

Exploring the Challenges and Possibilities of Introducing Korean Alcoholic Beverage 'Soju' to the Irish Market

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Abstract

This study examines the potential and challenges of entering the Irish market with the Korean traditional alcoholic beverage Soju. The study uses a quantitative approach, relying on data drawn from a survey conducted on 80 individuals between 20s and 40s currently living in Ireland. The results suggest relatively high awareness among the target group; 71.3% of the surveyed had heard of Soju, while 65.8% had tried it. Important factors in the purchasing decision include price, taste, and availability, with the most effective promotional strategies identified as discount offers and free samples.

The barriers identified to the product are a lack of consumer awareness, high price points, and competition with established brands. Hence, there is a need for comprehensive marketing strategies and strategic partnerships with local distributors to enhance Soju's market penetration. This research underscores that understanding consumer behaviour and preferences is important for a company as it leads to focused marketing efforts.

The dissertation concludes that there is considerable potential for Soju in the Irish market, especially among young adults who are open to embracing new drinks. However, the issues identified must be managed through effective marketing strategies and appropriate consideration during strategic planning to ensure successful entry and establishment in any foreign market. The findings of the study contribute to understanding how traditional alcoholic beverages can enter new markets, offering practical recommendations on consumer behaviour analysis, marketing strategies, and global business strategies.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mom.
Without your unwavering support and unconditional love, I could not complete this.
Your endless love and belief in me kept me going forward when I felt like giving up.
Thank you for everything and love you.

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List of Figures

FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF ALCOHOL CONSUMED IN IRELAND FROM 2015 TO 2022 (CONWAY, 2023).....	17
FIGURE 2. RESEARCH ONION (SAUNDERS <i>ET AL.</i> , 2012)	36
FIGURE 3. ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION BY AGE AND GENDER	47
FIGURE 4. FREQUENCY OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION	50
FIGURE 5. ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE PREFERENCE	51
FIGURE 6. ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMOUNT A MONTH	52
FIGURE 7: AWARENESS OF SOJU	53
FIGURE 8: EXPERIENCE OF TRYING SOJU	53
FIGURE 9: FIRST IMPRESSION OF SOJU	54
FIGURE 10: SOURCES OF AWARENESS ABOUT SOJU	55
FIGURE 11: PURCHASING FACTORS	57
FIGURE 12: THE EXPECTED PRICE OF SOJU	58
FIGURE 13: PREFERRED PROMOTION OF SOJU.....	59
FIGURE 14: PREFERRED SETTINGS FOR SOJU	60
FIGURE 15: CHALLENGES OF INTRODUCING SOJU	61

List of Tables

TABLE 1: CRONBACH'S COEFFICIENT ALPHA RESULTS FOR THE SURVEY	49
TABLE 2: DETAIL ON PERCEPTION OF SOJU AMONG RESPONDENTS	56

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Submission of Thesis and Dissertation.....	3
Acknowledgements	4
List of Figures	5
List of Tables	5
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
2.1 Introduction.....	9
2.2 Soju: The Traditional Spirits in South Korea	10
2.3 The benefits of global trade between Ireland-South Korea	11
2.4 The Korean wave (K-wave) and its impact on global consumer behaviour ..	15
2.5 Current Alcohol Beverage Market in Ireland	16
2.6 Business Development	18
2.6.1 Market Dynamics and Entry Strategy	18
2.6.2 Emphasising Quality and Authenticity.....	19
2.6.3 Consumer Behaviour and Market Segmentation	20
2.6.4 Initial Market Performance and Continuous Evaluation	21
2.6.5 Building Brand Loyalty	22
2.6.6 Leveraging Digital Marketing and E-commerce	23
2.6.7 Regulatory Compliance	24
2.6.8 Case Studies and Best Practices	25
2.7 Difficulties	27
2.7.1 Consumer Behaviour	27
2.7.2 Government Restrictions.....	28
2.7.3 Market-driven Factors.....	29
2.7.4 External Factors	30
2.8 Conclusion	31
Chapter 3: Research Questions and Objectives	34
3.1 Research Aim.....	34
3.2 Research Question	34
3.3 Hypothesis.....	34
3.4 Research Objectives.....	35
Chapter 4: Methodology	36

4.1	Introduction.....	36
4.2	Research Philosophy	37
4.3	Research Approach and Method.....	39
4.4	Research Strategy and Design.....	41
4.5	Research Instrument.....	41
4.6	Data Collection	42
4.7	Data Analysis.....	43
4.8	Ethical Considerations	43
4.9	Limitations	44
Chapter 5: Analysis & Findings.....		46
5.1	Introduction & Key Findings.....	46
5.2	Demographic	47
5.3	Internal Consistency.....	48
5.4	Descriptive Statistics	49
5.4.1	Alcoholic Beverage Consumption patterns and preferences	49
5.4.2	Awareness and Preference of Soju in Ireland	52
5.4.3	Marketing Strategies.....	57
Chapter 6: Results Discussion.....		63
6.1	Introduction.....	63
6.2	Discussion of Findings	63
6.3	Limitations of Study.....	65
Chapter 7: Conclusion & Recommendations.....		67
7.1	Conclusion.....	67
7.2	Recommendations for Future Research	68
References.....		70
Appendix.....		78

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Ireland, the alcoholic beverage business is one of the most important industries. The CSO data from published National Accounts 2022 indicates that Consumption of Personal Income at Current Market Prices on alcoholic beverages was €2,800 million in 2022. Diageo alone, the company owns Guinness, employs 62,000 people and produces around €2 billion in tax revenue annually from the production and retail of alcohol, in addition to approximately €1 billion in drinks exports (Foley, 2017). Also, drinking has a significant cultural and political place in Ireland. Ireland ranked sixth with 11.9 litres of alcohol consumed per capita compared to the European average of 10.7 litres. A report by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (2013) stated that Irish people are heavy alcohol consumers. Among them, the share of distilled liquor gradually increased from 18.7% in 2015 to 23.2% in 2022. The share of wine and beer slightly decreased from 27.7% and 47% in 2015, respectively, to 26.7% and 43.5% in 2022 (Conway, 2023).

Made using traditional Korean methods, Soju has a rich cultural heritage and a unique composition that sets it apart from other spirits (Park, 2021). Although Soju is popular around the world, it has not been introduced into the Irish market. This work is intended to explore the feasibility and challenges a Soju product may face upon introduction to Ireland. A successful market entry strategy can be put in place by understanding what the consumers want, their levels of awareness, and purchase determinants. Apart from identification, it also helps specify possible barriers or challenges so that strategies to overcome them can be formulated.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter of this dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the feasibility and strategic opportunities for introducing the traditional Korean alcoholic beverage Soju into the Irish market. This study will be conducted strictly from a business perspective. Considering the economic benefits that can be gained from international trade, it is worthwhile to conduct research to analyse evaluate, and predict the potential effects of introducing soju to the Irish market.

The main purpose of this literature review is to define Soju, exploring its cultural significance in South Korea and its potential as an export product. Examining the benefits of global trade between South Korea and Ireland highlights the strategic and economic advantages that can be leveraged through such international partnerships. Additionally, this chapter explores various theories related to international business, consumer behaviour, cultural adaptation, and strategic management. These theoretical frameworks are important for providing a comprehensive understanding of the market dynamics and strategies needed to successfully introduce Soju to the Irish market. The review will include an analysis of the current alcohol market in Ireland, the impact of the Korean Wave on global consumer behaviour, and the challenges and opportunities associated with business development in this context.

This chapter seeks to fill in knowledge gaps and create opportunities by integrating the existing literature. These will provide direction for the research methodology and offer a solid basis to evaluate whether introducing Soju to the Irish market is feasible. The insights gained through this literature review will guide the follow-up chapter and contribute to developing effective marketing and distribution strategies.

2.2 Soju: The Traditional Spirits in South Korea

First and foremost, it is essential to define 'Soju' for the purpose of this study. It is the representative distilled alcoholic beverage in South Korea.

Soju (Korean: 소주; Chinese character: 燒酒), 'So' means to burn, and 'Ju' is a Sino-Korean word meaning alcohol. The term 'soju,' meaning 'burned liquor,' likely originated from the traditional method of distilling the beverage using fire.

This traditional Korean alcoholic drink is one of the most popular alcoholic beverages in Korea. Soju is traditionally, distilled liquor produced by saccharifying grains or starchy raw materials and then distilling it continuously in a pot still (Choi, Kim and Lee, 2022). It is typically clear and has an alcohol content ranging from 12% to 53% alcohol by volume (ABV). Its historical roots extend back centuries, originally crafted from rice. however, contemporary versions may utilise alternative grains like barley or wheat to reduce production expenses. In Korean culture, Soju holds cultural significance and is often enjoyed during meals and festive events.

2.3 The benefits of global trade between Ireland-South Korea

When a business moves beyond domestic business and seeks to expand overseas, it tends to become more efficient, such as increased productivity or increased sales. In terms of this study dealing with trade between South Korea and Ireland, it is important to address the benefits for both countries from this trade. In this section, the researcher will examine the viability of conducting business between the two nations along with the strategies that are required and their potential advantages. In addition, will explore the benefits of global trade between Korea and Ireland to highlight the strategic and economic advantages of such trade.

Exports from South Korea tend to be mainly towards major markets like China and the United States (Kotra, 2023). Compared to these two countries, trade with Europe started relatively late. According to the European Commission, in 2011, the EU and South Korea applied for a free trade agreement. As a result, there are no customs duties on nearly all products (98.7%). It also abolished its non-tariff barriers (NTB) in the exporting of the European Union's products, more particularly on automobiles, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and chemicals. The bilateral trade and investment have surged remarkably since the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement entered into force on July 1, 2011. Bilateral goods trade amounted to 107.3 billion euros in 2021, thus increasing by a remarkable 70.8% compared to the year 2011. Korea is the 9th largest export destination for the EU in goods, and the EU is Korea's 3rd largest export market.

It is necessary to study whether Ireland can be a new export country for South Korea. Looking at the relationship between Ireland and Korea beyond the EU, diplomatic relations started in 1983. Irish imports from Korea have experienced a significant fivefold increase over the past decade. Concurrently, Irish exports to Korea have seen substantial growth, rising from €590 million to €901 million in the last five years, marking a notable increase of 53%. Also, In the year 2022 alone, Korea exported vehicles worth €430 million to Ireland (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment [DETE], 2023). Notably, medical and pharmaceutical products emerged as Ireland's largest category of exports to Korea in 2022, amounting to €425 million. The bilateral trade between Ireland and Korea reached an impressive figure, surpassing €5 billion, reflecting the total trade in goods and services for the year 2021 (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment [DETE], 2023). In November 2023, the Irish government launched a program called 'Team Ireland Trade Mission' to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Korea. The ultimate purpose of this program is to expand trade with Asia beyond Europe and the Americas. According to Irish Minister Simon Coveney, for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, these are the benefits of bilateral trade; Korea can expect to see its global exports expand, using Ireland as its gateway to entry into Europe, as many multinational corporations have done (O'Donovan, 2023). Whereas, Ireland can have partnerships with large Korean global companies (e.g., Samsung, LG, Hyundai, and Kia) to innovate their Irish counterparts. Korea is also expected to become a new market for Irish beef exports, as the world's largest importer of food. Such agreements will help the parties to cooperate better and create avenues for importers and exporters to access each other's countries. The European Commission reports that the EU imports foodstuffs,

beverages, and tobacco valued at €179 million from the year 2020. It steadily increased to €236 million in 2021, to €311 in the year 2022, and to €316 million in the year 2023. The combined efforts, strengths, and value chains of the two nations further foster the creation of new trade opportunities for companies in each country.

EU-South Korean agreement is underpinned by geographical indications (GIs) for wines, spirits, agricultural products, and foodstuffs (European Commission, 2008). GIs are a kind of intellectual property that labels goods as coming from some area where a quality, reputation, or other characteristic relevant to the good is essentially attributed to its geographic origin (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2021).

GIs play a crucial role in protecting the unique qualities of regional products, supporting local economies, and preserving cultural heritage (Higgins, 2018).

The agreement list specifies one Korean liquor product ‘Jindo Hongju (Korean; 진도홍주)’. Hongju is similar to Soju, but a different beverage. Irish whiskey and

Korean Jindo Hongju are both recognized under this agreement, ensuring that these products are protected from imitation and misuse of their names (GIs from non-EU countries protected in the EU, 2021). This recognition helps maintain the quality and authenticity of these traditional products while facilitating smoother trade between the two regions. For Soju, leveraging similar protections and ensuring compliance with GI provisions can enhance its market positioning in Ireland, assuring consumers of its authenticity and quality.

These efforts, combined with the strengths and value chains of both nations, create new trade opportunities. With the increasing interest in Korean culture and the increasing demand for different types of alcoholic drinks, Soju has a lot of potential to

be exported to Ireland. With the GI status, Soju will also ensure Irish consumers that it is authentic and of good quality, being different from other brands of alcoholic beverages. This protection prevents counterfeits from entering the market, thus protecting the reputation of traditional Korean Soju (Higgins, 2018). Additionally, GIs can fetch a higher price and attract consumers willing to pay a premium for a product that is genuinely made. This price premium extends economic benefits to local producers in Korea, supporting sustainable development and preserving traditional production methods (European Commission, 2024). In addition to economic benefits, GI status can serve as a powerful marketing tool, emphasising Soju's unique characteristics tied to its geographical origin. This underlines the traditional roots and the methods in its production and likely attracts many consumers who are looking for exotic and authentic experiences towards GI, making it a selling point for the brands (Higgins, 2018). There is then adequate information and, therefore, the facts, legally on the GI protection observed. This fact means that marketing and selling Soju would not result in court conflicts. Successful GI protection requires cooperation with the regulatory authorities in various jurisdictions and that all parties adhere to international agreements, such as the TRIPS Agreement (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2021).

This way, even though trade between the two countries is in the preliminary stages now, there is a possibility for exporting not only beef but also food in general and looking forward to possibly extending the sale of alcoholic beverages.

2.4 The Korean wave (K-wave) and its impact on global consumer behaviour

Hallyu, also known as the Korean wave, means the spread of South Korean culture throughout the world; including music, television series(drama), movies, fashion, and food. Not only has the K-wave changed entertainment and fashion, but it has played a vital role in consumer behaviour across the globe for a number of products, from food and beverage to fashion. (Reza, 2022). The term "Korean Wave" was first named by Chinese journalists in the late 1990s, referring to the rapid growth of Korean pop culture in China. Since then, the popularity of Korean culture has spread this wave from Asia to Western countries. Social media platforms and streaming services were the key to spreading Korean content around the world, allowing fans from different cultures to interact with and enjoy Korean culture (Jin, 2016; Kim and Ryoo, 2007).

The K-wave has had a significant impact on consumer behaviour, especially among young people who are frequently influenced by global pop culture trends. The rise in popularity of K-drama actors and K-pop idols has led to an increasing demand for Korean food, cosmetics, and fashion. Demand for products encouraged or emphasised by Korean celebrities in the media frequently rises, demonstrating the strong influence of cultural factors on consumer preferences (Jung, 2011; Lie, 2012). Businesses around the world started using the K-wave to market their products (Oh and Park, 2012). In the case of Soju, promotional campaigns can use the popularity of K-pop idols and K-drama actors to create strong cultural associations and attract fans Marketing strategies include Korean celebrity collaboration, hosting Korean

cultural events, and consumers interested in Korean culture. It can also include using social media platforms to engage several case studies to confirm the success of using K-waves in marketing strategies. For example, the global expansion of Korean cosmetics brand Innisfree, which uses K-pop idols as brand ambassadors, and the international popularity of Korean food through K-drama product placements, illustrate how cultural influence can drive market success (Kim and Ryoo, 2007). This example provides valuable insight into aligning marketing efforts with the K-wave and introducing soju to new markets.

The K-wave represents a cultural phenomenon that has a significant impact on marketing strategies and consumer behaviour all around the world. By understanding and leveraging the influence of the Korean Wave, businesses can effectively introduce and promote Korean products, such as Soju, in international markets. The increasing global appeal of Korean culture provides an opportunity to create strong cultural connections and enhance product appeal.

2.5 Current Alcohol Beverage Market in Ireland

The most important factor when exporting a product to a new market is to understand the current situation and demand in that market. Therefore, this study should examine the current Irish alcoholic beverage market.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the European region has the highest proportion of drinkers and the highest alcohol consumption in the world. In 2019, in Ireland total per capita (15+) alcohol consumption in litres of pure alcohol

was 12.75 litres. A World Health Organization report (2018) states that the total per capita alcohol consumption in the world population aged 15 years or over amounts to drinking an average of 6.4 litres of pure alcohol per year. Through this, it can be seen that the consumption of alcohol per capita in Ireland is nearly twice the global average.

As per the Alcohol consumption share in Ireland in 2015-2022 (Conway, 2023), beer accounts for almost half. After that, wine, spirits, and cider are next in order. In 2015, the spirits rate was 18.7%. In turn, it gradually increased to 19.8% in 2017, and 23.2% in 2022. Whereas, wine consumption decreased from 27.7% in 2015 to 26.7% in 2022, and the figure became similar to that of spirits. This can be interpreted as the demand for spirits steadily increasing in Ireland.

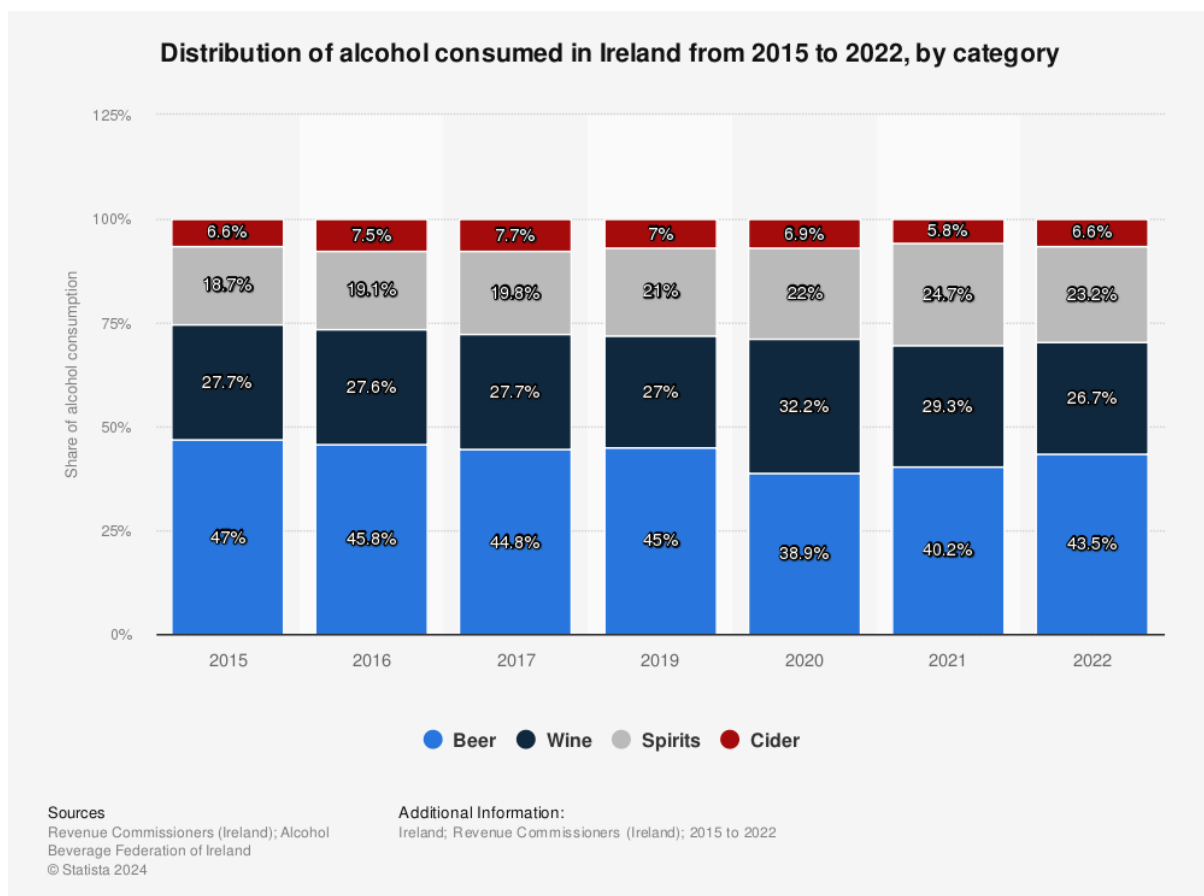


Figure 1. Distribution of alcohol consumed in Ireland from 2015 to 2022 (Conway, 2023)

Furthermore, Euromonitor International (2022) reported that Irish consumers are more open to trying new and exotic alcoholic beverages compared to the past. Also, the report shows that the Irish market has seen a rise in the consumption of premium and niche spirits, driven by a consumer base that values unique and high-quality products (Euromonitor International, 2022). It is in this context of openness to new experiences that Soju has been introduced, offering a unique taste and cultural experience. Therefore, based on such market dynamics, the introduction of Soju could be an approach taken to help satisfy the growing Irish consumers' increasingly changing preferences for new and diverse options in their alcoholic beverage choices. Given that the trend in spirit consumption is on the rise and the demand for new and exotic alcoholic beverages, Soju has huge potential in such a competitive market as Ireland.

2.6 Business Development

The introduction of Soju into the Irish market will be successful based on the formulation of a comprehensive business development strategy. This strategy must involve the understanding of market dynamics, the development of strategic partnerships, the high quality of its products and authenticity, effective marketing strategies, and constant evaluation of the market's performance. An elaborate plan to enable the successful penetration and growth of Soju in the Irish market is further discussed in the following section.

2.6.1 Market Dynamics and Entry Strategy

Understanding the market dynamics of the Irish alcoholic beverage sector is crucial for the successful entry of Soju. As referred to earlier, Ireland has a strong desire for alcohol consumption. According to Doyle, Mongan and Galvin (2024), the average household expenditure on alcohol in Ireland was around €20.62 per week in 2015–16. Of this amount, €10.56 is expended on alcoholic beverages drunk at home while €10.06 is spent on alcoholic beverages consumed outside of the home. This level of spending indicates a very good market for low-priced alcoholic drinks. In the Asian market in Ireland, soju is sold at approximately €8 per bottle, hence proving to be cheap and affordable.

The formation of local distributor and retailer strategic partnerships is key for effectively entering the Irish market. Macnamara and Gregory (2018) emphasise the importance of strategic communication and partnerships in enhancing market reach and credibility. Currently, soju is only available in a limited number of Asian markets in Ireland. To maximise the sales of soju, collaborating with established distributors who understand local market dynamics can facilitate better shelf placement, more effective distribution channels, and increased visibility in bars and restaurants. These partnerships can also help navigate regulatory requirements and cultural nuances, ensuring a smoother market entry.

2.6.2 Emphasising Quality and Authenticity

Product quality and product authenticity are critical points in gaining consumer trust and differentiating Soju from a range of available spirits. Cui and Wu (2016) argued that quality maintenance and assurance are essential for achieving product success in international markets. For Soju, this means adhering to hygienic brewing methods

and emphasising the spirit's cultural legacy. It proves to be effective not only for those consumers who want authentic products but also in building an image of a dependable brand. Quality is ensured by strictly following production standards and carrying out constant quality control measures. This involves sourcing high-quality and original ingredients, maintaining hygienic brewing processes, and regularly testing the final product to meet international standards. High quality and originality assure users of the authenticity of the wares, thus attracting prospective buyers.

2.6.3 Consumer Behaviour and Market Segmentation

To target the right audience, it is essential to understand consumer behaviour and segment the market successfully. For example, a study by Dietrich *et al.* (2015) provides evidence that segmentation using demographic, psychographic, and behavioural variables can reveal meaningful consumer subgroups that might respond diversely to marketing interventions. For Soju, potential market segments in Ireland could include young adults, casual drinkers, and culturally curious consumers. This is because the younger generation tends to be more receptive to newer products on the market (Jang, Kim and Bonn, 2011).

Through market segmentation, the company can then target their efforts to market in a manner that will be more appealing to the specific demographic. For instance, the young professional may be more attracted to Soju's cocktail ingredient versatility, while casual drinkers might find it commendable for its low price and relatively easy availability. Culturally curious consumers may be attracted to the heritage and storytelling surrounding K-culture. Targeting these kinds of segments with

personalised marketing communication may drive up consumer interaction and the sales of Soju.

A detailed understanding of consumer behaviour also involves analysing purchasing patterns and consumption habits. Research by Ong, *et al.* (2023) emphasises that factors like taste, quality, and even the associated cultural values could play a crucial part in a proper market segmentation study related to the foods of Korea. Again, unique flavour profiles and a rich cultural heritage also will help Soju impact many customer segments in Ireland.

2.6.4 Initial Market Performance and Continuous Evaluation

The initial months after launching Soju in the Irish market are critical for its overall success. Early market performance may have long-term ripples on eventual success (Cooper, 2016). Therefore, carrying out the launch with a strong marketing campaign is necessary. This campaign may comprise promotional events, free sampling, and limited-time offers, which would attract early adopters and result in viral marketing.

Moreover, continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms should be established to monitor consumer responses and adapt marketing strategies accordingly. This may include surveys, studies using focus groups, and monitoring social media to capture perceptions and preferences among consumers. Periodic evaluations help Soju producers make sound decisions and improve strategies to better meet consumer needs and market demand.

As Hosseini, Soltani and Mehdizadeh (2018) find that early market performance should be closely monitored to identify issues and opportunities. By continuously monitoring sales data and consumer feedback, Soju producers can quickly adjust their marketing and distribution strategies to improve results. This proactive approach is relevant in maintaining momentum to sustain long-term success.

Ma, Wu and Liu (2021) also postulated that the fitness between technology management and technological capability can have a significant impact on new product development performance. This coordinated effort would leave no loopholes in the strategic plan for business development, ensuring all aspects are aligned towards the goal of successful market penetration and growth.

2.6.5 Building Brand Loyalty

Establishing brand loyalty within the Irish market could have a long-term effect. If consumers connect with the brand in the proper ways, they might become loyal to the brand and are likely to make repeated purchases. Brand loyalty (BL) is one of the crucial elements that influence consumer buying behaviour regarding alcoholic beverages (Temesi, Lakner and Unger-Plasek, 2023). These brand-related behaviours can significantly impact the frequency and extent of Soju purchases. Temesi *et al.* (2023) highlight that while brand loyalty and brand relevance in the category do not directly influence purchase frequency, brand schematicity does. This indicates that consumers who are more brand-centric are likely to purchase Soju more frequently. Therefore, marketing strategies should aim to increase brand schematicity by emphasising Soju's unique brand attributes and cultural significance.

This can be developed through loyalty programmes, exclusive events, and personalised marketing. For example, a loyalty programme that rewards repeat buying with discounts or access to product previews will encourage consumers to remain engaged with the brand. Exclusive events for these customers will also give them a sense of belonging, thereby creating viral referrals.

2.6.6 Leveraging Digital Marketing and E-commerce

Marketing and e-commerce, among other approaches, will help in reaching out to a wider audience in efforts to escalate sales in this digital era. With marketing that just involves the use of information that is passed on digitally, it costs less to make use of that. Some of the marketing strategies that might be applied for Soju may include social media advertising, content marketing, and collaboration with influencers.

The e-commerce platform would serve as a secondary sales channel to support retail distribution. Now that everyone is shopping online for most of the products, having Soju readily available online would increase the market reach. Amazon and other speciality alcohol delivery services, even direct-to-consumer sales through a Soju-branded website, are all options on the table.

As Paul (2019) also affirms, the key to making an international marketing strategy successful is understanding and adjusting to the features of emerging markets. This should include cultural, political, economic, and legal features that are also pertinent to the deployment of digital marketing and e-commerce strategies into new markets. Besides, studies conducted by Critchlow *et al.* (2016) have shown that digital alcohol

marketing has a significant impact on drinking among young adults. This clearly illustrates what a great force of influence digital marketing creates on consumer behaviour, thereby necessitating the need for very strong and well-crafted digital marketing strategies for Soju. With targeted digital campaigns and engaging content, Soju can in effect create a very strong brand presence and consumer loyalty in the digital marketplace.

Also, research by Liang and Frösén (2020) suggests that the alignment between marketing controls and market-focused learning capability can significantly enhance firm performance. For Soju, this could involve implementing effective marketing controls that improve the ability to collect, interpret, and utilise market-related information, thereby creating personalized experiences that highlight the cultural and historical aspects of the spirit, making consumers feel more connected to the brand.

2.6.7 Regulatory Compliance

The regulatory compliance of Soju's introduction to the Irish market is a matter of importance. The local regulations are significant in justifying legality in the avoidance of legal disputes and gaining consumer trust. Regulatory compliance of the alcohol industry, in general, is important according to Mialon et al. (2016). It includes accurate labelling, marketing restrictions, and compliance with production standards. This makes the environment for regulation in Soju complex for any producer who wishes to be compliant.

Firstly, there is a need for labelling requirements for clear alcohol content, ingredients, and health warning labelling. Good labelling will not only meet the required legal standards but also build consumer confidence and provide transparency about the product. Secondly, marketing strategies have to be consistent with local advertising regulations, which are in many instances meant to limit alcohol promotion to specific time frames and limited media sources so as not to reach underage audiences. It is possible to collaborate with local legal experts to make sure all the marketing campaigns are developed within the scope and avoid possible actions in court, thus developing a responsible brand image.

2.6.8 Case Studies and Best Practices

Looking at some of the case studies on international brands and market entry can be useful in deciding the strategy for Soju. For instance, how the Japanese traditional alcoholic beverage 'Sake' entered Western markets also has salient lessons in cultural storytelling, strategic partnerships, and consistency in quality. The same holds with certification and authenticity for Mexican tequila to enter the world.

Japanese Sake has found its way into the Western market through its emphasis on cultural heritage and traditional brewing. Lee and Shin (2015) reiterated that Sake producers effectively use the instrument of cultural storytelling to sensitise their consumers to the heritage and meaning of Sake in Japanese culture. With a tradition of almost 300 years, Kida Brewery easily follows up on the element of tradition and the intense methods of brewing handed down from generation to generation. This is a narrative that deepens not only consumer appreciation but also loyalty to the

brand. The process of storytelling involves descriptions of the brewing process, the uniqueness of ingredients, and the history of the brewery and its products. These stories are shared via such vehicles as tours of breweries, tastings, and digital media, creating an immersive experience for the audience. Besides, the Japanese government has been supporting Sake's marketing around the world through the "Enjoy Japanese Kokushu Project," which publicises sake as a cultural bridge. It has effectively supported Sake's internationalisation through deregulation and quality improvement by the government.

Another success story is that of Mexican tequila in international markets. Tequila producers have monetised the "Tequila" appellation, authenticating that the product is produced under stringent conditions and in particular localities within Mexico. The certificate has enabled tequila to gain a reputation as a premium product with firm cultural and geographical characteristics. Based on this, Bowen and Zapata (2009) claim that tequila producers have engaged in strategic alliances with international distributors and retailers to help them gain more market access. Marketing campaigns have, therefore, focused on the authenticity and quality of the tequila, sometimes even drawing upon traditional methods in its manufacture. Tequila is marketed through its historic and cultural nature in addition to the traditional production methods involving harvesting and processing agave plants.

By marketing these aspects of the tequila product, the producers have been able to differentiate their product from other spirits, achieving great loyalty from their consumers. At the same time, this appellation serves to protect the quality and the reputation of tequila so that consumers can be highly assured they are consuming

an authentic, high-quality product. With the adoption of best practices from the case studies, Soju producers will have a perfect market entry strategy to communicate the unique qualities of Soju and establish a strong brand presence in the Irish market.

2.7 Difficulties

Introducing Soju to the Irish market presents several challenges that must be carefully considered and addressed. These challenges can be broadly categorised into consumer behaviour, government restrictions, market-driven factors, and external factors.

2.7.1 Consumer Behaviour

One of the primary challenges is the cultural difference between South Korea and Ireland. In the case of Koreans, Soju is ingrained in their culture, often consumed during social gatherings. However, for Irish consumers, the cultural gap will impede acceptance because the significance of this product to Koreans is not well understood. Overcoming this cultural gap requires significant education and marketing efforts to introduce Soju and its traditional consumption practices to Irish consumers. (Hofstede, 2011).

In other words, Soju is relatively unknown in the Irish market. The fact is, creating brand recognition and awareness is very significant but also quite challenging. According to Keller (2003), one of the things that will highly determine consumer buying decisions is brand salience. If Soju does not have such strong brand recognition, it will have to compete in the market with some of the most established

local and international spirits. It is important to drive awareness and interest through effective marketing campaigns and strategic alliances with local influencers and establishments.

Alcohol preferences are deeply rooted in Irish consumers: beer, wine, whiskey, and gin. A report by Doyle *et al.*, (2024) placed whiskey and beer at the top of the list of most preferred alcoholic drinks by the Irish. In bringing a new entrant such as Soju into the market, it is important to consider these preferences as they may need to change. The unique taste profile of Soju may appeal to some segments but could be a barrier for others accustomed to different flavours and alcohol strengths.

2.7.2 Government Restrictions

Ireland has stringent regulations on the marketing, import, and distribution of alcoholic beverages. Adherence to these regulations is mandatory for seamless market entry and to avoid any legal issues (Mialon *et al.*, 2016). As stated above, this includes adhering to the expectations of the Irish government, such as product labelling requirements, marketing restrictions, and health warning requirements on alcoholic beverages.

Non-tariff barriers may still affect the importation of Soju, although most tariffs on products are eliminated by the EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement. These barriers include complex customs procedures, additional necessary documentation, and potential quotas (European Commission, 2024). Overcoming such barriers

requires thorough preparation and robust collaboration with trade experts and regulatory agencies.

Ireland has very strict laws on alcohol advertising, especially to protect younger audiences. The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 dictates limitations on where and how alcoholic drinks can be advertised (Oireachtas, 2018). These limitations only leave a few promotional avenues for Soju, necessitating creative advertisement strategies to reach the market effectively while remaining compliant with the law.

2.7.3 Market-driven Factors

The alcoholic beverages market in Ireland is competitive, with both internationally recognised spirits and prestigious local brands dominating shelf space (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2022). The organisation faces intense rivalry as it competes against established rivals such as Jameson, Bushmills, and international producers of gin and vodka. Industry analysis using Porter's Five Forces model reveals that "high industry rivalry and strong competitors can reduce the market share of new entrants" (Porter, 1980).

Critical to establishing the correct pricing strategy for Soju is ensuring it is competitive with other products while reflecting its exotic image. Balancing production and import costs with competitive pricing is challenging. As Nagle, Müller and Gruyaert (2023) have pointed out, the pricing strategy significantly influences market penetration and consumer perception. The effectiveness of the distribution network is a key foundation of market penetration. This can be achieved through

partnerships with local distributors and retailers in various outlets, as well as hospitality facilities.

However, gaining shelf space in retail stores and menu spots in bars and restaurants where established brands dominate can be difficult (Christopher, 2016). Efficient logistics and strong distributor relationships are crucial to overcoming these challenges.

2.7.4 External Factors

Increasing health consciousness among consumers and stringent health regulations will affect the alcohol market. The trend is developing towards low-alcohol and healthier beverage types, which may affect the positioning of Soju if it is not marketed properly. Gordon (2024) reported a cultural change in Irish pubs, where there is an increase in the number of consumers desiring low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks. It can align with these trends by ensuring that Soju's health benefits, such as low alcohol content compared to many other spirits, are highlighted.

Further challenges may also be encountered in changing social attitudes towards alcohol consumption. Driven by growing public health campaigns and wider social changes, there are now frequent examples of headlines in the print and electronic media concerning the negative health impacts of excessive alcohol consumption, such as the report by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (2013). It would be difficult to promote Soju with an attitude or in any way that implies it can be drunk excessively.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review in this chapter has, therefore, been successful in providing a general overview of the feasibility and strategic prospects for entering the Irish market by introducing the customary Korean alcoholic beverage Soju. Analysis of elements such as the cultural significance of Soju, international trade advantages, the Korean Wave, and characteristics of the modern Irish alcohol market revealed both the potential and potential challenges that would be faced by the business venture.

Soju holds a prominent place in Korean culture, deeply embedded in social rituals and traditions. This understanding becomes a vital part of positioning Soju not only as an alcoholic drink but also as a cultural experience within the Irish market. It may be attractive to consumers who are interested in exotics and authenticity if traditional brewing processes and unique characteristics of the beverage are emphasised.

The EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement strengthens the trade relations between South Korea and Ireland. It makes trade easy and cheaper by eliminating almost all tariffs and non-tariff barriers among trading partners. Protection under GIs assures authenticity and quality for products like Soju in the Irish market. These trade benefits show the strategic and economic benefits of the introduction of Soju to Ireland.

The global popularity of Korean culture has greatly influenced consumer behaviour worldwide. Leveraging this cultural wave in marketing strategies will make Soju increasingly appealing to younger demographics, who will consider it fashionable under these trends in global pop culture. There will be a lot of cultural association with Soju if Korean celebrities are used and Soju is included at Korean cultural events.

Analysis of the Irish alcohol market shows a high, growing demand for spirits, and increasing openness towards new and exotic beverages. This is a market opportunity for Soju. However, in order to be able to plan proper market entry strategies, it is important to understand how deeply the market is predisposed to local spirits like whiskey and beer. Tailored marketing and strategic positioning will be important to appeal to the wide tastes amongst Irish consumers.

It has enabled the adoption of a systematic way in which theoretical frameworks are utilised to test the competitive environment, locate opportunities and threats, and design strategic blueprints for market entry. A few essential strategies towards business development include quality and authenticity in products, strategic partnerships, and capitalising on digital marketing and e-commerce channels.

A few of the challenges being faced are cultural diversities, brand recognition, regulatory compliances, and competition with established brands. This will require a multilevel solution that deals with them: consumer education, compliance with local laws, competitive pricing, and effective distribution networks. The changing social

attitude towards alcohol and increasing demand for healthier options in beverages also require responsible marketing.

Therefore, the findings and insights from this literature review give a strong foundation for assessing the possibility of introducing Soju into the Irish market. The literature review has articulated key factors that will be used to inform the research methodology and, hence, the following chapters of this dissertation. Strategic recommendations have been developed from this review for practical implementation in market entry strategies to ensure a comprehensive, well-informed strategy for introducing Soju into the Irish market.

Chapter 3: Research Questions and Objectives

3.1 Research Aim

This research aims to evaluate the feasibility and strategic opportunities for introducing the traditional Korean alcoholic beverage, Soju, into the Irish market.

The reasons why Soju wants to expand its market beyond Korea to Ireland are as follows. The soju market in Korea is saturated. Also, the fertility rate in South Korea is constantly decreasing. Now in 2024, the total population of South Korea is 51.7 million, but it is expected to continue to decline to 51.3 million by 2030 and reach 36.2 million by 2072 (Jeong-Yoon, 2023). It means the population is expected to shrink by nearly half in just 50 years. It is necessary to venture into a new market and separate from the steadily declining Korean market. As mentioned in a literature review, Ireland is the country where drinking culture has developed. It can be an attractive market for South Korea.

3.2 Research Question

This research will address the strategic opportunities and challenges in expanding South Korea's alcoholic beverage soju exports to Ireland.

The central research question is as follows: "What are the main challenges to introducing the Korean alcoholic beverage 'soju' to the Irish market?"

3.3 Hypothesis

H1: Spirits have market potential in the Irish alcoholic beverage market.

H2: The decision to buy Soju in the Irish market is driven by awareness of the cultural significance of Soju.

H3: The demand for soju will be higher among young adults.

H4: Advertisement in social media is the most effective.

H5: The biggest obstacle to soju exports will be a lack of consumer awareness.

3.4 Research Objectives

Objective 1: To discover the benefits of global trade between Ireland and South Korea.

Objective 2: To investigate consumer behaviour, regulatory requirements and potential barriers to importing and marketing Soju in Ireland.

Objective 3: To analyse the consumption patterns and preferences for alcoholic beverages in Ireland.

Objective 4: To assess the current awareness, perception and preference of Soju among Irish consumers aged the 20s to 40s (young to middle-aged adults).

Objective 5: To discover which marketing strategies are suitable to enhance the sales of Soju in Ireland.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this section, the philosophical underpinnings that guide this research will be examined. This chapter will discuss the methods and methodology used to collect and analyse information in this study. To effectively address the research questions and objectives, the research onion model is utilised (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Figure 2, the research onion provides a systematic framework to understand and design the research process, comprising layers that include research philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons, techniques and procedures.

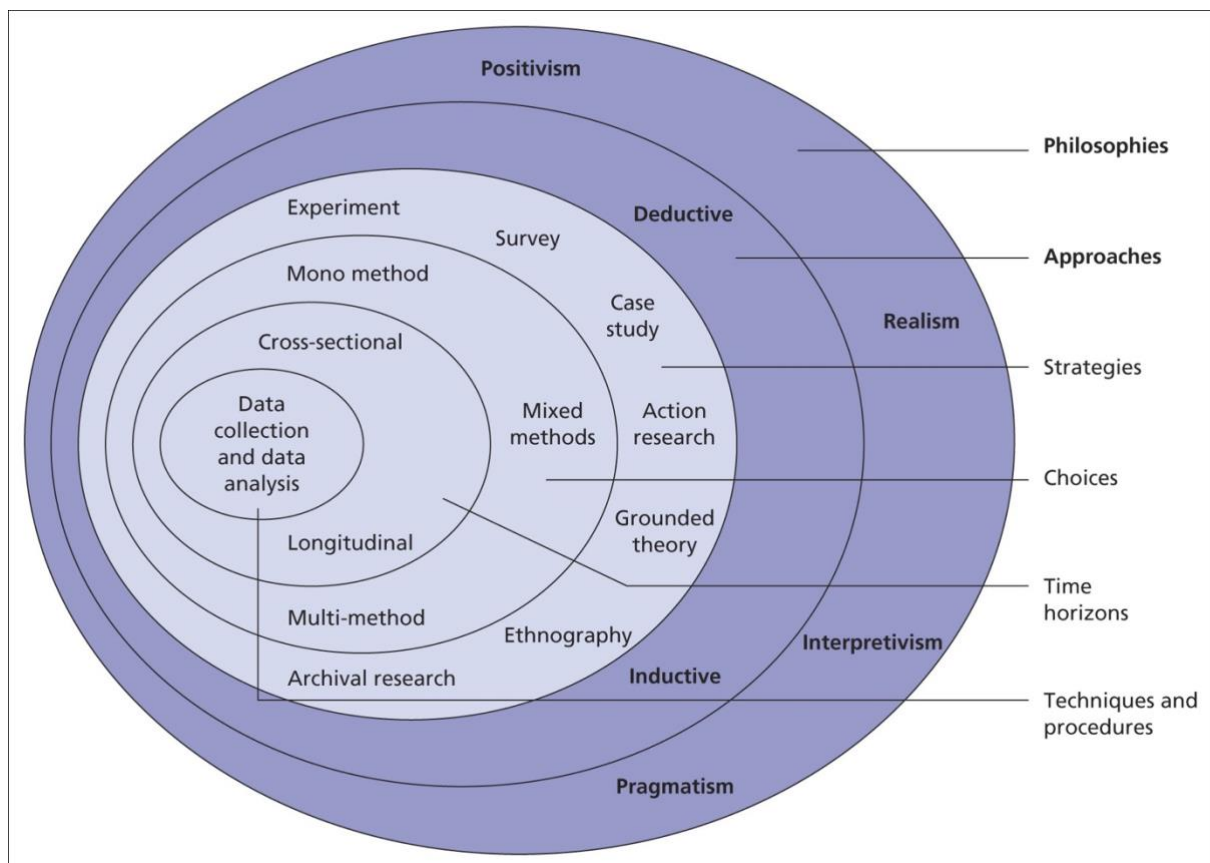


Figure 2. Research Onion (Saunders *et al.*, 2012)

4.2 Research Philosophy

This chapter outlines the research goals and objectives, the secondary research questions, and the methodological approach adopted in this study. Research philosophy is the first layer of the research onion (figure 2). According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), there are three major research assumptions; ontology, epistemology and axiology. Each of these assumptions is important to shaping the research approach, methodology, and overall framework of the study.

The first concept is ontology. As per Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2008), ontology is the most common debating point for researchers. It refers to the nature of reality and what can be known about it. In the context of this research, ontology can discuss the nature of the Irish market for Soju and the factors influencing its potential success.

Two principal ontological perspectives are offered by Saunders *et al.* (2012): first is objectivism, which holds that social phenomena and their meanings have a reality outside of the people who are involved with them. In this sense, the nature of the Irish alcoholic drink market, whether of its consumer taste or regulatory environment features, can be seen as existing on their terms and can, therefore, be put to test and analysed. This perspective would support the quantitative dimensions of this research because data related to market trends, consumer behaviour, and regulatory impacts will be collected and analysed to have the most objective conclusions.

Subjectivism, on the other hand, suggests that it is through social interaction that social phenomena, and their meanings, are constructed and therefore subjective.

This view would correlate with qualitative research components: interviews with industry experts or consumers, where subjective experience and interpretation are in place. For instance, it provides insights into the cultural acceptance of Soju and the perceived challenges and opportunities in the Irish market.

The second concept is epistemology. it is relevant to the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). It has two opposite views: positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). It addresses the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched.

Positivism advocates that knowledge should be interpreted from objective and measurable methods (Fisher and Buglear, 2010). It emphasises the use of scientific methods and empirical data to generate knowledge. This study adopts a positivist approach in its quantitative analysis of market data and consumer surveys. The objective behind this research is to collect numerical data and to find patterns that can help correlate and provide a reliable ground upon which one can understand the feasibility of introducing Soju into the Irish market. On the other hand, interpretivism claims to understand the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals, recognizing that social realities are constructed through these experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

This research appreciates the values of the research, particularly its objectivity in the analysis of the quantitative part. However, it also considers that the qualitative aspects of the study are inevitably shaped by the values and perspectives of the researcher. For example, the choice of survey questions, qualitative data analysis,

and the context in which the research is framed impacts the background, interest, and ethical considerations of the researcher.

This research adopts the positivist research philosophy, based on the assumption that there is an objective reality that can be measured and observed independently of the researcher (Adams, Khan, and Raeside, 2014). The positivist approach emphasises the application of scientific methods to obtain empirical data and create knowledge that is reliable, replicable, and generalizable across similar studies (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). The emphasis on empirical data and objective analysis aligns with the aim of providing implementable and strategic recommendations based on reliable and verifiable evidence.

4.3 Research Approach and Method

As discussed in section 4.2, this research adopts a positivist philosophy. The reason for choosing Positivism is that it emphasises objective measurement and the use of quantitative data, which aligns with the study's aim to evaluate the feasibility and strategic opportunities for introducing Soju to the Irish market (Fisher and Buglear, 2010).

The second layer of research onion is deductive and inductive. this research follows a deductive approach. This approach is suitable for testing hypotheses derived from existing theories and knowledge (Adams *et al.*, 2014). In addition, positivism and deductive reasoning are related to each other (Crowther and Lancaster, 2012). In this study, hypotheses about consumer behaviour, market potential, and regulatory

impacts are developed based on the literature review and are tested using collected data. The deductive approach ensures a structured methodology where specific observations are used to test the theoretical propositions.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), there are three research methods such as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. In this research, a quantitative research methodology is utilised to evaluate the feasibility and strategic opportunities for introducing the traditional Korean alcoholic beverage Soju into the Irish market. Quantitative techniques were chosen due to restrictions of time and limitations on research topics and commodities. This approach allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data, which is essential for drawing objective and generalised conclusions. This approach is a reliable way to collect significant quantitative data that can be investigated to address research questions. The analysis can be concluded based on the projected profitability of the foreign trade business. Also, quantitative research focuses on quantifying relationships, behaviours, and phenomena through the collection and analysis of numerical data. This study utilises primary quantitative data to investigate consumer awareness, preferences, and market dynamics related to Soju in Ireland by conducting five-minute self-questionnaires. The decision to employ a quantitative approach is driven by the need to analyse large datasets that provide statistical insights into consumer behaviour and market trends. This method is particularly suitable for addressing the research objectives, which include assessing awareness and perception of Soju, analysing consumption patterns, and identifying potential market segments.

4.4 Research Strategy and Design

A survey strategy is used for this research. As described by Saunders *et al.* (2012), the survey strategy is effective for collecting quantitative data from a large sample, allowing for statistical analysis and generalisation of the findings. In other words, a survey strategy opts for a large amount of data collection. Also, it tends to be quantitative research projects (Quinlan, 2011). This strategy is appropriate given the need to gather data on consumer preferences, intention to consume, and regulatory impacts related to the introduction of Soju in the Irish market. Surveys provide a systematic way to gather comparable data across different respondent groups, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the research questions.

4.5 Research Instrument

This research samples target individuals living in Ireland between the ages of 20s to 40s. This age group is selected because it is likely to purchase and consume exotic alcoholic beverages. It is based on the belief that adults, particularly young adults, are more open to trying new beverages and are influenced by factors such as marketing, social contexts, and personal preferences for novel and exotic products (Pechmann *et al.*, 2005).

The questionnaire was random sampling via various online platforms to maximise reach and participation. The target sample size was 70 to 100 participants who are living in Ireland.

This includes:

- Social Media: Platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp are used to share survey links and encourage participation.
- Email Lists: Collaboration with college and organisation groups where the researcher is studying and working to distribute the survey via email; National College of Ireland, College Green Hotel.

These distribution methods are chosen to ensure a broad and diverse sample, providing a comprehensive understanding of the market potential for Soju in Ireland.

As a result, the researcher got 86 responses. However, the respondents number (in order of response) 5, 7, 33, 38, and 77 answered they do not drink alcoholic beverages. Respondent 46 also responded that he was over 50 years old. These six respondents were excluded from the sample because they were not fit for the purpose of the study. Consequently, it was determined that 80 valid samples were available.

4.6 Data Collection

Primary and secondary data have been used in this study. Primary data has been collected from 86 individuals via an online survey (6 samples were eliminated). The survey is distributed online using Google Forms to ensure a wide reach and convenience for participants. The survey consists of multiple sections designed to gather comprehensive data on the following:

- Demographics: Age and gender, relevant demographic information.
- Consumer Preferences: Current consumption trends of alcoholic beverages, the preference for different types of spirits, and openness to try innovative alcoholic beverages.

- Awareness and Perception of Soju: Knowledge and awareness of Soju, previous experiences with Soju (if any), and preferences.
- Purchase Intentions: Likelihood to purchase Soju if made available in the Irish market, factors influencing purchasing decisions, and potential consumption contexts, such as social gatherings, restaurants, or home.
- Regulatory and Market Factors: Perceptions related to the regulatory environment, market entry barriers, and the role of marketing and promotional strategies.

In addition, secondary data was collected from academic journals, books, and articles etc.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis includes coding the collected data using statistical software like Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 29, Microsoft Excel, and Google spreadsheets. The outcome of this phase will be usable and allow the stakeholders to infer on the suitability as well as strategic possibilities of launching Soju in the Irish market while planning for targeted marketing and distribution strategies. To ensure internal reliability, Cronbach's alpha was also used to measure the internal consistency of the tools.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

This study complied with "Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants." of the National College of Ireland. Ethical considerations are

paramount in this research to ensure the protection and respect of participants' rights. Key ethical measures include:

- Informed Consent: All participants are provided with all information regarding the purpose of the study, procedures, and their rights as participants. Assurances regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation should be made.
- Confidentiality: To adhere to protecting the identities of participants, their responses are all anonymised. Data will be kept confidential and stored safely, with access restricted to only the researcher.
- Transparency: The participants shall be made aware of their data usage and the benefits of the research. They will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative implications.

4.9 Limitations

This study has several limitations while providing insights into the potential introduction of Soju into the Irish market. Firstly, according to Bryman (2008), generalizability would have been made more effective by having a larger sample size and being more diverse. However, this research bases its findings on the survey of 80 respondents, a factor that may not be generalisable to the entire Irish population.

Secondly, the cross-sectional survey strategy captures the attitudes and perceptions of consumers at this single point in time, which may fail to reflect changes over time in consuming alcoholic beverages. (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Longitudinal studies could provide more comprehensive insights into trends and shifts in consumer behaviour.

Lastly, this paper employs quantitative methods because it is the conventional approach. It is helpful to identify trends and patterns, though it may at some point be superficial and ignore deep, qualitative insights into consumer motivations and cultural influences (Creswell, 2014). One could further incorporate more qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to better understand the factors that influence the acceptance of Soju in Ireland.

Chapter 5: Analysis & Findings

5.1 Introduction & Key Findings

The chapter presents and discusses the findings related to the questionnaire and collected data. It entails the analysis of the collected answers with respect to the objectives of the research. It seeks to investigate the feasibility and strategic options of implementing Soju in the Irish market, considering consumer preferences, awareness, and potential barriers.

As discussed in Chapter 4.2, the researcher got 86 responses. However, respondents 5, 7, 33, 38, 46 and 77 were excluded because they were not fit for the purpose of this study. Consequently, it was determined that 80 valid samples were available.

The main findings from the primary research are as follows:

- **Demographic Analysis:** The study was on people between 20 and 49 years old in Ireland. Age distribution showed a significant concentration in the 20-29 and 30-39 groups. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with a slight female majority of 48 females and 32 males.
- **Awareness and Consumption Patterns:** The survey indicated that 71.3% of the sample had heard of Soju and 65.8% have tasted it in the past. This is a very encouraging percentage in terms of entering this market with relative ease. Among people who had tasted Soju, quite a significant number responded that they were favourably surprised at first, with 34% saying they would drink it again and another 31% saying they liked the taste.

- **Preferences and Purchase Intentions:** The results indicated that price (70%), taste (58%), and availability (51%) are the primary factors influencing the purchase of Soju. Promotional strategies also played a significant role in influencing purchase intentions. The most effective promotional activities identified were discount offers (66%) and free samples (65%).
- **Preferred Settings for Consumption:** Respondents indicated a preference for consuming Soju in social settings, such as gatherings with friends or family (51%), restaurants (48%), and bars or pubs (41%).
- **Challenges and Barriers:** The main challenges include a lack of consumer awareness (66%), high price points (56%), and competition from established brands (52%).

5.2 Demographic

Figure 3 shows the demographic data for 81 participants who are alcoholic beverage consumers in Ireland.

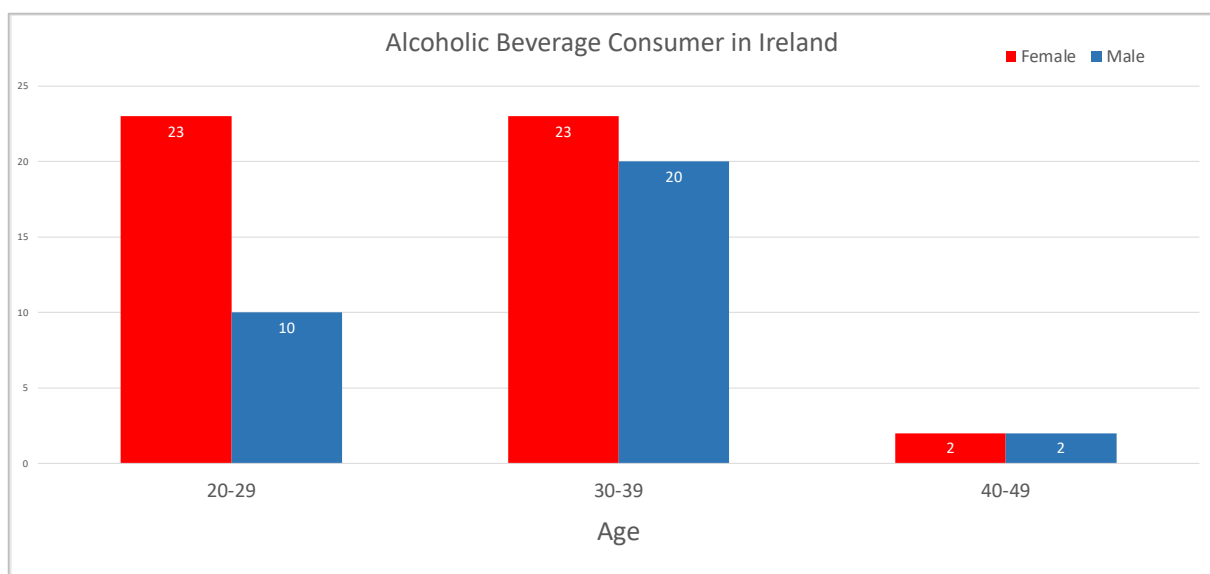


Figure 3. Alcohol Consumption by Age and Gender

The age distribution of the collected samples was the most in their 30s, 43 respondents, followed by those in their 20s at 33 respondents. This distribution indicates a concentration of young to middle-aged adults, who are often more open to trying new products and can be key early adopters of Soju (Harris, Bargh and Brownell, 2009). The gender distribution was 48 for women and 32 for men, with slightly more female respondents. This gender balance suggests that marketing strategies should be inclusive and consider the preferences of both male and female consumers.

5.3 Internal Consistency

In a survey, it is important whether the question was conducted with internal consistency. In general, Cronbach's alpha is used to verify it, which is usually used to measure the consistency of a response to a subset of questions combined as a scale to measure a particular concept. It is formed of an alpha coefficient that ranges from 0 to 1. When the value is greater than 0.7, it means that the question combined with the scale is internally consistent in the measurement (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

The initial analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.610. It indicated the need for further examination of individual items' contributions to the overall reliability. The Item-Total Statistics table provided insights into how the removal of specific items would affect Cronbach's Alpha. Specifically, it was observed that the removal of items Q14, Q18, and Q19 significantly increased the Cronbach's Alpha value from

the initial value to 0.700 (Figure 4). This substantial improvement suggested that these items were not consistent with the other items on the scale.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.700	.704	4

Table 1: Cronbach's coefficient alpha results for the survey

Table 1, Cronbach's Alpha value shows that this research data is consistent and reliable. This data was calculated from questions 10, 11, 12, 20. Hence, Cronbach's alpha was calculated based on only 4 questions and not the entire 7 scale questions from the survey. The three questions excluded here will not be used in any future analysis or conclusions.

5.4 Descriptive Statistics

In this section, the researcher will analyse the data from the survey to explore research objectives. Also, the hypothesis will be examined in detail during this analysis.

5.4.1 Alcoholic Beverage Consumption patterns and preferences

Research Objective 3: To analyse the consumption patterns and preferences for alcoholic beverages in Ireland.

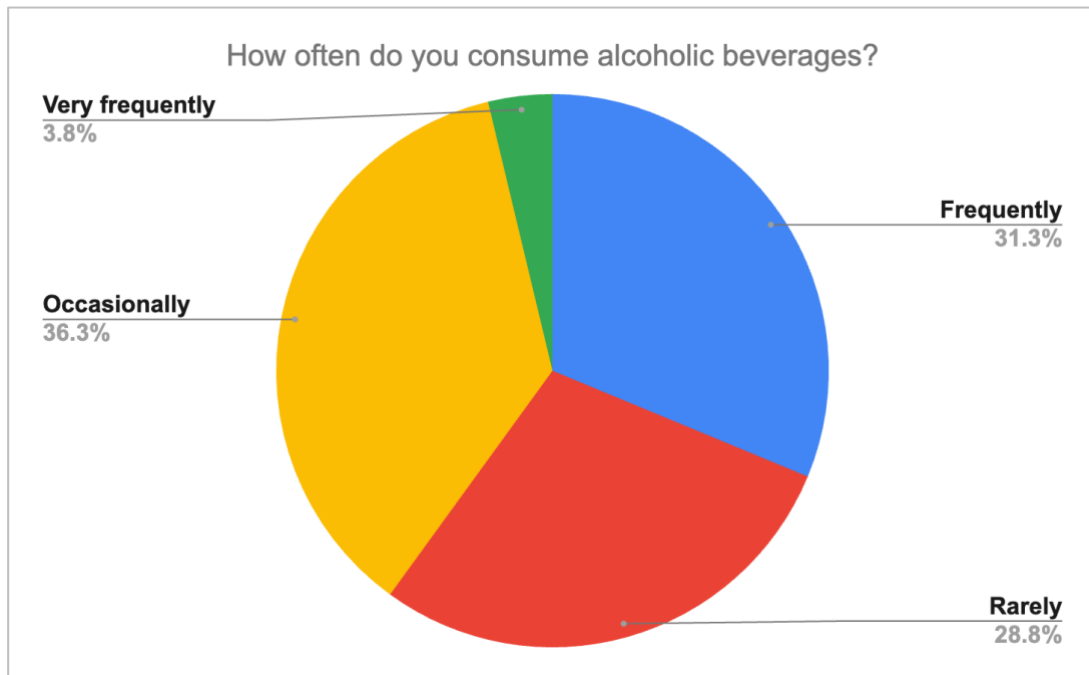


Figure 4. Frequency of alcohol consumption

To discover research objective 3, the researcher asked about the frequency of drinking. As shown in Figure 4, The largest number of respondents said they drink at least once to as many as three times a month (36.3%). The next largest percentage was 31.3% of respondents who answered they drink at least once to three times a week. Taken together, it can be seen that most of the respondents (67.6%) drink alcohol regularly. This suggests that there is a significant portion of the population in Ireland that regularly consumes alcohol, providing a steady market base.

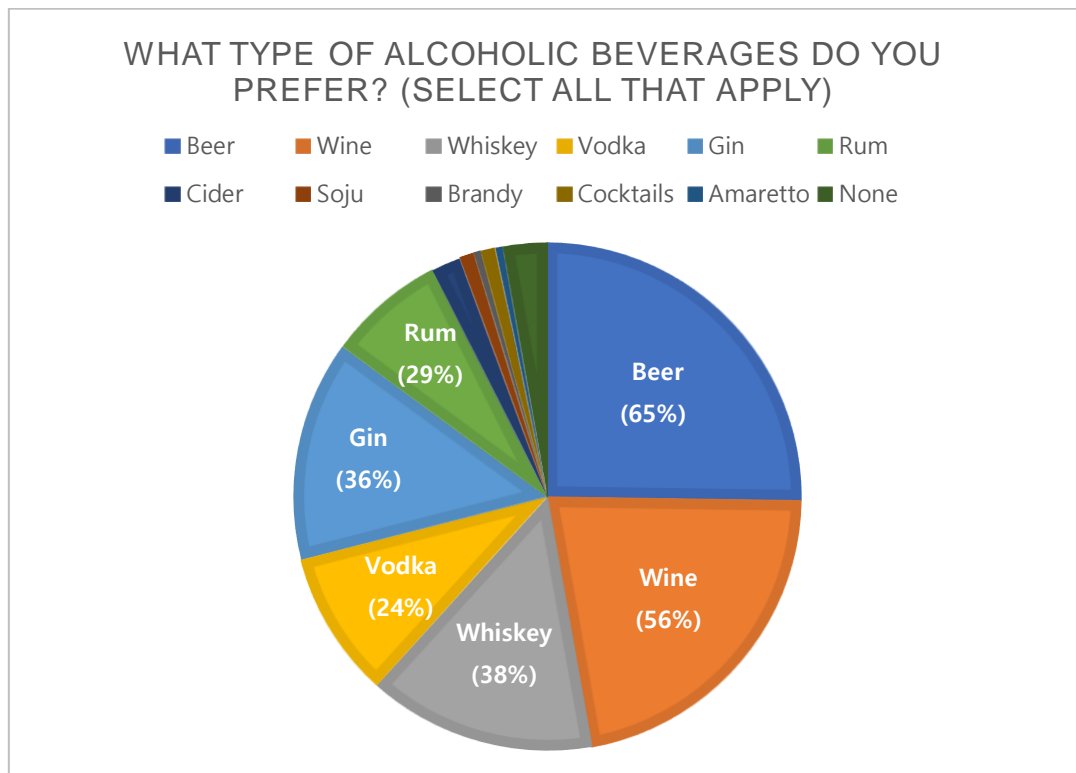


Figure 5. Alcoholic beverage preference

It is important to know a current alcoholic beverage consumer preference. This is an essential question to gauge the sales volume of soju, and as we have seen in the literature review, it is to find out whether spirits are dominant after beer. According to the survey, beer was the most dominant at 64% as expected in the literature review. Wine appears to be the second most at 55%, but the number of respondents who prefer spirits is very high, with whiskey (36%), vodka (24%), gin (35%), and cocktails (2%). As a result of this, it can be assumed that it also has marketability for other spirits, soju. These results align with the literature review of 2.5 part. Conway (2023) reported that alcohol consumption in Ireland was in the order of beer, wine, and spirits.

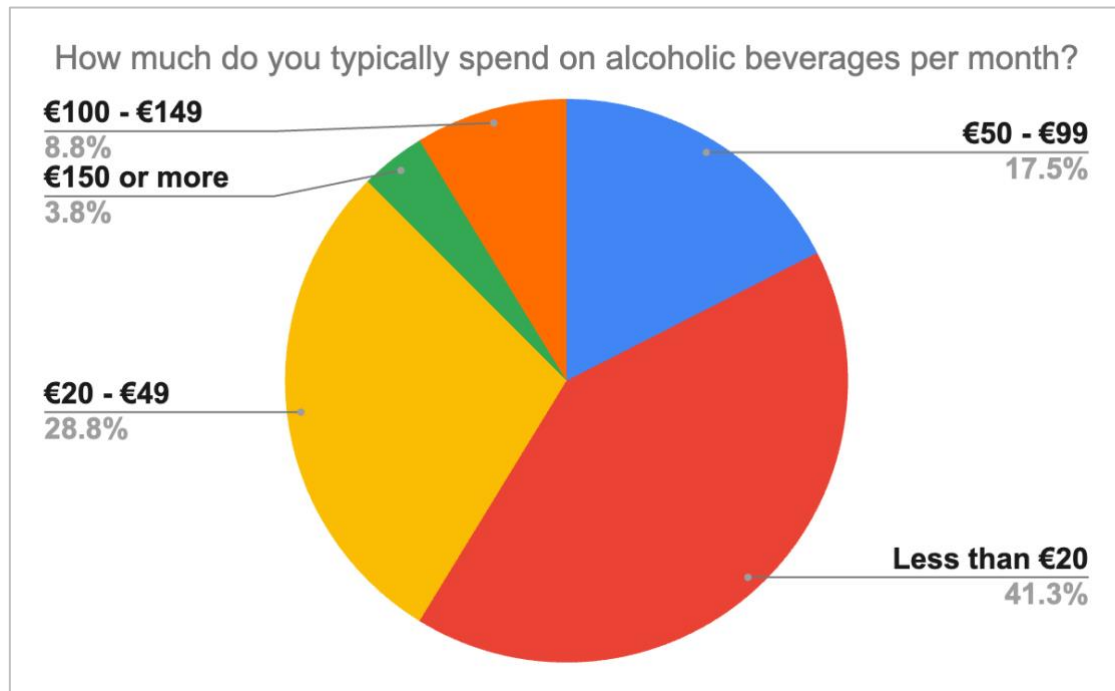


Figure 6. Alcohol consumption amount a month

To find out how much money consumers spend on drinking, researchers asked them how much they spend per month. 41.3% of consumers said they spend less than 20 euros a month, while 28.8% said they spend 20 to 49 euros and 17.5% spend 50 to 99 euros. This shows that a majority of consumers, or 58.7%, spend at least 20 euros per month on drinking. Given that Soju's current selling price is 8 euros at Asian supermarket, it suggests that Soju has a competitive price.

5.4.2 Awareness and Preference of Soju in Ireland

Research Objective 4: To assess the current awareness, perception and preference of Soju among Irish consumers aged the 20s to 40s (young to middle-aged adults).

It is important to understand the awareness and perception of Soju among the target demographic for assessing market readiness.

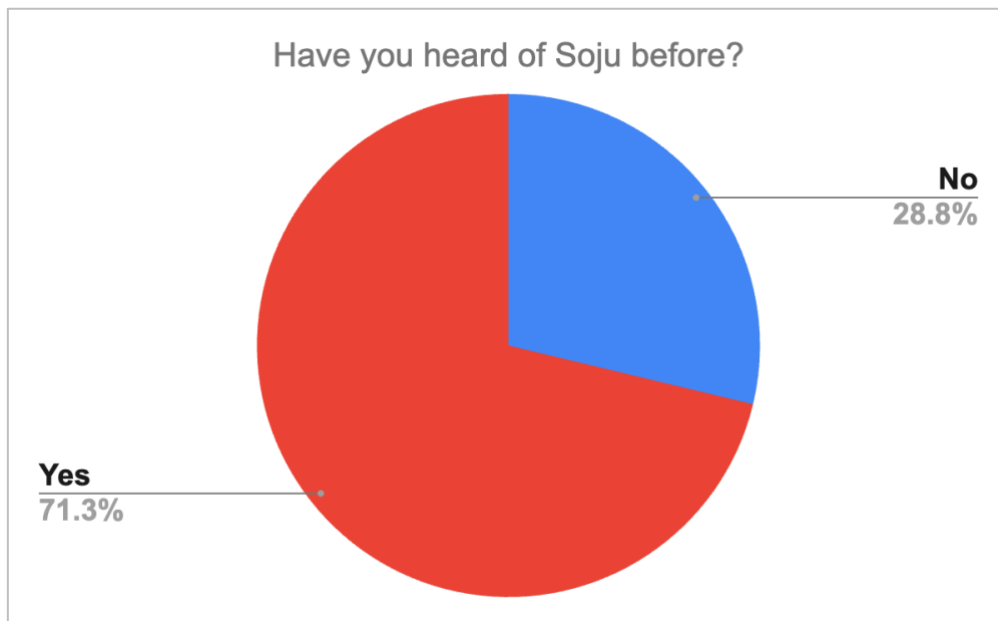


Figure 7: Awareness of Soju

In Figure 7, a significant portion of respondents (71.3%) had heard of Soju, indicating a high level of awareness.

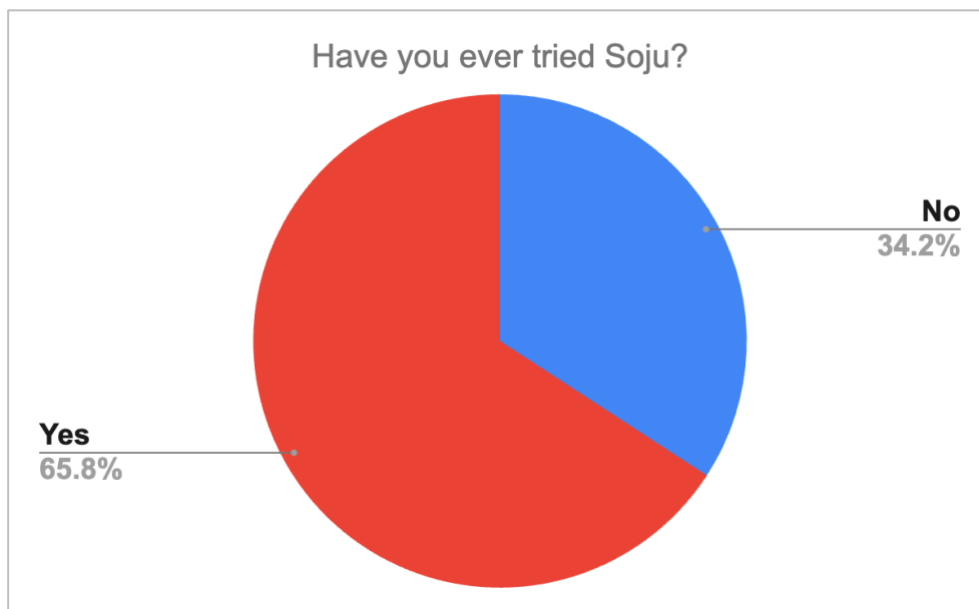


Figure 8: experience of trying Soju

Also, As seen in Figure 8, among respondents, 65.8% have already experienced drinking soju before. This awareness can be leveraged in marketing campaigns to

further potential consumers about the product's unique qualities and cultural significance (Kim and Ryoo, 2007).

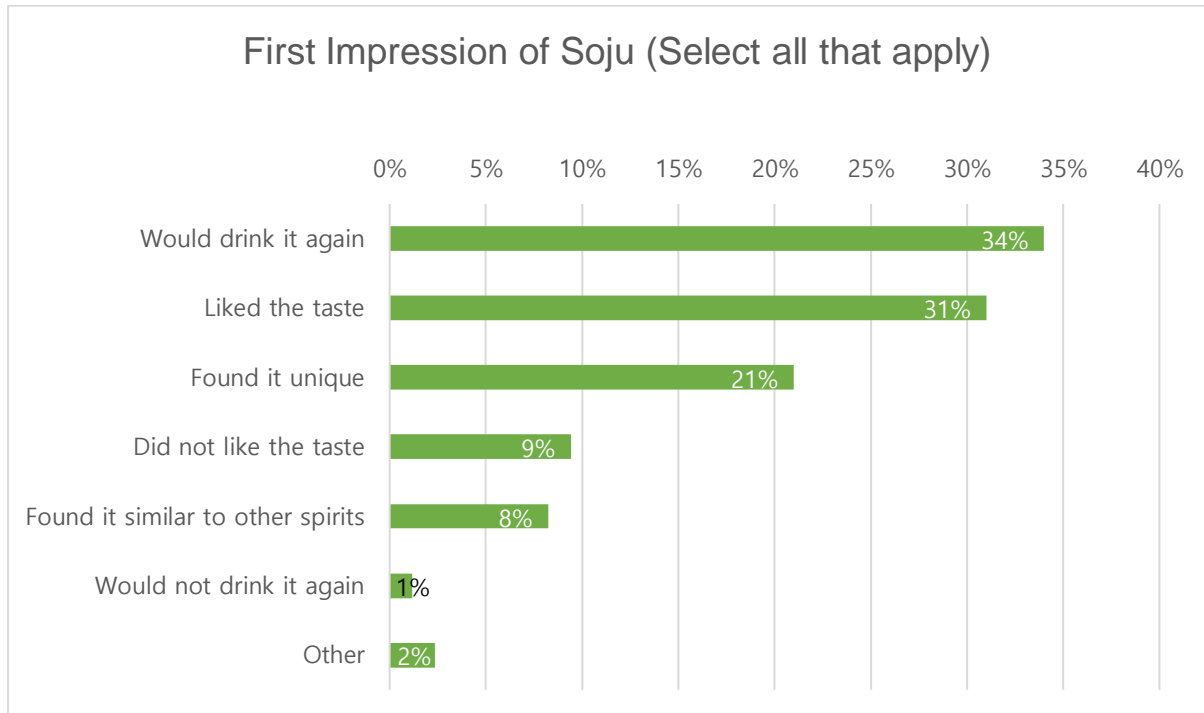


Figure 9: First Impression of Soju

Based on the respondents who drank soju, asked about the experience (Figure 9). The highest percentage of respondents (34%) indicated that they would drink Soju again. And 31% of respondents liked the taste of Soju. In contrast, 9% of respondents dislike the taste of Soju, and only 1% would not drink Soju anymore. Generally, one may say that from the chart, the first impression concerning Soju is positive since a majority of the respondents noted that they liked the taste and would drink it once more. A smaller percentage found it unique, while very few respondents did not like the taste or would not drink it again.

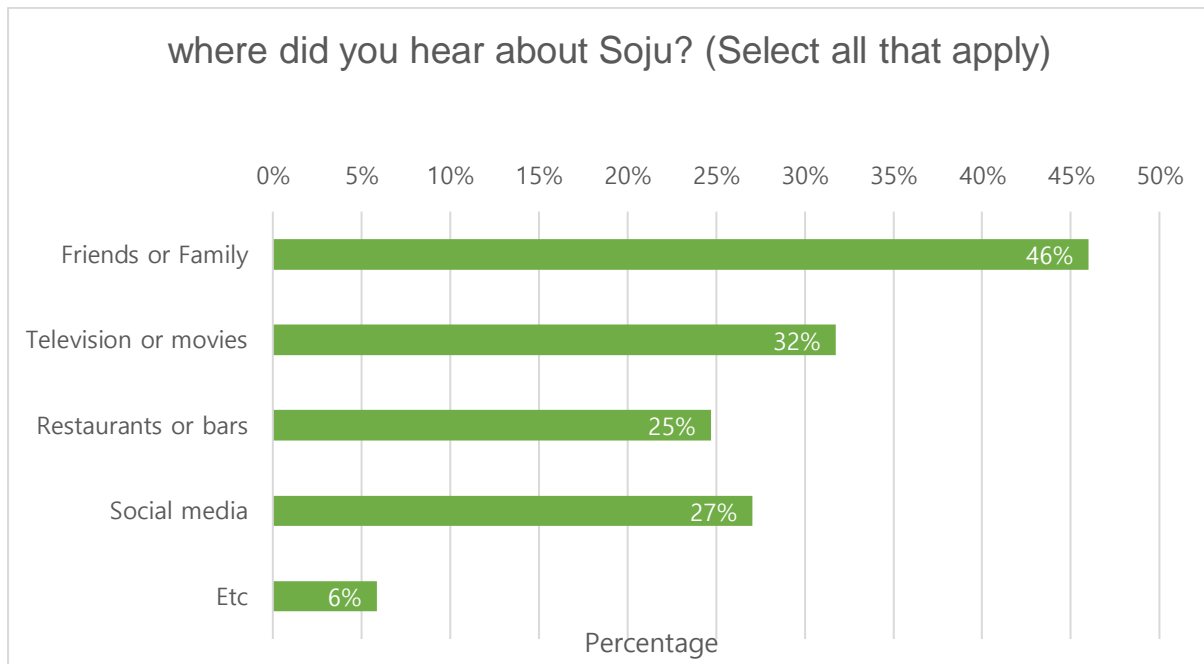


Figure 10: Sources of Awareness about Soju

In Figure 10, most respondents became aware of Soju through friends or family (45%), followed by social media (27%), and restaurants or bars (25%). This finding gives a clue to the importance of digital marketing and word of mouth in building awareness. Except for those who have heard it from friends and family, most respondents said they have encountered soju on social media, which is consistent with the importance of digital marketing as stated by Critchlow *et al.* (2016). The respondents who corresponded to 'etc' were mainly those who had visited Korea or were Koreans.

Perception of Soju	Percentage				
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am familiar with Soju	30.4%	10.1%	19.0%	10.1%	30.4%
my experience to try Soju was Excellent	21.9%	4.7%	14.1%	31.3%	28.1%
If it becomes available to buy soju at the supermarket near me, I would buy it.	7.8%	11.7%	13.0%	20.8%	46.8%
I believe that the availability of Soju in Ireland would add to the diversity of alcoholic beverages.	1.3%	2.6%	14.1%	33.3%	48.7%

Table 2: Detail on Perception of soju among respondents

In Table 2, it shows the respondents' perception of Soju. The percentage of respondents who know Soju was 30.4% and 10.1%, which is an adding total of 40.5% of respondents who knew Soju.

Furthermore, based on the respondents who have experience in drinking Soju, the proportion of positive responses amounts to 28.1% who 'strongly agree' and 31.3% who 'agree', making them more than half with experience and positive responses for their experience in drinking Soju.

A significant number of respondents (70%) answered that they would buy Soju if it were available at their local supermarket, as shown by their agreement or strong agreement. This can be interpreted as a result of Macnamara and Gregory (2018) showing the importance of their relationship with local distributors. Only a minority (15%) would not be interested in purchasing it.

Lastly, when asked if soju's entry into the market would contribute to Irish alcoholic beverage market diversity, 82% of respondents said they strongly agreed and

agreed. Very few respondents (10%) disagree or strongly disagree. This can be interpreted as positively accepting the introduction of soju.

5.4.3 Marketing Strategies

Research Objective 5: To discover which marketing strategies are suitable to enhance the sales of Soju in Ireland.

The researcher asked participants what factors would encourage them to buy alcoholic beverages to seek the answer to research objective 5.

According to the bar chart (Figure 11), Prices accounted for the majority of 70% of buyers consider the most when purchasing soju.

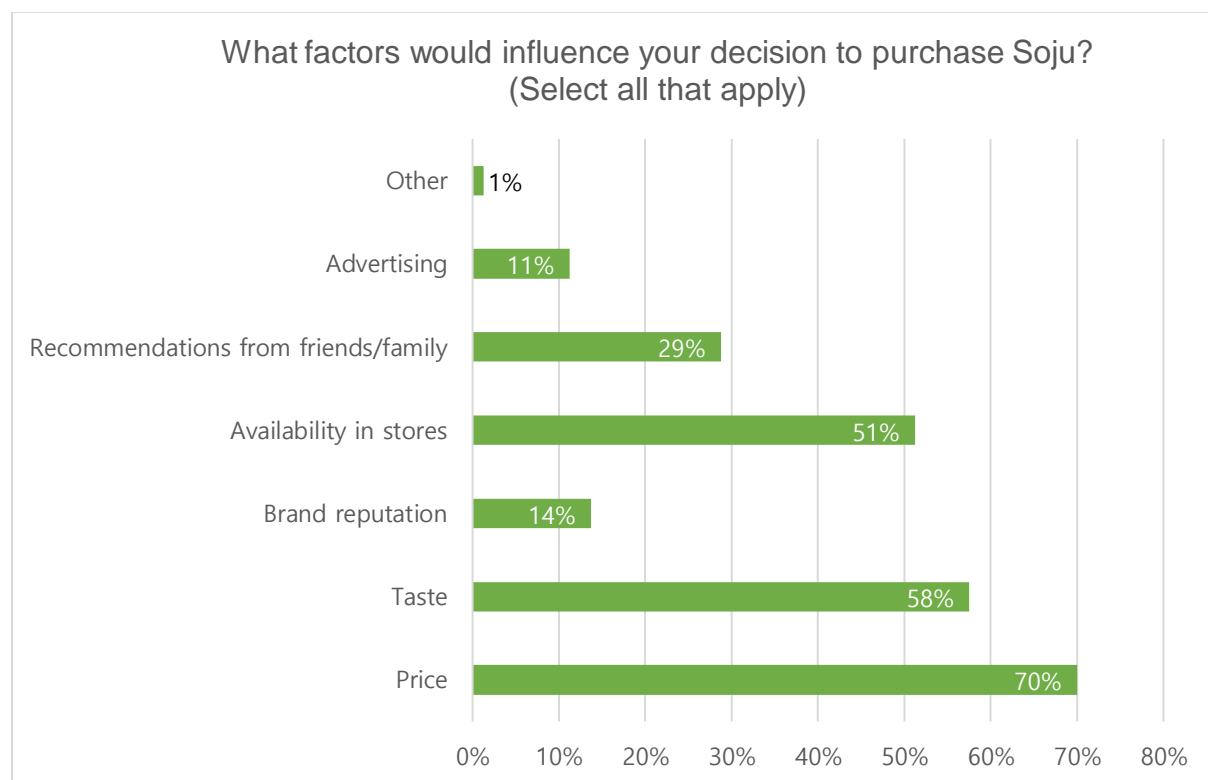


Figure 11: Purchasing factors

It was followed by taste and purchase status at 58% and 51%, respectively. Surprisingly, advertisements did not account for a significant proportion (11%). In particular, 29% of respondents said they considered recommendations from people around them (friends or family). Although it is a substantial factor, not the highest, indicating that personal recommendations play an important role. To link this result to Figure 10 in Chapter 5.4.2, it suggests a strong word-of-mouth effect, where personal experiences and endorsements significantly impact others' willingness to try and buy Soju. While friends and family are influential, taste (58%) and price (70%) are the top factors affecting purchase decisions, indicating that while recommendations may drive initial interest or awareness, the actual decision to buy is heavily influenced by the perceived quality (taste) and affordability (price) of Soju. Availability in stores (51%) also plays a crucial role, showing that convenience is key for potential to buyers.

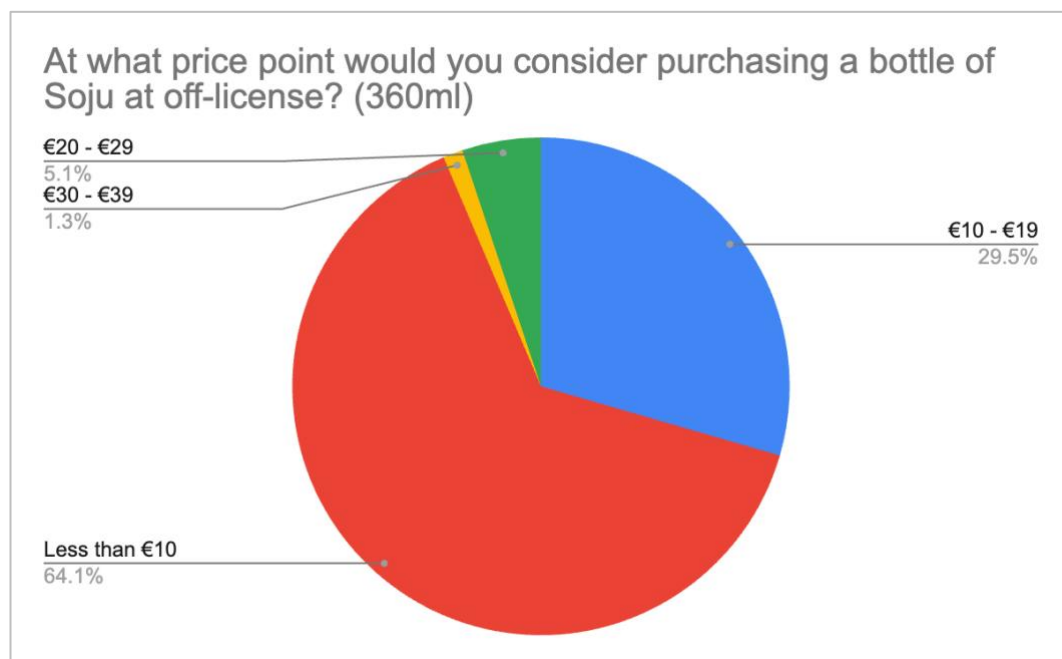


Figure 12: the expected price of Soju

The majority of respondents (64.1%) prefer to buy Soju for less than €10. It aligns well considering that the current market price is around €8. This indicates that Soju is priced attractively for potential buyers, suggesting good market acceptance at this price point. The next significant group (29.5%) is comfortable with a price between €10 and €19, which still covers the current price but offers some flexibility for a higher price point if needed. On the other hand, very few respondents are willing to pay more than €20, which means that a significant price increase might reduce the market size significantly.

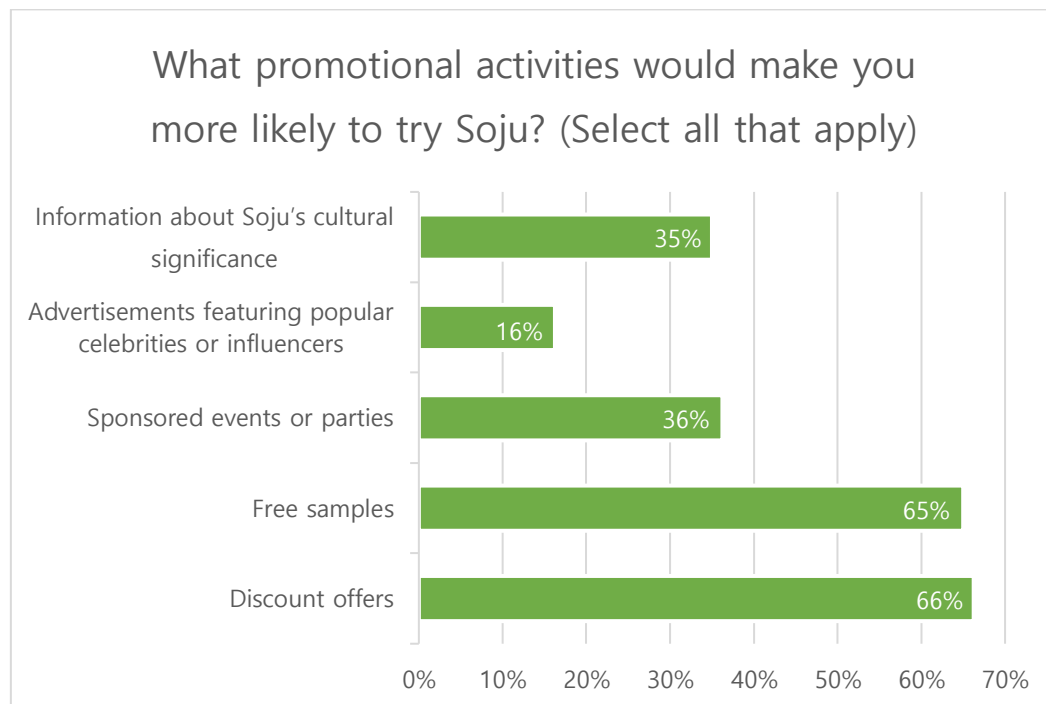


Figure 13: Preferred promotion of Soju

Figure 13 provides insights into the most effective promotional activities that would encourage participants to try Soju. 66% of respondents indicated that discount offers would make them try Soju. This is the highest percentage among the promotional activities which means the effectiveness of price incentives. Also, 65% of respondents would try Soju if free samples were available. It means that experiential

marketing of testing the product for free empowers. On the other hand, only 16% of the respondents said that they would go for an advertisement with a celebrity or influencer. The data suggests that the most effective promotional strategies for encouraging people to try Soju are discount offers and free samples. Combining these strategies could effectively increase Soju's market penetration and consumer trial rates.

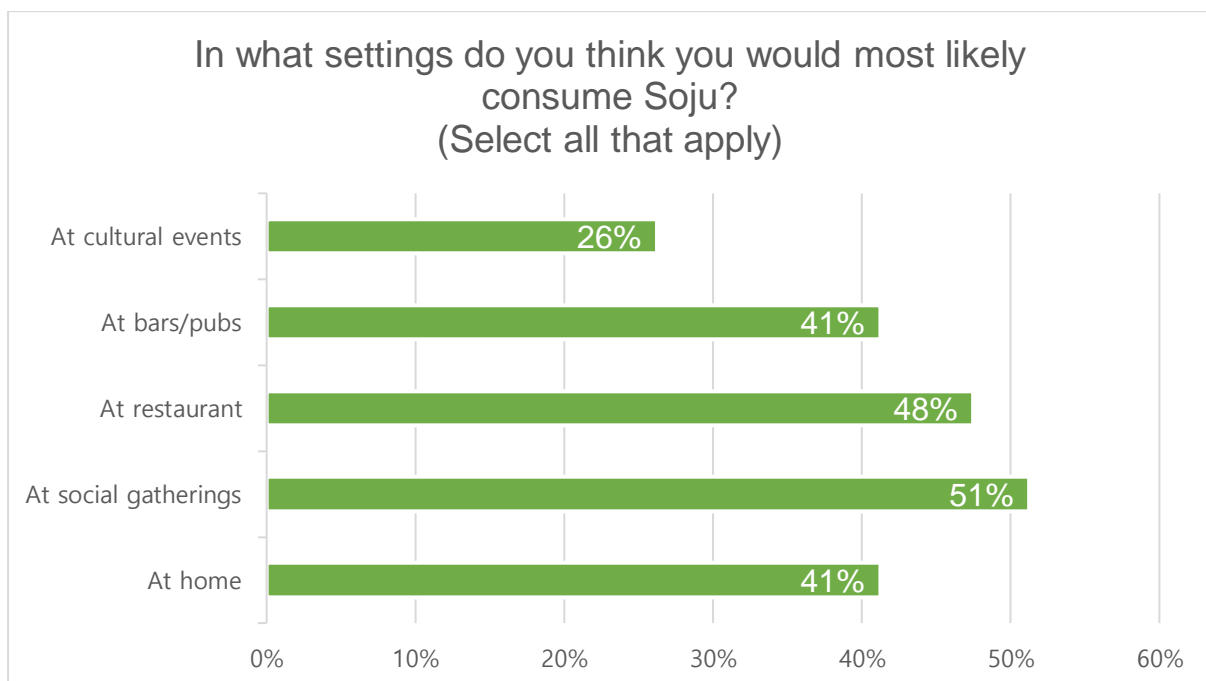


Figure 14: Preferred settings for Soju

Figure 14 shows the settings in which respondents will consume Soju. 51% of respondents indicated they would most likely consume Soju at social gatherings. This is the highest percentage among the settings listed, considered an ideal beverage for social occasions. 48% of respondents answered that they would consume Soju at restaurants. It means that Soju is possibly paired with meals. 41% of respondents are likely to consume Soju at bars/pubs or at home. This shows that Soju is popular in casual, nightlife environments and, at the same time, considered

suitable for personal or family settings. This questionnaire suggests its cultural significance. It can be interpreted that Soju can be easily consumed anywhere, regardless of occasion or circumstances.

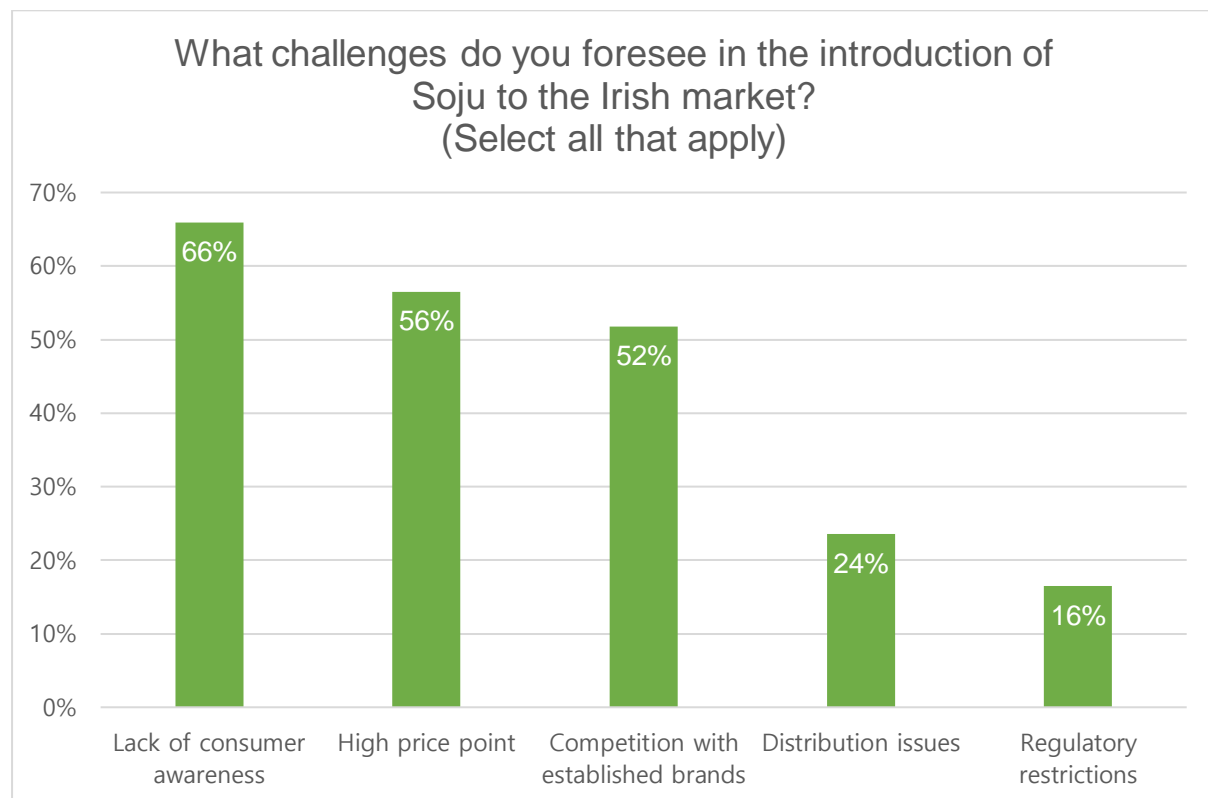


Figure 15: Challenges of introducing Soju

The last question was about the expected difficulties in selling soju in Ireland. 66% of respondents believe that a lack of consumer awareness is the most significant challenge. This suggests that many potential customers may not be familiar with Soju, its taste, or its cultural significance. To overcome this, it would be useful to devise a marketing strategy using the case study of Japanese sake or Mexican tequila mentioned in 2.6.8. For example, as mentioned by Lee and Shin (2015), the tradition of soju or its cultural implications can be used for marketing. 56% of respondents see the high price point. This indicates that if Soju is priced too high, consumers might not buy soju especially if it is perceived as more expensive

compared to other alcoholic beverages. 52% of respondents think competition with established brands is a challenge. This means that Soju would need to compete with well-known and already popular alcoholic beverages in the Irish market.

Chapter 6: Results Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This research holds significant relevance to the field of management, particularly within the context of global business strategies, market entry, consumer behaviour, and marketing management.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse findings through the obtained data from the primary research. Then it will be compared to the literature review in chapter 2 of this research. Also, an analysis of the hypothesis in Chapter 4 to be rejected or accepted will be discussed. In addition, the key findings of this study, the results and limitations will be discussed.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

The demographic data revealed a strong representation of young adults particularly aged 20s to 30s. This indicates that younger generations are more open to trying new and exotic beverages (Jang *et al.*, 2011). This demographic's openness to new experiences is a positive indicator of Soju's market entry. Thus Hypothesis 3, the demand for soju will be higher among young adults is accepted.

According to Ong *et al.* (2023), understanding consumers' behaviour is important to business. 71.3% of respondents said that they had heard of Soju. Also, 65.8% of people had tried Soju before. This levels of Soju among respondents indicate a substantial market familiarity. Of those, 34% answered that they would drink soju again. Hypothesis 2, the decision to buy Soju is driven by awareness of the cultural

significance of Soju, is accepted. This is because almost half of the respondents who recognised Soju said they would try Soju again. This suggests that soju is marketable in the Irish market. Marketing efforts should leverage this existing awareness by focusing on the unique qualities of Soju, such as its traditional brewing methods and distinctive taste profile.

Despite the positive indicators, several challenges must be addressed. The lack of consumer awareness was identified as the most significant barrier, followed by high prices and competition from established brands. Therefore, Hypothesis 5, the biggest obstacle to Soju exports will be a lack of consumer awareness, has been accepted.

To overcome these, effective strategies are needed. Consumers' most preferred promotion methods were discounts (65.9%) and free samples (65.9%). On the contrary, Advertisements featuring popular celebrities or influencers on social media accounted for only 16.5%. Hypothesis 4, Advertisement in social media is the most effective has not been accepted. Consumers like discounts or free samples offer than social media advertisement. Using this actively, for example, devise a plan to promote by setting a price cheaper than existing established brands and distributing free samples. Social gatherings, restaurants, or pubs were most likely places to consume soju. Providing free samples at restaurants or pubs seems to be the most effective. In addition, 45.8% of respondents said they would drink at home, setting a price cheaper than other brands at supermarkets or off-licenses would be an effective promotion method. This practical application of marketing management

principles is fundamental for the development of strong marketing campaigns that are well received by targeted audiences (Keller, 2003).

Overall, this has shown that there is a huge opportunity for Soju in the Irish market. But proper consideration toward consumer preferences, effective marketing, and partnership strategies are going to lead one to success.

6.3 Limitations of Study

This study is providing valuable insights. However, it has several limitations that must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the 80 participants in this sample might be considered too small to generalise findings. A more diversified and larger sample size would provide greater insight into the market potential and consumer behaviour (Bryman, 2008). Future studies should aim to include a broader demographic so that results have a higher reliability and applicability.

Second, this research design uses a cross-sectional survey that captures the behaviours of consumers at that specific time. This approach does not consider the potential changes in consumer preferences or market conditions over time (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). A longitudinal study would provide deeper insights into trends and shifts in consumer behaviour that offer a more dynamic understanding of the market.

Thirdly, this study uses quantitative methods which—though enabling the identification of various trends and patterns—may miss the deeper qualitative insight into consumer motivations or cultural influence (Creswell, 2014). Integrating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide a richer understanding.

Fourthly, cultural aspects in South Korea and Ireland were not carefully explored. A deeper discussion of the cultural impact on consumer behaviour would have facilitated the understanding of the potential Soju market in Ireland. Hofstede's culture dimensions theory could be utilized to gain a better insight into the cultural influence (Hofstede, 2011).

Lastly, whereas the current study has briefly discussed regulatory challenges and market competition, it is warranted to enter deep into the structure and condition of the regulatory environment and competitive landscape for a comprehensive knowledge of the barriers and opportunities of Soju in the Irish market. Future studies should help conduct a more comprehensive analysis to arrive at strategic recommendations.

Future research could, however, address such limitations by developing more evidence related to the feasibility and strategic opportunities for Soju's introduction into the Irish market.

Chapter 7: Conclusion & Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate the feasibility and opportunities for introducing Soju to the Irish market. Several key insights have been identified through a comprehensive literature review, quantitative research, and analysis of survey data.

The researcher used a quantitative methodology using a Google survey to gather data. 80 participants from different ages and gender revealed that young adults particularly those in their 20s and 30s are the primary target market for Soju in Ireland. This group showed a significant openness to trying new beverages, indicating a positive market potential for Soju. Also, the findings suggest that price, taste, and availability in the store are the primary factors influencing purchase decisions. Promotional strategies such as a discount offer and free samples were the most effective. This was the point at which experiential marketing came in: building consumer interest and loyalty. Allowing a consumer to try this product at a lower cost or for free samples can create an experience, thus increasing the chances of being interested and moving on to purchase.

Despite these findings, several challenges must be addressed. The lack of consumer awareness was figured out as the most significant barrier, followed by high prices and competitive market status. To deal with these, strong marketing campaigns, building strategic local distributor relationships, and competitive pricing strategies are important.

Therefore, the study concludes that there are significant opportunities for Soju in the Irish market. However, careful consideration of consumer preferences, effective marketing, and strategic partnerships will lead the successful market entry and growth. By leveraging the insights gained from this research, Soju producers can develop targeted strategies to position Soju as a culturally unique alcoholic beverage in Ireland.

7.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, a few recommendations for further research are proposed.

At first, Sample size and diversity could be increased. Future research should increase the sample size and diversity to ensure the generalisability of the findings. This will provide a full understanding of the market potential and consumer behaviour across all different demographic groups.

Secondly, as highlighted in the literature review chapter 2.4, the impact of the Korean Wave on soju consumption can be investigated in depth by conducting a more thorough analysis of cultural factors and their impact on consumer behaviour. For instance, applying theories such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions can provide a comprehensive analysis of cultural influences, enhancing the understanding of Soju's potential market in Ireland (Hofstede, 2011).

Eventually, future research can include a more detailed examination of the regulatory environment and competitive landscape. Understanding these factors deeply will help develop strategic recommendations for navigating the market and addressing potential barriers.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Confidentiality and Explanation

Exploring Consumer Preferences and Potential Acceptance of Soju in Ireland

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this survey. The purpose of this survey is to explore the feasibility and challenges of introducing Soju, a traditional Korean alcoholic beverage, to the Irish market. Your responses will help me understand consumer preferences and attitudes towards new alcoholic beverages.

Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. The survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time and valuable insights.

Appendix 2. Questionnaire

Survey - Exploring Consumer Preferences and Potential Acceptance of Soju in Ireland
Section 1 – Demographic information
Q1. Age
<input type="radio"/> 20-29 <input type="radio"/> 30-39 <input type="radio"/> 40-49 <input type="radio"/> 50 and above
Q2. Gender
<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say
Section 2 – Current Alcohol Consumption Habits
Q3. How often do you consume alcoholic beverages?
<input type="radio"/> Very frequently (4 or more times a week) <input type="radio"/> Frequently (1-3 times a week) <input type="radio"/> Occasionally (1-3 times a month) <input type="radio"/> Rarely (less than once a month) <input type="radio"/> Never
Q4. What type of alcoholic beverages do you prefer? (Select all that apply)

<input type="radio"/> Beer <input type="radio"/> Wine <input type="radio"/> Whiskey <input type="radio"/> Vodka <input type="radio"/> Gin <input type="radio"/> Rum <input type="radio"/> Other
Q5. How much do you typically spend on alcoholic beverages per month?
<input type="radio"/> Less than €20 <input type="radio"/> €20 - €49 <input type="radio"/> €50 - €99 <input type="radio"/> €100 - €149 <input type="radio"/> €150 or more
Section 3 – Awareness and Perception of Soju
Q6. Have you heard of Soju before?
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Q7. If yes, where did you hear about it? (Select all that apply)
<input type="radio"/> Friends of family <input type="radio"/> Social media <input type="radio"/> Television or movies <input type="radio"/> Restaurants or bars <input type="radio"/> Other
Q8. Have you ever tried Soju?
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Q9. If yes, what was your impression of Soju? (Select all that apply)
<input type="radio"/> Liked the taste <input type="radio"/> Did not like the taste <input type="radio"/> Found it similar to other spirits <input type="radio"/> Found it unique <input type="radio"/> Would drink it again <input type="radio"/> Would not drink it again <input type="radio"/> Other
Q10. I am familiar with Soju
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div></div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> <div></div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div>Strongly disagree</div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div>Strongly agree</div> </div>
Q11. If yes, my experience to try Soju was Excellent
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div></div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>4</div> <div>5</div> <div></div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div>Strongly disagree</div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div><input type="radio"/></div> <div>Strongly agree</div> </div>
Section 4 – Potential Acceptance and Purchase Intentions

Q12. If it becomes available to buy soju at the supermarket near me, I would buy it.						
	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree
Q13. What factors would influence your decision to purchase Soju? (Select all that apply)						
<input type="radio"/> Price <input type="radio"/> Taste <input type="radio"/> Brand reputation <input type="radio"/> Availability in stores <input type="radio"/> Recommendations from friends/family <input type="radio"/> Advertising <input type="radio"/> Other						
Q14. How likely are you to purchase Soju if it is marketed as a premium, exotic spirit?						
	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely
Q15. At what price point would you consider purchasing a bottle of Soju? (360ml)						
<input type="radio"/> Less than €10 <input type="radio"/> €10 - €19 <input type="radio"/> €20 - €29 <input type="radio"/> €30 - €39 <input type="radio"/> €40 or more						
Q16. What promotional activities would make you more likely to try Soju? (Select all that apply)						
<input type="radio"/> Discount offers <input type="radio"/> Free samples <input type="radio"/> Sponsored events or parties <input type="radio"/> Advertisements featuring popular celebrities or influencers <input type="radio"/> Information about Soju's cultural significance <input type="radio"/> Other						
Q17. In what settings do you think you would most likely consume Soju? (Select all that apply)						
<input type="radio"/> At home <input type="radio"/> At social gatherings <input type="radio"/> At restaurant <input type="radio"/> At bars/pubs <input type="radio"/> At cultural events <input type="radio"/> Other						

Section 5 – Regulatory and Market Factors

Q18. What are your thoughts on the current regulatory environment for alcoholic beverages in Ireland?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very restrictive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very lenient

Q19. Do you believe that the introduction of a new alcoholic beverage like Soju requires strong regulation and monitoring?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Q20. I believe that the availability of Soju in Ireland would add to the diversity of alcoholic beverages.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Q21. What challenges do you foresee in the introduction of Soju to the Irish market? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Lack of consumer awareness
- ☐ Regulatory restrictions
- ☐ High price point
- ☐ Competition with established brands
- ☐ Distribution issues
- ☐ Other