

**‘THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT’ AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF
CONSUMER BUYING DECISIONS ON MARKETING IN ECCO SHOES.**

Research dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of MSc in International Business and Law

Griffith College Dublin

Dissertation Supervisor: Carla DeTona

Edidiong Kingsley Mbre

3rd September 2021

Candidate Declaration

Candidate name: Edidiong Kingsley Mbre

I certify that the dissertation titled: ‘‘The Customer is Always Right’ An Analysis of the Impact of Consumer Buying Decisions on Marketing in Ecco Shoes

Submitted for the degree of **MSc in International Business and Law** is the result of my own work, and acknowledgement and references have been given to the work of others.

Candidate Signature: Mbre

Date: 3rd September 2021

Supervisor Name: Carla DeTona

Supervisor Signature:

Date:

Dedication

This Dissertation is dedicated to God and my Parents for guiding and supporting me throughout my years in college, Griffith college; for giving me a memorable learning experience, and Ecco Shoes, for the opportunity to gain access and conduct this study.

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IMAGE SHOWN TO CONSUMERSJ

List of Abbreviation

PWC Prime water house Coopers

Gen Z	Generation
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

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Abstract

This dissertation analysed the overall impact consumer buying behaviour has on marketing strategies. The analysis was focused on Ecco shoes, a global European brand with locations in Ireland and its recent changes with branding and marketing strategies. This is a qualitative study with primary data collected through 7 interviews.

The key contributor to the study is that consumers have an enormous impact to the marketing strategy of any business. This is because they have been prior research which suggest that marketing influences consumer buying behaviour. Although this is not entirely false, this paper proves that the consumers play as much as a role as the company's marketing. Importantly, the

analysis conducted established that consumers are keen to be involved in the creative progress of companies before the products are launched.

This study concluded that Ecco Shoes must always be up to date with trends and be socially responsible in order to draw a younger audience to their consumer base, as well as be more aggressive with communication to keep consumers informed of initiatives. The theoretical contribution of this study is that there is no better time to be socially responsible, hence companies and SMEs should cultivate these practices as a norm in their values. Overall, this author recommends more transparency as required by the Consumer Protection Act 2007, as the first step towards the brands success.

Finally, the paper concludes with some recommendations for future research as well as recommendation for Ecco Shoes, limitations to the paper and personal reflection

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth description of the research topic, research questions, the aims and objectives and justifications of the study. This chapter will also introduce a brief description of the company this case study is based on, Ecco Shoes, and its location in Wicklow Street, Dublin, Ireland. A brief summary all of chapters will also be included.

1.2 Research Topic

As the world continues to evolve, there is a considerable amount of influence that consumer buying behaviour has on marketing, whether it be retail marketing or general marketing. Hence, traditional models of interactivity and consumer decision processes simply cannot apply in a present world context (Solomon, 2006). This research has focused on how the power of marketing has been transferred to consumers, as posited by some academics (Hajli and Sims, 2015). This is because the way consumers react to brand products information and respond to brand marketing, changes through different social channels which leads to a change in their decision-making process. The internet consumers in this age are spread throughout the world and have grown immensely in different sectors. Social media, on the other hand, plays a huge role in this by providing a medium where the communication with consumers have been made easy.

A lot of companies value consumer engagement as it shows a positive interest to the brand. This is because studies have shown that content produced by consumers on social media drives more brand awareness and loyalty, than likes. (Nikolinakou and Phua, 2020). Therefore, it has been stipulated that the power of social commerce lies within the consumers, as they have a huge say in the sale of goods and the success of any business online (Nikolinakou and Phua, 2020).

One may suggest that businesses on social media can market and advertise their products as much as they want, which sometimes helps, but the main actions that push sales is consumer buying behaviour and interactivity. Therefore, this research aims to explore the buying behaviour of Irish customers, with or without any infrastructure in place. Focus will be on the European shoes brand, Ecco shoes.

1.3 Ecco shoes

Ecco shoes is a Danish footwear brand, with locations that span across Europe and beyond. Since its establishment in 1963, Ecco has grown to become one of the most recognized shoe brands. Ecco prides itself in comfort and quality and as a result, have gained several loyal customers who stick by the brand (Footwear, 2020). The company is one of the few large shoe manufacturers in the world that owns and supervises all aspects of its leather and shoe manufacturing, as well as retail sales (Ecco, 2021). The perception consumers have of the brand is that it is a comfort shoe brand for older people, according to the interview conducted with the Area Manager. However, Ecco has recently morphed into a sports brand and has also included younger people in its campaign (Ecco, 2021). This it to show that it is in fact not only a brand for older people. This change has been because of the lack of young consumers shopping from the brand.

This case study aims to uncover this, which will be in support of the research topic. To achieve this, interviews will be conducted with Senior Personnel and Consumers of Ecco shoes, which will help in this research.

1.4 Research Question

This study aims to answer the following questions.

- 1) How far does the analysis of consumer buying behaviour affect brand marketing strategy?
- 2) Has consumer buying behaviour sparked a shift in the marketing strategy of Ecco shoes?

This study aims to answer these questions by collecting and analysing data. In addition, these questions should provide a framework which will guide the research by outlining the relevant areas and issues to be explored. Appel et al maintains that because of the many dynamics of social media, the future of social media marketing might not be what we have already seen and what we are used to (Appel *et al.*, 2020). This study aims to understand the changes that have occurred in Ecco over the past 10 years and its changes in marketing strategy

1.4 Aims and Objectives.

The aim of this study is to further explore the impact consumer buying behaviour has on marketing in the Irish retail industry, in order to execute proper marketing and online campaigns. It is understood that the main purpose of marketing is to reach customers at a certain stage, which will influence their decision making about a particular brand or

product (Solomon, 2006). However, one may suggest that the two go hand in hand, as one cannot succeed without the other. There is a perceived notion that the power of social commerce rest in the hands of consumers (Hajli and Sims, 2015). Social commerce is essentially buying and selling online or through social networks.

This paper aims to explore the consumer behaviour pattern and how marketing strategies can be adjusted to this, looking closely at the case of Ecco Shoes. It is submitted that even with the best marketing strategies and infrastructures, some companies have yet to effectively market their products.

Consumers are continually an active part of the marketplace. They are individuals that purchase or consume a particular product or service. Discussions about products and brands and surfing the internet is as fun as buying products that one really loves. This happens because of online advertisement that have been put out by marketers. However, for markets to know how to market their products effectively, they must understand consumer behaviour. Solomon maintains that understanding consumer behaviour is good for business (Solomon, 2006). The response of a consumer to certain products or their engagement with a brand, determines whether a marketing strategy will succeed. Hence, a change in consumer behaviour may be detrimental to brand marketing.

There is an understanding that brand marketing can succeed on its own without understanding consumer buying behaviours. While there may have been some success with this, this author is of the opinion that understanding consumer behaviour is important with planning a good marketing strategy. Change is constant as well as a consumer's preferences. It is suggested that brands be up to date with the changes and innovations of the world.

Furthermore, as much as marketing strategies may succeed on their own without evaluating consumer behaviour, the recent events with companies underperforming with their marketing strategies begs to differ. Bonoma (1984) maintains that it is easier to think about a marketing strategy than it is to make them work under companies, constraints, or customers (Bonoma, 1984). This goes to show that the two indeed work hand in hand and this paper aims to critically understand the consumer as an influence for brand marketing strategy and investigate the different customer buying behaviour pattern.

1.5 Justification

Interest in this dissertation topic was stimulated by two factors. First, to understand consumer behaviour. Previous experience with retail jobs made one aware of the importance of a customer's impression for a company and the brand overall. This makes a difference in so many ways as many brands are always concerned with their representation and are always eager to serve customers in the best way possible. As a result, they listen to constructive feedbacks from customers and work towards by fulfilling these feedbacks, which then reflects in their strategies. This made this author understand the value of the consumer to a company's marketing strategy.

The second reason for selecting this topic is the different dynamics and concepts of brand marketing and online advertisement. Prior researchers have conducted a lot of studies that emphasize the influence marketing has over consumer behaviour, but not a lot of these researches discuss the significant role consumers play in brand marketing. To this end, this study will also be exploring the diverse ways consumers impact marketing strategies and its constant evolution.

This study aims to evaluate both ways but chooses the most effective way brands and marketers can achieve the best marketing strategies and sell their products and services. Nevertheless, besides the subjective experiences that have sparked this author's interest in this dissertation topic, this author hopes to deliver a varied analysis and understanding on how consumer buying behaviour impacts the marketing strategy of Ecco Shoes, which will be helpful to the Irish retail industry.

The theoretical gap found in this study is that not all consumers are green consumers or embrace sustainable practices, as some would not think about this when shopping, and would much rather buy from a fast fashion and cheaper brand. As a result, one may suggest that not all consumers take external factors into consideration before buying an item or product. Nonetheless, companies are advised to continue in sustainable practices as the number of green consumers outweighs the former.

In addressing the research objectives outlined above, the literature review in the next chapter will be assessing recent studies, definitions, theories, etc, which will give the reader a better understanding of the research topic and will serve as a construct for the empirical research.

1.6 Summary of Chapters

The aim of the first chapter is to introduce the reader to the research topic, the research questions, aims and objectives and justifications for the research. This chapter will also provide a summary of what the entire paper will contain, to avoid any confusions.

With consumer behaviour and marketing as the focus, the second chapter aims to discuss and critically examine existing theories of consumer behaviour, branding and marketing. This chapter will also examine certain factors that influences consumer buying behaviour, as well as a brief discussion on the Law on Consumer Protection. Finally, the conceptual framework will be explained.

The third chapter breaks down the methods that was used for this study. Here, the research methods, paradigm, approach, type of research, data collecting, and analysis method and ethical issues will be explained, explaining their importance to the research.

The fourth chapter consists of the findings gathered from the research conducted with participants, as required by the qualitative research method. Overall, the main aim of this chapter was to compare findings with the existing theory and determine the gap in the literature.

The fifth and concluding chapter concludes this study, by answering the research questions set above and suggesting recommendations for Ecco Shoes, and future research. This chapter also discusses limitations that this author had while conducting the research. The chapter closes with personal reflections that the author has regarding the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Exploring consumer buying behaviour regarding marketing in the Irish retail sector

2.1.1 Overview

This chapter provides the background knowledge of the research topic, which will start with the general theories like consumer behaviour, marketing, and fashion retail in Ireland, before gradually progressing to specific theories, laws and variables that affect the research topic. This chapter draws from secondary sources in books, websites, company reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Theoretical models and frameworks are discussed and critically evaluated which will serve as a base for the research. The overall aim of this chapter is to provide depth and breadth of understanding for the researcher and reader to understand the research topic fully.

2.2 Consumer Buying Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is the process involved when individuals select, purchase, use or dispose products or services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2006). It should be noted that the basic marketing concept maintains that firms exist to satisfy needs, and this can only be done with the study of consumer behaviour. Marketers are expected to understand the people that will use their products and services and the people they are trying to sell to. Solomon (2006) states that consumer response is a test of whether a marketing strategy will succeed or not. Hence, marketers are expected to incorporate knowledge of consumer buying into every aspect of a marketing plan, to ensure its success (Solomon, 2006). Specific data collected from consumers help companies to define the market and identify any threats or opportunities.

It is important to note that in the world of marketing, there is a constant change, so any knowledge derived should help to ensure that the product continue to appeal the market and its consumers (Solomon, 2006). Unfortunately, from a critical perspective, the data collected from consumers are not always used to benefit the consumers; they are used to benefit the marketers. This stems from the recent scandals that involve the abuse of social media-based data (Solomon, 2006).

It is opined that there are always ulterior motives involved with social media-based data, and that is why regulations have been put in place to help prevent these issues, like the

GDPR (Sinclair, 2016). In addition, it should be noted that because of the previous data breaches and resultant scandals, consumers do not feel safe to share data or participate in any exchanges on the social media marketplace. Solomon (2006) maintains that as much as people would like to think of the marketplace as a free site where exchanges are beneficial to both parties, it would be a naïve way of thinking (Solomon, 2006). Nevertheless, consumer behaviour is changing, and businesses need to adapt to these changes in order to ensure success.

2.2.1 Five-stage Buying Decision Process

The five-stage buying decision process model is used widely by marketers to understand their customers and behaviour further. The idea of this model is that when a customer purchases an item, the purchase event is a continuing process, which began before the actual purchase and continues after that (Comegys *et al.*, 2006). There are five distinct stages in the process: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase behaviour (Comegys *et al.*, 2006).

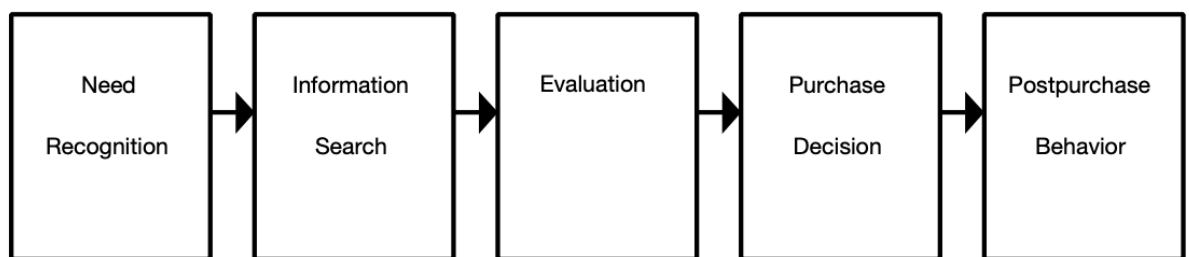


Figure 1: Five stage buying decision process model

Figure 1: Five stage buying decision process model

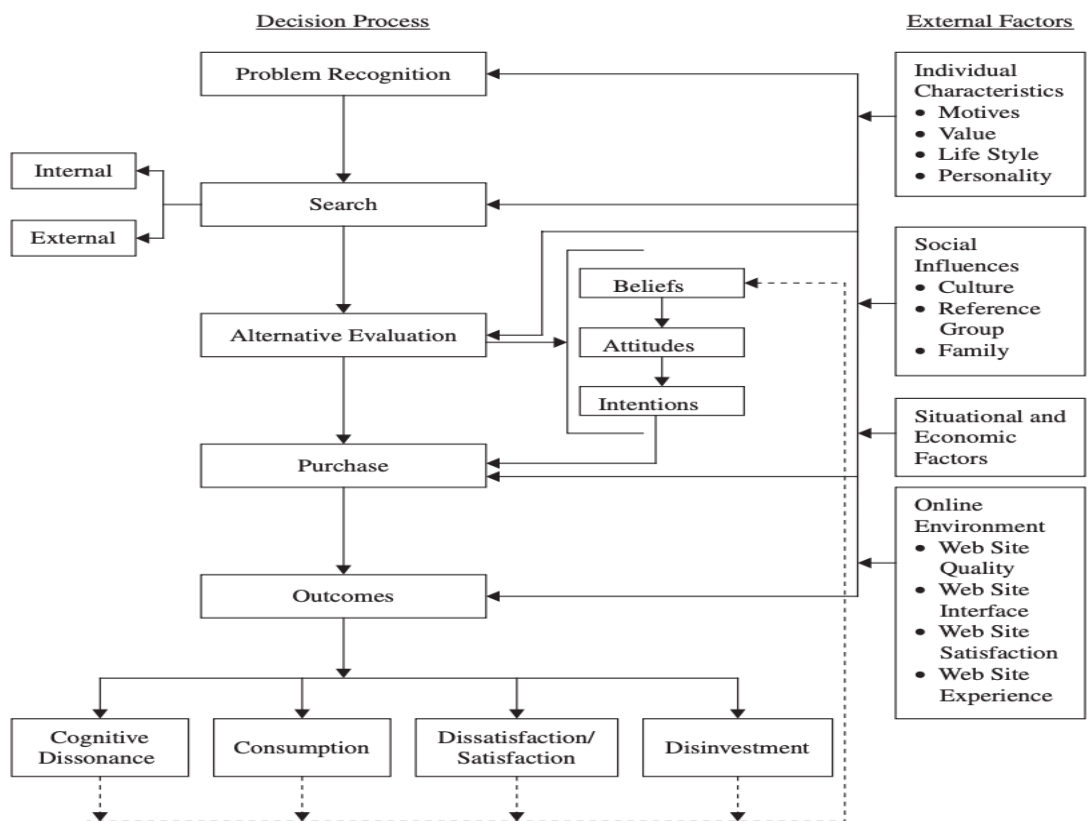
In 1910, John Dewey originally introduced the five-stage problem solving process mentioned above, which was widely recognised by a lot of scholars. However, it should be noted that studies were carried out on individual consumers, measuring external stimuli, such as in-store promotion, advertising, and discounts, in the early 1970s.

Based on these stimuli-response decision-making processes, consumers were seen as passive entities who make decisions based on external factors rather than gathering the information needed themselves (Shimizu, 2021). As a result of these stimulus-response models, other decision-making models were formulated, such as the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell model and the Howard-Sheth model. From the stimulus-response models, it can be said that consumers truly only make buying decisions based on external factors. These external factors may be as little as what the brand represents and what the brand stands for. It is not news that inclusivity and diversity is now external factors that some

consumers consider before any purchase. That is to say that brands will always be compelled to meet the requirements of consumers as this will ensure success. However, in contrast to this model, not all consumers consider external stimuli or factors before making a purchase, and for some, the buying process begins when the individual visits a store. Evidence of this can be seen in the findings in chapter 4.

2.2.2 Engel-Kollat-Blackwell Model

Engel-Kollat-Blackwell applied the John Dewey process to consumer behaviour, and it is now known as the EKB Model (Darley *et al.*, 2010). However, the EKB Model of consumer behaviour includes added external factors that influence the decision-making process.



Source: Adapted from Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1978) and Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1986).

Figure 2: EKB Model

This model describes the consumers decision process and how consumer decisions are made when alternatives are available, which are critical to marketers (Darley *et al.*, 2010). It also shows the components of decision making and how they interact with one another. It should be noted that many researchers explore the consumer decision-making process.

However, most of them consider the process as involving activities people are engaged in, when looking to buy or evaluate products and services to satisfy their needs.

Undoubtedly, the EKB Model has long been the most used theory for consumer behaviour. However, it can be said that this model, although it worked in the previous years, cannot be efficiently applied in the new age with the rise of digital marketing. In today's world, where a social collective heavily influences the consumer decision-making process, it is hard to say if this model can be as relevant in this present digital age. To this end, this author suggests improvements to be made to these existing theories.

2.2.3 Consumer Protection

The Consumer Protection Act of 2007 provides protection to consumers through a set of enforcement measures, which applies before, during and after a transaction. This Act requires traders to be fully transparent with consumers and this means it is illegal for a trader to make false or misleading information about products and services. Being fully transparent with consumers not only means being transparent about products and services. In this present world, transparency also requires businesses to communicate initiative that the business supports or are involved in. Initiatives such as eco-friendly products, inclusivity, diversity, etc.

Nowadays, consumers are not only interested in the external structure of a business, but also in the internal structures. So, in order for consumers to be informed, companies are required to practice full transparency with consumers.

2.3 Brand inclusivity and diversity

In the present world where consumers are more engaged with the brands they patronize and represent, there is a heightened expectation from brands. This comes with a lot of disadvantages for brands that do not take a stand on issues like racial equity, diversity, and inclusion (Burns *et al.*, 2021). Diversity is a matter of who is in the workplace, who is representing the brand and who is on the campaigns. Inclusion is a matter of how people experience in the workplace; how consumers feel when they shop from a brand (Burns *et al.*, 2021). Studies show that Gen Z consumers will end relationships with brands that run ad campaigns that are perceived as being macho, racist, homophobic, or do not seem to represent all types of people (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). This alone is the reason old businesses and SME's need to include these attributes to their brands to determine success.

Today's consumers care and are demanding more from brands. The discourse on diversity and inclusion has changed, as people are not only concerned with how brands are diverse or inclusive with their products. The focus also lies on the workforce. Younger consumers have been exposed to a lot of these new phenomenon through social media and other networking sites. The idea is that they all want to be socially responsible and play their part however they can (Burns *et al.*, 2021). Although not only consumers are aware of this social responsibility. Employees also believe that companies should have a social responsibility in respect to these issues and better the world. One may suggest that the responsibilities for companies include hiring people from diverse backgrounds and being inclusive. It was found that millennials will reject an employment offer if they find that a company lacks inclusivity (Burns *et al.*, 2021).

Burns et al. (2021) uses Dolce & Gabbana as an example of a mistake that can damage the reputation and sales of a brand for not being diverse or inclusive. Consumers tend to avoid a brand if they are not diverse or inclusive and this drives sales and reputation for the brand to plummet (Burns *et al.*, 2021).

2.4 Green Consumer

Green Consumers are defined as consumers who adopt green behaviours or purchase green products among alternatives. Even though a shift to a green business may be expensive, the growing consumerism creates room for more development and expansion. Consumers who choose to be green consumers are those that aspire to be sustainable and socially responsible (Pradeep and Akhilesh, 2017). Environmentally friendly products have gained increasing importance over the years and particularly with consumers. The rising concern for the environment has evolved over the years, causing more people to be aware (Eze and Ndubisi, 2013). This is mainly because consumers are interested in whether a product is good or bad for the environment when purchasing.

A consumer's behaviour towards a brand is influenced by the brands' reputation, nature of the business and variety of products and services (Bhattacharjee and Mukherjee, 2015). Hence, it should be noted that nowadays, consumers will consider the values of a brand before purchasing their products. Green initiatives are becoming popular among brands and brands are starting to see the advantages of it. However, some brands are still yet to become more sustainable. The development of green marketplaces promotes a more sustainable living, which includes delivering greener and cleaner alternatives to consumers (Eze and Ndubisi, 2013).

Pradeep and Akhilesh (2017) state that many consumers in the world now prefer green products and services as they will not cause harm to the environment or damage any natural resources. Nowadays, a lot of consumers are passionate about recycling and conservation. Brands play huge roles in informing consumers on sustainability, however it is not the duty of brands to make a consumer sustainable, as that is subjective. Nevertheless, this does not mean brands can avoid being sustainable, as the number of green consumers outweigh the non-green consumers.

Green consumers or not, brands still need to produce more sustainable products, not only because of the environment but also for its success and to prevent green consumers avoiding the brand. In addition, brands are profitable from being sustainable, in order to effectively compete in the market (Pradeep and Akhilesh, 2017). This also helps with the company's corporate social responsibility. The growing concerns for what certain products do to the environment and health benefits it has on consumers have alarmed brands to be more aggressive when communicating.

2.5 Marketing for Fashion Retailers

Marketing is the activity that occurs between organizations and customers. Blythe and Martin (2019) note that marketing stems from the idea of the marketplace, where customers and sellers come together to make transactions for their mutual benefits (Blythe and Martin, 2019, p. 23). As the seller is selling products and getting paid, while the customer is receiving the products with satisfaction. Blythe and Martin (2019) further state that marketing aims to ensure that the buyer makes transactions with the seller rather than its competition (Blythe and Martin, 2019, p. 23). It should be noted that their customers are their main priority for marketers, as they are dedicated to serving them and making them happy. In addition, a satisfied customer will always come back, which is the most important responsibility for marketers.

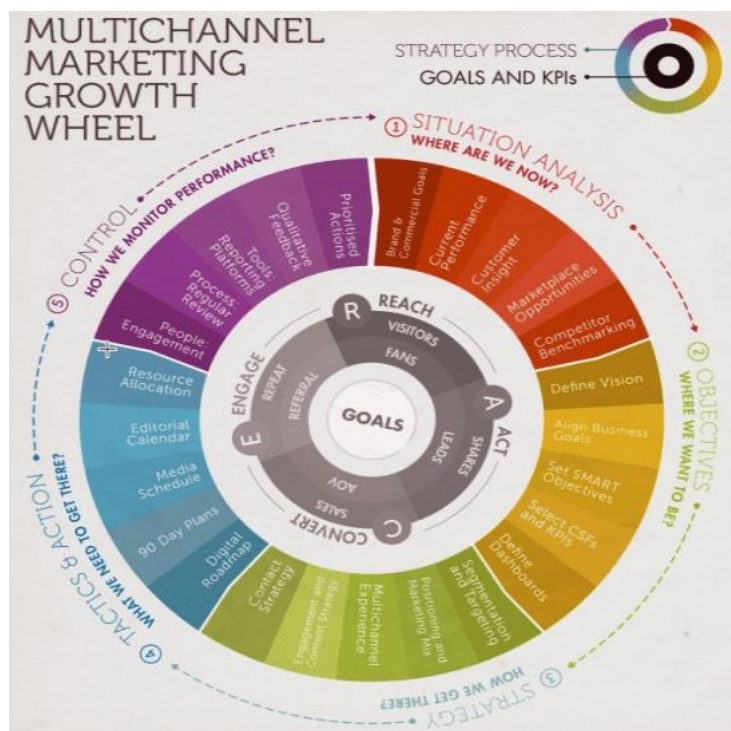
There are diverse ways of marketing. Traditional methods recognize word of mouth as a means of marketing and newspaper publications, radio, television broadcast, billboards. However, recently, most of the advertising and marketing takes place online. Now marketing is done through social media marketing, email marketing, internet advertising, affiliate marketing and product placement.

2.6 Digital marketing

Digital marketing is the modern way of advertising used by a lot of people around the world. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) maintain that digital marketing has completely

changed how businesses, as well as other organization, communicate with their audience (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 14). The 5D's of digital marketing mentioned earlier are particularly important for marketers. This is because they can be used to get closer to people, more convenient than before, even with the use of old traditional methods (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 14). For a smooth run of digital marketing, the 5D's must be utilized, which comprises of digital devices, digital platforms, digital media, digital data.

The Sostac Model developed by PR Smith is one of the marketing models that have been widely recognized and used.



(Smart Insights, 2020)

Figure 3: Sostac Model

This model helps with marketing planning; its acronyms stand for situation, objectives, strategy, tactics, action, and control (Reed FIDM, 2014).

This model enables marketers to gain an insight to their customers by helping them understand their needs better. Smith maintains that it is important to understand the who, how and why (Reed FIDM, 2014). This model can also be used for target marketing, used by social media and online resources. The use of the Sostac model helps marketers develop scenario plans that allow them to consider the ways customers interact with themselves (Reed FIDM, 2014). One may suggest that this model is a valuable tool used by companies to understand their customers, which then helps them to brand their products better.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Sostac model is an example of how companies consider the attitude and intention of consumers when marketing their products. This model is tested when interviewing research participants. This will ensure the model's validity and figure out how it applies when preparing a marketing strategy. It is the intention of this author to use this model as an aid when formulating questions for marketers in order to analyse their marketing strategies.

2.7 Advertising Theory

As one of the means of marketing, advertising equally creates awareness for a product, increases sales and image enhancement. Often, advertising focuses on checking and understanding customer responses to advertising (Bayne and Cianfrone, 2013, p. 3). It should be noted that traditional methods of advertising divides consumer responses into separate domains such as: cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioural` responses to advertising (Bayne and Cianfrone, 2013, p. 3). Vakratsas and Amber (1999) maintain that the mixture of marketing components like product category, target audience, competitive environment and stage of product should be altered accordingly to determine the best positioning strategy for the business.

Affective Response – this response can be described as a person's emotional response or interest in a particular service or product advertised. This then impacts consumer behaviour (Bayne and Cianfrone, 2013, p. 3). Bayne and Cianfrone maintain that the marketers' priority is reaching consumers in a way that will enable their interest to participate (Bayne and Cianfrone, 2013, p. 3).

Cognitive Response – This response is often associated with awareness and knowledge.

Conative and behavioural response – This is the intent of an individual to commit a particular behaviour (Bayne and Cianfrone, 2013, p. 3). With social media advertising, the marketers' end goal is for individuals to engage with or buy their products and services.

2.8 Fashion retail in Ireland

The retail sector of Ireland has shifted the past years with so many companies opening branches in the country. As reported by Fennell and Anderson, the retail sector in Ireland is one of the country's largest industry and private sector employer (Fennell and Anderson, 2020). For many years, the retail industry in Ireland has been the biggest contributor to the Irish economy, especially since its fiscal crisis in 2008 (Fennell and Anderson, 2020). This comes as no surprise as a lot of retail stores have launched a branch

in Ireland over the last few years. As of 2020, it was reported that the Irish retail sector employs over 300,000 workers with 3 in 4 outside of Dublin (Fennell and Anderson, 2020). Irelands large retail sector has also contributed to a stronger consumer confidence. Nowadays, with the contemporary trends and everyone becoming more aware, consumer spending has become harder to secure and retailers must work harder than ever to ensure that proper cautions and sophistications are in place (Dillon *et al.*, 2019). Dillon et al (2019) reports that retail success is the combination of the right products and services, as well as a good customer experience. As mentioned earlier, with branding, consumers always look out for good branding, and this is what keeps them longer in a store or prompts a purchase.

Dillon et al (2019) maintains that consumers values are a crucial step in their purchasing journey. This means that consumers are aware of their values, and they appreciate when that is the centre of the shopping experience (Dillon *et al.*, 2019). While retailers and brands try to satisfy the needs and demands of consumers, it is important to note that they can no longer rely on the traditional approach of targeting certain customers (Dillon *et al.*, 2019). PWC reports that 20% of Irish consumers shop online weekly (Dillon *et al.*, 2019). The shift into the digital sphere has also been a concern for Irish retailers, especially during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. A lot of consumers have had to move online shopping as first resort and concerns continue to arise on the best way to give the customers a good shopping experience (Fennell and Anderson, 2020)

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, retailers were faced with lots of challenges like margin pressure, competition, etc. (Fennell and Anderson, 2020). Profitability has been heavily impacted, with retailers having to move digital and having to decrease pricing and increase cost. As a result, shopping experience for consumers have had to change with everything moving online.

Consumers now must move to online shopping rather than in-store shopping. The impact of Covid-19 was drastic on brands, especially with those that did not have online store. A lot of difficulties arose, however, brands are now more aware and have no choice but to prepare for the future with everything being remote. To this end, a lot of physical retail stores have had to change the design of the store to meet up to social distancing regulations. Changing rooms are being shut down to minimise the spread of the virus in stores. There is no doubt that the pandemic has set a lot of business back and affected its future success, however, it is opined that business act early and fast in order to avoid any more loses.

2.9 Consumer preferences and Brands

Academics have noted that consumers are becoming broadcasters, who no longer want to listen to company marketing messages passively but are also taking part in the discussion. They go on to state that consumers have now become prosumers who not only know about the products and services but take part in improving the products and services (Diffley *et al.*, 2011). This way, consumers can use social media to tell marketers what they want. It is opined that this is where consumers take charge of e-commerce, as marketers must always listen to their wants, to be successful and to improve their services. Nevertheless, it should be noted that social media has played a huge role in empowering consumers.

There are many instances where the consumer's decisions affect a brand, and the brand has no other choice than to listen to the consumers wants. An example of this is the issue with now known SKIMS brand. The brand was not always named SKIMS. Before that, it was proposed to be named KIMONO (Robert, 2019). This shows that it is always important to listen to market trends and, most importantly, consumer preferences. Moreover, if consumers do not like a brand, they will not buy items from the brand, leading to a collapse.

2.10 Branding for Fashion Retailers

Over the years, there have been many perspectives on what a brand is and what branding denotes. Branding can be described as a strategy companies, and marketers use to distinguish a product from its competitors (Rashid and Barnes, 2018). It is opined that branding is an essential part of a company's survival because if a company is not correctly branded, it could lead to a loss or failure. Academics have noted that using distinctive names, logos, symbols, and designs can reflect a brands mission and vision (Birtwistle and Freathy, 1998). However, it is opined that as much as these methods work for a brand, a customer's loyalty is of the utmost importance. For example, popular brands like McDonald's, Apple, have a good reputation and distinct logo that attracts customers, resulting in the sense of loyalty.

Many fashion retailers must ensure that their core values are translated in their brand strategy, which helps them further pitch themselves and their brands to their customers (Birtwistle and Freathy, 1998). Besides the core values, innovation with the styles they produce, store ambience and the provision of skilled staff may be helpful to fashion retailers when branding (Birtwistle and Freathy, 1998).

Brand marketing has become increasingly important over the years. Companies are now keen on ensuring that the brand is represented a particular way, in order to avoid any substantial backlash or collapse. As Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) mentioned, digital marketing has become increasingly important, and brands depend on digital marketing, especially social media, to properly market their products.

Brand plays a significant role in marketing, which has attracted many academics over the years (Aaker, 1991). It is opined that the essential components that makes a brand strong is the brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is at the core of every brand; without this, companies may fail. The essence of this is to present the brand to attract customers and drive repeat business. It is no news that brand marketing and customer loyalty are mutually exclusive because it is almost impossible to have one without the other. However, brand awareness is also as important because if a customer does not know about a brand, there will not be loyalty. The next heading explores brand awareness and its importance.

2.10.1 Brand Awareness

From the famous quote by Cervantes Don Quixote, “a good name is better than riches”(Aaker, 1991) It is essential that the good name always goes before a brand. This is because having a good name leads to good brand awareness and good brand awareness equals riches. Researchers have noted that brand awareness is a good measurement of a brands strength. David Aaker (1991) defines brand awareness as the ability of a buyer to recognise a brand as belonging to a particular product category (Aaker, 1991).

David Aaker notes that before there can be proper brand awareness, a link between the product class and the brand must be in existence (Aaker, 1991). This helps with brand awareness because if a consumer can attribute a brand to a particular product class, it will be easier to remember that brand. It is opined that for a customer to be aware of a brand, they must remember the brand.

For example, if consumers are aware of a brand’s excellent value and attributes, they are most likely to buy from that brand. Brand recall is one of the important components of brand awareness. This is because remembering a brand means that the customer is aware of a brand, which is a good step towards brand loyalty. Brand recall is the ability of a potential buyer to remember a brand in a particular product class (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker (1991) introduces four ways brand awareness creates value, and they include Anchor to which other associations can be attached, Familiarity, Signal of substance/commitment and Brand to be considered (Aaker, 1991). The first step in the

communication task is brand recognition (Aaker, 1991). It is easier to communicate a brand attribute when a name is associated with the attributes (Aaker, 1991). The brand name is an association of the brand, in that when a potential buyer recognizes a name of the brand, they know the associations. For example, if consumers know a brand, they can attribute that brand to their popular selling product, like McDonald's for Big Mac, fast food, and kids. All these attributes of the brands are linked to the brands name via chains (Aaker, 1991).

Once a brand is recognised by consumers, brand familiarity arises, and consumers love a brand they are familiar with (Aaker, 1991). It is important to note that when a potential buyer is familiar with a product, they are going to buy such products, no matter the category(Aaker, 1991). In some instances, familiarity may be enough with the absence of attribute evaluation. Aaker (1991) states that some recognition studies have shown that exposure repetition can affect liking without affecting the recognition level. He uses the example of old brand names like Ipana and Black Jack, to illustrated that the recognition of the brand's value contributed to its success (Aaker, 1991). It is opined that in the present age, as recognition contributes to a brand's success, positive word of mouth also plays a considerable role with familiarity. Potential buyers may be familiar with a brand, but without trying it or getting positive feedbacks from those who have used the said brand, consumers may be sceptical about trying out such products.

Knowing a brand name can be attributed to presence, substance, and commitment to the brand for potential buyers (Aaker, 1991). There are varied reasons why a brand name will be recognized. Some of the reasons are the brand advertisement. The brand has been running for a while, the brand is distributed widely and the success of the brand (Aaker, 1991). Nevertheless, Aaker states that these assumptions are not always founded on knowledge of specific details about the brand. It is opined that advertising goes a long way with brand awareness, even with the digital age.

Social media sites are configured when a potential buyer searches for something in a product category; they are automatically shown other brands with the same product category.

Aaker (1991) states that the first step in the consumer buying process is to choose a group of brands to consider; he calls this a consideration set (Aaker, 1991). For example, if a potential buyer decides on getting a new phone, they will first think about the brands that make phones. Most of the big brands will come to mind, such as Samsung, apple, google, etc. This process is the consideration set. The fact is that the consumer has different

options in mind to choose from, attributes to brand recognition and recall. It can be said that all the above attributes presented by Aaker (1991) all contributes to the attributes needed in the consumer buying decision process. The consumer buying models mentioned above (the five-stage buying decision process and the EKB model) have omitted or have not explicitly mentioned all attributes stated here which should be included in the models.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

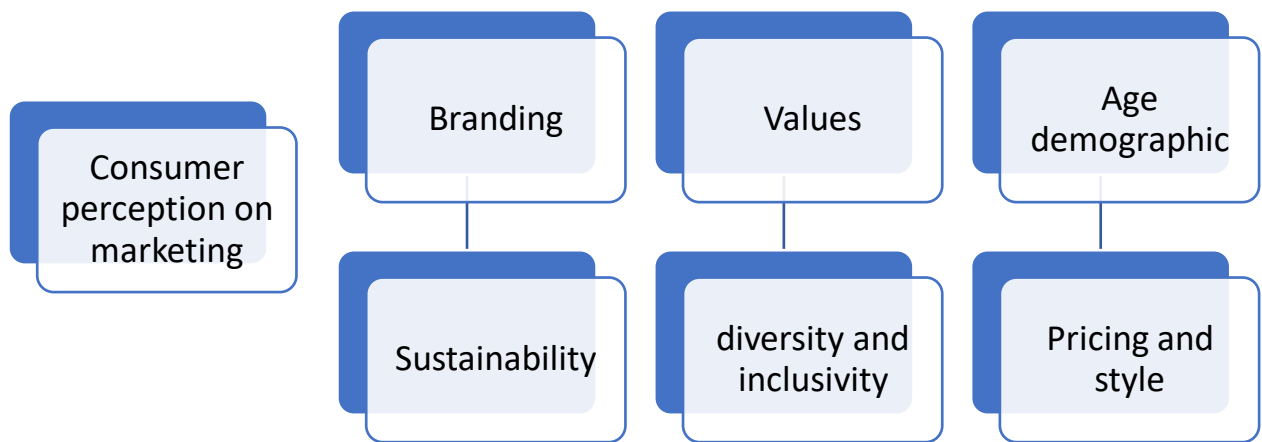


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework above shows the variables that are included in the proposed study. In this diagram above, all the variables are considered as the consumer perceptions which affects marketing for brands. The diagram shows a hypothetical analysis of the impact of consumer buying behaviour on marketing. Over time, consumer demand will increase, and brands have the responsibility to meet up with these demands, in order to avoid failure. When consumers go shopping, they consider what the brand stands for, and depending on their age, the type of style the brand produces. For example, a teenager will not go into a store that focuses on or have been reputed as a brand for older people, simply because that is not their style.

Now this is where the consumers impact comes in. Suppose the brand or store the teenager does not enter, is only reputed to be a brand for older people and not actually a brand for older people, the brand will want to act on this reputation. This will lead to a change in the marketing strategy and the campaigns, including styles for the younger audience. Price is another determinate factor for consumers when buying a product and if a consumer considers a product too expensive for the value it offers, that consumer will not buy the product. It is now up to the marketer to wither add more value to the product for the price or give detailed explanation as to why the product costs that much.

With the constant change the world is seeing with climate change, a lot of brands have taken a stand to be sustainable. As a result of this change, consumers have also transitioned into green consumers, and this will affect the marketing of brands, as this becomes a demand from consumers. Diversity and inclusion have become an important part of a consumer's shopping experience. Typically, when a consumer enters a store, they want to feel like they are welcome and belong and it is up to brands to ensure this. From the literature review, it has been found that consumers tend to avoid brands that are not diverse or inclusive. One may suggest that this has now become one of the qualities consumers will out for when buying from a brand.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, different components of the research will be used with justifications in the research. The research paradigm, approach, strategy, data collection techniques, target population, nature of data, access and ethical considerations, analysis, etc. are some of the elements that will be used and discussed in this chapter. Qualitative research method was used to collect data. This method consists more of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions with participation from marketers and consumers.

The research method used for this paper is a case study. This is a case study of an Irish retail brand, Ecco shoes. Detailed explanation on the nature of data, analysis of data and ethics and research access will also be discussed in this chapter. The aim of this chapter is to help readers understand the techniques and procedures used by the researcher to analyse and find data relating to the research question.

3.2 Research

Kothari and Garg (2019) describe research as a search of knowledge. It is a method of searching and collecting data to support a point of view. Research can also be defined as a scientific and systematic search for information on a particular topic (Kothari and Garg, 2019). Redman and Mory define research as a “systematized effort to gain new knowledge”(Redman and Mory, 1933). This knowledge then goes on to aid in answering questions and solving a particular problem. Based on the definition provided, one can see that the research is defined in a unique way, but ultimately it can be seen that all these definitions agree that research is systematic and adds new knowledge to existing knowledge. However, some academics have suggested that the true definition of research lies within the theoretical framework of the researcher (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

There are diverse types of research. Some of them include descriptive, analytical, applied, fundamental, qualitative, quantitative, conceptual, empirical, etc. (Kothari and Garg, 2019). This author intends to focus on the qualitative research method as a means of investigating and collecting data. As Baarda notes, qualitative research is a research

method that is concerned with getting insights, rather than hard statistical data (Baarda, 2010). This research method will be explored in more detail in section 3.5.

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state that research may consist of paradigms, and it is the choice of paradigms that dictates the motivation, intents and expectations for the research. Some research paradigms include positivist, post-positivist, interpretivist, constructivist, transformative, critical, deconstructivism, emancipatory and pragmatism (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). However, for the purpose of this research, the focus is on the interpretivist paradigm.

3.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm can be defined as a “loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) note that it is useless to choose a research method, methodology or research design, without choosing a research paradigm, as it is the first step in research. A research paradigm is selected based on the level of knowledge and understanding a researcher has on the study.

As the subject matter of the dissertation is based on exploring the impact consumer buying behaviour has on marketing, interpretivism is the right paradigm to be used. This paradigm was also chosen because there is still an amount of knowledge and understanding of how the consumer buying behaviour impacts marketing. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, information has been gathered by collecting primary data such as semi-structured interviews to gather further knowledge on the study, as well as to understand from different perspectives, the consumers, and marketers of Ecco shoes.

3.3.1 Interpretivist Paradigm

Interpretivism paradigm was developed as a critique to the positivism paradigm but from a subjectivist perspective (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Saunders *et al.* (2019) states that interpretivism emphasizes that individuals are distinct from physical phenomena because of their ability to create meanings and a reality. It is then the job of interpretivists to study these meanings and realities. Interpretivism argues that social sciences research must be distinct from that of natural sciences, rather than emulating the latter (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state that the interpretivist approach is set up to understand the individual world. This may be because of the diverse and subjective realities that pertain to everyone. In other words, everyone has their own realities based on their own personal beliefs and values which help in understanding their own world. As a result, this paradigm is the most appropriate as this author uncovers the different experiences of managers and consumers of Ecco shoes. Using the interpretivist paradigm, this author must look at the organization from the perspectives of distinct groups of people. This may consist of perspectives from the managers and as well as the consumers.

It is the position of the researcher to rely on the views given by participants on the research being studied, and recognise its impact on the research (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Matching paradigms and research methods are important, as they go hand in hand. For example, an interpretivist paradigm will run using qualitative research methods, however in some cases, quantitative research methods may be used. Nevertheless, a positivist paradigm tends to use quantitative methods (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

3.4 Research Approach

The extent to which one's research uses theory testing or theory building reflects on what design will be right for the research. There are two contrasting approaches with one to be adopted: deductive and inductive, although there can also be an abductive approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The deductive approach occurs when a conclusion is derived from a set of theory-based premises (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, in inductive approach, there is a gap between the conclusion made and premises observed. Hence the conclusion must be supported by the observation made, while the deductive approach deduces conclusions from the observation of premises. The abductive approach usually consists of a surprising fact being observed.

This research is mostly concerned with observing, analysing, and investigating existing theories and models, which will bring this author to an informed conclusion. Therefore, the research approach for this study is an inductive approach. The interpretivist research philosophy and inductive research approach work together. With the help of the inductive approach, this researcher is more flexible to shift from specific observation to broad generalization, while if it were for a deductive approach, it would have been the other way around. So far, effective knowledge has been gathered by this researcher through the collection of primary and secondary data.

3.5 Research Methods

Largan and Morris defines qualitative research as a systematic approach that uses existing data to enhance understanding that may be additional to or different from the research being studied (Largan and Morris, 2019). In literature, the terms qualitative and quantitative are often used in two discourses with one relating to a research paradigm and the other relating to research methods (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Saunders et al (2009) notes that one of the ways to differentiate quantitative research method from qualitative research method is the difference between numeric and non-numeric data.

This way, quantitative is used as a synonym for any data collection technique such as a questionnaire, which uses numerical data, while qualitative is used as a data collection technique that uses non-numeric data (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). However, Saunders et al (2019) argues that this differentiation is problematic and narrow. Problematic because there are instances where business research design will combine both methods.

3.5.1 Qualitative Research Method

Silverman notes that the ability to directly access what happens in the world, is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Silverman, 2006). For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research method is appropriate as the data collected is non-numerical and evaluated. In addition, a qualitative research process will be the most appropriate because of the subjective nature of this research. A qualitative research method uses single data collection techniques, such as semi-structured interviews, which is known as a mono method qualitative study. However, this research method can also use more than one data collection technique, known as multi-method qualitative study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This research method is also associated with several strategies, with the common ones being action research, case study research, ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This author uses case study strategy for this research.

3.6 Research Method Selection

This research method selection will show what research method this author plans to use in carrying out the work. This author uses an ethnographic case study as the research and interviews as the source of data collection.

3.6.1 What is a Case study

Yin defines case study research as:

“An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”

(Yin, 2009)

The use of case study research helps to gain insight into a contemporary phenomenon (Farquhar, 2014). The purpose of this case study is to distinguish this research from others. Often, the case in a case study may refer to either an individual, an association or an organization (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In this research, this author focuses on an organization, Ecco Shoes. The real-life context of this case study stems from the fact that this author is an employee of the brand and has had the opportunity to see these changes in phenomenon. Interviews are conducted with consumers that shop at the brand, rather than consumers who do not shop with the brand, to get their insights of the brand.

Saunders et al (2019) states that this research method sets out to understand the dynamics of the topic being studied, allowing for more in-depth insights which lead to a development of theory. For this research, the author intends to use ethnographic evidence, which will be based on a real-life context.

3.7 Nature of data

To effectively conduct the research, the collection of relevant and reliable data from particularly reliable sources is important. For this research, the author collected data through primary and secondary sources. The primary data collected will be semi-structured interview, while the secondary data will be gathered through various sources like websites, books, libraries, articles, journals, etc. In addition, the secondary data that is collected is done with the intention of building a strong theoretical background for the study. These secondary data can also help this researcher in reaching an effective conclusion for the study. As a primary source, interviews were conducted with open-ended and flexible questions, to access the participants views, understanding and opinions of the study.

3.7.1 Interview as a source of primary data

Primary data can be collected through observation or direct communication through interviews (Kothari and Garg, 2019). The interview was conducted using zoom calls and was recorded for later use. One of the reasons why interviews were the main primary data

of the study is to get a more in-depth and complex understanding, which may not be available to other types of primary data such as surveys, etc. On the other hand, the data collected focused on the research aims and answering the set-out research question on consumer behaviour and its impact on retail marketing. The aim of collecting primary data such as interviews, is to ensure that the different perspectives are known and analysed to a considerable extent. As mentioned previously, the interview was semi-structured that allowed for open-ended questions to be asked.

McDermid notes that interviews are normally designed to produce narrative data, which exposes researchers to an extensive range of information, experiences, opinions, and feelings (Mcdermid *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, since this is a qualitative research, in-depth interviews are a good investigative tool. It was the aim of this researcher to start the interview with open-ended questions (see Appendix B) that helped participants express their opinions and help the researcher gain knowledge of useful materials that was not included in the research.

3.8 Analysis Techniques

To carry out the research effectively, the researcher must analyse the data to prove practical outcome. For this study, the researcher implemented the qualitative research method for evaluating the data collected. Furthermore, for the qualitative analysis, the researcher conducted interviews to collect data relevant to the study. All interviews were about 15-30 minutes long, five of which were conducted on Zoom and Microsoft teams, while the other two were conducted in person. The researcher welcomed the participants and exchanged pleasantries before the recording began.

The data collected will be group into categories and summarized to support the analysis process. NVivo 10 analysis software was used for coding and a clear understanding to the analytical process. All the semi-structured interviews conducted are being coded and the coded words are the particular words gotten from quotes from the research participants. All coding can be found in Appendix A.

3.9 Access and Research ethics issues

Irvine and Gaffikin maintain that some of the issue's researchers face when conducting qualitative research, is how to get the most out of it, without cause inconveniences (Irvine, Gaffikin, 2006). Carrying out proper ethics prior to and during the interview is mandatory. This is important as it helps in keeping correct information collected from various

sources. In addition, it is important for the researcher to properly apply data, and this means that all sources are correctly referenced. All information gotten from the participant will remain confidential and removed at the end of the study. During the research, the data is stored in a password protected device but upon the completion of the research, the data will be removed.

Prior to the interview, the participants will be emailed a plain statement and consent form and this form will be signed and sent back to this author for proof of consent. It is important that this author gets consent to conduct interviews to avoid any form of harm to the participants. Furthermore, when conducting qualitative research, it is important to give details of the study to the participants, explain why primary data had to be collected.

This researcher could also highlight the benefits the research could offer for the company. This way, the participants may be willing to give access. As for ethical issues, participants may decide to stay anonymous if they wish to, and the research will treat their answers and any details as confidential. This researcher is also responsible for acting in good faith throughout the research process.

Prior to the interview, all participants will be emailed a copy of the research topic, what it entails and the reasons for conducting the interview. Details about how long the interview will take and a sample of the type of questions to be asked will also be communicated to the participants (see Appendix B). The researcher will ensure that throughout the process, the utmost professionalism and integrity will be observed.

3.10 Summary

This dissertation will, as mentioned above, investigate the diverse ways consumer buying behaviour impacts marketing in this Irish retail industry. As previously stated, prior research has focused on the impacts marketing has on consumer behaviour and there have not been a lot of research on how consumer behaviour impacts marketing. There is no dispute that the prior research is wrong, however, this study will seek to fill in this gap in literature by looking at how marketing in the retail industry is formed in the first place, which will help in proving the point of this research. The reader has been provided with the various methodological designs, approaches, and an explanation for why each method has been chosen.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research participants, the primary data collected and concluding theory gotten from coding. In this chapter, results gotten from the interview conducted will be analysed and discussed.

In this chapter, the primary source of data is the semi-structured interview conducted with the intention of getting further insights into to the Consumers impact on campaigns and marketing strategy in Ecco shoes.

The findings of the interviews will be presented in detail and emergent themes, such as Age demographic, sustainability and inclusion and diversity will be discussed. All themes discovered using the NVivo 10 software analysis (See appendix A). The findings of this research will contribute to the existing literature on consumer buying behaviour.

After discussing findings from the interview conducted, the emergent themes will be critically analysed and suggestions for each finding will be made. This author also presented correlation between findings and existing literature. Finally, as an unavoidable topic, the impact of Covid-19 on Ecco shoes and the Consumers will be discussed briefly.

Overall, the main aim of this chapter is to provide a fresh perspective on how consumers view sustainability practices and the efforts of companies to be inclusive and diverse will also be provided.

4.2 Research Population

The research population for this study was chosen from Consumers of the Ecco Shoes Wicklow Street, Dublin store, an area manager of the stores in Ireland and the Content and Community Strategist of Ecco Shoes Europe. The research participants include five Consumers of Ecco shoes and two senior personnel, one who works in Dublin, Ireland and the other at the branch in Amsterdam, with the Consumers ages ranging from 20-25 and a mix of male and female participants.

This author sought permission to interview Consumers from the store, however not all the Consumers contacted were available for the interview, hence the number of participants. Despite the assurances set out in the informed consent form and plain language form, this author felt as though, some Consumers were not comfortable to do the interview, which was very understandable.

This author noted the difference in responses given by each participant, with some responses being short but informed and the others being long and informed. The information gotten from these responses were then compared to reach a conclusion. All interviews were held for the span of 20-30 minutes. However, it should be noted that two out of the interviews with Consumers were conducted in-person.

4.3 Overview of Consumer impact and Marketing in Ecco Shoes

The Consumer impact and marketing strategy of Ecco shoes can be described as a continuous process. When asked about the reputation of the company, all participants

went on to explain how the company has been perceived to be a brand that specializes on comfort shoes for the elderly. However, from the responses gotten from the personnel at Ecco shoes and the Consumers, it was found that there has been a change in the company's style and from these responses, Ecco is now focused on changing Consumer's perception of the brand.

Response from Senior Personnel

The interviews conducted with the Area Manager and the Content and Community Strategist, included questions about the brands reputation, down to its marketing and recent changes with their products. The responses gotten from both participants were very in-depth and very insightful. The Area Manager has been in Ecco for 16 years while the Content and Community Strategist has been working at Ecco for 2 years.

When asked about the age demographic, the Content and Community Strategist noted that Ecco has been making their new styles younger to target the younger Consumers. One may suggest that this is because of the brands mislead reputation over the years. However, as much as the style will be changing for the company, the company plans to leave its roots as a comfortable shoe brand, as said by the Content and Community Strategist "Of course, comfort is the key to what we do, but we tried to get the more under style aspect." Nevertheless, it should be noted that this change has been in the works. The Area Manager notes that the company has been doing huge work product, material, and technological innovation, for the past 15 years. It is probably that this information is known because he has been working with the company for a long time.

The response from the Area Manager notes that Ecco uses the same campaign in every market. This way it is easier to analyse the responses gotten. The Content and Community Strategist notes that the responses, however, is different in different markets, particularly in China. It was noted that Ecco Shoes in the Chinese market has a younger customer base as opposed to the European market. This may be because of the advancement in innovation that has been happening in the company and the stores launched during this transition phase for the brand. One may suggest that the difference in market in the European market may be because the brand was originally established in Europe and had to evolve in Europe, before becoming global.

Information gotten from the Area manager notes that this effort to target younger people is not only with the styles, but also with the marketing methods. It was found that in the Dublin store, window campaigns are particularly driven by the targeting younger

Consumers, and this has proven to work for the company. The Content and Community Strategist noted that the new campaign direction is an all-inclusive campaign that drives the message of diversity and inclusivity, something a lot of Consumers would not have known with its earlier styles and campaigns. One may suggest that Ecco may be using this new diverse and inclusive strategy because this is most common now with millennials on the internet. In addition, after so many years of being represented as an old, brown, and comfortable shoes company, Ecco is making sure that the narrative changes with this new diverse and inclusive campaign.

When asked about the inclusivity and diversity turn for the company, the Area Manager noted that Consumers may not be aware of this. He goes on to stress that this may be because of the world we live in today, where it is expected for all brands to be inclusive and diverse. It is opined that he might have said this, because of the trends in the world we live in now, where avoiding a brand for not supporting a cause or a movement is normal. He also notes that people notice when a brand is not doing something, rather than when they are doing it. One may suggest that this is now the world we live in. It should be noted that this statement from the Area Manager is important, as it correlates with the existing literature on Gen Z Consumers and a company's take on inclusivity and diversity (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

On the other hand, the Community and Content Strategist had a different response to the question about the diversity and inclusivity of the company. The participant noted that in some conservative markets, this may not always be the case, as some may see this as an issue. He goes on further to note that in these conservative markets, it may be harder to get Consumers on the board. Nevertheless, the message has been received quite positively from Consumers. One may suggest that this may be because of Consumers wanting to be represented in the most normal way possible and feeling like they belong. This response from the Content and Community Strategist may be contradicting to the already existing literature on this topic, which is interesting to note.

When asked about sustainability of the company, both Senior Personnel, went on to list the steps the company has taken to go green. They both mention the company's dry tanning process, a patented technology that they hope to share with other brands soon, as "a gift to the world." However, this has not been received well by consumers, as all the participants did not know about this step the company has taken to become more sustainable, all of which will be looked at later in this paper.

The Senior Personnel described the impact of Covid-19 as a challenging time for the company. The Content and Community Strategist noted that in terms of sales, the company gained a huge attraction to its online store as no one could physically go into the stores to shop. The participant also mentioned the changes the company had to make in terms of marketing. It was found that the company changed its focus from formal shoes to athleisure and sporty footwear because of people always being at home and not really going into offices or functions.

This response correlates with the literature on the impacts of Covid-19 on Irish retail, as companies had to move online as store could not be physically open during this time. There is no doubt that this also affected the sales of the company. Nevertheless, the Area Manager notes that since opening back after the lockdown, the physical stores has seen a younger footfall in the stores. He goes on to note that this has been because of the window campaigns in the stores. Further discussion on the reasons both participants gave certain responses is contained in the division of the themes.

Response from Consumers

All participants that took part in this research were of ages ranging from 21-25 respectively.

The First Consumer, a 21-year-old female who has been shopping in the company for 3 years with her family, noted that the styles in the store are following trends and looking like brands that she is more accustomed to.

In relation to the perceptions of the company, it should be noted that all Consumers noted that they have noticed the changes in Ecco. All Consumers were consistent with the wording “style” when describing the changes that have been made within the company, which could be attributed to their age and the fact that they all have been shopping in the Wicklow Street store, in Dublin for 2-3 years, respectively. All the Consumers acknowledged that the focus is now being in their age group, which may be positive for the company. One may suggest that they are aware of these changes because they have been Consumers at the store a while now and the changes in style are noticeable and different. The change in Ecco may be surprising to Consumers as they are not used to seeing shoes like this in store. Also, Consumers like herself may be happy that the company is now making shoes that they love to see in other brands.

The Consumer goes on to mention that her friends were surprised to find out that a shoe she was wearing was from Ecco shoes. Nevertheless, the turn out could be positive for the company, as they are achieving the goal to drive younger Consumers into the stores. Aside's style, another factor that was constant with the responses form the Consumers was "price." All participants noted that price was a key factor when shopping. It should be noted that they may have said this because they are all between the ages of 21-24 and still in college, so they must shop "within their means", as stated by the 21-year-old female Consumer.

During the interview, a picture of the company's new campaign was shown to all Consumers (See Appendix C), to say the first thing that comes to mind when they see the picture. It should be noted that different responses were gotten from each Consumer. Three Consumers, all, Male with ages 21,23 and 24 respectively, stated that what came to mind was diversity and inclusion. One may suggest that the reason these three immediately noticed that their picture represented diversity and inclusivity, was because they have been noticing the trends of brands becoming more diverse.

The other two Consumers, a 21-year-old female and a 21-year-old male stated that what came to mind was "normal people wearing shoes". it may be suggested that the reason these Consumers have noted this is because they are so used to seeing high end models in campaigns and not models who look like them. In addition, it should be noted that this may stem from the fact that with their ages these Consumers spend an amount of time on social media and are seeing these types of campaigns and people daily.

When asked the participants if they would support a brand that is not diverse, all participants noted that they would not. This response correlate with the literature review which state that consumers will avoid brands that are not representing everyone and standing for a worthy cause. It is suggested that this many not only be a characteristic of consumers in Dublin, but also for consumer in the United States and around the world (Burns *et al.*, 2021).

In relation to green consumers and sustainability, all participants had different responses. Two Consumers, (Male and Female, both ages 21) noted that they are Green Consumers and look at for these features when shopping, while the other three Consumers (all male) noted that they are not Green Consumers but try to be sustainable anyhow they can. One may suggest that while Consumer's in their 20s may want to do better and better the world as best they can, some are still new to the idea of being sustainable and relating that to their daily lifestyle. As a result, responses gotten from this question do not entirely

correlate with the literature review, as some admit to being Green Consumers, while some said that “that does not come to mind when shopping.”

The final element that the Consumers noted in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on their shopping is the fact that they all had to move online. However, they all noted that they would much rather prefer shopping in store, where they can try on items rather than shopping online. One Consumer, a 21-year-old Female noted that with the new Covid-19 regulations, the long queues have been a challenge, but she understands that it is just precautions. This response was regarding the store located in Wicklow Street, Dublin City Centre.

Considering the interviews conducted with the Consumers, Area Manager and Content and Community Strategist, three themes emerged from the semi-structured interview data:

Theme 1: Age Demographic

Theme 2: Inclusivity and Diversity

Theme 3: Sustainability

All of which will be discussed extensively in the next section. These themes will also aid in further developing the study, in order to reach an informed conclusion.

4.3.1 Investigating the change in age demographic at Ecco shoes

Over the past years, there has been an evolution of styles for the brand, inviting a younger customer base to the brand. The brand has been known for comfort first and this has been a contributing factor to the “old people brand” narrative. From a response by the Area Manager, it was found that the brand suffers from a positive legacy of being a safe, comfortable shoes brand that have been considered an old person’s shoes. The Area Manager expressed that.

“Ecco perceived, I suppose, in truth we suffer from a positive legacy of being perceived to be a safe, comfortable brand that is all about comfort and considered to be an old person's shoe also, you know, shoes that are comfortable for jobs that you're on your feet all day, such as nursing homes and so on.”

Positive because although this may not be what the brand intended to be its legacy; the narrative has brought in a lot of great sales for the company.

One male Consumer, who has been shopping in the store for three years now, states that the customer base in Ireland especially, ranges from the middle aged to the elderly particularly because the focus of the brand is on comforts first rather than style. As a result, the younger demographic has not found the store to be for them until recently. Following the interviews conducted and the research done, Ecco has gone through certain changes to ensure that the narrative of “old people brand” is abolished.

The brand has done this through evolving styles, marketing strategies and campaigns. One may believe that these changes are because of younger audience not visiting the stores. The new styles and campaigns now reflect these recent changes the brand has made. The response gotten from the Content and Community Strategist suggests that the company is now experimenting with styles and marketing with campaigns in order to target the younger consumers. One may suggest that the priority is now placed on the younger consumers as the brand moves increasingly into becoming an athleisure brand.

Both Consumers and Senior Personnel have attested to the changes Ecco has made to draw a younger footfall to the stores and online shopping. From the responses and the literature review, it is opined that the new campaigns and changes that have occurred in Ecco over the past 10 years have only happened because of the impact consumers had on the brand (Solomon, 2006). The Content and Community Strategist also says that; “We focused mostly on these tests that we're doing, but we also do more consumer listening, which is something that we start to do more and more off in terms of social media etc.,” which correlates with the literature that consumer behaviour and inputs impact marketing, and it is important to understand consumer behaviour for an effective marketing strategy (Solomon, 2006).

Data gathered from the Content and Community Strategist suggest that the narrative of old people brand only exist in Europe. It was found that this is not the case in China. This finding is based on the information provided by the Content and Community Strategist in the interview. He expressed that “we also sell in China and in China it is a big market for us where the brand perception is completely different. So, we have a way younger consumer, who are also more fashion forward consumers.”

The difference in the markets may show that the narrative is only rampant in Europe. Product and technology innovation are among the few changes that have occurred to change Ecco from being a brown shoe brand to a sports brand.

Ecco has not only improved styles to target younger consumers, but they also have new price points that are less expensive and closer to the price of other shoe brands that the younger consumers shop at. It is opined that the new price points will have a positive impact in targeting younger consumers. Furthermore, with the company offering excellent quality and more sustainable products, it will surely be a bargain for the younger consumers if the price points are low.

The Consumers response to the company's new styles and campaigns is prove that the marketing strategy has indeed succeeded. Therefore, it is important to incorporate the knowledge of consumer into every marketing plan (Solomon, 2006). It was found that Ecco does this by conducting annual surveys to get customer feedback. The literature on consumer behaviour and the responses gotten from consumer and Ecco personnel correlate with each other focusing that understanding consumer behaviour is good for business (Solomon, 2006). Furthermore, the relationship between a brand and its consumers has an enormous impact on the success of any business.

As mentioned earlier, there are certain qualities that encourages consumers to buy from the store, the next heading explores this quality regarding findings from the interviews with all participants.

4.3.2 Exploring the perception of inclusivity and diversity in Ecco's new campaign

In the retail industry of Ireland, inclusivity and diversity has been the new phenomenon (Slattery, 2021). One may think that this shift in the marketing strategy may be because of trends surrounding diversity and inclusion, and the Consumers awareness of them. For most businesses, this has been a constant mantra in their core values, while some are only just being informed of its importance (Burns *et al.*, 2021).

Questions were asked to both managers at Ecco and Consumers, about the certain changes of inclusivity and diversity made within the company, and each set of participants gave distinct responses. For the consumers, the questions asked was to examine whether they were aware that the new campaign at Ecco Shoes passed a message of diversity and inclusivity. Unfortunately, the response gotten form the consumer were different were different from the message the company was passing across. While two Consumers, male and female, both aged 21, noted that they were normal people, the three other consumers aged 21, 23 and 24, did notice the message of diversity and inclusivity. Two of which were of an African background and the other European.

It is reasoned that the participants with the African background picked this up at first instance is because people want to see others that look like them on a campaign and in the stores, they walk into which brings a feeling of safety. For example, if a consumer with a prosthetic leg goes into Ecco shoes and sees this campaign, they will not only feel welcomed, but they will feel safe enough to shop in a store that recognises people like them. Also, these Consumers have also been shopping in the store for over two years, so it can be said that the new campaign was new to them, which they immediately picked up.

The response gotten from the interviews conducted with the Content and Community Strategist, is evidence that this shift to become more diverse and inclusive was a fast shift for Ecco. The Content and Community Strategist noted that “I think it's very mixed, so of course we have shifted quite fast.”

This stems from the trends around the subject. However, Ecco has noted that they have had to be careful in their communication, in order to avoid any legal backlash from conservative consumers. Nevertheless, it of this authors opinion that the if the brand is hoping to pull more young consumers, diversity should be at the fore front. This is because we have seen from the survey that this generation has become more aware of their surroundings and will not hesitate to avoid a brand if they are in the wrong (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

It is reasoned that Gen Z Consumers may have cultivated this from spending time on social media and trying to be better to their community any way they can (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). This reasoning is based on the fact that the Consumers interviewed for this research were all in the early 20s and spend a reasonable amount of time on social media. In addition, sharing that the brand holds the same philosophy as the younger audience will draw more consumers. However, it is important to know that they have gone ahead to communicate these changes through marketing in the more diverse markets.

It has been found in this study, that these efforts of Ecco Shoes to be more diverse and inclusive have not been entirely excluded by all the consumers, as three of the male research participants noted that when he saw the campaign, “diversity came to mind.” Francis and Hoefel (2018) state that consumers of this generation will turn against brands that are not diverse and inclusive. From the interviews conducted, this statement was found to be true as all the Consumers stated that they “would not” buy from brands that are not diverse or inclusive.

As true as the statement from Francis and Hoefel (2018) seem to be, this may not always be the case. From one of the consumers, it was found that most times, these issues do not always matter to the consumers. When asked a research participant if inclusivity and diversity will stop them from buying from a brand, they indicated that it would not bother them. This response from the research participant indicated that there are some consumers who do not care if a brand is diverse or inclusive while some do. Nevertheless, the latter is always greater than the former.

Most times, the subject of inclusivity and diversity is not always about the campaigns and images of the brand; the employees are also considered. One of the male Consumer, age 23, stated that they would not give their money to a brand that does not put the money to effective use for the benefit of the employees. They also noticed that this type of pattern is recurrent with big brands and as a result, would much rather support a smaller Irish brand. This goes to show that at times the consumers do not only look at the surface of the brands, but they also look internally. For this reason, brands must do better to ensure success.

From the responses gotten from all participants, it was found that the existing literature and interview responses correlate with one another, In the terms of Consumers being interested if a company is diverse or inclusive and that reflecting in their marketing strategies (Burns *et al.*, 2021).

Green consumerism and sustainability have become important for brands, and we have seen why with the findings above. Ecco is found to be playing their part and consumers have had responses to this. The next chapter further investigates the part Ecco has played in being sustainable and consumers thoughts on being green.

4.3.3 Investigating the relationship between green consumers and brands attempt to be sustainable

In the Irish retail industry, there has been a new phenomenon to offer more sustainable products to consumers. Consumers have also become aware of their environment and as a result, there have been a slight shift in their buying behaviour, as some consumers will only consume green products. From interviews conducted with the senior personnel at Ecco Shoes, it was found that the company has been doing their part to become more sustainable.

From the interview conducted with the Area Manager and Content and Community Strategist, it was found that the development of the dry tan technology by Ecco has given the brand the opportunity to increase their profit sustainability, access new markets and enjoy competitive advantage over brands that are not aware of sustainable practices. However, Ecco shoes plans to share this patent invention to other brands, “as a gift to the world.” Although this is known by this author, from the interview conducted with all five consumers, it was found that they do not know about the company’s new initiative.

To the brand, this idea has been received positively, but there must be input from the consumers perspective. Two out of five of the consumers interviewed, one female and one male participant, noted that the brand uses biodegradable leather and uses plastic bags in stores. These were the only information known to the Consumers. One may argue that for some Consumers, this may be enough to show that the brand is sustainable, however for others it may not be the case. to this end, it is the responsibility of the brand to inform its consumers about recent changes and initiatives relating to sustainability, as this is one of the steps to draw more consumers to the brand and efficiently compete in the market (Pradeep and Akhilesh, 2017).

On the contrary, from the interviews conducted with consumers, it was found that three out of five consumers, all male participants, were not as interested in green consumption or a brand sustainable initiative. One of the consumers noted that being sustainable is not what they think about when shopping, while another stated that they do not care for sustainability. One may argue that for some consumers, price and style are the top considerations when buying, and therefore sustainability might not be what they think about before making a purchase. On the other hand, sustainable practices to some may still be new and proper awareness and communication will be need for them to be fully informed. However, the third consumer noted that at times, it may be hard to be sustainable, but they try to be sustainable when they can.

From one of the Consumers responses, it was observed that another reason a consumer may find it hard to be sustainable, is because sustainable products in general are more expensive than the products that have the most impact to the environments. From the responses gotten from three Consumers in this study, it was found that they would much rather turn to fast-fashion brands that are cheaper. On the contrary, it was also found that in some cases, quality will be more important than the price, as a consumer notes that they would much rather buy an expensive item if they were wearing it often and if the item is durable.

It was found that some consumers will stop buying products from a brand if they are not sustainable. The literature on green marketing showed that brands will put in efforts to ensure that they are carrying out sustainable practices (Pradeep and Akhilesh, 2017). This is because sales and revenue of the business increases drastically due to the demand of these products in the marketplace. One may argue that this is one of the reasons why retail business should implement sustainable strategies to improve marketing and provide a safer environment (Pradeep and Akhilesh, 2017).

4.4 Investigating the Impact of Covid-19 on Ecco Shoes

From the responses gotten from all participants, it was found that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the company in diverse ways. The Area Manager notes that in line with guidelines from the government, the store had to be closed for a few months, which affected the business in terms of sales. However, responses gotten from all the consumers, suggest that shopping online was a bit challenging as they could not physically try on the shoes before buying them.

One may suggest that for the younger consumers, it may be easy for them to navigate the online store and pick something out if they really wanted to. Unfortunately, most of Ecco's consumer base are the elderly, so it may have been hard for them to navigate the online shop if they did not have someone to help them with that.

In addition, as noted by one of the male consumers, most of the people who come into the stores are elderly people, who mostly have issues with their foot or knees, so this will mean that they will have to physically try the shoes, which could not happen due to its closure. This may have also resulted in a loss for the company.

As stated by the Content and Community Strategist "I mean so, we have these different segments in our collection, so we have formal which of course is a trend that is decreasing overall. And that is because of COVID-19 that has been heavily decreased because of course nobody was really going to events anymore. Nobody needed to have business shoes or formal shoes." This statement is said to correlate with the literature review on the impact of Covid-19 in the retail sector of Ireland.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the changes in marketing strategy and the age demographic and determine whether the change in the age demographic could be linked to Ecco's innovative marketing strategy. Furthermore, this study is set out to break down consumer buying behaviour and what Ecco need to do or improve to avoid any backlash.

This chapter begins with an overview of the Ecco shoes case study, a revisit of the original research questions, the objectives tied to the research question. All of which will be a summary.

Conclusions are drawn from research data analysis, and findings which correlate or disagree with existing literature. The conclusions will be based on emergent themes from the data analysis.

Theme 1: Diversity and inclusion

Theme 2: Sustainability

Theme 3: Age demographic

Summary if these themes will be made in the body of this chapter, following limitations to the study, further recommendations, and personal reflections.

The focus of this study was on a global European company, with locations in Dublin, Ireland. The company has been in existence from 1963, and the sole purpose of the brand was to make comfortable shoes for everyone. The company also produces leather goods like bags, and belts and other accessories. With headquarters in Denmark, Ecco shoes has managed to build a wide customer base in various locations around the world. in addition, Ecco is a supplier of premium leather to luxury brands like Apple, Louis Vuitton, etc (Ecco, 2021).

The total research participants for this study were n=7, which consists of Consumers of Ecco shoes, and senior personnel like the area manager in Ireland and the Content and Community Strategist in The Netherlands.

5.2 Research Questions and Methods Revisited

As mentioned earlier in this paper, this study set out to answer two research questions:

- 1) How far does the analysis of consumer buying behaviour affect brand marketing strategy?
- 2) Has consumer buying behaviour sparked a shift in the marketing strategy of Ecco shoes?

It should be noted that after series of research and data analysis, these questions have been successfully answered.

To answer the research questions, the data gotten was analysed in two phases. The first phase involved gathering data from research participants, using semi-structured interviews as a requirement of the qualitative research method, and the Second stage involved analysing information gotten from the participants, using a coding software, NVivo 10.

Answering the first research question, it was found that consumer buying behaviour is primarily and has an enormous impact in brand marketing. As posited by Solomon (2006), brands exist to serve consumers and consumers engagement determines a success of a brand. This research proved this theory right and exposes brands and business owners to the dynamics of consumer buying, i.e., what will lead to a purchase.

The second question was answered based off the interviews conducted with Ecco senior personnel, the Area Manager of the Irish stores and the Content and Community Strategist based in The Netherlands. Their responses to the questions asked opens the diverse ways consumer buying behaviours affects marketing strategy and a change in the marketing strategy of Ecco shoes.

5.3 Investigating the Change in the Age Demographic at Ecco Shoes

My analysis shows that Ecco has indeed been directing all campaigns and marketing strategies at targeting a younger audience. This analysis agrees with the literature review, because it proves that consumer buying behaviour has an enormous impact on the marketing strategy of any business, hence it correlates with the literature review. Furthermore, the findings gotten from the research agrees with the theory made by

Solomon (2006), that the consumers response is a test of whether a marketing strategy will succeed or not. One can see this through consumer willingness to avoid a brand for wrong values and strategies. The findings gotten from the research answers the question on whether consumer buying behaviour sparked a shift in the marketing strategy of Ecco Shoes.

5.4 Exploring the Perception Regarding Inclusivity and Diversity in Ecco Shoes

The inclusivity and diversity movement are not new, however, consumers are now stirring up this conversation, which means brands must be alert and comply, to prevent failure. Response gotten from the research participants correlate with the literature review, in that consumers will decide to stop shopping from a brand if they notice that they are either not diverse or inclusive.

However, it is important to note that this does not only affect consumers, but employees as well. It is reasoned that brands should not only focus on their consumers, but their employees as well. This reasoning is because employees represent a company and if it is seen that the employees are not diverse, this will indirectly reflect on the company. As a result, it is suggested that brands not only do better in campaigns, but also with employees.

This research study contributed insights from the consumers perspective which will help this brands and other brand switch marketing strategies. In addition, different opportunities have been presented not only to this brand, but to other Irish retail businesses. Finally, it should be noted that findings gotten from participants indicates that a consumer buying behaviour will affect changes in the marketing strategy of brands.

5.5 Investigating the Relationship between Green Consumers and Brands Attempt to be Sustainable.

As stated earlier in chapter 4, it is evident that the finding regarding sustainability and green consumers both agree and disagree with the literature. This because, only a few consumers, as mentioned above, are concerned with sustainability, and buying green. The others are either not green consumers or find it hard to become one. It was found that most of them find it hard to become green consumers, because the fast fashion items are cheaper. One may suggest that this is a controversial issue, and unfortunately not every consumer has the privilege of being able to afford anything other than fast fashion. Nevertheless, the findings agree with the literature in that two of the consumers aspire to

be sustainable and socially responsible as posited by some academics (Pradeep and Akhilesh, 2017). To this end, one may think that this will also apply to other consumers outside Ecco shoes

In summary, this author found both responses from the Consumer and Senior Personnel to be very insightful and interesting. One of the important findings was that some of what the marketers hope to pass have not been received well by Consumers, in terms of sustainable practices. It is important to note that not all responses correlate with the literature, however, this does not mean that the literature on the different topics is not relevant. Lastly, it should be noted that the ages of the research participants reflected well in their responses.

5.6 Limitations to the study

The only limitation to this research was that it was hard to get consumers to conduct the interview. The initial number of interviews were around 10 people; however, this was reduced to 7 because some consumers were not available to participate in the research. In addition, as the flow of younger people into the store is still rising, this researcher found it difficult to ask younger consumers to participate in the interview. Due to the impact of COVID-19, it was harder to physically approach consumers, as some were cautious of contacting the virus. Perhaps being more experienced would have been a bonus for this author when conducting interviews.

This author would have hoped for an additional timing, which would have helped in gathering more resources and data for this research.

5.7 Recommendations for practice and future research

Considering the interviews conducted, this author is of the opinion that brands should take on inclusivity and diversity as a norm in their values. This is because only adding that now, as in the case of ECCO, will not be obvious to consumers, as consumers will just see these recent changes and disregard the intention behind it. From the interview with the Area Manager, it was clear that the consumers do not notice these changes to appreciate the brands effort, hence why there should be vocal about inclusivity and diversity from the start and normalize it.

The issue of sustainability as well. Consumers that come into the store will automatically think the brand may not be sustainable, mainly because it uses leather. Form the interviews conducted, it was found that Ecco is into more sustainable practices, and they have done this by using dry tan; a technology that saves up to 80,000 gallons of water per

cycle. Only a familiar customer will be aware that the brand uses paper bags in stores and that the leather is biodegradable.

Although the existing theories and models on consumer behavioural patterns helps with the understanding of consumer buying behaviour, it is recommended that improvements be made in order to apply in the present world and the consumers constant change in preferences and external factors.

As a result, it is recommended that the company do better with campaigns to further inform its consumers of their effort to pursue more sustainable practices. Full disclosure and transparency are advised as required by the Consumer protection Act 2007 to avoid any further issues. Lastly, it is important to note that not only will this help the brand in welcoming more consumers, but it will also improve the company's corporate social responsibility.

5.8 Personal Reflection

Through the process of authoring the paper, I had the opportunity to interview senior personnel of Ecco, which seemed impossible at the time. This also led to more insights about the company, which was interesting to know. Conducting this research taught this author how to conduct an interview, as the author has not done this before. Furthermore, my ability to identify the difference between information and data has changed, as this author had to use a qualitative research method rather than a quantitative research method.

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Appendix A

NVivo 10 Coding

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participants Profile: Female Consumer (Age 21)

Date: 14th August 2021

Theme	Coding	Consumer Interview (Female, age 21)
Diversity/inclusivity	Normal	“Diverse, using normal people rather than high street models”
Sustainability	Environmentally conscious	“I have been more environmentally conscious; I’m trying to stick away from fast fashion”
Sustainability	Paper bags	“Ecco Uses paper bags in store”
Age demographic	Means	“I’m a student at the moment, so I have to shop within my means”
Age demographic	Style	“Style as well, I’m not going to buy clothes I can’t wear, I have to fit to what my style already is”
Age demographic	Trends	“there’s a few shoes now that you can compare to the likes of Balenciaga and yeezys style and keeping up with trends”
Age demographic	Younger	“They need to try get younger customers into the store”

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participants Profile: Male consumer (Age 22)

Date: 14th August 2021

Theme	Code	Customer Interview (Male, age 22)
Sustainability	More sustainable	“I have been trying to more sustainable and have more sustainable practices”
Sustainability	Biodegradable	“The sole of the shoes may not be biodegradable, but I know the leather is”
Age demographic	Expand	“Expand their target audience”
Inclusive/diverse	Part of life	“it’s good to see that they have a woman with a prosthetic leg, because that’s part of life, its normal”
Age demographic	Younger audience	“I have become more aware of their presence in Europe, which is a much younger audience”
Age demographic	Style	“Style comes before price”
Sustainability	Quality	“Generally, if something is more sustainable, it Is going to be of a higher quality”
Diverse/inclusive	Normalize	“Brands need to normalize everybody”
Diverse/inclusive	Opportunity	“Give people the opportunity on their own merit, not because of the way they look”

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participant's profile: Male Consumer (Age 24)

Date: 16th August 2021

Theme	Code	Consumer 3 interview (Male, age 24)
Age demographic	Vibrant	“I like Wicklow Street because it’s a very vibrant street, very busy and there’s a lot of nice shops there”
Age demographic	Old fashioned	“I think they’re sort of right, a lot of the shoes are very old fashioned, and a lot of the customer that shop there do tend to be very elderly”
Age demographic	Colorful	“they’re making the colors a lot more colorful now especially for summer.”
Age demographic	Spend	“I don’t really like to spend a huge amount of money on one product, I usually like to spend a lot of money on multiple products, you know”
Sustainability	Not sure	“I’m not sure, to be honest”
Diversity/inclusivity	Mind	“Diversity comes to my mind first”
Diversity/inclusivity	Targeting	“Obviously, they’re targeting women in the in the photo there”

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participant's profile: Male consumer (age 24)

Date: 22nd August 2021

Theme	Code	Consumer 4 Interview (Male)
Inclusivity/diversity	I really like it	“I really like it. Yes. I really like, there's a lot of diversity”
Inclusivity/diversity	workers	“that's kind of respecting workers as well”
Sustainability	Hard	“I try to be, but it's very hard”
Sustainability	Fast fashion	“It's just like a lot of fast fashion that is actually the cheapest”
Age demographic	Not late to the trend	“They are on trend now; they are not late to the trend anymore”
Age demographic	Smart	“They are being very smart about the colors and how it looks”
Age demographic	Support	“It tries not to support them if they are not of good values”
Age demographic	Stories	“If I have had stories about them not respecting their workers”
Age demographic	I do not want to give	“I don't want to give my money to someone who will not put it into the work force and make everyone happy”
Sustainability	Cheap	“I will be using much more than something that is very cheap or something that I won't wear or something that is not

comfortable or sustainable”

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participant's profile: Male consumer (age 21)

Date: 22nd August 2021

Theme	Code	Consumer 5 Interview (Male)
Diversity/inclusivity	Big case	“If there's a big, big case of discrimination or whatever, then I probably wouldn't”
Diversity/inclusivity	Radar	“If they're under the radar, in regard to that stuff, then I have no problem with them”
Sustainability	Buy	“No, because I never think of that when I buy clothes”
Age demographic	Customer base	“If you look at the customer base in Ireland, they are mostly the elderly, or middle aged to elderly”
Age demographic	First	“Ecco pride themselves on comfort rather than solely style, they do focus on style, but I think comfort comes first”
Age demographic	Variety	“Now they have more variety in style and colors”
Age demographic	Branch out	“I do feel like they are trying to brand out and grab younger populations”

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participant's profile: Content and Community Strategist

Date; 19th August 2021

Theme	Code	Content and Community Strategist Interview
Age demographic	Target	“It's also a direct approach from us to target a younger consumer, which is that what we're doing is trying to do now”
Age demographic	Fashion forward consumers	“We also sell in China and in China it's a big market for us where the brand perception is completely different so that we have a way younger consumer also way more fashion forward consumer”
Diversity/inclusivity	Message	“And moves like you is a more diverse and inclusive message like it's for everyone, which of course fits with a younger demographic that we then target.”
Age demographic	Reach	“Yeah, I think there's a lot of stuff going on to reach a younger consumer”
Age demographic	Design	“Like I said, the shoe itself is key to what we do, and that's also where you see the design is heavily like trying to do its own thing and like get that younger consumer, try experiment more with styles”
Diversity/inclusivity	Movement	“But there's a lot of markets where a diverse audience is not necessarily a common thing, and it's more challenging to get them aboard on the movement”

Diversity/inclusivity	Shift	“Internally we all need to shift our minds as well, like this is what it's going to be, and this is what we have to do, and I think we see the same with the consumer”
Sustainability	Long way to go	“And I think Ecco has very much realizes that there is a long way to go and being a production company like we make our own footwear.”
Sustainability	Communicate	“And I think a key focus is now that we try to communicate more”
Sustainability	Difficult	“And being a production company like we make our own footwear, it’s very difficult to be fully sustainable”
Sustainability	Materials	“We also introduce more and more sustainable materials, so more biodegradable materials etc.”

Participants Name: Anonymous

Participant's profile: Area Manager

Date: 5th August 2021

Theme	Code	Area Manager Interview
Age demographic	Innovation	“So, there's huge innovation and that's, what's driving the product to a younger audience”
Sustainability	Gift to the world	“Gifting that to the whole industry as an environmental sort of gift to the world, which I think it saves 80,000 gallons of water in every cycle”
Age demographic	Outdoor	“Now outdoor is over 40% of our business, you know, and over 40% of our collection. So that's been one of the big drivers”
Age demographic	Chasing	“Oh, I think there's loads of styles chasing the younger market”
Age demographic	Price points	“Price points of you know, 90 and 100 Euro in ladies, 100 up to 120 in men's shoes, I think is chasing that younger audience as well”
Age demographic	Footfall	“The passing footfall and the footfall coming into the store is much younger”
Sustainability	Less	“Be it by using less water to the current, the latest innovation of pure dry tanning”
Sustainability	Onwards	“From 2025 onwards, and that there is still some work to be able to move the whole collection to that”

Inclusivity/diversity	Aware	“I don't think customers are even aware of it”
Inclusivity/diversity	Cater	“it's for everybody we cater for everybody”
Inclusivity/diversity	Expected	“that's expected by customers and maybe they would see it if you weren't doing it, rather than if you were”

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Ecco Marketing

- How do you think the Ecco brand has been perceived?

- The age demographic of people that shop in the store have changed, why do you think that is?
- Are there any priorities placed on the younger consumers than on the older consumer, regarding style and overall marketing in the recent years?
- what was Ecco trying to achieve with its new campaign? inclusivity? Diversity?
- how has this new campaign been received with consumers?
- Why was this only done with this campaign? any specific reasons?
- how often does the brand incorporate consumer feedback to its marketing strategy?
- is the brand likely to change a style or discontinue a style based off customer response?
- where is the company heading to with style and innovation?
- with the world becoming more sustainable, how have green consumers affected the marketing strategy
- Has there been any changes in consumer buying behaviour post Covid-19?
- How is the company moving forward with the impact of Covid-19?

Questions for the consumers

1. Are you currently living in Ireland?
2. As a resident in Ireland do you patronize retailed business (Ecco shoes)
3. Do you think it is an old people brand?
4. Have you been too other Ecco stores, and what makes you shop from Wicklow Street, the experience and all?
5. Are you most likely to purchase from a brand if they good values or not?
6. What will discourage you from buying from a brand
7. Are you a green consumer, if yes, does it matter to you that a brand is sustainable or not?
8. What do you think when you see this picture?
9. What is your take on brand diversity and inclusivity?
10. How does style and price influence your buying discussion
11. Do you believe that certain products should have the approval of consumers before they are released?
12. What prompts you to leave a store, asides the fact that you might not want to buy
13. How has your shopping experience been with the impact of Covid-19?

Appendix C

Image shown to Consumers

