaba (2020) argument on demographic attributes shaping purchase behaviour.

**5.3.2.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: *How sensitive are consumers to differentiation in prices of same or similar food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets?***

Research Question 2 is on consumers' price sensitivity in relation to same or similar food-type groceries in different supermarkets. The question is aimed at understanding if the varied prices of same or similar food-type groceries has any effect on consumers' patronage behaviour towards their preferred supermarkets. Questionnaire items designed to answer “Research Question 2” are between questions 30 and 34 of the questionnaire (See appendix).

**Chart 9: Reactions on lower price as attraction to patronage**



**5.3.2.3.1.** Between Questions 32 and 34, respondents were asked to rank what their perception is on price sensitivity and patronage behaviour. The rating options were: 1-Least important, 2-Unimportant, 3-Indifference, 4-Important and 5-Absolutely Important.

**Findings:** On Lower price as attraction to patronage, respondents who considered it as “Absolutely important” are the majority with 49%. Also, on if higher price can discourage patronage; respondents who considered the statement as “Absolutely Important” are 40.4%, the majority. On whether special offer will motivate patronage, 35.6%, the majority also considered it as “Absolutely Important”.

**5.3.2.3.2. Summary of findings for Research Question 2:** In all of the questions asked to ascertain whether or not price would be a consideration for the patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets, respondents did not fail to demonstrate their bias for patronizing supermarkets where they pay less and get more. From the question on whether price affordability is a consideration to whether lower prices will motivate them or whether higher prices will discourage them from patronage as well as whether special offers in supermarkets can motivate them. When this result is viewed alongside the responses given by consumers on the names of supermarkets they patronize most, a trend can be established. The most patronized supermarket

among the respondents as earlier identified, was Lidl at 36% majority. The supermarket is famous for selling at discount prices (O'Callaghan and Wilcox, 2002). The trend established helps to confirm that majority of the respondents are sensitive to price and will rather patronize supermarkets with lower prices of food-type groceries.

To further ascertain if the consumers' preference for lower prices of food-type groceries has any relationship with demographic attribute, a cross-tabulation of responses of the respondents was carried out on the question: will higher price discourage your patronage behaviour?

**Table 7-9: The cross tabulation tables below reflect respondents' demographic attributes (Age, Gender and Employment status) when answering the question of whether higher prices demotivate patronage. The cross tabulation is thus tagged: "higherpricesdemotivation".**

		higherpricesdemotivation					
		Least Important	Unimportant	Indifferent	Important	Absolutely Important	Total
Age	18-27	1	6	7	13	24	51
	28-37	4	5	10	10	9	38
	38-47	1	1	0	1	6	9
	48-57	0	0	2	0	2	4
	58-67	1	0	0	0	1	2
Total		7	12	19	24	42	104

		higherpricesdemotivation					
		Least Important	Unimportant	Indifferent	Important	Absolutely Important	Total
Gender	Female	4	3	9	15	24	55
	Male	3	9	10	9	18	49
Total		7	12	19	24	42	104

higherpricesdemotivation			
Least Important	Unimportant	Indifferent	Important

Employment	Paid	2	3	6	6
	Self-employed	0	0	0	1
	Student	2	9	12	15
	Unemployed	3	0	1	2
Total		7	12	19	24

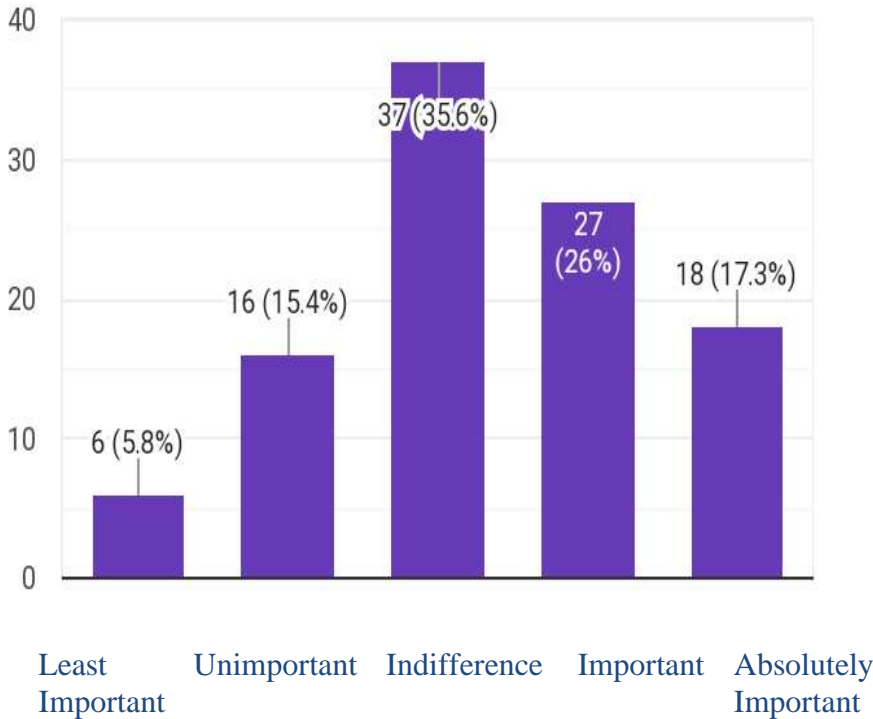
		higherpricesdemotivation	Total
		Absolutely Important	
EmploymentStatus	Paid	12	29
	Self-employed	3	4
	Student	21	59
	Unemployed	6	12
Total		42	104

**Table interpretation:** Higher prices in the patronage of supermarkets in relation to respondents' demographic attributes (age, gender and occupation status) as demonstrated above, shows that respondents who, majority of whom were female students, within the age group of 18-27 years formed the majority of the 40.4% who find higher prices as discouraging to patronage. The choice of "Absolutely Important" itself is a strong emphasis of the importance they attached to the issue. This findings corroborates that of Disantis et al (2013) on low-income earning women being sensitive to prices because of their limited incomes.

#### **5.3.2.4. RESEARCH QUESTION 3: *What are the other factors of influence on consumers' patronage of food-type groceries other than price in Dublin supermarkets?***

Research Question 3 seeks to understand other factors of consideration, other than price that consumers do consider in the patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets. It is believed that consideration of these factors can further sustain the relevance of price in the patronage behaviour or diminish it. Questionnaire items designed to answer the "Research Question 3" are between questions 35 and 41 (See appendix).

#### **Chart 10: Reactions on Brand as a factor of patronage behaviour**



**5.3.2.4.1.** Between Questions 36 and 38, respondents were asked to rank statements on: grocery brand, easy accessibility to supermarkets and grocery quality. The rating options were: 1-Least important, 2-Unimportant, 3-Indifference, 4-Important and 5-Absolutely Important.

**Finding:** 35.6% who chose “indifference” among the respondents formed the majority when they were asked if “brand” of a food-type grocery can be considered for patronizing its product. This finding contradicts similar finding by Hanaysha (2017) who rated “brand as a factor of consideration among consumers. On “easy accessibility” as a factor of consideration in supermarket patronage, 39% who chose “Absolutely important” formed the majority, and on “quality”, majority at 37.1% of the respondents considered it as “Absolutely important”. The finding is consistent with Papafotikas, et. al. (2014) who asserted that quality is a major factor of consideration in patronage behaviour of consumers.

Considering the facts that there could be other factors of considerations for the patronage of food-type groceries, which may not have been highlighted, respondents were given the opportunity to state, in an open-ended question, what sort of factor that could be. Out of the 108 respondents however, only 27 of them attempted the question. And each respondent has different factors in mind. However, two respondents mentioned “NA”, that is Not Applicable and that

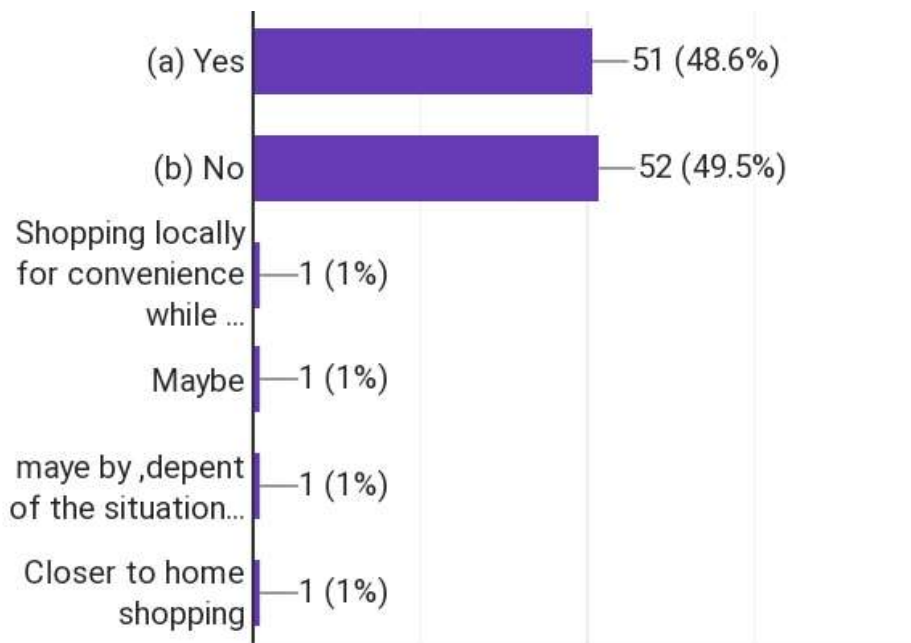


scored 7.4%. Among some of the other factors listed for consideration, were: “cleanliness and varieties of products available”, “consistency of supply”, “I like the store to be relatively small”, helpful staff, among others.

Also, putting in mind that the study was conducted at a period of Covid-19, a global pandemic, which has profound impact on general way of life including consumers’ patronage behaviour, the researcher deemed it fit to sample opinions on how impactful this has been on the patronage of food-type groceries. Questions 40 and 41 treated this (see appendix).

Impact of Covid-19 on patronage behaviour: When respondents were asked to indicate whether or not the impact of Covid-19 has affected them in the patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets, 57.5 % answered “Yes” in affirmative, while 42.5% answered “No” in objection. This affirms the study of Sheth (2020) on how the pandemic has altered the normal shopping approach.

**Chart 11: Reactions on whether a supermarket with higher prices but has hygiene measures against Covid-19 in place will attract more patronage.**



The chart above reflects respondents’ views when asked as to whether they will consider shopping for food-type groceries in a supermarket once considered to charge higher prices, in

view of the safety and hygiene measures introduced. The chart demonstrated shows that majority at 49.5% chose the “No” option. In other word, they will not sacrifice lower groceries shopping for higher prices even if such supermarkets have measures against the pandemic in place.

**5.3.2.4.2. Summary of the findings:** Respondents through their responses acknowledged consideration for other factors of patronage other than price (Ramya and Ali, 2016). But while “Absolute importance” was attached to “easy accessibility” to supermarkets and “quality “ of the food-type groceries, majority of the respondents chose to be indifference to the brand producing such food types. Within the category of other factors influencing patronage behaviour is the on-going Covid-19 pandemic with direct impact on every facet of life, including patronage of food-type groceries (Sheth (2020). While majority through their responses confirmed being that the pandemic has impacted on their shopping behaviour, of interest is the fact that majority answered “No” when asked if they will consider patronising supermarkets with higher prices but having in place safety and hygiene measures. A cross tabulation analysis of that response alongside respondents’ employment status is represented below:

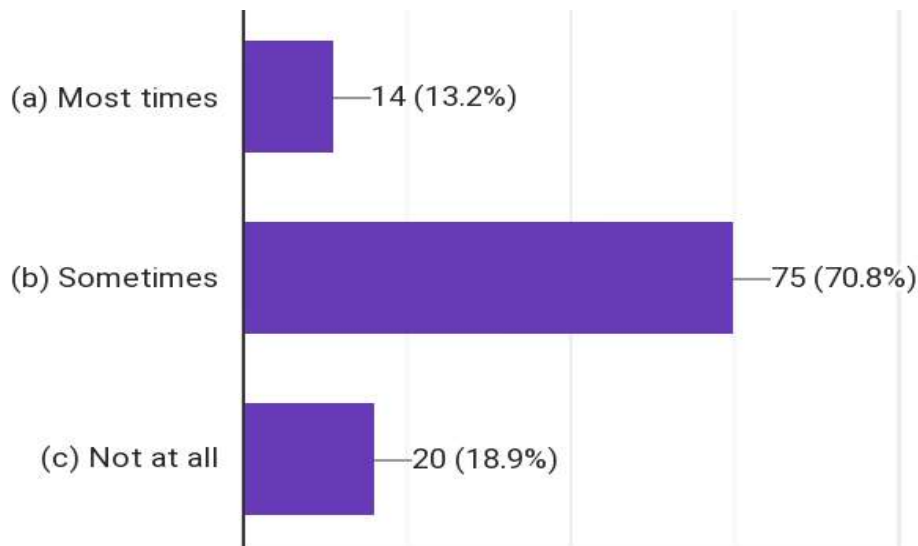
		Covid19SafteyMeasures		Total
		No	Yes	
EmploymentStatus	Paid	1	15	15
	Self-employed	1	1	2
	Student	2	27	28
	Unemployed	0	6	5
Total		4	49.5	48.6

From the cross-tabulation table above, it is apparent that within the class of respondents who answered “No”, students formed the majority. This can be tied with the early discovery in this study that majority of the respondents were young, unmarried and still students. The idea of jettison safety and hygiene measures, just because of higher prices, in view of Convid-19 pandemic is a risk and the willingness to take such risk can only come from students, many of whom are still young and are driven by youthful exuberance and willingness to take risk. (Littunen, 2000).

### 5.3.2.5. RESEARCH QUESTION 4: Do consumers in Dublin use price to rate quality of food-type groceries in supermarkets?

Research Question 4 seeks to understand if price is being used as a measure of quality in the patronage of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets. In other word, the question is particular about how prices of groceries are perceived among consumers and whether they use price as the yardstick to weigh groceries' quality they buy in supermarkets. Questionnaire items designed to answer the “Research Question 4” are between questions 42 and 43 (See appendix).

**Chart 12: Reactions on how if lower price also means lower quality**



**5.3.2.5.1.** Questions on the usage of price to measure quality was asked in questions 42 and 43.

**Finding:** In response to the question of whether lower price of a grocery item, means lower quality, as reflected in the chart above, 70.8% who are majority chose the “Sometimes” option. Again, in a followed-up question on whether respondents would be willing to pay higher price for a food-type grocery considered to have superior quality, 70.8% who are majority chose the “sometimes” option.

**5.3.2.5.2. Summary of findings:** Respondents through their responses for the two sub-set questions for Research Question 4, were clear in their position. In both instances where the

questions on price for quality were asked, they chose to give a response that reflects that they do use price to judge quality of their food-type groceries but probably not in all cases. Literature takes different positions on this. While Carlson et al (2014) study revealed no relationship between price and measurement of quality, Pondor, et al (2017) believes there is.

**5.4 OVERALL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:** From the above presentation of findings , it can be said that the impact of price instability varies, depending on the demographic attribute of consumers and the food-type grocery being considered. And in this study, the female respondents who are students and are within age range of 28 and 37 years formed the majority. Also, the it has also been revealed that majority of the respondents in the study are sensitive to prices and would rather patronise supermarkets with lower prices. The demography of consumers affected by this are female students with the age range of 18 and 27 years. Also, respondents have demonstrated through their responses that they consider other factors of patronage like “quality” and “easy accessibility” to supermarkets, but that they are not really interested about product’s brand or supermarkets with higher prices but do have safety and hygiene messures against covid-19 in place. Finally, the respondents acknowledged that they do use price to measure quality but on some occasions and not in all instances.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

## 6.1. Introduction

This Chapter will discuss analysis of key findings. First analysis will focus on the respondents' demographic characteristics and their patronage behaviour. Secondly, the discourse will examine respondents' responses in relation to price instability, price sensitivity, consideration of other factors of patronage other than price as well as price as measurement of quality.

## 6.2. Demographic attribute and patronage behaviour

This section examines demographic attributes: age, gender and employment Status in relation to patronage behaviour.

**6.2.1. Age:** Respondents within the age group of 18-27 years emerged the majority of those sampled in the study. Slaba (2019) describes age as one of the most significant factors that influence consumers' buying behaviour. Similarly, Hervé and Mullet (2009) submit that age as a factor of influence in consumers' patronage behaviour cannot be underestimated. In a study, focusing on adults between the age of 18 and 90 years, Hervé and Mullet (2009) come to the conclusion that age influence is quite significance and for young people, a lower price is a good consideration to purchase a product. The current study is consistent with Hervé and Mullet (2009) study because it has been established that consumers, especially those who are young female students in Colleges, have preferences for lower price food-type groceries.

**6.2.2. Gender:** The female respondents are in majority with 51.9%. The study is consistent with previous similar studies on consumers' patronage behavior that have proven time and again that women have always shown more interest in shopping than their male counterparts (Darley and Smith 1995; Shabbir and Safwan, 2014). The idea of women having greater interest in shopping behaviour for have been of scholarly interests for many years and this study has proven once more that more female consumers engage patronage behaviour than their male counterparts.

**6.2.3. Employment status:** The fact that an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 57.4% indicated that they are students indicated that they be limited in income. Caspar (2015) notes that students, especially those from low-income household, usually lack financial wherewithal while still studying. Chaiyasoonthorn and Suksa-ngiam (2011) similarly establish a relationship between personal income which, according to them is tied to individual occupation and which in

effect has a relationship on the buying behaviour of individuals concerned. To that extent, it may be argued that the fact that majority of the respondents are students who are not yet in paid employment and as such are limited in incomes, is a significant factor for their preference of lower-priced food-type groceries. Although Chaiyasoonthorn and Suksa-ngiam (2011) submit that their study established that personal income has less impact on purchase intention, it nonetheless has significant impact in actual purchase. And to that extent a relationship can be established between this study and Chaiyasoonthorn and Suksa-ngiam (2011).

**6.2.4. Summary of Demography:** The three highlighted attributes in respondents' demographic status appear to have provided the foundation upon which answers to subsequent questions regarding price and patronage behavior of food-type groceries were built. What could be deduced from the study's demography is that majority of the respondents were female, youthful and still in colleges. The implication associated with the study's finding is that it has from this stage points towards the direction of price-conscious consumers whose demographic attributes have profound influence on their patronage behavior. This may not be unconnected with the purposive sampling technique adopted which titled in the direction of more students' participants.

### **6.3. Price and Consumers' Patronage Behaviour Section**

This section focuses on findings on two sub-sections: consumers' background knowledge and research questions' scenarios.

#### **6.3.1 Consumers' background knowledge**

This sub-section looks into consumers' choice of supermarkets, time spend on shopping /time spend in considering prices and frequency of food-type purchase.

**6.3.1.1. Choice of Supermarkets:** In testing the respondents' background knowledge on food-type patronage behavior, question was asked on the choice supermarket they patronize most. Using the June (2020) Kantar's data on market share of the major retail stores in Ireland, the quartet - Supervalu, Tesco, Dunnes and Lidl were listed as options in order of ratings for respondents to indicate their preferences. While the four were the key options provided, respondents whose choice was not among those listed were allowed to state their preference. The

fact that Lidl, a supermarket in Kantar's fourth position emerged as the most preferred with 36% majority. Tesco, which was second in the rating came second with 29.6%. Interestingly consumers who have no preferred supermarket but patronise anyone they come across, polled 14% to emerge third, while SuperValu which was actually in number one position in Kantar's rating came fourth with 4%, while Dunnes which occupied third position in the rating could not feature among the respondents' preferences.

Reasons for this outcome might be varied. First, the demographic findings of the respondents already tilted in the direction of price-conscious consumers, so it is only logical that majority who patronise Lidl are doing so because of its discount sale strategy (O'Callaghan and Wilcox, 2002). Also, the Kantar's research on the market share of retail stores was conducted across Ireland. This study focuses only on Dublin, which in a way is a limitation. It may be that whereas Lidl and Tesco have their strengths in Dublin, SuperValu and Dunnes have their strengths outside of Dublin. In addition, this study had used Kantar research rating of May, 2020 that was published in June, while this study itself was conducted in July. It is possible that a number of developments including the growing impact of Covid-19, global pandemic kept evolving, which ordinarily could have impacted the purchase behaviour and consumers' choice of supermarkets.

**6.3.1.2. Weekly time spend on shopping/time spend on considering prices:** Respondents who spend "30" minutes on shopping on weekly basis were in majority with 31.2%. If that figure is related to "two days a week" which was the majority answer for the numbers of days spend on shopping on weekly basis, then it can be concluded that majority of the respondents spend an average of 15.5 minutes in shopping on weekly basis. That may not appear to be too much of time being spent on shopping and that probably accounted for why majority of the respondents at 57.9% said they spend between 1-3 minutes in consideration of prices.

If respondents do not spend much time in shopping and spend little time in considering prices, yet they are price-conscious, it probably has to do with manifestation of theoretical postulation of consumers' internal price referencing as espoused by Niedrich, et al. (2001) and Chandrashekar (2011). What may not be clear is whether their decision-making process was being guided by historical (temporal) or contextual price referencing approach (Rajendran and Tellis, 1994).

**6.3.1.3. Frequency of food-type purchase:** The six food-type groceries (breads, dairy, juices, cereal, chocolates and biscuits) used for the study were based on considerable mentions they enjoyed in reviewed studies and literatures: bread (B&A, 2018); milk or dairy products (Liese et al, 2007); fruit juices (B&A, 2010); cereal (French, 2003; Wiig and Smith, 2008); chocolate (Anesbury, et al, 2015) and biscuits (B&A, 2018). Respondents' views on these food-type categories however varied. For instance, while majority at 34.6% mentioned "Very frequently" for Dairy items, majority of the respondents at 29.4% and 25% indicated "Frequently" for purchase of bread and biscuits respectively. On the other hand, 33.7% respondents who chose "Rarely" emerged majority in the purchase of chocolate, while 26% who chose the "Never" option emerged as the majority in the purchase of Cereal. Ironically, two groups emerged as majority with each having 22.1% on the frequency of purchase of juice. While one group had chosen the "Rarely" option, the other had indicated "Very frequently".

**6.3.1.4. Summary on consumers' background knowledge:** Findings on consumers background knowledge no doubt established another pattern of interest, which is that whereas majority of the respondents have preferences for supermarkets with relatively cheap prices of food-type groceries, they nonetheless have limited time to waste on price consideration as they are driven by internal referencing and their respective choice of food-type groceries. The implication here is that respondents are guided by their previous bias and do not appear to be interested in trial-and-error approach when it comes to what to buy and how much is paid in return.

## **6.3.2. Research questions scenarios**

This sub-section covers consumers' views in instances of price instability, price sensitivity to same or similar food –type groceries, consideration of other factors of patronage other than price as well as using price as measurement of quality. The four scenarios highlighted here formed the thrust of the study's research questions.

**6.3.2.1. Price instability and consumers' patronage behavior:** To understand how consumers will react in instances of price instability in the patronage of six identified food-types groceries, scenarios on 20% increase and 20% decrease were created. While majority said they will not increase their purchase of Bread whether there is an increase or decrease of 20%, majority also said they will not increase their purchase for Dairy products if there is an increase of 20% in



price but will moderately improve purchase if there is 20% decrease. If these responses are to be weighed alongside respondents' earlier answers on frequency of purchase (where majority had picked "frequently" for Bread and "very frequently" for Dairy), then it could be explained that respondents considered both Bread and Dairy as staple foods in which a 20% increment in price is not strong enough to discourage their buying behavior in both. However, they may be tempted to buy more Dairy products if there is a 20% decrease but not impressed to buy more of Bread. Such revelation is not new judging by Waterlander et al (2019) findings that assert there have been instances where a tax increase, aimed at increasing prices of certain food items had worked and in other instances, failed to discourage purchase.

It is difficult to explain while respondents would be willing to moderately improve their purchase with 20% price increase in the case of Juice and Cereal because for instance, in the frequency of purchase, those who chose "Rarely" and "Very frequently" for Juice were in equal number, while majority chose "Never" for Cereal. The same is the situation for Chocolate where those who chose "Rarely" were in majority but with 20% increase they are willing to "Completely improve their purchase". It is either majority of the respondents did not decipher the questions very well or a perception that a jump in the price of previously unwanted food-type have brought in better quality in such food items. Perhaps, it was confusion like this that underscored previous scholarly assertions that no single approach can be used to understand human food preferences (Sanjur, 1982; Furst, et al., 1996; Bisogni and Sobal, 2009). It is understandable however, that majority would be willing to improve purchase in Biscuit even with 20% increase. This majority had previously rated the frequency of their purchase as "frequently". Significantly, while a 20% decrease in the prices of Dairy, Chocolate, Cereal and Biscuits will lead majority of the respondents to moderately improve their purchase, in Juice, majority asserted that it will lead them to substantially improve purchase behaviour. This runs in tandem with the experimental study carried out by French (2003). French's finding further assert that the higher the percentage of price reduction, the higher the chances of consumers buying much more.

Most profound in the findings under price instability however, is the fact that a sudden change either by increase or decrease in price will not trigger the same reaction from the respondents (Waterlander et al, 2019), rather the food-type in which the price change has occurred, the class

of gender that it affects most, the age-group considered most impacted by it and the employment status of the most affected consumers, shall be the determinants of patronage behaviour that follows. This study has however demonstrated that the class of people who are most likely to react in the case of price instability in Dublin supermarkets, albeit differently, are female consumers, most whom are students and are within the age range of 28 and 37 years.

**6.3.2.2. Consumers' sensitivity to price of same or similar food-type groceries in different supermarkets:** In various questions and scenarios presented on consumers' sensitivity to prices, respondents did not fail to give unmistakable answers as to how readily they will give price affordability a consideration in their choice of food-type groceries available in different supermarkets. Chandon and Wansink (2014) findings are in consonance with this. In response to the question of whether lower price motivate them patronise a supermarket, majority who were 49% chose the option of "Absolutely important". Again, when they were asked if higher prices will demotivate them from patronage, the majority at 40% considered the statement as "Absolutely important", just as 35.6% emerged the majority who considered it as "Absolutely important" if Special offer is introduced by a supermarket as motivation for patronage. The consistency of respondents' answers represent emphasis on their sensitivity to price and their preference for food-type groceries that could be purchased at cheaper prices. This according to Disantis et al (2013) is usually the case among low-income earners.

A further enquiry to ascertain through a cross tabulation data presentation helped to put into perspectives the demographic attributes that seem to shape consumers' views on price sensitivity. And just like it was revealed in study of price instability, it was discovered that price sensitivity in the purchase of food-type groceries appeared to be more pronounced within the class of female consumers who are still in Colleges and who are within the age range of 18 and 27 years. The different between this class of respondents and those observed under price instability is the age range. It thus mean that whereas women who are within the age of 28 and 37 are likely to be more reactive to price instability, the consciousness of lower prices on food-type groceries is more pronounced among younger female respondents between 18 and 27 years. This result is in consistent with similar study conducted in United States, wherein the researchers assert that

women with low-incomes are likely to be guided by “economic and environmental situations” while in groceries shopping (Wiig and Smith, 2008).

**6.3.2.3. Consideration for other factors of patronage other price:** The findings revealed the significance respondents attached to other factors of patronage other than price. Majority rated “easy accessibility” to supermarkets and “quality” of the food-type with “Absolute importance”, However, they chose to be less-concerned about the brand of the food-type groceries they are purchasing. The less interest in the brand may once again be reinforcing the respondents’ perception that aside for price which has direct bearing on their pockets; easy accessibility which makes their connection to the supermarket hassle-free and product quality which guarantees longlifespan for their choice food-type groceries, every other considerations should be secondary. This finding is a sharp contradiction with Momani (2015) study in Jordan which found that brand loyalty, product country of origin and marketing communications are considerations for patronage. His study undermines product quality and historical tradition. Similarly, Hanaysha (2017) study elevates social responsibility and store environments as factors of considerations among Malaysian consumers. However, Papafotikas, et. al. (2014) and Melovic (2020) in different studies carried out in Greece and Montenegro respectively, list “product quality” among factors of patronage consideration.

Most novel discovery within the category of other factors of patronage was the affirmation of the majority that the global Covid-19 pandemic has affected their patronage behaviour (Stanciu et al, 2020), yet when asked if they were willing to start patronising supermarkets with higher prices but with safety and hygiene measures regarding Covid-19 in place, same majority said ‘No’. Apparently, the respondents are not willing to sacrifice their bias for lower price food-type groceries with any safety and hygiene, irrespective of the risk involved. A further analysis to determine the occupational status of the majority of the respondents saying ‘No’, will later reveal that majority of them were actually students. The willingness to take the risk may not be unconnected with their low income status as students and partly, the tendency to take risks as Littunen (2000) observed.

**6.3.2.4. Using price as measure of quality:** The findings had also shown that majority of the respondents do use the price tags of their food-type groceries to measure what they perceive to

be of low quality. Although they do not believe this to be the case all the time but “sometimes”. This study is consistent with a similar study carried out on the use of price to measure food quality by Pondor, et al (2017). However, the findings of this study contradict that of Faulds and Lonial (2001) and that of Carlson et al (2014), both of which revealed that consumers do not see a relationship between price and product quality. Again, majority in the study at hand, settled for the “sometimes” option when the question was asked if they will be willing to pay higher prices in the believe of buying qualitative food-type groceries. This discovery perhaps should be seen as an exception for majority of the respondents who were not always ready to sacrifice anything for lower-priced food groceries. It also confirmed the earlier assertion of the majority who rated consideration of product quality with “Absolutely important” under the category of other factors of patronage.

**6.3.2.5. Summary on Research questions scenarios:** From the discourse in this section of the findings, it has been demonstrated that reactions to price instability by consumers of food-type groceries is not universal and it is more pronounced among female consumers who are students and are within the age range of 28 and 37 years. Also, consumers showed bias for lower-priced food-type groceries across different supermarkets and that sensitivity is more pronounced among female consumers who are students and are within the age range 18 and 27 years. Consumers also take cognisance of easy accessibility and product quality in their purchase behaviour but are not willing to compromise lower-priced food groceries for brand, safety and hygenic shopping even in the face of Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, consumers were of the belief that lower price of food-type groceries can be sometimes used to identify low-quality food product and they will be willing sometimes to pay extra for quality food-type groceries.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the key research findings, limitations are outlined and recommendations provided for future research.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

This study from the start has clear objectives of what it seeks to achieve as it concerns price and consumers' patronage behaviour on food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets. The four key objectives had been: to establish if instability of prices has effect on consumers' patronage behaviour of food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets, to ascertain if consumers are sensitive to differentiation in prices of same or similar food-type groceries in different Dublin supermarkets, to find out if there are other factors of influence on consumers' patronage of food-type groceries other than price in Dublin supermarkets as well as to establish if consumers use price as a measure of quality for the food-type groceries they bought in Dublin supermarkets.

To achieve these objectives, the study reviewed extant literatures with specific attention on the works of Kotler and Keller (2012), Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) among others for conceptual understanding; Sammut-Bonnici and Channon (2015) on pricing strategies, Helson (1964) Adaptation level theory on price referencing, among others to establish theoretical foothold; before finally exploring empirical studies as well gaps in literatures to justify its necessity. The review of literature was followed by adoption of survey research methodology that involved the use of questionnaire as instrument of data collection and quantitative approach to collate data before dwelling on descriptive analysis of findings.

## **7.3 Key Findings**

In the end, the study's research questions, extrapolated from its objectives were provided from respondents' answers. The findings are summarized thus:

- That although price instability majorly resonates among female consumers who are students and are within the age range of 28 and 37 years, yet there is variations in reaction to its effects based on consumers' food type choice, gender, age and occupation.
- That consumers are sensitive to prices of same food-type groceries across Dublin supermarkets and it is mostly pronounced among females who are students and are within the age range of 18 and 27 years.

- That consumers take cognizance of “easy accessibility” and “product quality” as other factors of patronage but are indifferent to product brand and are not willing to patronize higher-priced supermarkets even with the offers of safety and hygiene measures against Covid-19.
- That consumers do sometimes use price to identify low quality food-type groceries in Dublin supermarkets and are willing to pay extra to buy those perceived as of good quality.

#### **7.4. Limitations of study**

In carrying out this study, a number of challenges were recorded. These challenges thus limit the extent by which the study could have explored.

- First, the non-availability of any reliable data on the consumers in Dublin made it difficult to explore the possibility of using any of the probability sampling techniques. The use of a probability sampling technique would have further deepened the study and guarantees potential respondents equal chances of being picked.
- Also, the outbreak of the global pandemic, Covid-19 hampered the initial plan of physical or real-life distribution of questionnaire copies to the consumers. The health and safety measures among the population such as the wearing of face masks, social distancing among others, necessitated the study being carried out with the aid of virtual questionnaire.

#### **7.5 Recommendation for further study**

In view of the aforesaid findings, it must be stated that the food groceries retail sector underwhich the study exercise has been carried out is of growing interest and as such more scholarly studies should be carried out, exploring different aspects of it. Of interest in the course of this study is the discovery of growing male consumers’ interest in patronage behaviour of food-type groceries. There have been numerous studies on female consumers’ patronage behaviour but in view of almost-at-par interest shown in this study by male consumers it would be of interest if future studies dig further into it. Already, Mortimer and Clarke (2011) have discovered something similar in this regards, yet more can be done.

Also, it is being recommended that a further study on why younger female consumers are sensitive to prices with bias for lower-priced food-type groceries and the older female consumers more concerned about price instability, will make an interesting read.

Furthermore, it is also being recommended that any future study in this regards tries and adopt any of the probability sampling techniques to give potential respondents equal chances of being picked so as to reduce sampling bias.

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## **Appendix**

# **Price and Consumers' Patronage of Food-type Groceries in Dublin Supermarkets**

## **Consent to take part in research**

- I ..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from the answers given within two weeks of my participation in the questionnaire, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation in filling the questionnaire involves relating my personal experiences as to the extent of whether or not; prices do influence my buying pattern of groceries in retail stores in Dublin.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.
- I understand that signed consent forms will be retained in accordance with the NCI's Data Retention Policy which stipulates that thesis or dissertation of this nature is deposited in NORMA, the College's Institutional Repository through the College's Library. This would be the period of the dissertation's result's confirmation by the Examination Board.
- I understand that a copy of the questionnaire I answered, in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalization, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

N.B: This questionnaire is drafted for the study: “Price and Consumers’ Patronage of Groceries in Dublin Retail Stores”. The answers provided will help in understanding whether or not, there is a relationship between prices that groceries are being sold and consumers’ purchase pattern of such groceries in retail stores. The study is a requirement for the completion of a postgraduate degree programme (Masters of Science Degree) in Entrepreneurship.

If you have any question, clarification or an observation to make regarding any aspect of the questionnaire, you can contact either me as the researcher or my supervisor through the details provided below:

Researcher: Nurudeen Oyewole

Degree: Msc Entrepreneurship

Contact E-mail: nurudeenoyewole@gmail.com

Supervisor: Michelle Ahern

Contact: Michelle.Ahern@ncirl.ie

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher: NURUDEEN OYEWOLE ----- Date 17th July, 2020 ----

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

Kindly tick appropriately, the option considers as the right response to the question asked, where necessary.

### **SECTION A**

#### **Demography**

- (1) Age (a) 18-27 (b) 28-37 (c) 38- 47 (d) 48- 57 (e) 58-67 (f) 68 and above
- (2) Gender (a) Male (b) Female (c) Other
- (3) Education. Kindly tick only on your highest qualification. (a) Secondary School (Junior Certificate) (b) Secondary School (Leaving Certificate) (c) College/ University Undergraduate (d) College/University Graduate (f) Post-Graduate

- (4) Marital Status (a) Single (b) Married (c) Divorced (d) Widow(er) (e) Other
- (5) Occupation. Kindly pick one option (a) Student (b) Self-employed (c) Paid Employment (d) Unemployed

## **SECTION B**

### **Price and Patronage Pattern**

6. Do you shop in Dublin supermarket(s)? (a) Yes (b) No
- 7a. If your answer is No in 6 above, you do not need to answer subsequent questions ()
- 7b. If your answer is Yes in 6 above, how often do you buy groceries in a supermarket?
- (a) Seven days a week
  - (b) Six days a week
  - (c) Five days a week
  - (d) Four days a week
  - (e) Three days a week
  - (f) Two days a week
  - (g) One day a week
  - (h) Occasionally
- Other
8. Which one of these Supermarkets do you patronize most? Note: Just one option is all that is needed to be picked. If your choice supermarket is not listed below, kindly type the name in the option, "other".
- (a) SuperValu
  - (b) Tesco
  - © Dunnes
  - (d) Lidl
  - (e) I patronize whichever one I come across
  - (g) Other
9. How much time in minutes do you spend shopping a week? Kindly pick one option.
- (a) 10 minutes
  - (b) 20 minutes
  - © 30 minutes

- (d) 40 minutes
- (e) 50 minutes
- (f) One hour

10. How much time in minutes of your shopping time do you spend considering prices? Kindly pick one option.

- (a) 1-3 minutes
- (b) 4-6 minutes
- (c) 7-9 minutes
- (d) 10 minutes and above

**Questions 11-16. Kindly rate how regularly you buy the following food-type groceries. Kindly note: [1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Frequently and Very Frequently].**

S/N	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
11	Breads (Buns, White or Brown, Brioche etc)					
12	Dairy (Yogurt, Ice Cream, Milk, Cheese, etc)					
13	Juices (Blueberry, Watermelon, Canberry, Orange etc)					
14	Cereal (Corn flakes, Coco puffs, Oats, Choco flakes etc)					
15	Chocolates (Milk, White, Dark, etc)					
16	Biscuits (Custard Creams, Digestives, Rich Teas, Ginger nuts etc)					

17. Does the food-type grocery you purchase influence your consideration of the importance of the price?

- (a) Yes (b) No (c) Indifference

**Questions 18-23: Kindly rate how you will react if there was a twenty per cent increase in the price of the following categories of food-type groceries. Kindly note: [1- No purchase improvement, 2- Slightly improved purchase, 3- Moderately improved purchase, 4- Substantially improved purchase, 5- Completely improved purchase]**

S/N	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
18	Breads (Buns, White or Brown, Brioche etc)					
19	Dairy (Yogurt, Ice Cream, Milk, Cheese, etc)					
20	Juices (Blueberry, Watermelon, Canberry, Orange etc)					
21	Cereal (Corn flakes, Coco puffs, Oats, Choco flakes etc)					
22	Chocolates (Milk, White, Dark, etc)					
23	Biscuits (Custard Creams, Digestives, Rich Teas, Ginger nuts etc)					

**Questions 24-29: Kindly rate how you will react if there was a twenty per cent decrease in the price of the following categories of food-type groceries. Kindly note: [1- No purchase**

improvement, 2- Slightly improved purchase, 3- Moderately improved purchase, 4- Substantially improved purchase, 5- Completely improved purchase]

S/N	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
24	Breads (Buns, White or Brown, Brioche etc)					
25	Dairy (Yogurt, Ice Cream, Milk, Cheese, etc)					
26	Juices (Blueberry, Watermelon, Canberry, Orange etc)					
27	Cereal (Corn flakes, Coco puffs, Oats, Choco flakes etc)					
28	Chocolates (Milk, White, Dark, etc)					
29	Biscuits (Custard Creams, Digestives, Rich Teas, Ginger nuts etc)					

30. Are you aware that same grocery item can have different price tags in different supermarkets?

(a) Yes (b) No

31. Will price affordability of groceries be a consideration for you in choosing among multiple supermarkets for patronage? (a) Yes (b) No (C) Indifference

**Questions 32-34: Kindly rank the following statements. Note: [1- Least important, 2- Unimportant, Indifference, 4- Important, 5- Absolutely Important]**

S/N	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
32	In your opinion, do lower prices of groceries motivate patronage of a retail store?					
33	In your opinion, do higher prices of groceries discourage patronage of a retail store?					
34	In your opinion, does patronage of a retail store be about special offers it has on groceries?					

35. Will you rather consider other factors aside groceries' prices in your choice of supermarket?

(a) Yes (b) No

**Questions 36-38: Kindly rank the following statements based on other factors of consideration for supermarket patronage? Note: [1- Least important, 2- Unimportant, Indifference, 4- Important, 5- Absolutely Important].**

S/N	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
36	In your own opinion, will the brand of particular grocery items being sold at a particular retail store, motivate your patronage?					

37	In your opinion, will you patronise a supermarket for groceries because you can easily access it?					
38	(38) In your opinion, will you patronise a supermarket because of the quality of its groceries?					

39. If there are other factors that influence your patronage of a supermarket, kindly state here.

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40. Has the Covid-19 pandemic had any impact on your supermarket patronage? (a) Yes (b) No

41. Would you now shop in a store that you originally perceived to charge higher prices because of the safety and hygiene measures they have introduced in trying to combat Covid 19? (a) Yes (b) No

26. Does lower price of grocery item means it is of low quality? (a) Most times (b) Sometimes (c) Not at all

27. Will you buy a higher price grocery item in its belief of a superior quality? (a) Most times (b) Sometimes (c) Not at all