An Investigation Into Attitudes of TESCO Customers in South Dublin Towards Private-Label Brands

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at Dublin Business School

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Declaration: I, Shane Mooney, declare that this research is my original work and has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is compliant with the Dublin Business School’s academic honesty policy.

Signed: [Signature]
Date: 02/01/2019
Acknowledgments

I believe my ability to complete – not only this paper – but this Masters course as a whole was only made possible by the support of those I am lucky enough to have around me.

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation paper is to investigate the attitudes held by TESCO customers towards TESCO’s private label range of products and to investigate if attitudes changed depending on demographic. The author designed a survey and administered it to two different samples – customers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire and TESCO Tallaght. To gain further insight, a focus group was also conducted.

Following in-depth analyses of the data gathered, it was found that the customers of both demographics held similar views towards TESCO’s private-label range. However, areas in which there were noticeable differences included those that frequented the Tallaght store expressed greater tendency to purchase national brands compared to those that shop in Dun Laoghaire. It was also found that, while consumers do report an improved opinion towards TESCO’s private-label range, this does not translate to store loyalty – much of the reasoning behind this appears to relate to brand-trust.

Finally, according to the views expressed during the focus group, the extension of private-labels into more categories, combined with the introduction of multi-tier ranges, is actually adversely affecting customers confidence in their product ranges as there is a lack of perceived “expertise” in any one area, thus encouraging customers to purchase more expensive national brands which tend to focus on a single category (i.e. Lindt: chocolate; Tayto: crisps etc.).

The author concludes that while the general opinion towards TESCO’s private-label range is improving, their relative newness is inhibiting their ability to gain consumer trust. Perhaps the most significant find from this study is that multi-tier ranges, while offering greater variety and accommodating to a greater demographic of consumers, is damaging the brand from the perspective of their limited expertise in any one area.
1. Introduction

The days of private-labels (henceforth referred to as “PL”) being viewed as the “cheap option” are behind us. According to a paper by Ward et al. (2002), PLs were introduced in the late 80’s/early 90’s, at which time discount products had been long regarded as “cheap” and “generic”. However, this perception has seen a dramatic change in the past decade as advances in technology have allowed PL manufacturers to closely replicate national brand (henceforth referred to as “NB”) products.

Today, consumers are becoming more willing to try PL alternatives. Furthermore, the change is often permanent, thus seeing a constant boost in market share over a succession of business cycles (Steenkamp et al., 2010). As a result, NBs are becoming increasingly reliant on product innovation and attractive packaging in order to regain their market share. According to a study by Koschate-Fischer et al. (2014), when a consumer switches to a particular store’s PL, they tend to also remain loyal to the store.

The current study explores if the growth in popularity of PL foods has changed the Irish consumer’s perception – specifically those living in the South Dublin area – of value-for-money and quality. A study by Nielsen (2014, p. 06) reports that the “…weighed global average of PL [private-label] share has reached 16.5%”. The same paper also reported that the growth in sales within the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector grew by 24% between 2007-2012 (Euromonitor, 2013) suggesting that consumers are gravitating towards PL brands. This has allowed PLs to increase their prices and close the price-gap between PL and NB. As a result of loss in sales, NB manufacturers have resorted to increasing their prices in an effort to offset their losses (Steenkamp et al., 2010).

Due to the increase in popularity, TESCO have now started capitalising on consumer willingness to try their products by introducing a wider range of options via their introduction
of multi-tier options. An article by Zoe Wood (2012) of The Guardian newspaper, reported that TESCO would be rebranding their ‘Value’ range to ‘Everyday Value’. This move was in response to the growing sales of TESCO’s PB range and “…to relieve consumers of the embarrassment of buying the cheapest products on its shelves.” (Wood, 2012).

This study is concerned with consumers’ perception of TESCO’s PL products and if their purchase-decision is based on quality, price, or a combination of both. The reason behind the authors decision to focus this research on TESCO customers is, according to a report by Geoff Percival (2018) of the Irish Examiner published on June 05th, figures released by Kantar Worldpanel revealed TESCO as having the greatest share of the market with 22.3%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary of Abbreviations</th>
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<td>Private-label</td>
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<td>National brand</td>
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1.2 Research Question and Objectives

The current paper aims to answer or, at the very least, provide further insight and understanding to the following question:

- Research Question: Has the growing market-share of TESCO’s PL range impacted customers’ attitudes towards quality and price?

In order to answer this question, the researcher aims to accomplish the following objectives through the combined use of quantitative and qualitative research approaches:

- Investigate if the extension of PL options across categories has made customers more price-conscious.
• Examine the impact multi-tier options has had on consumer product choice.

• Explore if PLs have increased store-loyalty.

• Assess if PLs have impacted the price-quality schema.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Based on the extensive literature available on consumer behaviour and attitudes towards PLs and NBs, there are a range of factors, both directly related and indirectly related to how consumers around the world perceive PBs and, moreover, what persuades them to buy one brand over the other. As the current paper is primarily focused on quality and price, the following chapter aims to discuss and critically analyse the areas previous studies have highlighted as key areas relevant in the consumer decision-making process, how it relates to the consumer’s perception of quality and price, and how it has been affected by the emergence of PLs.

2.2 Price

While the price of groceries has always been an important factor during shopping, it wasn’t until the 90’s – when retailers started to see the potential of PLs as a tool to increase margins – that customers were bombarded with by so many prices. Today, the average PL product is 31% cheaper compared to NBs (Nielsen, 2018). It wasn’t until the 90’s that technology had reached a level of advancement that retailers could begin innovating and focusing more on the quality of their products without inflating overheads and competing against industry-leading NBs.

Multiple studies (e.g. Quelch & Harding, 1996, Bontempts et al., 2005, Gabrielsen & Sorgard, 2000) have analysed the effect introducing a PL into a category has had on consumer behaviour. Bontempts et al.’s study, for example, suggested that when a PL first enters into a market, the price of the NB increases. A report by the Financial Times (2009), as cited by Steenkamp et al. (2010) discusses how Unilever increased their product prices at record rates to compensate for a 2.4% loss in sales. The Wall Street Journal (2009) warned that this could drive consumers away as the economy improves and strengthens. However, as highlighted by Gabrielsen &
Sorgard (2000), this strategy may be adopted by NBs targeting “brand addicts” – consumers that have developed a habit of always purchasing a particular brand and find it very difficult to change to another brand, regardless of perceived advantage – while knowingly sacrificing, in the short-term, “brand switchers” – consumers willing to try another brand if it offers an advantage (e.g. cheaper). Gabrielsen & Sorgard (2000) found that strong NBs have made such an impact on the habits of its customers, that they possess a greater sense of risk towards switching to another and, in their mind, inferior brand. Consequently, these consumers make the ideal target when a new PL enters the market, typically offering the same at a considerable price-advantage. Under such circumstances, “switchers” are the target for the newly introduced PL – they are often already familiar with PLs and therefore possess less sense of risk and are willing to try alternates when they offer an advantage over their existing preferred choice.

Relating to consumers switching between NB and PL brands is the subject-matter of changing economic-climates. Several authors have related the performance of brands to economic conditions. Quelch and Harding (1996) observed that US PL shares peaked to 17% during the ’81-’82 recession period, compared to an average 14% in the years previous, suggesting that during times of a weaker economy, sales of PLs increase. This finding was supported by a study by Nandan and Dickinson (1994), as cited in Lamey et al. (2007), while also reporting findings that times of stronger economic growth give rise to an increase in NB sales. However, as a report by The Wall Street Journal (1993) highlighted, as cited by Lamey et al. (2007), often when consumers switch from a NB to a PL as a result of difficult financial periods, a significant portion are unwilling to change back even when they can afford to, thus resulting in a permanent loss in the sales of NB. A paper by Bowman et al. (1994) supports this perspective by pointing out that consumers change their spending behaviour more promptly during times of economic difficulty than they do when the economy is on the path to recovery. Shea (1993a), as cited in Bowman et al. (1994), found – using information on union contracts to construct a
measure of expected wage growth in his sample – that the response of consumers’ willingness-to-spend declined more promptly during times of anticipated decreases to their income than their willingness-to-spend during times of economic flourish.

2.3 Quality

A consumer’s perceived quality of a product is dependent on many different factors, all generally decided upon within a matter of seconds of seeing a product. Therefore, naturally, a product’s packaging is an important factor – it needs to be attractive enough to grab the customer’s attention. In this area alone, PLs are always playing catch-up as NBs have the advantage of investing in the areas of product-and-packaging innovation according to research conducted by Kumar & Steenkamp (2007), as cited in Steenkamp (2010). As a result, upon first glance, PLs are almost always perceived as of lower quality than their NB counterpart. However, should NBs fail to continue to innovate or introduce new, attractive features to their product, this results in consumers going from noticing something for its innovative newness to, over time, becoming familiar and developing a sense of been-there-done-that, which ultimately benefits the PB as they have time to develop a similar feature at a more attractive price.

Product packaging is an important issue relating to this area. As cited in Geyskens et al. (2010), Kapferer’s (1995) study discusses how consumers can project the perception they have associated over time towards a NB product onto a PL when their packaging is similar. This is a major concern for NBs and a key motivation for manufacturers to ensure their product remains distinct from the PL competition. Should the packaging of PL and NB be similar and should they be placed within close proximity on a shelf, a phenomenon known as “stimulus generalisation” is a likely occurrence (Geyskens et al., 2010). “Stimulus generalisation” occurs when a customer, who has acquired a perception through past experience with a particular
stimulus (i.e. product), identifies two-or-more stimuli that have few distinguishing features, and adopts that perception to the similar-looking stimuli. It is because of this phenomenon, that continuous innovation is such a crucial aspect for NBs to maintain their distinction against PLs. As Corstjens & Lal (2000, p. 288) discuss in their research, “if manufacturers can develop innovative products that are difficult to imitate, it will be difficult for retailers to offer store brands that are perceived to be of high quality” by comparison.

2.4 Multi-Tier PLs

Further complicating the matter of choosing between a NB and PL, was the introduction of multi-tier PL brands. According to Geyskens et al. (2010) the Information Resources Inc. recommended the introduction of multi-tier variations as a result of the market becoming too saturated and leaving little room for further introductions. Multi-tier options has allowed for far broader range among PLs as it offers no-frills economy range (“Everyday Value”) targeting those that are more budget-conscious, the standard PL range for those that seek mid-range offerings, while the premium-tier (TESCO “Finest”) allows for PLs to compete directly with NBs, often even being priced higher than their NB competitors. A survey by Doug (1996) & Palmer (1995), as cited in Ward et al. (2002), found that 90% of customers believed that the premium range of PL were of either the same, or exceeded the quality they associated with NBs. In a recent interview with TESCO’s Chief Customer Officer, Allessandra Bellini, she acknowledged that while the “Everyday Value” range had been performing well since replacing the generally disliked “Value” range, it still came with a sense of cheapness and “nobody trusted the quality” (Hammett, 2018). In response to this, TESCO relaunched the range under a new brand – The Hearty Food Co. (Hammett, 2018).

A paper by Prelec et al. (1997) investigated a phenomenon known as “context effect” in relation to multi-tier products. The term “context effect” refers to the occurrence whereby a customer
with a history of buying a particular product, will consider changing their purchase-habit in-light of the introduction of a new, competing product. According to Geyskens et al. (2010), context effect are comprised of three principle phenomena that have been widely researched and can be attributed widely to consumer behaviour towards multi-tier PL ranges – the compromise effect, the similarity effect, and the attraction effect.

![Positioning of Choice Set Along Quality-Tier and Brand-Type Dimensions](image)

Figure 1: Positioning of Choice Set Along Quality-Tier and Brand-Type Dimensions (Geyskens et al., 2010, p. 793)

2.4.1 Compromise Effect

The compromise effect suggests that when a premium PL product is introduced to compete with a premium NB, it negatively influences the sales of the lower-end offering, rather than the higher-end NB it was introduced to compete with (Prelec et al., 1997). Wernerfelt (1995) offers a possible explanation for this – during the process of product selection, consumers often have limited awareness of their personal preferences towards a certain product, however, they have a perception of where they place themselves relative to others in terms of, for example, social-class. By using this as a form of relativity, they choose products according to how they want to be perceived by others and thus, will choose the mid-tier option. Prelec et al. (1997) used the example of selecting a new camera to illustrate the compromise effect; often a
consumer will not know the specific features they want from a product, but rather compare their needs to the needs of others in terms of below, equal-to, or above the typical needs of others, and will use this to determine their own needs and purchase accordingly.

2.4.2 Similarity Effect

The similarity effect, also referred to as the “substitution effect”, predicts that when a new product is introduced, the choice probability to products similar will decrease disproportionately. An example of the similarity-effect is when an economy-tier PL is introduced. As the economy-tier works to extend the range of brands to appeal to those looking for better-value, there are no similar products for it compete with on this level (see Figure 1 above). Therefore, the product range it is most similar to is that of the mid-tier PL range. According to Geyskens et al. (2010), under these circumstances, the similarity effect can adversely affect the sales of mid-tier PL products. The explanation offered for this is that of product-image quality-dilution. According to findings by Dacin and Smith (1994), the introduction of lower-quality can create a “step-down” effect. A “step-down” effect can work to create a negative impression by customers towards the core brand. This can result in overall uncertainty on the part of consumers as they develop an inconsistent impression towards a store, it’s PL brands, and the variation in quality being offered. The same principle applies when a premium-tier PL is introduced – customers form scepticism towards products that form the company’s historical expertise (i.e. functional, price-based products).

2.4.3 Attraction Effect

In contrast to the above similarity-effect, is the “attraction effect”. According to Simonson (1989), the attraction-effect essentially predicts the opposite to that of the similarity effect – customers uncertain of whether to decide between a newly introduced economy-tier PL product, versus a mid-tier option, will base their decision according to how they expect others,
whose opinion they consider important, will view them based on their product choice. The belief that others will perceive the mid-tier PL as superior to that of the economy-tier and therefore influence favourably their perception of the customer ultimately results in the purchase of the superior product.

2.5 Involvement

Consumer purchase-decision involvement relates to the amount of importance a consumer places on a product in achieving a desired outcome, and can vary widely. Mittal (1989, p. 148) defines the process as “…the general level of interest in the object or the centrality of the object to the person’s ego-structure”. For example, the average consumer will place little involvement on a cereal product as its primary functions are to taste good and convenience and generally requires little consideration. Whereas, a high-involvement product would be the likes of a car – a purchase that requires much research, is required to satisfy several criteria, will come at a substantial cost and will be expected to last a considerable amount of time. For the most part, when it comes to grocery shopping, the involvement level will be low. However, past research of sales of products in certain categories have been shown to exhibit higher involvement than others and thus, suggest consumers displaying greater reluctance to switch to brands that offer comparable quality with a more advantageous price-point. As noted by Bloch & Richins (1983), some customers will show a high-involvement towards products which they expect and associate a high level of performance from in terms of function, social and psychological functions, and therefore the quality-gap plays a greater role in their willingness-to-pay for a product. It is believed that this is the primary reason why PL have struggled to penetrate the cosmetic sector.

More recent research by Maiksteneine & Auruskeviciene (2008) investigated the impact of purchase-involvement relative to NB versus PL. Their findings suggest that consumers with
low-purchase-involvement are more prone to purchasing NBs, while those with higher involvement will take the time to assess and compare the pros and cons offered by each brand. As a result, those with higher-involvement were found to be more likely to purchase PL. One limitation to Maiksteneine & Auruskeviciene’s study was that it focused exclusively on one product type within a specific population – diapers among Lithuanian consumers – and therefore, their findings cannot be generalised. Nonetheless, it does present an interesting insight into how consumers within that category decide among brands.

2.6 Price-Quality Schema

There is a myth related to how consumers make their purchases – the more expensive it is, the better it must be. This is known as the “price-quality schema”. As customers encounter vast amounts of information relating to quality in a variety of different variations – television advertising, word-of-mouth, billboards etc. – the limited cognitive abilities of the human brain develops ideas or, as they are scientifically referred to as, “schemas”. Schemas are the brain’s way of summarising what represents quality allowing us to quickly assess the world around us in seconds and make an informed judgment (Lichtenstein & Burton, 1990). Through experience, we further develop our schemas more accurately, rather than abstractly. Peterson and Wilson (1985), as cited in Geyskens et al. (2010) first coined this term, and theorised that if a customer develops a belief that quality is strongly associated with price, they will use this association to help them make shortcuts in their decision-making process. Quelch and Harding (1996) make the point that while PLs offer greater profit-margin, retailers still rely heavily on NBs for their ability to pull those customers who are attracted to NBs. By offering NBs, they enable the price-quality schema to work, and so, without NBs, it could be argued that incentivising customers to switch to PLs would be more difficult. The logic used is that, in order for the price-schema to become activated, the stimulus of a NB is required to trigger the beliefs/opinion towards that brand before it can be generalised to the similar-looking PL.
Geyskens et al. (2010) found that heavy price-promotion dilutes the consumer perception of products and emphasize price-sensitivity while also diluting the gap in quality between NB and PL. Therefore, they recommend that manufacturers decrease intensity of price promotions during difficult economic periods, and instead increase advertising and product innovation. In contrast, Dhar & Hoch (1997) believe that the bigger the price gap between brands, the more likely a customer is to trade-down. However, this directly contradicts Geyskens et al.’s (2010) theory of price-dilution. Interestingly, a study by Raju et al (1995) found that greater price-gap among competing brands showed less penetration among PL brands, thus supporting the theory of a price-quality schema.

2.7 Loyalty

It is generally accepted that when first introduced, PL products were considered the cheap alternative to NB. However, as technology has advanced, the ability for retailers to invest more into the quality of their PL offerings has allowed them to compete far more closely against their NB counterpart. This improvement in quality, while also maintaining strong price-advantage has been noticed by customers (Ward et al, 2002). As a result, retailers have been able to capitalise on this and use their PL range as a method to differentiate from other retailers, thus using their PL range to enhance their store image and further encourage loyalty to their store. According to a poll commissioned by the Private Label Manufacturer Association (PLMA), as cited in Ward et al. (2002), consumer awareness of improvements among PLs resulted in consumer awareness rising from 86% in 1991 to 91% in 1995, while the percentage of consumers that regularly bought PLs rose from 77% to 83%. Supporting this view is a study by Richardson, Jain and Dick (1996), as cited in Bhatt and Bhatt (2014), that states that PLs help to increase store traffic by offering lines that are unavailable elsewhere. Furthermore, of consumers surveyed by the PLMA, 76% agreed that store-brands were of similar quality to NBs. As Moberg (2006) states, as cited in Szymanowski and Gijsbrechts (2007, p. 231), “…
private-labels, we can better differentiate ourselves and our brands. We can increase customer loyalty”.

However, while there is evidence to support the theory that PLs increase store loyalty, there is also studies to suggest PLs have negligible impact on store loyalty. As a study by Richardson (1997) suggests, as cited in Ailawadi et al. (2008), that while customers may be loyal to PLs in general, this loyalty may not pass on to the store itself. In other words, customers may not return to a particular store for their PL range, but instead may generalise the quality of one store’s PL to all PL offerings, including those of competing stores. This perspective is further supported by Szymanowski and Gijsbrechts (2007) who argue – based on feedback from their study – that consumers transfer their attitudes from one PL to all PLs. In other words, consumers use a similar mental construct towards NBs as they do PLs in terms of quality and experience – the quality/experience of a NB will be constant regardless of store/chain it is bought.

The concept of brand inertia (Ailawadi et al., 2008) is a concept that has been shown to relate to loyalty. The concept refers to when a customer first purchases a product then, following a positive experience, repurchases the same product and, with repeat purchases, develops a habit of purchasing the product as it makes for an easier decision-making experience with minimal risk. This trend is unlikely to be altered unless a new product appears that fits the same requirements at a better price, for example. Customers primarily driven by price can be said to have low brand-switching inertia as they do not value a product’s branding, but rather the lower price (Corstjens & Lal, 2000). Bawa (1990), as cited in Corstjens & Lal (2000), demonstrated using panel data that the possibility of repeat product purchase increases with each consecutive purchase. Goldsmith et al. (2010) recommended that stores promote their PLs using in-store sampling as a way of removing the risk often associated with switching to another, unfamiliar brand for the first time. An example of a store that implemented such a strategy was the
American grocery chain Publix – they offered a promotion of buy-the-leading-brand-get-the-corresponding-store-brand-free, which resulted in increased sales of their PL thereafter. (Goldsmith et al. 2010)

2.8 Manufacturer

Despite the progress made by PLs in producing quality products, there is still uncertainty surrounding the quality of PLs by comparison to NBs – more than half of the NB manufacturers in the US alone, engage in the production of PLs (Geyskens et al., 2010). The quality-gap perceived from the data obtained by Steenkamp et al. (2010) increased when the perceived manufacturing complexity of a product increased. The manufacturing complexity refers to a customer’s perception towards how difficult a product is to produce. As this perception increases, so too does the customers belief that more advanced skill is necessary to produce the product to a high quality. This belief of “greater skill needed to manufacture” stimulates an innate belief that a manufacturer with a proven track record is needed to produce the product to a satisfactory standard – thus, resulting in the purchase of the NB rather than the PL. This finding supports the current trend that while PL sales are increasing, NBs have consistently outsold PL in luxury categories and among products whose manufacturing process is considered to be more complex among consumers. However, what is the effect if the opposite is true – the customer perceives the skill or production process of a product to be lesser of the skills possessed by the manufacturer?

In a study by Aaker & Keller (1990), when participants were asked to give impressions of a product that they believed was below the skill-level of a known manufacturer, the feedback was negative. One explanation Aaker & Keller (1990, p. 38) offered is;
“consumers may attribute the act of placing a quality brand into what is viewed as a trivially easy-to-make product class as a blatant effort to capitalize on a brand name image to command higher than justified prices”.

While brand-extending is not directly related to the current study, how customers perceive products within a different context – as is the case in both brand-extending and the introduction of a familiar product under a PL – does relate to the current study.
3. Methodology

3.1 Methodology Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the philosophy and methods employed in order to answer the research question and accomplish the objectives of this dissertation. The author will justify the methods chosen and how the findings observed from the data collected will prove beneficial both academically and used effectively within business practices. The author will explain the choices and decisions made sequentially using Saunders et al “research onion” (2016, p. 124). The “research onion”, illustrated below in Figure 2, provides a framework that can be followed to help ensure the research carried out was done so in a cohesive manner with a logical flow.

![Figure 2: Research Onion](source: Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012, p. 124)
The following sections will discuss the reasonings behind the author’s decision to use an interpretive research philosophy as well as why an inductive approach was adopted for the development of theory gathered from the data gathered. Also covered in the following sections is the reasoning behind the use of a mixed-methods approach – both quantitative and qualitative. Furthermore, the author will explain the method employed to select participants using the mixed-methods approach. Finally, the decision to opt for a cross-sectional as opposed to longitudinal time-horizon in order to complete the dissertation within a fixed timeframe will also be covered.

3.2 Research Design

The author used a mixed methods research strategy to explore and compare the various attitudes of customers from two different demographics within the Dublin area, with the goal of understanding the reasoning behind these attitudes and updating existing theoretical frameworks according to the findings produced from the data analysed. The current study utilised a mixed-research design approach. In order to grasp a better understanding of what factors play a role in the decision-making process of customers, gain a descriptive background regarding the different populations and present a causal relationship between variables, the current study uses a combination of exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory designs.

The explanatory approach will be adopted primarily for the qualitative aspect of the study, the focus group (discussed in detail in section 3.2.10), whereby participants will be encouraged to discuss various topics amongst each-other, with the goal of giving insight into the various different ways each individual perceives a stimulus, and to explore if these perceptions alter when challenged by other members of the sample. As Saunders et al. (2016) describe, an exploratory study is an effective means to ask open-ended questions and understand what is happening among different individuals whilst also gaining insights into a topic of interest. It is
with this reasoning, that the author believes an exploratory approach would be appropriate for the current study.

Saunders et al. (2016) describe the use of descriptive research as a means to an end within a research design. In the context of the current study, the descriptive data which will be collected during the quantitative survey (discussed in more detail in section 3.2.9). The author hopes this will provide insight into the habits and trends of customers from two different demographics. Thus, it is expected that from the data collected, current theories in the field can be further refined to help TESCO stores more accurately target consumers of different backgrounds. Descriptive research is generally used as an extension of exploratory research which would usually dictate that the qualitative research occur before the quantitative (Saunders et al., 2016). However, due to scheduling conflicts, this was not the case in the present study.

The author plans on using the data gathered from both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to establish explanatory causations between the variables (Saunders et al, 2016). For example, one of the objectives of the current study is to explore if TESCO customers today believe price is a good indicator of quality (“price-quality-schema”) – to be able to answer this question, the author feels a combination of exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research is necessary.

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

As the current study deals with the views of customers in relation to a particular context or scenario (in this case, TESCO stores), and given how one person’s experience can differ vastly that of another, the author will be responsible for the interpretation of each account recorded. As such, the research philosophy that is adopted for the collection of primary data required for the current study is interpretivism. The rationale for this choice of philosophical approach is that the author expects to collect a vast quantity of data, much of which will be of a descriptive
nature and thus require interpretive skills to gain a fuller understanding. As Creswell & Creswell explain, “the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied.” (2018, p. 08). With this in mind, it is vital to avoid the risk of bias, that the author interprets the data gained in accordance with the participants’ intentions rather than his own, as Creswell & Creswell state “the researcher’s intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (2018, p. 08). Another reason this philosophical approach is important in the context of the current study is for the focus group which will be conducted. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), the opinions and beliefs of people are a result of discussions had with others that can change from one form to another as a result of social influence. The reason this may prove to be important during the focus group exercise is that it gives rise to the possibility of changes in viewpoint – the subject matter of the current study has been shown to be controversial in past research and thus, the likelihood of perspectives and opinions to change in accordance with differing viewpoints of colleagues is high.

In the context of the current study, the aim is to gain a greater understanding of why consumers choose the products they do when all are exposed to the same varieties and options. Moreover, the question is regarding the attitudes of consumers towards competing products – why one customer perceives/interprets one product as superior/better than the other, while another will hold the opposite belief. As Saunders et al. suggest, the key difference between the interpretivist philosophy compared to that of the positivist philosophy is the viewpoint that each human has a unique perspective on life and experience, whereas those with a positivist perspective “attempts to discover definite, universal ‘laws’ that apply to everybody” (2016, p. 140). As Saunders et al (2016) suggest, reducing human behaviour to simple, definite guidelines and a series of rules takes away from the great complexity and insights associated with the human condition.
The primary goal of approaching research with an interpretivist perspective is to create new and richer understandings of familiar contexts (Saunders et al. 2016). Furthermore, the matter of varying gender, background, ages etc. are all elements that the current study will deal with and attempting to develop a greater understanding of the different viewpoints of individuals in a shared environment while accounting for these individual characteristics further support the adoption of the interpretive research philosophy.

3.2.2 Research Approach

There are two approaches available to choose from and each is dependent on the research question and objectives the researcher wishes to answer through their design methodology. Those approaches are inductive and deductive.

A study that uses an inductive approach proposes that through the collection of data, a theory is devised. Saunders et al (2016) use the example of interviewing a sample of employees and supervisors about their individual experience of working in a company with the goal of using these reports and data to develop a new theory to explain absenteeism. In other words, the researcher would be approaching the study with no pre-determined expectations, but rather would approach the analysis of data to produce “the formulation of a theory, often expressed as a conceptual framework.” (Saunders et al, 2016, p. 147). This approach does not fit the current author’s research objective, as the purpose of the current study is not to formulate original theory, but rather build and update pre-existing models and theories. As the inductive approach relies on the formulation of a new model or construct based on data accumulated, it is arguably far more challenging and time-consuming to use such an approach for a dissertation paper.
The deductive approach relies on the testing of already established theories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As cited in Saunders et al. (2016, p. 146), Blaikie (2010) put forth a list of six steps through which a deductive research study should follow:

1. The proposal of an idea, hypothesis or set of hypotheses to form a theory
2. The analysis of existing literature based around the idea/hypothesis/hypotheses to develop a testable proposition(s) (“objectives”)
3. Examine the premises and the logic of the argument that produced them, comparing this argument against existing theories to see if it offers an advancement/evolution in understanding.
4. The gathering of appropriate primary data to measure the concepts/variables and analysing them using the relevant software.
5. If the results of the analysis are not consistent with the idea/hypothesis, then the theory is false and must either be rejected, modified and the process restarted.
6. If the results support the hypothesis, then the theory may be accepted as true.

As the mixed-methods approach being used in the current study is based on already established theories, with the aim of both testing and updating these theories according to current trends in the Irish grocery market, the deductive approach is the most appropriate.

3.2.3 Research Strategy

The effectiveness/success of a research project largely lies in the strategy implemented to answer the research question and accomplish the research objectives. Without a clear methodology in place, the reliability of the data gathered and the credibility of the study as a whole, will suffer. The research strategy can be defined as “the plan of action to achieve a goal” (Saunders et al. 2016, p. 177) or the detailed blueprint for which the research is guided in order
to answer the research question and accomplish the accompanying objectives (Aaker et al., 2007).

With the above guidelines in mind, the author considered multiple different strategies in order to identify the correct one(s) to best answer the research question and objectives of the current study. According to Saunders et al (2016), the research strategy selected should be determined by the research question and objectives, and the coherence by which these are linked to the philosophy, research approach and purpose. Saunders et al (2016) also highlight that important factors to consider before commencing a study are those elements vital to the study, and often under-estimated, are the time-horizon (discussed in further detail in section 3.2.4) and also access to participants/sample. As the purpose of the current study was to explore attitudes towards brands held by customers of TESCO, the strategy identified as most appropriate by the author was a case study and survey approach.

The case study strategy was utilised as it is an effective approach in answering questions of a “why?”, “what?” and “how?” nature and also gaining rich information pertaining to a single organisation (Saunders et al, 2016). While case studies are generally used in the accumulation of data over a sustained period of time (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), this will not be necessary in the current study as the sole requirement is to establish attitudes held by customers within a specific time-frame (discussed in more detail in section 3.2.4). As Yin (2018, p. 15) defines it: “a case study is an empirical method that a) investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within real-world context”. Put in the context of the current study, the “phenomenon” Yin refers to can be related to consumer attitudes towards NBs and PL brands, while the “real-world context” can be related to the TESCO store. Yin (2018) further refines his definition by suggesting that a case study can benefit from prior research and theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection and analysis – all elements that have been incorporated into the current study. Furthermore, as summarised by Yin (2018, p. 04) – “the
more that your research question(s) seek to explain [emphasis in original] some contemporary circumstance (e.g., “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), the more that case study research will be relevant.” – it is for this reason, that the author has selected the case study approach, as appropriate for the current study.

While the validity of case studies have been challenged in the past by scholars, particularly those of a positivist background regarding their findings and the ability to produce results that can be generalised, these criticisms have been countered as the value of mixed-methods research is becoming more widely accepted in fields of research (Saunders et al, 2016). Yin (2018) further argues this point by comparing the validity of case studies to that of a scientific experiment – a practice accepted by researchers all over the world. Yin (2018) argues that scientific experiments, that ultimately result in the development of theories and facts, are rarely based on the grounds of a single experiment, but rather multiple separate experiments that all followed similar conditions and guidelines. This same principle could be used to describe the validity of case studies – the results from multiple case studies produce similar results, therefore forming the development of a theory/phenomenon.

The survey approach, generally used in deductive research, is very effective for gathering the opinions of a large group of people while also being very cost-effective (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). It is also particularly useful in asking questions such as “Who?”, “What?”, “Where?”, “How much?” and “How many?” (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). While there is certainly a convenience associated in the gathering of large amounts of standardised data that can be generalised to a much broader population through the use of a survey, it would be naïve to think that a survey has no drawbacks. While gathering data may be more cost-effective and efficient, the aspects of gaining access to the necessary sample (while also ensuring it is representative of the target population), designing the survey, piloting the data collection as well as analysing the data collected are all very time consuming. Furthermore, ensuring surveys
are completed correctly and ensuring a high response rate are also elements that require a lot of planning and consideration (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). Arguably the most difficult aspect of designing a survey, is the decision-making process of identifying how many questions to ask participants and, subsequently, which questions are the most relevant. As Saunders and Lewis (2017, p. 121) summarize: “designing a questionnaire is very easy; designing a good one is enormously difficult”.

The author chose the survey strategy as the most appropriate for the current study as it is regarded as the most effective way of asking participants for their opinion on a number of related topics without requiring too much of their time, while it also offers an effective strategy for directing discussion within a focus group environment when time is of far lesser an issue.

3.2.4 Time Horizon

As the current research paper is a dissertation to, in-part, fulfil the requirements of a Master’s degree, the author had to ensure the strategy implemented would both suffice to answer the research question and accomplish the accompanying objectives within the time-frame available. With this in mind, the author recognized that of the two time-frames recognised within research methods – cross-sectional and longitudinal – cross-sectional was the only viable option.

As described by Saunders et al. (2016) research studies that take the longitudinal approach provide a “diary” perspective of possible questions – studies of a longitudinal nature can take anywhere between months to years to complete. An example of a longitudinal study would be the study of how price-fluctuations between seasonal sales affect consumer purchase behaviour. A research question of this nature would require ongoing testing and analysis of how customers behave from one shopping season to another. The current study does not require
observation relating to changes of time, and for this reason, the longitudinal approach was not chosen.

The author of the current paper wishes to study the attitudes of customers towards the private-labels stocked by TESCO stores during the current time-frame – September-November 2018. Part of this study will compare how attitudes have changed/evolved over the years. This comparison will be done by comparing the primary data collected in the present study with those reported in the literature review. Therefore, the author believes that the only primary data required to sufficiently answer the current research question and objectives is the current opinions held by TESCO customers. As such, the current study will employ a cross-sectional strategy in order to investigate the attitudes of TESCO customers during the period this research was undertaken.

3.2.5 Sampling

As the focus of the current research is the analysis and comparison of customers of TESCO stores in Tallaght and Dun Laoghaire attitudes’ towards NBs and PLs, the author accepted the fact that it would be implausible to reach every customer of TESCO within these demographics to assess their each individual opinions toward brands. Furthermore, gaining access to an accurate and up-to-date list of customers that shop in TESCO would also not be a realistic undertaking (Saunders et al, 2016). Therefore, it was not reasonable for the author to consider a probability sampling frame. Saunders and Lewis (2017) define probability sampling as a method whereby the researcher would select a sample of a target population at random using a complete list of those that make up the population. With this not being possible under the current circumstances, the author chose to select the sample frame for the current study around a non-probability sampling frame – “a variety of sample techniques for selecting a sample when you do not have a complete list of the population” (Saunders and Lewis, 2017, p. 276).
Among the options available to researchers opting for non-probability sampling are quota, purposive, volunteer and convenience sampling. The author chose a combination of purposive and quota sampling as the most appropriate sampling method to answer the research question and the objectives. Purposive sampling (also known as “judgmental sampling”) allows the researcher to use his best judgment to actively select participants that will best answer the research question and meet the objectives – this approach was implemented during the surveying phase that took place within Bloomfields Shopping Centre. The author believed this approach to be most suitable under the circumstances as several elements had to be considered during the selection of potential participants. For example, it was important that the participant was not familiar with the author as this would serve to potentially give lesser credibility to the respondents answers – given that the author is a resident of the area, this was an element that had to be avoided as much as possible. Also, the author had to make his selection according to his best judgment of who was most likely to stop and be willing to participate – this was generally gauged according to speed of walk and body language. The author found that the most willing to participate were those that eye-contact was made from a distance, were alone, and those that were clearly waiting for their partner/spouse to finish paying (which proved greatly opportunistic as the partner/spouse would generally partake too).

During the phase in Tallaght, a similar approach was used, however, the use of quota sampling was also required to qualify those that shop in the TESCO store from those that do not (Saunders et al, 2016) (the criteria was that participants had shopped in the store, not necessarily that they had just completed a shop before partaking in the survey). The process of qualification was a matter of engaging potential participants and, once engaged, asking whether or not they had shopped in the TESCO store before – 3 had claimed to have not, and therefore were thanked for their time but not qualified to partake in the study.
For the focus group, a convenience sampling approach was adopted. The sample consisted of 4 friends of the researcher, between the age of 28-32, 3 male and 1 female, all of whom were regular TESCO customers.

3.2.6 Research Ethics

In addition to the planning of how the primary and secondary data will be collected, analysed and presented, there are ethical issues that need to be considered in advance of the commencement of any research project. One of the principle issues that needs to be considered ahead of time, as highlighted by Punch (2014), as cited in Creswell & Creswell (2018), is in regards to the collection of data from people, about people.

As the current study is concerned with consumer attitudes, naturally a key aspect of the primary research is the collection of data from members of the public. With this in mind, the researcher had to be aware of a number of important ethical issues and ensure the practice of proper ethical standards during the collection of such data. For example, before allowing a participant to partake in the survey, it was important for that the participant was fully aware of the purpose of the study. This was done by the researcher first introducing himself by name and declaring his status as a Master’s student in Marketing within DBS and the purpose of the research. Should a participant reject the request to participate, the researcher thanked the person for their time and was respectful of their decision. This highlighted the researcher’s awareness of preserving the standards of the store in which the survey was being conducted, as well as respecting people’s decision to say “no” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al, 2016; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In the event that the researcher was required to conduct the survey verbally, it was crucial that the researcher take great care with his tone of voice and be careful not to lead participants to answer in a certain way and ensure they were responding according
to their own beliefs rather than being in any was influenced by the researcher thus damaging the credibility of the data gathered and results produced (Saunders et al, 2016).

Another important aspect that needed to be considered during the collection of data was anonymity and confidentiality. While the vast majority of surveys completed were done so by each participant without assistance, some required the assistance of the researcher and was facilitated without bias. In all instances, however, the confidentiality and anonymity of all that partook in the survey was ensured as no information was recorded that could identify individuals taking part and, for those that completed the survey independently, each was instructed to place the completed survey in a folder containing all the completed surveys, thus further ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (Saunders and Lewis, 2018).

As discussed earlier, gaining access to TESCO Bloomfields customers was a key aspect of this study, and therefore, it was important that the author sought permission from the store management (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In order to address this issue, correspondence was established through email with the store’s management to ensure they understood the purpose of the study and that full reassurance that the store’s image would not be at risk should permission be granted (see Appendix iii). While the store’s manager did initially request a copy of Public Liability Insurance from the college, the author was able to negotiate around this request by offering a compromise (in this case, a letter of confirmation stating my status as a student – see Appendix iv) in order to gain the access required.

During the data analysis process, it is important that the researcher maintains a neutral status in regards to the data obtained and avoid bias. This includes the accurate reporting of data collected and not selecting/ignoring data according to what suits the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).
A number of ethical considerations needed to be understood and employed before, during and after the qualitative research stage which involved a focus group. For example, the author required the consent of the volunteers taking part in the focus group in order to analyse the data gathered. In order to do this, it was important that participants fully understood the purpose of the focus group, as well as in what capacity the information they divulged would be discussed and that the confidentiality and anonymity of the data would be assured (see Appendix v). In order to obtain the consent of each participant, a “consent form” was handed out to each member of the focus group before the discussion commenced, outlining the purpose of the study and how the data would be used (see Appendix vi). Also outlined in the consent form was the right each participant had to withdraw from the discussion at any point (Saunders et al, 2016). As part of the process to ensure confidentiality, participants of the focus group were asked to address each other on a first-name basis only – this measure was taken to further ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

3.2.7 Limitations

While every effort was made to ensure the methodology employed to carry out this research study was as appropriate and well implemented as possible to ensure the findings were as representative of the sample population as possible, there were various elements and circumstances beyond the authors control that may have adversely impacted the results. Furthermore, as this is the authors first attempt at carrying out a research study, lack-of-experience may also have resulted in flaws in the methodology and/or the resulting findings. However, besides the general limitations relating to the author’s lack-of-experience in the field of primary research, the other primary limitations the author has identified within the study were related primarily to the sample and sample size.
As each member of the sample was chosen according to the author’s best judgment (purposive sampling), the findings resulting from the data cannot be generalised to all TESCO consumers. Furthermore, as the sample were selected based on their attendance in an individual TESCO shopping centre, this further emphasises that the findings of this study cannot be considered as a blueprint of the average TESCO customer. Another limitation to the current study is the sample size – due to time-restrictions, the survey was carried out on a single-day and thus, the sample size is small, which, again, limits the ability to generalize the findings.

In terms of the implementation of the focus group, the transcription was done so according to the authors best interpretation of the recording made. Therefore, it is possible that certain points made throughout the discussion may have been incorrectly interpreted from what a speaker said and meant compared to how it was interpreted by the researcher during transcription. Also, there is the possibility to consider that, as the discussion was being held in a controlled environment with participants being encouraged to speak openly and honestly about their opinions, participants may not have spoken honestly due to the risk of being judged by their fellow peers in the group. Moreover, it is possible that the views expressed within the focus group may not have accurately represented each participant’s behaviour in the reality.

Another limitation to the design of the current study was the matter of varying demographics, with specific reference to the focus group participants compared to the survey sample. As the participants of the focus group were from mid-to-high demographic backgrounds, it is not possible to say the views expressed are reflective of those that partook in the survey.

3.2.8 Pilot Survey

In order to overcome any potential difficulties during the administration of the survey such as misinterpretation and/or misunderstanding of questions/statements, and ensuring as many potential participants would be willing to partake in the survey and not be intimidated by
length, the author chose to pilot the survey among friends and family members. During the piloting phase, the survey consisted of 13 questions (see Appendix i). The author believed it sufficient to send the survey to respondents via text/Whatsapp as most people use it and it ensures quick delivery and feedback. With only a few suggestions made relating to minor details such as terminology and the addition of more options for certain questions, the feedback was very positive.

However, when piloted in the format it would be administered – using a pen and clipboard – the author was surprised to find respondents reporting major confusion towards various aspects of the survey and drawing attention to various typos and other grammatical errors. The most notable comments were in regards to the phrasing of statements/questions, the length of the survey, and, in-particular, the final question/statement which requested participants to categorise specific product types according to their preference of either NB or PL. Interestingly, another comment made was in regards to the use of the phrase “National Brands” – the author was advised that this could be confused for an “Irish-made product”. The author was also advised that the font-size was too small. The final draft of the survey (see appendix ii) differed in length (reduced from 13 to 10), has increased font-size, and several questions/statements and options rephrased to ensure it was more universally understood terminology. The pilot survey proved potentially the difference between a successful and unsuccessful quantitative research study, particularly the pilot version that implemented the brick-and-mortar approach.

3.2.9 Survey

The author commenced the quantitative data collection on October 24th within the mall lobby by casually approaching those exiting the mall and requesting they partake in the survey at 8:45 and concluded at 12:30 – at which point a total of 32 completed surveys had been returned. Of the 32 completed 28 were completed independently by respondents. While every effort was
made to ensure all surveys were completed under identical circumstances, 4 were completed with the assistance of the researcher with respondents giving their responses verbally while the researcher completed the survey on their behalf. The researcher made every effort to ensure no verbal cues were given to avoid the risk of bias (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Following this, the researcher travelled to Tallaght Square to conduct further surveys among the locals in that area. The purpose of this was to compare the results of both demographics. While every effort had been made to gain access to the TESCO located here, gaining permission was not possible. Therefore, the author compromised by casually approaching people that were exiting the main mall. Everyone that stopped was first qualified as a TESCO customer with the question “Have you been shopping in TESCO today?”. Only those that responded affirmatively, were selected to participate in the survey. A total of 28 surveys were completed, all of which were completed without any assistance from the researcher.

3.2.10 Focus Group

Following the collection and analysis of the quantitative data, a focus group was compiled in an effort to gain further insight into the data collected from the surveys. The focus group consisted of 4 friends of the researcher each of whom participated on a volunteer basis – 1 female, 3 males, and all from a mid-high demographic backgrounds. The focus group took place at a time and place that agreed upon by all participants - Tuesday, 3rd November, 2018, from 19:00-20:15 in the home of the researcher.

Before commencing with the focus group, all participants were requested to read and complete a consent form (see Appendix vi) that confirmed that each participant had volunteered to partake in the group and were free to withdraw at any time, that they understood the purpose of the study, agreed to the discussion being recorded and, finally, that each agreed to the use of anonymised quotations in the publication of the current report (Saunders & Lewis, 2017).
When all consent forms were returned completed, participants were seated in a circle to commence the discussion.

Before commencement of the discussion, however, the researcher setup the recording equipment (a phone) in the centre of the group and gave a brief introduction which included basic information regarding the purpose and aims of the study, some basic guidelines to ensure as much as possible that all participants were given time to express their opinions and views without interruption and encourage that those that had differing view(s) to feel free to voice them (see Appendix v). From an ethics standpoint, it was also important to remind all that should they at any time feel a need/want to withdraw from the process they were free to do so. The interviewer began the discussion by confirming that all members of the sample were indeed regular shoppers of TESCO and asked each member to introduce themselves by first-name only and for their reason for choosing to shop at TESCO. After the first member answered with their reason, the researcher asked the each other member if they shared this reason. This resulted in a number of participants offering various other reasons and the discussion unfolded naturally from here. From this point, the role of the researcher was, whenever an interesting point and/or research question/objective-related was made, to probe for further information regarding the point without specifying the reason (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). An example of a probe used was “can you elaborate further on that…?” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 191). Another important line of questioning utilised by the researcher was that of interpretation (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). Interpretation is used to clarify a respondents meaning being a comment, for example “so what you are saying is…?”. This is an important technique used to avoid researcher bias.

When the researcher was satisfied with the data gathered, the discussion was closed by opening the floor to any further points participants may have had but didn’t have an opportunity to express during the discussion.
4. Data Analysis And Findings

4.1 Introduction

After completing the quantitative element of the primary research and gathering all necessary data required to begin answering the research question and complete the objectives, the next step was the processing and analyses of the raw data, followed by interpretation of the subsequent results. This chapter discusses, in detail, the procedures followed by the author in order to convert the raw data collected from both the quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group) into meaningful information that can be understood to the reader and, potentially, scholars and practitioners. As Saunders et al. (2016, p. 496) explain,

“quantitative data in a raw form, that is, before these data have been processed and analysed, convey very little meaning to most people….therefore, need to be processed to make them useful, that is, to turn them into information.”

The chapter is broken down into three sections – quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis and, finally, findings. The chapter on quantitative data is broken down into 2 subsections as it consists of data gathered from two different demographics – Dun Laoghaire and Tallaght – and therefore, the author saw it fit to analyse each data-set independently first, before comparing and contrasting where applicable.

4.2 Dun Laoghaire – Data Analysis

4.2.1 Gender

While carrying out the survey the author made every effort to be as impartial when selecting participants as possible. As part of this effort, the researcher felt it important to try and select equal numbers of males and females. As can be seen from Table 1 below there was an equal
number of participants representing each gender – 16 male and 16 female. Accordingly, it is expected that the consequential findings can be attributed equally among both genders.

![Table 1: Gender Ratio](image)

### 4.2.2 Age

The next criteria was participant age. As can be seen in Table 2 below, the majority of respondents were in the 25-34 age bracket (10), followed by 35-44 (8), with the next age-range being 45-54 (6). Finally, the segments that had the fewest number of participants were the 18-24 and 55-60 (both accounting for 3), with the 60+ segment representing 2. As discussed in section 3.2.5, the author employed a purposive sampling approach which meant that the author used his best judgment to determine the most appropriate participants to partake in this study. Part of what determined the selection was avoiding potential ethical issues and therefore those that made up the 18-24, 55-60 and 60+ segments were approached sparingly.
4.2.3 Occupation

In order to gain a better insight into the type of customer that do their shopping in the Dun Laoghaire TESCO, it was important for the researcher to enquire about each participant’s occupation. As illustrated by Table 3 below, the majority of respondents were “Employees” (11), with “Other” being the second most common form of occupation, accounting for 7 of the total respondents, with “Student” making up 5 of the total sample. According to Table 3, the minority of respondents were currently “Self-employed” (4), “Unemployed” (3) and “Retired” (2).
4.2.4 Average Monthly Income

The researcher believed including the average monthly income as a variable was important in order to gain an insight into the extent to which spending-power influences (if at all) the product selection of customers that shop in TESCO Dun Laoghaire. As can be seen from Table 4 below, the majority of participants declared themselves as currently occupying the “Between €1000-€2000” segment (13), followed by both “Less than €1000” and the “Between €2000-€3000” segments, both accounting for 9 respondents. Perhaps surprisingly, given the demographic, the minority of responses came from those in “More than €3000” segment accounting for just 1 respondent.

Table 3: Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.5 How Often Do You Shop In TESCO?

Table 5 below illustrates the frequency by which respondents of the survey reported to shop in TESCO Dun Laoghaire. As can be seen, most respondents reported that they shop in TESCO “Few times per week”, accounting for 15 respondents. This segment is followed by those that claim to shop in the store daily (11), with “Once per week” and “Not often” accounting for 4 and 2 respectively.
4.2.6 Price Is More Important To Me Than Brand

Table 6 illustrates how the sample used to represent the population of TESCO Dun Laoghaire customers feel towards the pricing of products, compared to branding. As can be seen, the vast majority of consumers (18) reported that they strongly agree with the statement that price is more important than brand when it comes to product selection. This was followed by those participants that did not agree so strongly, but did agree nonetheless that price, in their opinion, is the more important factor when selecting products (9). 4 respondents disagreed while 1 strongly disagreed with the statement. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, the opinions of people that do their shopping in TESCO Dun Laoghaire vary widely across the topic of branding and price and which is more important during their decision-making process. Referring back to the literature review and the findings by Gabrielson & Sorgard’s (2007) study, these findings could suggest that those customers that claim brand is more important to them than price, could be those that Gabrielson & Sorgard referred to as “brand addicts”.
4.2.7 Quality Is More Important Than Price

The next statement on the survey aimed to gain an insight into the views of shoppers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire and their opinions on whether quality is more important when selecting products than price. Based on the surveys completed and as can be seen on Table 7 below, while the majority of participants were in agreement that, generally, they prioritise quality over price, there were still several that disagreed, and even 1 that strongly disagreed. Similar to the price/brand point, this illustrates that the matter of which do consumers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire consider more important when making their purchases, or in their decision-making process in the event of two competing brands in the same category, quality or price, is still a grey area for some.
4.2.8 Generally I choose…

When asked when having to choose between a NB (referred to in the survey as “Name brands” following feedback from the pilot study) and PL, the resulting feedback – as shown in Chart 1 below – suggests that PLs claim the majority of the market-share with customers shopping in TESCO Dun Laoghaire. It is worth mentioning here that this point caused several participants to express their difficulty in choosing one over the other as they claimed that it is often dependent on the product category, to which the researcher simply responded “just select the one you feel you would more frequently select…” After some consideration, majority chose PLs over NB. While this certainly doesn’t necessarily prove anything, this finding is the first to suggest that the opinions held by customers that do their shopping in TESCO Dun Laoghaire towards PLs has changed from perceiving PLs as the inferior cousin to NB to the more now being the more popular choice.
4.2.9 Reason(s) For Selecting TESCO Brand

Following on from investigating choice between NB and PL, the next point on the survey aimed to probe this point further and find out specifically the reason(s) behind selecting TESCO brand products. Most respondents (26) selected “Price” as a factor that influenced their choice when selecting PLs. It is important to note that this question allowed for multiple responses.

A high percentage of respondents selected “Quality” as a reason for their choice. This suggests that, in certain areas at least, consumers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire perceive PLs as equal or better quality than NBs, thus supporting the finding by Doug & Palmer (as cited in Ward, 2012) that customers consider PLs to be of equal or superior quality to NBs. This highlights a vast change of opinion from that held by consumers when compared to the study by Kumar and Steenkamp (2007) who suggested that as NBs have greater spending-power relative to their PL competitors, they invest heavily in improving their product packaging-innovation in order to suggest superior quality. This may no longer be the case. However, of all the respondents that participated in the survey, only 1 reported that packaging played a part in their choice.
Another interesting point highlighted here is that of “Loyalty”. According to Chart 2 below, very few report having purchased TESCO brands as a result of loyalty. This would suggest that while the opinions of TESCO consumers towards their PL is changing for the better, it may not have the benefits they are necessarily striving for – customers returning to purchase their own PL. According to the feedback, only 4 respondents selected “Loyalty” as a reason for their purchase of TESCO brands.

Table 8: Reason For Buying TESCO Brand Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.10 Introduction of Multi-Tier Changing Consumer Opinions Towards PLs

In light of the previous question investigating why consumers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire choose PLs, the aim of this point was to investigate how the introduction of multi-tier varieties has impacted their perception of their PL range. As can be seen in Table 9, the majority of participants (12) reported that their opinion has “definitely” changed with the introduction of the multi-tier range. Interestingly, the responses that followed in terms of frequency were those that felt either their opinion had changed “A little” or “No” with an equal response of 7, while those that simply agreed and responded “Yes” made up 6 of the sample population.
4.2.11 Willingness to Pay More For a TESCO “Finest” Product Than a NB

When asked about their willingness-to-pay more for a “Finest” product than a NB, consumers in Dun Laoghaire were split in their opinions, as illustrated in Chart 3. While, “Maybe” gained the most responses with 37.5%/12, this strongly suggests to the author that the opinions towards PLs are certainly on the rise as, even though the majority chose uncertainty, it was by a very narrow margin. The responses for “Yes” and “No” gained equal share of the opinion with 31.3%/10 each, suggesting the majority of respondents would, at the very least, consider a premium-tier PL over a NB.
4.2.12 Increase In TESCO Brands Has Made Me More Price-Conscious

An important aspect of this dissertation was investigating how – if at all – the increased range of TESCO products has resulted in consumers becoming more price-conscious. As can be seen in Chart 4 below, according to feedback from customers, it is highly possible that this is indeed the case among customers shopping in TESCO Dun Laoghaire. With 46.9%/15 of participants agreeing that this is the case, while 40.6%/13 reporting that they strongly agree with this statement. However, while most respondents did agree in some capacity, there were a few (12.5%/4) that did not agree with the statement. This result raises further questions. For example, for those that reported that they did not agree with the statement, it would be interesting to investigate the type of product they would be more likely to choose during their usual shop.
4.2.13 Price Reflects Quality

After being asked about their price-consciousness in-light of the rising varieties of TESCO brands, the next statement looked at consumer awareness of their own price-quality schema. As discussed in Chapter 2, Peterson & Wilson (1985) coined the term and referred to it as the process by which consumers relate the quality of a product to its price, and through this process, associate price with quality in an effort to make decision-making easier. According to the feedback gathered from the survey – as can be seen below in Table 10 – the vast majority of customers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire do not agree to adhere to this rule with 20 strongly disagreeing that this is how they decide on which products to purchase. This was followed in descending order as few expressed disagreement (6), fewer claiming to agree (4), while 2 even reported that they strongly agreed with the statement. The range of responses again, arguably, raises more questions than answers – for example, the author would like to explore this further, but under circumstances whereby participants could be observed to allow for more unconscious behaviour to be studied that could perhaps shed further light on this matter.
4.2.14 TESCO Brands Resulting In Consumer Loyalty

Returning to the topic of store loyalty, the next statement participants were asked to respond to asked them directly if they shop at TESCO with the specific intention to buy their PL products. As can be seen from Table 11 below, the majority of respondents claimed this was not the case, with 9 saying they “Disagree”. What is interesting here is the that the second most popular choice for respondents was “Agree”. Furthermore, while it received the least number of responses, “Strongly Agree” received 2 responses. This suggests a certain amount of contradictory claims from when customers were asked to give their reasons to purchasing TESCO products, where only 4 respondents selected “Loyalty”. Here, however, between “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”, 12 responded that they shop in TESCO specifically to purchase their PL products. Again, another point that perhaps raises more questions than it answers.
4.2.15 Investigating if Customers Generally Switch Back to NB After Trying PL

As is illustrated below in Table 12, the final statement on the survey explored the likelihood customers feel that they continue purchasing PLs after trying them, or are more likely to switch back to the competing NB. As can be seen from Table 12 below, most participants that took the survey reported that they “Agree” (18) – that after trying a TESCO brand product, they are unlikely to switch back to the NB. “Strongly Agree” received the second-most responses with 8, while “Disagree” received 6 responses. “Strongly Disagree” received no responses. This finding indirectly supports the idea of loyalty towards PLs, however it does little to shed further light on whether consumer preference towards TESCO brands is exclusive to TESCO brands, or if consumers perceive all PLs under the same umbrella of products.
4.3 Tallaght: Data Analysis

In this section, the author will analyse the data gathered from participants that took the survey in the Tallaght area. As discussed in the chapter 3, the sample taken from Tallaght was done so using a purposive and quota sampling approach – the author believed the use of quota sampling was necessary to qualify all members of the sample as indeed shoppers of TESCO Tallaght.

As with section 4.2, this section will present the findings of the survey taken descriptively without drawing conclusions. Chapter 5 will discuss comparisons between the two sets of data collected – including apparent similarities and differences between the two demographics – as well as interpret the findings by comparing the results of the current research against those findings reported in past research – do the findings of the current study support those of past research report?
4.3.1 Gender

As Table 13 illustrates, there were a greater number of female participants in the sample taken from Tallaght – the sample consisted of 16 females and 12 males. While every effort was made to ensure a heterogenous sample was used, this was made very difficult as the majority of the sample available were female and thus, having a more homogenous sample is more representative of the population. Furthermore, given the sample size, the author justified that gender imbalance would not cause major discrepancies in the results.

![Table 13: Gender](image)

4.3.2 Age

As can be seen from Table 14 below, the majority of the sample that completed the survey were in the 25-34 age bracket (9), followed by equal shares of 18-24 and 35-44, each accounting for 6 of the sample size. The minority of the participants represented the older age brackets, with 5 consisting of those within the 45-54 age bracket, and 2 respondents claiming to be part of the 60+ segment. There were no respondents under the age of 18.
4.3.3 Occupation

The table below, Table 15, displays the occupation of the sample that partook in the survey. As can be seen, most selected the “Employed” option (12). Following behind “Employed”, were those that declared themselves as “Self-employed” (6), while an equal share were either a “Student” or “Unemployed” (4). Finally, those that considered themselves unfit for any of the previous categories, selected “Other” (2).
4.3.4 Average Monthly Income

Below we can see the responses received from the sample of participants that shop in TESCO Tallaght regarding their average monthly income. As can be seen, most respondents reported having an average monthly income of “Between €1000 - €2000” accounting for 11 of the total sample selected. The next most common average was “Between €2000 - €3000”, making up 8 members of sample, followed by “Less than €1000” (6) and finally “More than €3000”, which was formed by 3 members of the sample taken from the Tallaght area.
4.3.5 How Often Do You Shop In TESCO?

Table 17 displays the frequency which consumers of the TESCO store in Tallaght that made up the sample for this study shop at TESCO. “Few times per week” was the most popular choice here, being selected by 15 members of the sample. This was followed by the most regular option of “Daily”, which was voted for by 7 respondents, followed by equal responses shared between “Once per week” and “Not often”, each receiving 6 votes.
4.3.6 Price Is More Important Than Brand

When customers of TESCO Tallaght were answering about whether they prioritize price over brand, the great majority of the responded that they strongly agreed – price is more important to them than brand. As can be seen below in Table 18, 20 respondents strongly agreed with the statement. A distant second choice for this demographic of customers simply agreed with the statement, accumulating 5 of the votes, with 3 disagreeing.
4.3.7 Quality Is More Important Than Price

When participants answered whether or not they believe that the quality of a product is more important than the price, as can be seen below in Table 19, the responses were mixed between those that agreed and disagreed. Both “Agree” and “Disagree” received equal votes from consumers in Tallaght, both accounting for 9 of the total votes. Interestingly, “Strongly Agree” received just one vote less than these, gathering 8. I will discuss this result, as well as a comparison against the Dun Laoghaire feedback in the next chapter. Only 2 participants said they “Strongly Disagree” with this statement.
4.3.8 Selecting Between TESCO and Name Brands

Chart 5 displays the feedback of data gathered from TESCO Tallaght customers and whether they generally choose NBs or PLs during their shop. From the pie chart below, the response was very positive towards NBs, with PLs receiving the minority of the vote from customers in Tallaght, receiving only 9 votes, by comparison to 19 who said they usually choose NB.
4.3.9 Reasons Customers In Tallaght Purchase TESCO Brands

Below are two charts illustrating the selections made by customers of TESCO in Tallaght – Chart 6 displays selections made by my respondents, while Table 20 illustrates the frequency each option was chosen by participants. While “Price” being the most common reason for which customers choose to buy is not surprising, the fact that considerably fewer claim to choose TESCO brands for their quality did surprise the author. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5.
4.3.10 Introduction of Multi-Tier Changing Consumer Opinions Towards TESCO Brands

In general, the feedback towards whether or not the introduction of multi-tier TESCO brands have altered the opinion held by TESCO customers in Tallaght seems rather mixed. As can be seen from Table 21 below, the majority of respondents (13) responded that their opinions had not been changed, while 6 responded very positively that their opinion had changed, and 5 responded that they support the statement and that their opinion has changed since the introduction of multi-tier products. 4 respondents also said that their opinion had changed a little. So, in total, adding together the responses from “Definitely”, “Yes” and “A Little”, the total count of customers that reported that their opinion had changed with the introduction of multi-tier TESCO brands is 15 while those that reported that their opinion had not been changed is 13.
4.3.11 Willingness to Pay More For a TESCO “Finest” Product Than a NB

Similar to the previous point, participants were divided when it came to deciding whether or not they would be willing to pay more for a premium-tier TESCO “Finest” product than a NB. As Chart 7 shows, 17.9%/5 of participants said that they would be willing to pay more for a TESCO “Finest”, whereas those who were unsure accounted for the majority of respondents (42.9%/12), with those unwilling close behind with (39.3%/11).
4.3.12 Increase In TESCO Brands Has Made Me More Price-Conscious

As can be seen in Table 22, the difference between those that selected “Agree” and “Disagree” was minor – 10 versus 12 (35.7%) respectively. Looking closer at the feedback, however, we see that while most participants either chose to “Disagree” with the suggestion, there were still a number that strongly agreed (5) that they are more price-conscious under the current circumstances, compared to when there were fewer PL products to choose from. One respondent reported that they strongly disagreed that the greater number of PLs in TESCO has impacted their price-consciousness.
4.3.13 Price-Quality Schema

When asked if, when having to choose between a competing NB and PL, they would choose the more expensive of the two, the response – as can be seen below in Table 23 – was largely divided between those that “Agree” and those that “Strongly Disagree”. 11 strongly agreed, while 12 disagreed that this statement does accurately reflect their decision-making process under such circumstances when shopping – more on this in Chapter 5. A noticeably fewer number of participants either strongly agreed, or simply disagreed with this statement, with 2 strongly agreeing that, in their opinion, price-reflects-quality, while 3 disagreed. These figures, again, suggest a far from unanimous outlook from those that shop in this store.
Table 23: Price-Reflects-Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.14 PLs Resulting In Store Loyalty

The customers of TESCO in Tallaght, as can be seen in the below Table, predominately disagreed that TESCO’s PL range was the reason they shopped there, with only a very small minority of respondents agreeing with the supposition. In total, 27 of the participants either strongly disagreed, or just disagreed that TESCO’s PL range was the reasoning behind their decision to shop in TESCO, while only a single person agreed that they shop there specifically to buy their PL range. This is another factor that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, as this sheds interesting light on TESCO customers, their attitudes towards their PL range and how this affects their loyalty towards the store.
4.3.15 When I Try A PL Brand, I Rarely Change Back to The NB

Following on from question 9, which aimed to establish the degree of loyalty held by customers of TESCO Tallaght towards the store based on their PL range, question 10 investigated their tendency to opt for PL over NB after having tried the TESCO brand alternative. This yielded further interesting feedback as, after the feedback from question 9 suggested very little customer positivity towards TESCO’s PL, the researcher was anticipating few to report a preference for PL over NB. As can be seen from Table 25, however, the opposite appears to be true – after trying a PL alternative, 19 participants reported that they would continue purchasing the PL alternative rather than change back to the NB. By comparison, 8 participants disagreed, and would switch back to the NB, while only 1 strongly disagreed with the statement, suggesting they are very loyal to NB.
4.4 Focus Group

As mentioned in section 3.2.10, the focus group consisted of 4 individuals, all of whom were known to each other and the researcher. The views expressed during the focus group discussion revealed a number of interesting points. All participants unanimously expressed a general preference towards NBs, except in specific categories. For example, one participant claimed that they would never buy any other brand of butter than the NB they are familiar with, and this viewpoint was shared with another participant, but was disagreed towards by the other two in terms of butter specifically, however, each expressed strong preference towards NBs in other categories. One participant claimed that they would never purchase a PL of either tea or chocolate. The remaining two members of the group expressed a preference towards meat products (would never buy anywhere but a specialty butcher), while the final participant expressed a preference towards TESCO’s PL water compared to NB lines. When asked for their reasons for their selections, the term “trust” came up on multiple occasions. The question of what factors about the product influences their trust was asked. The product’s packaging
was identified as a major factor – “if they’re ‘skimping’ on the packaging, what else are they ‘skimping’ on when producing the product?”.

4.4.1 Product Packaging

All participants agreed that they do judge a product based on their packaging, but interestingly, all commented on the very distinct blue-and-white stripes of the TESCO brand range as “very off-putting” and “cheap”. The researcher found this interesting because all participants were sure that that was still the packaging of TESCO’s “Everyday Value” range, when in fact, it was redesigned and relaunched back in 2012 (Stokes, 2012) under the new brand “The Hearty Food Co.” (Hammett, 2018). Also commented on was the amount of thought and consideration the manufacturer has put into designing the package can impact their overall impression of the product and, ultimately, their decision to buy. This again brought up the point of the blue-and-white stripes associated with TESCO’s PL and all, again, suggesting this as a reason they would not purchase these products.

4.4.2 The Perception of Others

During the shopping routine, there are generally others around that are also doing theirs and that, should they so choose, can observe the selection of others. This fact again is relevant to the point of product packaging and thus, the group were asked if the opinion(s) of others affects their product-selection. In other words, do they choose particular brands depending on if it is for themselves or if they are either intended for someone else – would they be dissuaded from buying a PL for fear of judgment? While all initially claimed the impression others make based on their product selection does not affect their choice between NB or PL, when the researcher probed further by clarifying that they would each be happy to serve a PL brand of crisps, for example, at a function such as a fundraiser, opinions changed. For example, the point was made of “I wouldn’t advertise that I bought the TESCO brand, particularly when I am having people
over for a formal occasion. If I had a TESCO product, I would empty the crisps, or sweets, or whatever, into a bowl to avoid the potential judgment associated with that type of product”. Even TESCO “Finest” products were identified as a reflection of “cheap” and not an option for buying as a gift. This was further clarified in that the participant expressed that the reasoning for not giving a TESCO “Finest” product as a gift is not because they consider the quality inferior, but rather because it would “look cheap” and come with the implication that they “…couldn’t be bothered spending the extra 50c…”.

This perspective changes however when the occasion is less formal – a casual gathering of friends, for example. The point was made that in the event of having friends over for a casual get-together, TESCO PLs are fine, but they are perceived as being “a bit cheaper”. It was also accepted that even when the TESCO variety may taste the same, they still don’t reflect as well. Again, in terms of advertising the brand choice, a participant stated that they would agree with the point made earlier of emptying into a bowl as, “…if it was a packet of crisps from TESCO, there would be definite feelings of judgment”. The final point made regarding packaging came with the declaration that “If I’m going to buy a box of chocolates, I’m not going to buy a TESCO “Finest” chocolates, because it’s obviously for a nice occasion”. These views support Simonson’s (1989) proposed “attraction effect” which predicts that part of the decision-making process considers the opinions of those important to us.

4.4.3 Have Opinions Changed Over The Past 10 Years Towards TESCO’s PL?

The next topic discussed was in regards to whether the overall impression has changed over the past 10 years and, if so, how? While all agreed that their opinion of the TESCO PL of products has changed for the better, one participant still expressed his preference towards NBs and said he would not be willing to buy PL as there has been a certain level of trust developed, but other products, such as cleaning and toiletries, TESCO’s PL range are “acceptable”. On
this point, all participants noted that a major factor that has influenced their improved perception of TESCO’s PLs is the packaging. Given that this was one of the reasons for their universal dislike for PLs earlier in the conversation, the researcher found this interesting.

4.4.4 Selecting Between NB and PL – Greater Selection, Less Expertise

When having to decide between a NB and PL, do they take into consideration the product’s manufacturing process such as ingredients? While most generally agreed that they do not take this into consideration as they already know which they want to buy before the begin shopping, further discussion was initiated when one member claimed that their opinion towards a PL being cheaper than a NB, was due to the assumption that they use “a lot more synthetics…chemicals…artificial stuff…I would just assume it’s more full of that than the national brand, justifying the higher price-point”. This lead to a fellow member supporting this view from the perspective of “speciality” – “…the national brands, they generally make their own stuff, and that’s what they focus on, and this helps with creating their loyal consumer base, because their confident in what they do and they know their own strength”. The group agreed with this point, from a perspective of the extension of PLs into so many categories implies a lack of expertise in any one area. The comparison was made to fine dining – generally a fine-dining restaurant will have a very limited range of dishes to choose from and these reflect a chef’s expertise, whereas an average restaurant will put less emphasis on refinement and instead focus on attracting as many customers as possible by offering a greater selection, with the standard suffering as a result of less focus on expertise. The group agreed with this point.

The topic of trust towards NB varieties of products once again came up as a result of the point of “expertise”. The participant that mentioned butter at the beginning of the session once again voiced their opinion in-so-far-as they were incessant that they would only ever purchase a particular NB of butter because “they’ve developed a really strong brand for a reason – they’ve
refined this process, they know what their at. And I just wouldn’t trust that some other random brand…be it TESCO, or whoever, has reached that standard”. When questioned further on this point – as the researcher would consider milk, butter and cheese to be of a similar line of products – if the participant also shares the same degree of brand trust for milk and cheese, the respondent replied “Eh…. No…”, in a noticeably less assured tone of voice. When asked why, it was reasoned that there are distinct characteristics associated with butter such as taste that, by comparison, they do not find that big of a difference between brands of milk or cheese. When the other members of the group were asked if they shared this opinion, 1 strongly agreed, while the remaining two did not. Elaborating further on the preference for NB varieties of butter as opposed to PL, the manufacturing process was commented upon. In reference to the manufacture of milk and cheese, one made the tongue-in-cheek remark of “How wrong can you get it?”, but in regards to the process of making butter, there was a significantly higher level of doubt associated with lack of expertise. When questioned further on if the complexity of the manufacturing process is an important aspect when choosing brands, the participant expressed uncertainty but admitted “I suppose maybe… I had never really thought about it, but yeah, with certain products there needs to be that correct balance. With butter, that balance is in regards the amount of salt is in it”. As mentioned earlier, similar comments were made in relation to other specific brand categories, such as chocolate and even mineral water with similar reasons being expressed regarding personal preference.

4.4.5 Price-Quality-Schema

Given the previous topic touched on the perceived quality of products in association with particular brands, the author saw fit to bring up the topic of “price-quality-schema”. The general synopsis here was that generally price-does-reflect-quality. The point of consumer cynicism was touched on and largely accepted among the group towards PL products costing less and, therefore, must lack in some way. Each member admitted that while they do not
necessarily believe this on a rationale level, they are nonetheless influenced by the higher price point and accept that it must surely reflect some form of superiority over the cheaper alternative – “…two different labels….I’m going to assume the more expensive one is better quality, tastes nicer, that it’s more natural, something that cost them more in the manufacturing process, and therefore justifies the higher price-tag. But I realise that may not be true…”. Adding to this point was the thought-process of whether the savings to be had when purchasing the cheaper, PL alternative, are worth the trade-offs of what may or may not be in the product.

4.4.6 Economic Circumstances

The point of economic circumstances was then discussed in terms of whether or not difficult financial circumstances influence buying-habits. The group was divided on this point – 3 members agreed that their economic circumstance does dictate their product selection, while the 4th member said no, they would stick to the product they trust. When the 3 that said yes, they would switch to a cheaper PL during difficult financial times were asked if – in the event that they enjoyed the PL more than anticipated – they would continue purchasing it when their situation improves, or switch back to their usual, more expensive NB, all 3 said they would return to the more expensive NB. Again, the reasoning was “trust”.

The most common themes that occurred throughout the focus group discussion were “trust” and “involvement”, and “brand addiction”. Involvement and brand addiction seemed to often accompany each other throughout the discussion – when someone mentioned their trust in a brand, a particular type of product (e.g. “butter”, “chocolate”, “meat” etc.) would soon be mentioned in the context of it being too important in the participant’s lifestyle to substitute for a different brand. Interestingly, when the discussion drew to a close and the floor was opened for anyone to add any further opinions or views that they may have, the point was made that the term “it depends” came up so frequently that it now begged the question of “what does each
individuals’ choice of product depend on?” and the fact that each participant identified a particular product type that they would not be willing to substitute for a PL and while it made sense to each personally why they would not substitute, it seemed illogical to the rest of the group. This, and how all of the other various points discussed during the focus group compare to the feedback gathered from the surveys, how all support or contradict the findings in previous studies, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Before discussing the above data in detail, let us first revisit the purpose of the current study, specifically the research question and the accompanying objectives: the author of this study set out with the goal of answering the following research question – has the improving market-share of private-label brands (PL) impacted TESCO consumers’ attitudes towards quality and price? In the pursuit of answering this question, the author also set out to accomplish the following objectives – 1) if PL options have made customers of TESCO more conscious of price, 1.1) to investigate the impact of multi-tier options on product choice, 2) to investigate if PLs has impacted store loyalty, and 3) to investigate if PLs have impacted the price-quality-schema.

5.2 Consumer Attitudes Towards TESCO’s PL Products

As can be seen from Chart 1 and 5, while the majority of the total sample chose NBs in favour of TESCO brands, the margin was slim. In Dun Laoghaire, for example, the majority (56.3%) reported that they would choose TESCO brands over national brand, while of those that participated in the survey in Tallaght, 67.9% said they would choose national brands. While this suggests that national brands still control the majority of the market-share, it also demonstrates that consumers do not perceive each brand as being starkly different.

Delving further into the discussion of consumer attitudes, and more specifically, investigating why consumers do choose TESCO products over national brands, the feedback from the surveys for both demographics showed that the price advantage held by TESCO brands is still the primary reason for which consumers are drawn to them. However, as seen in Table 8 and Chart 2, customers of TESCO Dun Laoghaire also reported that “Quality” was an important contributing factor in their selection, with 22 of the 32 participants selecting it. This again
demonstrates how the investment by TESCO to improve their PL range has resulted in improved attitudes from their customers towards their PL brand. What is interesting about this finding is, as discussed in Chapter 2, a big challenge for PLs is playing catch-up with NBs who are always innovating their packaging in order to maintain a competitive edge and to be perceived as better quality on shop shelves (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2007, as cited in Steenkamp, 2010). However, as Table 8 and Chart 6 illustrate, among both demographics, almost no customers identified “Packaging” as a contributing factor in their purchase of a PL. However, this was mentioned in a negative context during the focus group, whereby participants identified the old TESCO “Value” range packaging as a reason that they would not purchase them today. This brings up the interesting point of rebranding as, as noted in the report by Hammett (2018), the “Value” range was rebranded in light of this concern, and yet none in the focus group – all regular TESCO customers – had ever heard of it. This leads the author to question if the impact of product packaging and the innovation associated plays a predominantly sub-conscious role in customer decision-making – something perhaps worth researching in greater depth in a future study.

5.3 The Effect of Income on Product Choice

As can be observed from the respective tables illustrating the incomes of the samples used, the average income of participants from Tallaght was higher than that of those that partook in the survey in Dun Laoghaire. It is interesting to note that, the majority of the participants in Tallaght reported a preference towards NBs while those in Dun Laoghaire chose PLs. This supports the findings by Shea (1993a) suggesting that consumers will be less willing to spend on higher priced goods than those with greater disposable income. Another interesting observation to be made from the data collected is that, while the majority of participants from Tallaght reported that they prioritise price-over-brand, the majority also reported that, in general they would buy NB products over PL. These two findings would appear to contradict
each other as NBs are more commonly sold at a higher price-point. This may indicate brand-inertia and suggest that an aspect of product-selection is sub-conscious.

5.4 PLs Have Made Customers More Price-Conscious

As can be seen from Table 6, price is a more important factor when it comes to product choice than brand, with 26 of the 32 respondents that do their shopping in Dun Laoghaire either strongly agree or agree with the statement. This is supported by those that shop in TESCO Tallaght, with more than 88% of the respondents in agreement.

However, while the majority of the sample did agree, there were still a number of respondents among both demographics that did not agree that price was the more important determinant when it came to product choice. For example, among those shopping in Dun Laoghaire, 4 members of the sample disagreed, while 1 strongly disagreed. After further investigation into this finding, it was discovered that those members that disagreed, were in the older age bracket. With this in mind, the author hypothesises that there may be an element of product “inertia”, as was discussed by Bawa (1990) as cited in Cortjens & Lal (2000) at play here – members of the older generation find comfort selecting products they are familiar with and therefore, while price may be an advantage with PLs, they value the security of familiarity associated with NBs more. This was a view very much echoed by all members of the focus group – “familiarity” and “trust” are two vital factors when choosing products and deciding between brands. By comparison, however, among the sample from Tallaght – where 6 respondents were between 55-60 – a much greater proportion agreed that price is the more important factor, highlighting a difference in these two demographics.

When respondents were asked if the increase of PLs across product categories has resulted in greater selection of products based on price, the feedback was less conclusive – while the vast majority of participants in Dun Laoghaire either strongly agreed or agreed, fewer agreed in
Tallaght. In fact, among the Tallaght respondents, “Disagree” received the greatest individual votes with 12, while “Agree” received 10 votes and “Strongly Agree” received 5. The results from the focus group helped elaborate a bit further on this – as one member of the group suggested, while the cheaper price of a PL is attractive, it also brings with it a sense of insecurity and raises the question of “why is it cheaper, what makes it inferior?”.

This narrow division in perspective suggests that the contrasting phenomena identified by Gabrielson and Sorgard (2007) – “brand addict” and “switcher” – exist across these varied demographics. The “brand addict” will pay no attention to price when selecting their preferred brands, while those that are price-conscious, will choose the brand that offers the better value. But then there is also the “sceptic” that will be attracted by the better-value price tag but then question the potential performance limitations that allows the manufacture to sell at a reduced price, and therefore the lack-of-trust determines their purchase-decision of the familiar NB.

5.5 Impact of Multi-Tier PLs on Product Choice

According to the feedback gathered, the extra choice and variety offered by the introduction of multi-tier product ranges has resulted in differing views among the demographics sampled. As can be seen from Table 9, for example, 12 of the 32 respondents in Dun Laoghaire said that their opinion towards TESCO’s PL range had “Definitely” changed since the introduction of the multi-tier range. However, by contrast, of those that partook in the survey in Tallaght, the vast majority – 13 – reported that they had had no impact on their opinion towards TESCO’s PL range.

When asked specifically about TESCO’s premium range of products, “Finest”, and if they would be willing to spend more on them than a NB, the majority from both demographics responded “Maybe”. This finding contradicts Geyskens et al.’s (2010) finding in their study that multi-tier has dramatically changed the perspective of consumers towards PLs, as the most
common reflects uncertainty among consumers. Contradicting the findings of Doug (1996) & Palmer (1995), as cited in Ward et al. (2002) – whereby they found that 90% of respondents in their survey claimed premium PLs were of either the same or better quality than NB - is the finding that equal measures of customers from Dun Laoghaire said either they would or would not be willing to pay more for a “Finest” product than a NB, while a greater proportion of respondents in Tallaght reported they would not be willing to pay more. This finding supports the point made by Dacin and Smith (1994) as cited in Geyskens et al. (2010) suggesting that as a retailer broadens their range primarily in terms of quality variation, this results in consumers becoming less confident in the level of quality offered by their products. This was discussed in the focus group also – participants expressed a lack of confidence in a manufacturers ability to produce a product to satisfactory standard when they are producing products across so many ranges, it suggests a lack of expertise. The lack of confidence depicted in the feedback from the surveys and particularly the focus group suggests that consumers of TESCO in both Dun Laoghaire and Tallaght, feel less able to rely on the quality offered by TESCO’s PLs due to the variation offered across their different tiers and a lack of reassured expertise in any one category.

5.6 PLs And Store Loyalty

As discussed already, the results from the surveys suggests that while customer feedback suggests preference towards NBs, PLs are not far off claiming equal share. However, this does not answer the question of does this translate to store loyalty?

When participants were asked if they shop in TESCO specifically to avail of their PL range, the feedback was mixed. For example, in Dun Laoghaire, 21 respondents disagreed that they shop in TESCO specifically to avail of their PL range, while 11 reported that they did. Interestingly, when asked if they change back to NBs after trying a PL alternative, the majority
of respondents said they do not – they continue purchasing the PL. This feedback supports the report published by The Wall Street Journal (1993) suggesting that when consumers change from NB to PL they will often not switch back.

By comparison, those in Tallaght strongly disagreed that they shop in TESCO specifically to avail of their PL range. Similar to those in Dun Laoghaire, participants here also agreed that, after trying a PL alternative they too rarely change back to the NB competitor.

By contrast, however, the focus group feedback largely rejected this idea – all reported that they do generally change back to the familiar NB after trying a PL alternative. However, in terms of actually selecting TESCO as a preferred store to shop in, all agreed that they do consciously choose TESCO over the competitors, primarily because it offers a good compromise in terms of price and quality, and this includes their PL offerings.

So, what does this tell us about loyalty? It would seem that the data gathered from the surveys supports the PLMA’s report (1995), as cited in Ward et al. (2002), that 76% of customers find PLs to be of comparable quality to NBs. However, while this is encouraging information for TESCO, it does not appear that this translates store loyalty. As the information gathered from the focus group suggests, that even when TESCO’s PL range compares favourably to the NB, the lack of trust earned from years of use of NBs ultimately results in a loss of loyalty enjoyed by NBs.

Therefore, the results of the current study support the findings of Richardson (1997), as cited in Ailawadi et al. (2008) and Szymanowski and Gijsbrechts (2007) whose research findings suggest that attitudes held by customers towards PLs are not exclusive to the PL of a particular store. Szymanowski and Gijsbrechts (2007) discuss this finding further in the context of “inertia” – as a consumer continues to purchase a PL, their experience with that PL is generalised to all PL offerings regardless of store. This process can be compared to that by
which consumers buy a NB in one store, enjoy it, repurchase it again in a competing store, and have a similarly satisfactory experience – the beneficiary is not necessarily the store, but rather the brand. However, arguably the primary reason for TESCO experiencing difficulties in converting customers of their PL range to loyal customers, is the relative newness, unfamiliarity and, crucially, lack-of-trust their PL have earned in comparison to NBs.

5.7 PLs And The Price-Quality Schema

Given that PLs still generally possess a price-advantage over their NB counterparts, the author considered it a worthwhile area to investigate in terms of when having to decide between a NB and PL competing in the same product category, do TESCO customers base their decision on price? The result of this question yielded vastly different results from the surveys, while the focus group was largely unanimous in the views. For example, among the Dun Laoghaire participants, over 90% agreed that, under such circumstances, they will generally choose the product with the higher price as they feel it reflects better quality. What is interesting here is that, when asked earlier in the survey about the brand they generally choose, PL was the more popular choice. Furthermore, when selecting their reasons why, “Price” and “Quality” were the most popular reasons. Therefore, this would suggest that the attitudes held by TESCO Dun Laoghaire customers towards PL products, in terms of quality, is improving. However, as noted earlier, this is not necessarily creating more loyal customers due to lack of trust built. This feedback supports Dhar & Hoch’s (1997) theory that the greater the price-gap between competing brands, the more likely customers are to trade-down to the more affordable product with confidence that quality will not be compromised in the process. This was a point that was made during the focus group – when the price-gap is large enough, this generates the question of how much better can one be than the other? Specifically, one member of the focus group made the comment of, if choosing between 2 different jams – one PL while the other is NB –
and the price difference is €1.50, how much better can the more expensive one be? From this deduction, the PL is selected.

In Tallaght, the feedback was considerably different, with the majority of customers surveyed, either agreeing or strongly disagreeing with this view. This supports the feedback gathered regarding the brand customers of Tallaght generally purchase, with the majority selecting NB. Furthermore, when selecting reasons for their selection, “Quality” was selected by only 9 of the 28 participants. This supports Raju et al.’s (1995) suggestion, as cited in Dhar & Hoch (1997), that greater price-gaps between competing brands results in less PL penetration.

This finding would suggest that consumers between the age of 25-54 shopping in Dun Laoghaire pay closer attention to price differences among products, rather than the brand, which would therefore suggest that, given the price advantage held by PLs, they should have the stronger sales. However, as further investigation of the data illustrates, this is not necessarily the case. Once again, this raises the point of trust. It would appear that the majority of customers of TESCO in Dun Laoghaire and Tallaght prioritise trust over price.
6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study set out to attempt to answer the question of whether the increased market-share in private-label brands has impacted TESCO customers’ attitudes towards quality and price. Accompanying this question were objectives that the author hoped would elaborate and help give further understanding toward customers and their decision-making process within this context. The first of these objectives was to investigate if the ever-extending variety of private-label brands across more categories has increased consumer price-sensitivity and, furthermore, how the introduction of their multi-tier varieties has impacted consumer product choice. The next area the author set out to investigate was if the price-quality-schema has been impacted by private-labels. Another area the author was interested in exploring was if the manufacture of a product affects brand choice – does the perceived complexity associated with a products production impact a consumers willingness-to-try a PL alternative? Finally, is the increased sales of TESCO’s PL product range reflected in store loyalty?

In order to gather the data required to answer these questions, the researcher chose to select a sample from 2 different demographics in an attempt to gain a greater insight into the reasons behind product selection. This research method used here was a quantitative approach in the form of a survey. Following the completion of the survey and having analysed the data gathered, the researcher designed a questionnaire that would be implemented in a focus group setting with the goal of gaining further understanding into why customers of TESCO select the brands they do.

6.2 Conclusion

Having analysed the data gathered and comparing it against the previous literature available on the topic, the researcher feels confident to report on a number of key findings. In regards to the
research question itself, the overall consensus suggests that the average TESCO consumer’s opinion towards TESCO’s PL range has improved. However, complicating this point is matter of brand familiarity which develops into brand trust – while TESCO have attempted to adjust their PL positioning by changing the packaging to distance itself from the perception of “cheapness” that plagued their “Value” range, results gathered from the surveys and focus group would suggest that customers still associate this image with their PL range. Furthermore, the findings of the current study suggest that these associations that consumers develop over time require a period of time to re-associate and for familiarity to develop and, more time, for this familiarity to evolve into trust. It would therefore seem likely that when TESCO attempts to adjust its image, it must allow for an extended period of time for customers to start familiarising themselves with the new image, before they can develop a trust with their consumers. Only in this way will they be able to promote loyalty via their PL range.

The question of whether the extension of TESCO’s PL range into more categories has increased consumer price-consciousness, the results appear to confirm this to be the case for the majority. While the majority do agree that when shopping they are aware of the price advantage offered by PL over NB, the author was surprised by how this proved for many to be a caveat for their product choice. The matter of “trust” again became apparent here for today’s consumer, and the only way “trust” can be gained is through familiarity, which is something that TESCO needs to focus on building with its consumer base if it wants to increase store loyalty through its PL range.

The results gathered also suggest that TESCO’s extension of products has both improved the overall perception its customers have of the store, but at a price – customers lack confidence in the PL range on offer as a result of the multi-tier varieties. A major advantage NBs have over PLs is the perception they project on to the market of their expertise. This was a common theme, particularly throughout the focus group discussion – there is an strong element of trust
associated with NBs as they tend to have an association with one-product-per-category. The broad selection of TESCO’s PLs appears to have damaged the consumer confidence that their selection offers comparable quality to that of NB. This supports Dacin and Smith’s (1994) theory of the “step-down effect”, as discussed in Chapter 2, suggesting that when an economy-tier product is introduced into a range, it creates a sense of uncertainty towards the brand as a whole and the overall quality offered by their line of products.

TESCO’s extension of its PL range as well as multi-tier offerings also relate to the price-quality-schema held by its customers. According to the results gathered, the price-quality-schema is still very much prevalent among TESCO consumers of the 2 demographics sampled and is something that should be considered by TESCO in regards to its pricing practices. Specifically, while many participants expressed an awareness that they did not believe there to be a discernible difference and that they even appreciated that oftentimes there will be no difference, that they are still persuaded by the idea that a higher price means better quality. Therefore, while having a lower price-point than the competing NB range should an advantage and increase sales, the current research suggests that this is instead repelling customers who assume the lower price-point reflects inferior quality. This is something NBs do not have to contend with as a result of years of building a relationship of trust with the consumer which, from the consumer’s perspective, is worth the higher price-point.

6.3 Recommendations

From the results of the current research, the author believes that it is a reasonable conclusion to say that while the general perception held by consumers of TESCO have improved in regards to their PL range, the preference towards NB in certain categories (e.g. butter, chocolate) is a result of trust built up over the years. Furthermore, from analysing the responses given from the focus group, the fact that consumers lack a clear awareness of why they feel a level of trust
towards particular NBs suggests that, in order for TESCO to achieve a similar level of trust through their PL range requires a prolonged time of exposure and less emphasis on price and continued focus on product packaging innovation to reflect quality. Therefore, the author’s recommendations are as follows: 1) improve product packaging and innovation to the standard and “Finest” range, and 2) either phase-out the “Everyday Value” range or rebrand it across the categories that show weakest sales. The author justifies the “phase-out/rebrand” approach as, according to the current research, the extensive range TESCO currently offers is having a “brand-dilution” effect (Dacin & Smith, 1994) thus damaging consumers perception of its brand and, moreover, ability to produce a consistently quality product. Therefore, limiting its offerings and investing greater resources into the standard and “Finest” range, the author hypothesises, should encourage the consumer that these lines offer greater quality and, therefore, with time, these lines could compete better against NBs. The author supports Goldsmith et al. (2010) suggestion to offer in-store samples – this method would guarantee greater reach and potentially convert likely “switchers”.

6.4 Directions For Future Research

While the current research sheds light on several areas of the FMCG environment in terms of the performance of TESCO’s PL range and the motivations for TESCO consumers to choose the brands they do, there are areas the author identifies that could be researched further or, that the methods used in the current study could be adapted and improved upon. For example, in future studies, it would be greatly beneficial to increase the sample size. As the current study was limited by time as it is in-part fulfilment of a Masters, the researcher was could not dedicate greater time to extend on in this area of the study. As a result, it is not possible to generalise the findings of this study.
As mentioned, time was a limited resource for this research study. The author believes that future studies in this area would greatly benefit without such restrictions. For example, researching how different seasons may affect consumer attitudes towards brands and product selections. Also, how the introduction of new PL products impact consumer product selection could prove very beneficial to TESCO and there product management. However, studies like these require longitudinal research approaches, not possible under the current circumstances.

Another area that would produce further findings and greater insights would be in the area of the focus group. Again, due to time restraints, the author was under pressure to attain the data necessary to produce the paper. However, under the right circumstances, designing 2 or 3 focus groups consisting of a sample not known to the researcher and coming from more diverse backgrounds could provide much needed insight into brand-attitudes and product-selection.

As the current paper was concerned with consumer attitudes towards TESCOs PL range in general, while the results produced provide useful insights for managers and marketeers, it lacks the ability to focus on a particular range of PLs. Therefore, the author believes future studies should consider narrowing the area of research to a particular category.

Finally, as the researcher focused on TESCO’s consumer base for the current study, a study extending to across more consumer bases would provide more in-depth results. For example, a comparison of the consumer case of two different stores would perhaps provide further insight into why one store’s PL range perform better than the other. Another possible area for future studies would investigating the attitudes of consumers that shop in Aldi and Lidl – stores that have built a successful business model stocking predominantly PL brands.
7. Reflection on Learning And Skills Developed

7.1 Introduction

The following provides an in-depth account of my experience in producing this dissertation paper as well as my experience of the Masters program as a whole.

7.2 Returning To The World of Academia

When I graduated with my first degree all the way back in 2009, the last thing I anticipated my future ahead involving was a return to studies almost 10 years later. Having spent the majority of those years in the world of retail, I felt an urge to upskill and challenge myself. Much to my surprise, this “urge” would land me in a Masters in Marketing course, something that had me questioning my sanity throughout 2018, finally putting my degree in psychology to some good use.

After researching the courses available, and following advice from various contacts, I was led on the path to applying for an MBA in DBS. However, after attending an open day and discussing the stream of marketing with Alan Morgan, in response to my years of experience working in sales and retail roles he questioned my choice of choosing the MBA path rather than the Msc in Marketing – something I knew I had looked into initially, but could not recall at the time the reason I chose the MBA instead. After leaving the meeting with Alan, I reviewed the entry-requirements for the Msc course, discovering that my lack of a degree in Marketing was the reason for my application for the MBA rather than the Msc. However, with the help of Alan, this limitation was converted into a strength.

7.3 Understanding My Learning Technique

As my time away from academia had been considerable, there were a number of challenges that I needed overcome – both anticipated and unanticipated. Perhaps the most immediately
apparent learning curve was my learning technique. From the outset, I established myself as “that student that wouldn’t stop asking questions”. While I am aware that I am very extroverted in social situations, this aspect surprised me. Being a past-student of psychology, I decided to do a bit of research on this. I was advised to read up on David Kolb.

After reading up on Kolb (1984), It became immediately apparent to me the reason for my constant questions and outspokenness within the lecture environment. According to Kolb, the process of learning occurs on 2 levels – a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles. The cycle of learning, essentially refers to an individual’s first experience with something, providing them with a basic understanding of a concept, followed by reflection of the experience, which is then followed by “active experimentation”, or trial-and-error to improve upon prior experiences. My understanding of this model helped me understand how my performance in assignments improved over throughout the course.

![Figure 3: Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle](https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html)

Further investigation into Kolb’s work brought me to understand that I have grown to learn best through hands-on experience and rely greatly on intuition rather than logic. This learning approach may be referred to, according to Kolb (1984), as an “accommodating” learning style. This is supported by Honey and Mumford’s theory of 4 learning styles (1986). According to Honey and Mumford’s models of learning, I am an “activist” – similar to Kolb’s definition of “accommodating”, the “activist” learns best by “doing”. In terms of how I was very inquisitive
during lectures, this learning style makes sense as, through discussion with my lecturers and/or classmates, I was getting more direct or hands-on experience with the topic. This also explains why I struggle to learn from merely reading books, and why it takes several read-throughs before I fully grasp the meaning of a passage. Whereas, hands-on experience, I learn far more readily.

These models can be applied to my working on this dissertation – progress was noticeably slower when I was required to read up on theories and/or models, whereas when I had hand-on experience, I had a much greater understanding of my topic and thus could write extensively and more confidently. What I found of particular interest about my apparent “accommodating learning style” was, according to Kolb’s theory, people that have this learning style often rely too heavily on others – as Alan, my supervisor would no doubt testify, this is absolutely reflective of me. Regardless of progress made (which I was always pleased with), after roughly a week, I would feel the need for Alan to reaffirm that the work I was doing was progressing according to plan. But, now I know – that’s just part of who I am! Had I known this before, I’d have probably used it as an excuse to meet twice-as-often!

Another aspect of myself I became very acquainted with throughout the duration of the course and dissertation process in particular was my ambition to see tangible results. I was adamant not to allow myself to leave anything until the last minute. I believe this attribute I learnt from the Personal And Professional Development module.

We were required to produce a detailed portfolio during this module, something we were warned on several occasions to get started on early. Naturally, we were all far better at laughing this advice off than following it. Thankfully, I came to my senses relatively quickly and managed to produce a piece of work I am relatively proud of. However, I can’t help but feel it could have been better had I gotten started on it earlier. Consequently, I promised myself to
never allow lack-of-time be an issue in future assignments. Much to my satisfaction, through
the entire dissertation process, I followed through on this promise – by comparison to the
portfolio, I made sure that I got started on this paper as early as possible, and am extremely
relieved to have done so. Time-management is certainly something both this course and this
dissertation have helped me give me a great appreciation for.

An aspect I found surprisingly challenging throughout the process, but in particular during the
focus group, was avoiding researcher bias. Large part of the reason for my choice to research
consumer attitudes towards PLs was an awareness of changes in my own product choices when
shopping – I would consider myself a frequent consumer of PL products as I, personally, cannot
discern a significant difference to justify the higher price of NBs. Learning the various
techniques to pry for further detail while not revealing my own opinion, proved very
challenging, but enjoyable.

Throughout the dissertation phase, the biggest challenge I found I had to cope with was my
mentality and self-confidence – too often I found myself struggling with anxieties and self-
confidence issues. During these times (of which there was many), had I not the incredible
support around me, including my supervisor, I know I would not have reached this point,
certainly not to the level of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment I sit here with now.
Funnily enough, I learnt that more often than not, a great cure for these occasions was
occupying myself by working on this paper. Therefore, in hindsight, what I considered stress
and anxiety at the time, proved to be arguably the most useful source of motivation!

Now then, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to see if I still remember how to celebrate over a pint…
References


Appendices

Appendix i) Pilot Survey

Dear participant, the following survey is part of a research paper examining the attitudes of TESCO customers towards TESCO own brands. Your answers will be used to measure the current positioning held by TESCO products in relation to customers in the Dublin area. All data is kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

- I confirm that I understand the purpose of the study, my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. ☐ Agree ☐ Decline

- Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female
- Age ☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-60 ☐ 60+
- Occupation ☐ Student ☐ Employee ☐ Unemployed ☐ Retired
- Average Monthly Income ☐ Less than €1000 ☐ Between €1000-€2000 ☐ Between €2000-€3000 ☐ More than €3000

- On average, how often do you shop in TESCO?
  ☐ Daily ☐ Once/week ☐ Twice/week ☐ More than twice a week

1. During my grocery shopping, price is an important factor to consider when selecting products.
  ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

2. During my grocery shopping, quality is an important factor to consider when selecting products.
  ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

3. When I select items, I generally prefer National Brands (e.g. Heinz, Hellman’s etc.)
  ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

4. When I select items, I generally prefer TESCO brands (e.g. Everyday Value, Tesco, Tesco Finest)
  ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

5. When I purchase TESCO brand products, it is because of the (tick all applicable)
  ☐ Quality ☐ Price ☐ Packaging ☐ Loyalty

6. Has the introduction of multi-tier TESCO brands (“Everyday Value”, “Tesco”, “Finest”) changed your opinion towards TESCO brands?
  ☐ Very much so ☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat so ☐ No
  a. If you answered “Very much so”, “Yes”, or “Somewhat so”, how have they changed your opinion?
     ☐ For the Better ☐ For the Worse
  b. If you answered “For the Better”, would you generally be willing to pay more for a Tesco Finest product than for National Brand?
7. The increase in TESCO brand products has made me more conscious of price
☐ Definitely agree  ☐ Possibly agree  ☐ Unlikely agree  ☐ Definitely not agree
☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree

8. In general, when I have to choose between a National or TESCO brand, I will often choose the one with the one with the higher price as I feel it reflects better quality
☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree

9. The improvements in packaging across the TESCO Brand range has improved my overall opinion towards them
☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree

10. I choose to shop in TESCO specifically to avail of their TESCO Brand range
☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree

11. When I change from an National Brand to try a TESCO Brand alternative, I rarely change back
☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree

12. Does your preference towards National brand/TESCO Brand change according to product category? (please mark each box with corresponding colour)

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Many thanks for your participation!!
Appendix ii) Final Survey

Dear participant, the following survey is part of a research paper examining the attitudes of TESCO customers towards TESCO own brands. Your answers will be used to measure the current positioning held by TESCO products in relation to customers in the Dublin area. All data is kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

- I confirm that I understand the purpose of the study, my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.  ☐ Agree   ☐ Decline

- Gender  ☐ Male   ☐ Female

- Age  ☐ <18   ☐ 18-24   ☐ 25-34   ☐ 35-44   ☐ 45-54
☐ 55-60   ☐ 60+

- Occupation  ☐ Student   ☐ Employee   ☐ Self-employed   ☐ Unemployed
☐ Retired   ☐ Other

- Average Monthly Income  ☐ Less than €1000   ☐ Between €1000-€2000
☐ Between €2000-€3000   ☐ More than €3000

- How often do you shop in TESCO?
  ☐ Daily   ☐ Few times per week   ☐ Once per week   ☐ Not often

13. Price is more important to me than brand.
  ☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

14. Quality is more important to me than price
  ☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

15. I generally choose
  ☐ Name brands (e.g. Heinz, Coca-Cola, Cadbury)   ☐ TESCO brands

16. When I choose TESCO brand products, it is because of the (tick ALL applicable)
  ☐ Quality   ☐ Price   ☐ Packaging   ☐ Loyalty

17. Has the introduction of multi-tier TESCO brands (“Everyday Value”, “Tesco”, “Finest”) changed your opinion towards TESCO brands?
  ☐ Definitely   ☐ Yes   ☐ A little   ☐ No

18. Would you generally be willing to pay more for a Tesco “Finest” product than for a Proprietary/Name brand?
19. The increase in TESCO brand products has made me consider price more
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

20. In general, when I have to choose between a Name or TESCO brand, I will often
choose the one with the higher price as I feel it reflects better quality
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

21. I choose to shop in TESCO specifically to avail of their TESCO brand range
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

22. When I change from an Name brand to try a TESCO brand alternative, I rarely change
back
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Thank you for your participation!!
Appendix iii) Record of E-mails Requesting Permission for Store Access

Good afternoon,

My name is Shane Mooney. I am a student studying for a Masters in marketing in DBS. I am currently in the process of conducting research for my dissertation on an area that greatly interests me - consumer attitudes towards branding, with a particular interest in private labels. In order to complete my research, I am hoping, with your permission, to be granted access to your customers after they have completed their shop in Tesco, to take part in a short survey (3-5 minutes).

Being a frequent customer of Tesco Bloomfields myself, I appreciate how much you value your customers and take every effort to ensure that their experience in your store is as pleasant as possible. Therefore, I assure you, should you be kind enough to accommodate me with this request, I will honor this value with the utmost respect and ensure no customer is made feel uncomfortable and completely free to reject my request to partake in the research.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Should you agree to grant me permission, a letter from my college supervisor is available will be presented to the store manager on the day we agree is suitable for me to conduct my research. At the time of writing, I do not have a preferable date as I am still designing the survey but, as I am sure you understand, knowing if I have the store available will provide a great advantage for when it is complete in the coming weeks.

Many thanks in advance for your time and help.

Kind regards,

Shane
Dear Shane,

You would need not only permission from the Shopping Centre but also from Tesco themselves.

The area immediately beyond the Tesco Checkouts is in the Shopping Centre’s control but I would not be able to give permission for you to interview Tesco’s customers.

Therefore I suggest you apply firstly to Tesco for permission and if they are willing come back to me and I will process an application on the basis that the activity will take place on my property.

To do this I will also require a copy of the Public Liability insurance which would cover you most likely your college has this cover in place.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further help.

Kind regards,

*
Dear *,

Apologies for the delay in this follow-up email regarding my enquiry for permission to conduct my survey in your centre. The person responsible for the Public Liability Insurance you referred to in your email was away. However, I have since heard back from her with the below information:

"Hi Shane,

Many thanks for your email. Public Liability Insurance provides cover in the case of an accident occurring on the premises.

Unfortunately, we would not be in a position to offer this as the research you conduct is not on the behalf of the college and is your own responsibility.

You could ask Tesco if you could sign a waiver in order to conduct your research.

Kind Regards

**

Naturally, my question now is, would signing a waiver in order to conduct my research within the centre suffice as a substitute to the Public Liability Insurance?

Kind regards,

Shane
Shane,

I’m not supposed to allow any activity on the mall without Public Liability cover as it also indemnifies us from claims relating to data protection etc. However, if you can get a letter from your educational supervisor in DBS stating you are a student of the faculty I think that would suffice. You will however need to check with Colin Cashman in Tesco if he is happy to accept something similar.

Regards *,

* - Name removed in the interest of confidentiality
Appendix iv) Permission Request Form

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Shane Mooney is a student at DBS studying for a Master’s of Science in Marketing.

He is currently engaged in writing his Masters Dissertation. A major part of this dissertation is the collection of primary data.

As Shane’s research focus is on grocery retail, he needs to collect raw data from consumers in a shopping environment and TESCO is his chosen retailer for this purpose.

I am supervising Shane through his dissertation and both he and myself would be grateful if you could allow him to conduct this research.

Please feel free to contact me to qualify any aspect of this letter,

Yours Sincerely,

Alan Morgan
Appendix v) Focus Group Introduction

Good evening all. I would first like to sincerely thank you all very much for being kind enough to give up your time and volunteering to assist me in carrying out this crucial part of my dissertation. The aim of my research is to investigate consumer attitudes towards branding, with a particular interest in TESCO private-labels. The Irish retail market currently consists of 2 primary types of brands – national/proprietary label (Heinz, Avonmore, Kilmeaden etc.) and private-label (Tesco branded). Over the past 15/20 years, the private-label industry has seen a massive increase in its market share and, therefore, expanded its range to appeal to a broader customer base with the introduction of Tesco Everyday Value, Standard and Finest range.

Before we begin, can I first confirm that all participants here today are frequent shoppers in TESCO.... The reason I have narrowed my research down to TESCO is, according to a report by the Irish Examiner published on June 05th, figures released by Kantar Worldpanel revealed TESCO as having the greatest share of the market with 22.3% (followed by SuperValu 22% and Dunnes 21.8%).

The purpose of this focus group is to evaluate perceptions held by TESCO consumers towards branding and allow me to delve deeper into those perceptions by allowing for discussion among your fellow consumers. It is important to understand that while there are no “wrong” answers, I expect and encourage participants to voice their opinion(s) honestly, particularly in the event that an opinion differs from that of your own. Bear in mind that I am just as interested in negative comments as I am positive, as oftentimes, the negatives can be more helpful.

As you may have noticed, there is a recorder present – this is being used to record the entire session as, while I shall be taking notes throughout, there will likely be occasions whereby I will not be able to keep up with the discussion. Also, we are here today on a first-name only basis, and no names will be used in my report – your anonymity and confidentiality is very important, and nobody will be identifiable from the report produced from this discussion. It is also important to know that should anyone at any point want to withdraw from the discussion, to feel free to do so with no need for an explanation.

During the duration of this discussion, there are just a couple of ground rules I have set-out in order to help maintain flow of the discussion, assist me in transcribing the viewpoints expressed and to allow for each participant to get their opinion across. They are as follows:

- Please turn your mobile phone on silent – should you receive or need to make a call, please leave as quietly as possible and return in the same manner.
- 1 person talking at a time – again, please feel free to be as open and honest as possible.
- As this session is being recorded, please speak as audibly (not shout) and clearly as possible.

Before we begin, does anyone have any questions or is anyone unclear about the purpose of the research? If anyone is unclear about a point/topic, or would like further clarification on an area, please feel free to ask. Now, let’s begin – going in a clockwise direction, would each participant please introduce themselves (first name only), and tell us why they choose to shop in TESCO...
Appendix vi) Focus Group Consent Form

*An Investigation Into The Attitudes of TESCO Customers in South Dublin Towards Private-Label Brands*

Shane Mooney, MSc Marketing Student at Dublin Business School

1) I confirm that I understand what the research is about and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3) I agree to participate in the research.

Please initial box

4) I agree to the use of recording equipment.

5) I agree to the use of anonymised quotations in publications.

Please tick box

Participant’s name: ........................................ Signature: ..................................................

Researcher’s name: ........................................ Signature: ..................................................

Date: ........................................