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The Attitudes of the Enugu Urban Consumers toward Supermarkets: Consumer Acceptance

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Introduction

According to Czinkota et al. (2003), the supermarket concept of retailing was established in the US during the 1930s, as no frills retail stores offering lower prices. Supermarkets came about when the Great Depression forced many grocers to replace their small, inefficient, traditional, mom and pop corner stores in order to offer consumers lower prices. Selling groceries and some general merchandise products through large-scale physical facilities with self-service and self-selection displays enabled the supermarket retailer to shift the performances of some distribution functions to consumers.

Supermarkets gained acceptance in the United States during the 1930s. The early stores were usually located in reconverted industrial buildings in outlying areas; they had no elaborate display facilities. In the 1940s, and 50s, supermarkets became the major food marketing channel in the US; the 1950s also saw supermarkets spread through much of Europe. Their growth is part of a trend in developed countries toward reducing cost and simplifying marketing. In the 1960s, supermarkets began appearing in developing countries in the Middle East, and Latin America, where they appealed to individuals who had the necessary buying power and food storage facilities.

Cundiff et al. (1980) are of the view that the basic characteristics and operating philosophy of the supermarket are indicated in its definition; a large retailing business unit that sells mostly food and grocery items on the basis of low price, wide variety and assortments, self-service and heavy emphasis on merchandise appeal. According to them, originally, when supermarkets were first introduced in the 1930s, they were devised as purely food retailing business. They continue to emphasize the mass selling of food and grocery items, but in order to widen their merchandise appeal and improve their profit potentials, increasing numbers of supermarkets add such none food as drugs, household utensils, hardware and garden supplies.

Beckman and Davison (1967), leading marketing writers furthermore defined a supermarket as "a large, departmentalized, retail establishment offering a relatively broad and complete stock of dry groceries, fresh meat, perishable produce and dairy products, supplemented by a variety of convenience, non-food merchandise, and operated primarily on a self-service basis".

Hallsworth (1988) argued that today's consumers take good supermarkets for granted. Some of their gripes and requests are now classic but many are really new. They are interested in fun – in enjoying what they buy and the process as well. They are paying lots more attention to prepared food, finding it more important and easier to justify. They are more concerned about safety, and quicker to associate the supermarket with cleanliness. But young or old, East or West, they are still asking for clearer labeling, tastier produce and better price communications.

Consumers continue to demonstrate money-saving behaviours such as coupon clipping, reviewing advertising specials, comparing prices at different supermarkets, participating in frequent shopper programs and stocking up on sale items. American consumers continue to incorporate economizing behaviours in their weekly shopping routines, according to the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) (2004) report. The report also shows that consumer interest in nutrition is increasing, as is their awareness of food safety issues.

According to the report, the top two features which American Consumers ranked as very important in selecting a supermarket are a clean, neat store and high quality produce. Other features deemed very important by shoppers include use-before/sell by dates, convenient location, courteous/friendly employees, accurate shelf tags, items on sale or money saving specials, store layout that makes it easy to shop, personal safety outside the store and fast checkout. Although low prices and economizing appear to be a priority, the need for convenience, both in meal preparation and in shopping, is still important to today's shoppers. Consumer's hectic lifestyles, especially

those of working women with children at home, drive a need for features and services that enhance opportunities for one-stop shopping and speed.

A report on *Checking out the Supermarket – Competition in Retailing* (1988), which was updated in 2003 states that the dominance of large supermarket chains affects every area of our lives – economically, socially, environmentally and culturally. While supermarkets have undoubtedly brought many benefits, their dominance creates problems. The underlying issue is that untrammelled market forces and poorly identified “consumer interests” frequently run counter to sustainable development. Awareness of this is growing rapidly. It is time for debate to ensure that the changes of the next thirty years are in the public interest and are sustainable on a global basis.

The report furthermore states that a fundamental problem is that supermarkets at present have a duty to shareholders and consumers through sourcing in the cheapest market, often outside the UK, regardless of social or environmental issues. In the short term this destroys the local economies. In the long term it will destroy national food industries, as markets are switched from one country to another, with particularly damaging results for developing countries.

Food Retailing System

The food retailing system in Enugu consists of a number of large multi-line supermarkets, a large number of small one line food stores often referred to as “provision stores” and a few traditional markets such as the “Ogbete main market and the Kenyatta market”. Such enterprises usually lack any reasonable degree of specialization in management and employees with exception of the supermarket. Most of the small food outlets such as country produce stores; butchers’ sheds etc. are situated in such traditional markets. Traditional markets, although fewer in number, are the most important food retailing outlets in Enugu measured by annual sales volume. But since the business is operated by private individuals, it will be difficult to determine the actual annual sales volume of such business, however, some estimates can be made.

Research Objectives and Survey Design

The purpose of the study is to determine the attitudes of the Enugu urban consumers towards supermarkets. The problem being studied here is how the appearance of supermarket has affected the food shopping of the Enugu urban consumers. Enugu is the capital of Enugu State in Nigeria.

The analysis is based on structured, undisguised, pre-tested and refined questionnaire. The questionnaires were self administered among a sample of Enugu urban consumers numbering 48 and later collected by hand. This method is chosen because it permits control of bias due to interviewer and interviewee interactions and also to ensure good quality control of information. Since many of the Enugu consumers reside in areas where no supermarket exists the focus of the study is on the consumers residing in neighbourhoods being served by supermarkets, provision stores and traditional markets. The decision to concentrate on these groups of consumers was motivated by the fact that only these consumers are really in a position to choose whether to switch over the supermarket or continue to buy their food needs from other outlets – provision stores and the traditional markets.

A list of all the city neighbourhoods served by supermarkets was used as the basis for the sample. These areas were then classified into four groups on the basis of their economic status and one neighbourhood was randomly selected from each of these four groups. Finally a random sample of 12 households was then drawn from each of these four neighbourhoods that were randomly selected. A respondent in each of the sample households was asked to complete his or her own questionnaire at home. The respondents numbering 48 were asked detailed questions about their shopping patterns for groceries, produce and fresh meat. In addition, some demographic and socio-economic data about each family were obtained.

The Findings

The study reveals that many respondents continue to buy most of their food items from the traditional market places (open markets) inspite of the convenience and generally easy accessibility of the supermarkets. While 31% of the sample have accepted supermarkets shopping in the sense that they frequently purchase some food items there, only a very small proportion of the sample (7%) of these supermarkets “adopters” spend more than 50% of their monthly food expenditure there, and only 2% of the respondents interviewed purchase all their food needs in supermarkets. The dominant food shopping pattern of all the respondents who frequently shop in the supermarkets is basically that of “selective” approach to adoption or (acceptance). Whereas the supermarket is frequently used to supply some specific types of food items, the traditional market places and the provision stores continue to be frequently used to supply other types of food lines.

As expected, higher income consumers, those residing nearer to the supermarket and those who own cars were found to show higher tendency to adopt supermarkets shopping and to concentrate more of their total purchase there. However, further analysis of the shopping patterns of the highest income group and of those residing nearest (under 10 minutes walking distance) to supermarkets revealed that a surprisingly large proportion (155%) continue regularly to purchase some of their food needs either in the traditional market or provision stores or both, while 93.75% of those who own cars continue regularly to purchase some of their food items from traditional markets or provision stores. In the final section of the article, these results are discussed and the implications of this shopping pattern for our understanding the issue of supermarket shopping in developing countries are highlighted.

Measuring Adoption of Supermarket Shopping

The question of when a consumer should be regarded as having “adopted” supermarket shopping is not a simple one. Different definitions are possible which might lead to completely different results. The definition used here is different from those usually used in the supermarket adoption studies. Nevertheless, it was chosen because it is highly relevant to the issue of improvement in food retailing. Supermarket shopping is viewed here as signifying the movement of consumers away from the situation where traditional market outlets (traditional markets and provision stores) are exclusively used to supply all of their food needs. Consequent upon the above, two elements were emphasized in the adoption definition employed here which in turn was based on the adoption definition of Rogers and Shoemaker (1971). First, this study was concerned only with the regular and continued use of the supermarket and not with shopping there in a casual and erratic manner. Second, since the traditional food retailing system in Enugu urban metropolis consists of a number of types of one line-food outlets, an adoption of supermarket shopping could be based on one, two or a number of these food lines. Whereas a consumer may, for example regularly buy his groceries and fresh meat in the supermarket and continue to purchase his other food needs in traditional outlets in Enugu, another consumer may buy all his food needs in the supermarket. It is therefore desirable to bring explicitly into the supermarket shopping adoption definition, the number of food lines involved. Broadly speaking, since the food we purchase in Nigeria can be classified into 3 major categories – grocery, country produce, and meat – the definition in the present case involved only these three food lines.

The respondents were 48 in number and most of them were females. Each respondent was asked a set of detailed questions about his or her shopping patterns for each of the three food lines, groceries, country produce and meat. For example, in the case of country produce respondents were asked the following: “Please tell us where you regularly purchase your country produce?” The respondents were further told to indicate one out of a limited number of alternatives that included all the possible shopping patterns for the food line. These patterns are (1) only in supermarkets, (2) only in provision stores, (3) only in traditional markets such as Ogbete Main Market, (4) in both supermarkets and provision stores, (5) in both supermarkets and traditional markets (e.g. Ogbete), (6) in both provision and traditional markets, (7) in all the three outlets. An identical procedure to the one described above was followed for each of the two other food lines – groceries

and fresh meats. A respondent was considered as an adopter of supermarket shopping for a specific type of food line if he or she regularly purchases the line “only” in the supermarket pattern (1) above or in both supermarket and any of the traditional outlets patterns (4), (5) and (7) above. This is considered as a “broad” approach to defining adoption of supermarket shopping since it views even the respondents who regularly purchase food line occasionally in the supermarket and in traditional outlets as a supermarket adopter for that food line. A “stricter” approach to the definition is also possible where only respondents who purchase a given food line exclusively in a supermarket will be considered as supermarket shopping adopters, for that particular line. Whereas the “broad” approach was the one used in the study, some data based on the stricter approach were also provided in the latter part of the article.

Two adoption measures were developed for each respondent. The first measure regards as an “adopter” – a respondent who regularly purchases in the supermarket at least one of the three food lines (grocery, country produce and meats). This measure is labeled here as “minimal” adoption measure. The 2nd measure indicates how many of the consumer’s three major food needs are being regularly purchased in the supermarket. In this case, four levels of adoption were possible representing different degrees of concentration of food purchases in supermarkets. A “complete” adoption involved a pattern where the respondents regularly purchased all three food lines in the supermarket, i.e. ($3/3$). A partial adoption pattern involved a situation where two out of three food lines are regularly purchased in the supermarket, i.e. ($2/3$). A “low-level” adoption occurred when only one food line was being regularly purchased in the supermarket. Finally, when none of the three food lines was regularly purchased in the supermarket the respondent was considered as a “non-adopter”, i.e. ($0/3$). This adoption measure is called “Concentration of Purchases” measure.

Table 1

The Supermarket Adoption Patterns of the Respondents

Concentration of Purchases				“Minimal” Adoption		
Pattern		*N	%	Pattern	*N	%
Complete Adopters	3/3	1	2	Adopters Non-Adopters	15 33	31 69
Partial Adopters	2/3	7	14.6			
Low Level Adopters	1/3	7	14.6			
Non-Adopters	0/3	33	68.8			
Total		48	100		48	100

*Number

The table shows that while a reasonable proportion of the respondents (31%) are regularly buying at least some of their food needs in the supermarket, only 2% (N = 1) of the group, i.e. (the supermarket adopters) concentrate all of their food purchases there. In other words, most of the adopters have adopted supermarkets shopping in a “selective” manner – they regularly shop there for some of their food needs while continuing to regularly buy the other food lines in the traditional outlets such as Ogbete Main Market and provision stores.

Group Differences in Adoption

There is a general agreement in the literature that lower-income consumers in developing countries are less likely to adopt supermarket shopping. This is often explained in terms of constraints on their ability to use the supermarket. According to Goldman (1971) these include lack of adequate transportation and social/cultural attachment to the traditional outlets. Also it is realized that consumers residing far away from supermarkets are less likely to buy there. Given the above expert opinions, the focus of the analysis here is on comparing the supermarket shopping adoption patterns of respondents from different income groups and of respondent residing at various distances from the supermarket. The following consumer variables were used in the analysis.

Educational status, income levels, marital status and occupation were among the variables used. Both distance in terms of minutes walked from the supermarket and ownership of an automobile were used here as indicators of the special constraints limiting the ability of respondents to purchase in the supermarkets. Table 2 shows the levels of association between the two measures of adoption behaviour and various consumer variables. The data show significant differences in the adoption behavior of the different consumer groups. A significantly larger proportion of unmarried consumers, residing nearest to the supermarket, having the highest education levels and annual incomes, who are public servants, and owning automobiles were found to be adopters of supermarkets shopping according to the “minimal” definition. In addition, the tendency to concentrate purchases of all the three food lines in the supermarket was found significantly to increase with the ownership of a car.

Table 2

Group Differences in Adoption “Minimal Adoption” Adopters

Consumer Variables	%	Total in Group
Distance from Supermarkets (Minutes Walking)		
Under 10 mins.	*55.6	9
11 – 20 mins	11.1	9
21 – 30 mins	37.5	8
Above 30 mins.	22.7	22
Educational Status		
1 st Leaving Certificate	14.3	7
W.A.S.C./GCE/TC. Gr. II	30.4	23
Diploma. Degree	*33.9	18
Annual Income		
Low	20	20
Middle low	33.3	12
Middle high	41.7	12
High	*50.0	4
Marital Status		
Single	*33.3	21
Married	29.6	27
Ownership of Car		
No	18.8	32
Yes	56.25	16
Occupation		
Public Servants	*41.9	31
Self Employed	9.1	11
Students	13.7	6

* Read: 55.6% of 9 respondents residing at a distance of under 10 minutes walking from supermarket were supermarket adopters if the minimal definition was used.

Discussion of Results

Rate of Supermarket Shopping Adoption and Supermarket's Share of Food Retail Stores

The study results demonstrate the danger involved in the common practice of using the market shares of supermarkets type of data as the sole basis for indicating the rate of spread of supermarkets in a country. While such data are highly useful as an indicator of the relative importance of the supermarket in the economic and retailing system, it may not be a good measure of the rate of supermarket shopping adoption by consumers. The limitations of such share of the market

data are clearly apparent in the case of Enugu. Specifically, only one of the respondents interviewed purchases exclusively from the supermarkets. Respondents buy from provision stores and traditional markets such as Ogbete and Kenyatta markets in Enugu. In the present case, since many of those who regularly shop in the supermarket do not purchase all of the three major food lines, there it follows that the supermarket's share of total sales will always be much lower than the actual rate of consumer adoption. Based on the "minimal adoption measure", a consumer who regularly shops two out of three major food lines, i.e. (2/3) is qualified to be a supermarket adopter whereas sales lost by the supermarket due to the consumer's "selective" approach to adoption equal 1/3. No discrepancy between the two sets of figures would have existed if each supermarket user had purchased all of his or her food needs there, i.e. (3/3). On the other hand, a larger gap between the two figures is also possible in a situation where more of the supermarket adopters will buy only one food line there.

Adoption of Supermarket Shopping by the Least Constrained Respondents

The findings of this study strongly support the notion that consumers who are more constrained in their ability to use the supermarket are less likely to do so while the higher-income consumers and those who reside near the supermarket will tend to show a higher rate of adoption. However, additional important insights can be gained into the supermarket acceptance issue if we go beyond the above results based on a trend analysis and take an in-depth look at the food shopping patterns of the groups of respondents who are least constrained in their supermarket shopping ability. These are respondents who reside nearest to the supermarket, own a car, have an academic background, have highest annual income and are single. While it is clear from Table 2 that these consumers show a very high tendency to adopt supermarket shopping, it is interesting to see how many of their food needs are being supplied by the supermarket. If adoption of supermarket shopping is not a function of other factors other than the level of constraints on consumers' ability to use the supermarket then we can expect all or most of these consumers to be complete adopters. Detailed data showing the supermarket shopping patterns of these least constrained respondents are provided in Table 3. Table 3 also shows that 44.4% of those residing under 10 minutes walking distance from supermarkets, 50% of the highest income group, 43.75% of those who own cars and 66.7% of unmarried respondents have not adopted supermarket shopping.

Table 3

Adoption of Supermarkets shopping by least Constrained Respondents Concentration of Purchases in Supermarket

	Complete (3/3) %	Partial (2/3) %	Low (1/3) %	No. Adoption (0/3) %	Total %	No. of Respondents
Respondents who reside under 10 minutes walking distance	0	44.44	11.11	44.4	100	9
Highest Income Group	0	25	25	50	100	4
Own a Car	*6.25	37.5	12.5	43.75	100	16
Single	0	9.5	23.8	66.7	100	21

* Read 6.25 % of the 16 respondents who own cars have completely adopted supermarket shopping – purchase there all of their food needs.

Implications

The small one line food store – "provision stores" are considered to be costly and inefficient distributors of food items, while "the traditional markets" such as "Ogbete" and "Kenyatta"

markets are generally regarded as outmoded and difficult to control by the government. Therefore, the transformation of the conventional food retailing system into one consisting mainly of supermarkets is regarded as one of the main methods for improving food distribution in the developing countries. Two major types of impediments to the successful acceptance of the supermarket have long been realized by academicians in developing countries. While various academicians did mention supply type of impediments, most of the attention in the literature has centred on identifying various consumers (demand) – related constraints on the adoption of supermarket shopping. Given this background, it is clear that the findings of this study has lent additional support to the expert opinions thus, emphasizing the importance of demand constraints in explaining the adoption of supermarket shopping. The study results also show that it does not necessarily follow that those who have adopted the supermarket shopping will necessarily purchase all their food requirements there. This was dramatically shown in the case of the least constrained consumers most of whom continued to purchase some of their food needs, mostly perishables (country produce) from the traditional markets.

The later result combined with generally widespread phenomenon of the “selective” adoption of supermarket shopping cannot be explained in terms of the consumer constraints approach alone; deficiency in the supermarket offerings, i.e. (product lines) must also be considered. In fact, while the supermarket is able to compete successfully against the traditional outlets in the grocery area, it is less able to compete against them in perishables such as yams, fresh pepper, tomatoes, fruit, vegetables, “garri” and corn. There are indications that this supermarket weakness in the perishable lines does characters the supermarket operation not only in Nigeria but elsewhere in developing countries. Indeed, a number of writers have observed that the so-called supermarkets in developing countries turn out to be mostly sellers of grocery items.

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