

THE IRISH CONSUMER CURRENT SENTIMENTS TOWARD MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This investigation is the first to examine Irish consumer attitudes towards marketing and, in addition to the categories examined in the original Gaski and Etzel study of consumer sentiment, it investigates attitudes towards "Buying Irish."

The principal objective of this study is to establish an indicator of consumer sentiment toward marketing in Ireland that will serve as a benchmark for a continuing longitudinal study. To accomplish this, the core part of the instruments that measured multiple facets of five major aspects of marketing: retailing, products, prices, customer service, and advertising were purified such that the measures of each marketing sector could be argued to be both reliable and valid. The cleansed measures for each sector of marketing were averaged into a single index and then importance-weighted. The five importance weighted constructs were then added to arrive at a single index value for consumer sentiment toward marketing in Ireland. In addition, other measures of consumer sentiment will be reported as mean values in rank order to complete the "snapshot" of the current state of consumer sentiment in Ireland.

Overall, a valuable set of benchmarks of consumer sentiment was established for future use. The so-called "footprint" of the Irish consumers' sentiment toward marketing has been established at very important time as the surging Irish economy becomes a major force within the European Union while at the same time being a major link in commerce between Europe and the Americas.

Examination of the relative importance of the measures reported in this research can be used to establish the goals for improvement in marketing performance that will result in an improvement in the consumer sentiment index in the future, but more importantly, provide an enhanced marketing environment for the Irish consumer. Specifically, the study suggests that consumers are being over served on market factors that they do not consider important and underserved on factors that they feel are important. In order to satisfy better the desires of their Irish consumers, marketers need to focus on the following issues:

- **Product Quality:** Consumers must be persuaded of the quality and reliability of products offered in today's marketplace and marketspace. It appears that consumers nostalgically remember halcyon days when products were well made by companies who cared how their products performed. Marketers must convince them that this is still the case.
- **Price Related Issues:** At the time the research was conducted, Irish consumers were unhappy with the prices paid for goods purchased. In general, goods were seen as over priced and businesses were viewed as taking an excessive profit. These concerns have, if anything increased over time, and the advent of the single European currency (the Euro) in January of 2002 has exacerbated concerns that consumers are being "ripped off".
- **Retailing Issues:** In general, Irish consumers seem satisfied with their retail experiences and the highest mean of all of those items loading on the various scales was agreement with the statement that "most of my shopping experiences are pleasant because of the way I am treated in stores". Clearly, Irish marketers need to ensure that this level of satisfaction remains. As an additional consideration, stores should indicate the overall value of Irish purchases on till receipts - a practice already followed by many of the big grocery players.
- **Advertising:** Finally, while advertising concerns did not rank highly with our consumers, marketers need to continue to monitor their performance here in order to ensure this does not change.