

Is Organisational Commitment Culturally Bound?

Dr Helen Chen & John Murray

**The Impact of the SW3 Armband and Physical Activity
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Editorial

Welcome to the seventh edition of *Irish Business Journal*. Since the inception of this journal in 2005, the journal has endeavoured to provide authors with a forum for presenting research across a broad spectrum. In this edition, Dr Helen Chen and John Murray explore if organisational commitment is culturally bound. Bernie Cunningham, Suzanne Kennedy, Dr Joseph English and Humphrey Murphy adopt a comparative study to assess the impact of the SW3 armband and physical activity logbooks in promoting adherence to physical activity. Dr Aisling Ward and Agnieszka Stessel present research in the area of dark tourism and provide an assessment of the motivations of visitors to Auschwitz-Birkenau Poland. In their paper, Dr Breda Kenny and Mairéad Clohessy provide an empirical investigation of the organisational factors that determine export performance and electronic commerce adoption. The aspects of fair trade marketing and consumer behaviour are examined by Birgit Derler, Vicky O'Rourke and Dr Simon Stephens. Christine Murphy provides an exploration on the topic of the effect of advertising the thin ideal on women.

As editors we are delighted to present our readers with such a diverse and interesting collection of papers. We would like to thank all authors who responded to this call for papers and particularly we would like to congratulate first-time authors. As always, we are grateful for the constructive and helpful reports from our expert reviewers and we acknowledge their efforts to present feedback in a timely manner. We also thank our editorial advisory board for their interest and look forward to working with them for future editions of the *Irish Business Journal*.

Rose Leahy, Dr Margaret Linehan, Editors Irish Business Journal, Faculty of Business & Humanities, Cork Institute of Technology

Is Organisational Commitment Culturally Bound?

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Abstract

The paper investigates whether organisational commitment is culturally bound. Literature was reviewed on the impact of Hofstede's four dimensions of culture on organisational commitment. Three hypotheses were put forward in relation to the cultural impact on the three components of organisational commitment: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Data was collected from two branches of an American multinational corporation with operations in China and Ireland. The two cultures were chosen as they demonstrate differences as well as similarities on Hofstede's dimensions, which provided an opportunity to explore the cultural impact. The results supported two of the hypotheses that Chinese employees have higher levels of affective and normative commitment than their Irish counterparts. Such findings reaffirm some extant literature and justified the conclusion that affective and normative commitments are culturally bound. If organisational commitment is culturally bound then it is sufficient to use Hofstede's cultural scores to compare organisational commitment across cultures. In addition, income was found to be significant in predicting continuance and normative commitment; tenure was a significant factor in understanding affective and normative commitment.

Keywords: *Organisational Commitment, Cross-Cultural Comparison*

Introduction

The theory of organisation commitment has largely originated in the United States of America. It is one of the most popularly researched subjects as it has significant effects on job performance and turnover (Chen and Francesco, 2003; Suliman and Iles, 2000), and on organisational performance (Benkhoff, 1997). Much research over the past few decades stresses the nature of organisational commitment (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Porter, Steers and Boulian, 1974); its measure, validity and reliability (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolnystsky, 2002; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Sekimoto and Hanada, 1987); and its antecedents and consequences (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Takao, 1998).

However, Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) assert that most American theories reflect an individualistic perspective and fail to include a full range of explanations for organisational commitment. Since then, more research on organisational commitment has been extended into other cultural contexts to include countries such as Jordan (Suliman and Iles, 1999), China (Ling, Zhang and Fang, 2001; Wang, 2004) and Malaysia (Rashid, Sambasivan and Johari, 2003). More recently, comparative work has started to emerge, such as Cheng and Stockdale (2003) on organisational commitment differences between Chinese, Korean and Canadian employees, Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, and Topolnystsky (2007) on employment commitment and

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support for organisational change in Canada and India; and Hattrup, Mueller and Aguirre (2008) on whether organisational commitment can be generalised across countries.

Inspired by the cross-cultural comparative studies, the present research, by using an American MNC which has branches in China and Ireland, sets out to compare the organisational commitment of its Irish and Chinese employees in order to investigate to what extent the American studies are generalizable in other cultures. In the following sections, we provide a review of the existing literature on organisational commitment with an emphasis on the theoretical developments of organisational commitment; the research of organisational commitment in Chinese and Irish contexts; and some cross-cultural studies including meta-analysis on organisational commitment. The main objective of the literature review is to understand given the cultural characteristics of Ireland and China in light of Hofstede¹ (1980), what are the organisational commitment levels of the two nationals as prescribed in the literature. The hypotheses are put forward. The methodology and data analysis is then presented with an accompanying examination into what extent organisational commitment is culturally bound. In other words, if the American-based literature is generalizable in other cultures, then when organisational commitment across cultures is studied, only Hofstede's culture scores are sufficient.

Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment is a somewhat complicated concept. However, it is primarily regarded as an attitudinal construct dealing with the perceived utility of continued participation in an organisation (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972). In a similar vein, it has also been described, according to Buchanan (1974), as a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organisation, to one's role in relation to goals and values of an organisation, and to the organisation for its own sake. Such an argument has received popularity. Porter *et al.* (1974) postulate that employees with high organisational commitment tend to demonstrate a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values, and are willing to exert considerable effort into the organisation, and have a definite desire to maintain the employment relationship. Meyer and Allen (1997) state that a committed employee tends to stay with the organisation through ups and downs, attends work regularly, puts in a full day, protects company's assets and therefore shares the goals and values of the company. As such, organisational commitment has been found to affect job performance and turnover

¹ Hofstede (1980) proposed that cultures be compared on four dimensions based on his research of employees working in IBM between 1967 and 1973, covering 70 national cultures. These dimensions are power distance (PD), individualism/collectivism (IDV), femininity/masculinity (MAS) and certainty avoidance (UA). A fifth dimension was added into the model in 1991, long-term orientation (LTO) based research of Michael Bond. In the present paper, only the original four dimensions will be discussed.

(Gregson, 1992; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). It has also been found to have effects on societies as a whole as it affects job movement, community stability and national productivity (Porter *et al.*, 1974).

One of the key areas in which there is little agreement is how organisational commitment should be measured. Porter *et al.* (1974) defined organisational commitment as the strength that an individual identifies with and involves in an organisation. In such a light, organisational commitment is measured as employees' motivation and identification with the values of the organisation and their intention to remain as an employee (Porter *et al.*, 1974). O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) however, approached organisational commitment from the perspective of psychological attachment and believed that it reflects the degree to which the individual associated themselves with the characteristics or perspectives of the organisation. Therefore, they proposed that the bond between an employee and an organisation could take three forms: compliance, identification and internalisation.

According to O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), compliance attachment reflects instrumental behaviour designed to gain rewards; identification attachment occurs when employees behave in a way they want to maintain a relationship with an organisation due to its attractive values or goals, and internalisation attachment occurs when employees' behaviour is driven by their values that are consistent with those of the organisation. Meyer and Allen (1991) argued that the identification and internalisation dimensions discussed in O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) have been difficult to distinguish from each other. As a result, Meyer and Allen (1991) produced the most commonly accepted (Wasti 2005) three-dimensional organisational commitment model, comprising of affective, continuance and normative commitment. It should be noted that Meyer and Allen (1991) viewed these three forms as components rather than types of commitment. They are not mutually exclusive. Instead, it can be assumed that an employee might experience all forms of commitment to varying degrees. One employee might, for example, feel both a strong need (continuance commitment) and a strong desire to remain (affective commitment), but little obligation to the organisation (normative commitment), while another employee might feel little desire, moderate need and a strong obligation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). In other words, employees who have strong affective commitment stay in an organisation because they want to; those who have strong continuance commitment remain as they need to and those who have strong normative commitment stay in an organisation because they feel obliged to. This finding provides a subtle theoretical foundation to approach the three components separately, which are within the scope of the present research.

Organisational Commitment in China and Ireland

The rationale for the selection of units of one organisation in two cultures such as Ireland and China lies in the following. First, the study of organisational commitment especially in the case of China is developed (Cheng and Stockdale, 2003; Chen and Francesco, 2003). Few studies however propose approaches to robustly test the affective, continuance and normative commitment variables in Eastern and Western countries. Secondly, the Irish and Chinese cultures are different yet they share similar scores on the dimension of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. It is anticipated that the direct contrastive effects from two potentially dissimilar units yet with similarities in one organisation will add to the literature on organisational commitment.

China has received attention in the study of organisational commitment not only because China has a population of 1.3 billion and its economy has been growing strongly for more than 2 decades; but also because it has a culture in which power distance (Cheng and Stockdale, 2003) and collectivism scores are high (Chen and Francesco, 2003). The score of the Chinese culture on power distance is 80 and its score on individualism is 10 according to Hofstede (1980). Under the influence of Confucius, Chinese culture emphasises loyalty to the emperor (zhong), obedience to parents (xiao), loyalty to the spouse (jie), helpfulness to friends (yi) and conformity with social codes (hemu). As a result of these values, Yang (1993) observed that the Chinese people do not truly express themselves as individuals preferring to stay within the formalised system of roles. Tan and Akhtar (1998) argued that 'coupled with a strong emphasis placed on the network of relationship (guanxi) and reciprocal expectations of the proper behaviour (li), the Chinese are subjective to specific forms of behaviour consistent with his or her job role within the organisation' (p.313). Accordingly, the normative commitment of the Chinese employees is high (Tan and Akhtar, 1998).

This pattern of behaviour has spurred a number of researchers to conduct research on organisational commitment within a Chinese context (Chen and Francesco, 2003; Cheng and Stockdale, 2003; Tan and Akhtar, 1998). With the economic reform of China, significant changes have also occurred within society with people no longer 'having an iron rice bowl' (having a secured job in a state-owned enterprise) but ready for 'frying squids' (being made redundant); previously individuals welfare was looked after by state enterprises, however individuals must now pay for education and healthcare themselves.

The economic landscape of Ireland has experienced radical change in the last forty years. Up until the early 1990s, huge numbers of the population emigrated to seek employment overseas. During this time, often it was the most educated, creative and innovative individuals that emigrated, which subsequently led to the term 'brain drain' being coined in Fanning (2001). Owing largely to the economic success in recent years, organisational commitment in the Irish context has attracted the attention of a small number of studies. They focused on the

Irish employees working on farms (Randall and O'Driscoll, 1997; O'Driscoll and Randall, 1999). Nevertheless, the findings from these studies have shown that affective commitment and job involvement of the Irish employees are positively associated with one another, whereas emotional attachment to the organisation is distinct from continuance commitment (O'Driscoll and Randall, 1999).

Cross-cultural Studies of Organisational Commitment

Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) stated that commitment researchers are entering into an international phase as some of the American theories are lacking of other cultural perspectives. Randall (1993) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 papers and associated Hofstede's framework of four dimension of culture with organisational commitment; power distance; acceptance of inequality in societies and organisations; individualism/collectivism; preference for working in groups and influence of reference groups; and uncertainty avoidance.

Randall (1993) concluded that

- 1) affective commitment to organisations is greater in cultures that tend to have lower levels of conformity (i.e. individualistic, tolerant of ambiguity, and less authoritarian);
- 2) normative commitment is greater in more collectivist countries;
- 3) continuance commitment is greater in feminine cultures.

In a similar light, Clugston *et al.* (2000) tested the influence of culture on the three components of organisational commitment and three foci (organisation, supervisor and workgroup). Their findings confirmed that power distance is related to normative commitment across all foci; uncertainty avoidance is associated with continuance commitment across all foci and collectivism is related to three components of organisational commitment across workgroups only. Table 1 summarises some of the extant literature on the cultural effect on organisational commitment.

Hofstede (1980) provides a perspective to study culture. In his model, China has an individualism score of 20 while Ireland 70 and therefore, according to Table 1, the Chinese employees have a higher affective commitment (Randall 1993; Clugston *et al.* 2000); higher continuance commitment (Clugston *et al.* 2000); higher normative commitment (Randall 1993; Clugston *et al.* 2000; Boyacigiller and Adler 1991) than their Irish counterparts. China has a power distance score of 80 while Ireland 28 and therefore the Chinese employees have a lower affective commitment (Randall 1993); higher continuance commitment (Clugston *et al.* 2000) and higher normative commitment (Stanley *et al.* 2007; Clugston *et al.* 2000) than their Irish colleagues. China has a masculinity score of 66 while Ireland 68 and therefore the Chinese have higher affective commitment (Randall 1993); lower continuance commitment (Randall 1993; Clugston *et al.* 2000) and lower normative commitment (Cheng and Stockdale 2003). China has an uncertainty avoidance score of 30 and Ireland 36 and therefore the

		Affective Commitment		Continuance Commitment		Normative Commitment
Individualism	-	Randall 1993; Clugston <i>et al.</i> 2000	-	Randall 1993; Clugston <i>et al.</i> 2000	-	Randall 1993; Clugston <i>et al.</i> 2000
Power distance	-	Randall 1993	-	Randall 1993	-	Randall 1993
Masculinity	-	Randall 1993	-	Randall 1993	-	Randall 1993
Uncertainty avoidance	+	Randall 1993	+	Randall 1993	+	Randall 1993

Table 1: The cultural impact on the three components of organisational commitment

Chinese have a higher affective commitment (Randall 1993) and a lower continuance commitment (Clugston *et al.* 2000). Therefore, the following hypotheses were compiled:

- H1:** The Chinese employees have a higher level of affective commitment than their Irish counterparts.
- H2:** The Chinese employees have a higher level of commitment than their Irish counterparts.
- H3:** The Chinese employees have a high level of normative commitment than their Irish counterparts.

Data and Sample

Data was collected in two branches of one American MNC in Ireland and China by two researchers on the same day. The MNC was chosen as it has the same human resource policies in the two subsidiaries. The same questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire was originally designed in English and then was translated into Chinese by one bilingual researcher. A back translation was performed from Chinese into English to ensure the two versions were consistent as this can be an issue in cross-cultural studies (Brislin, 1970). The respondents in Shanghai were all Chinese and they received the Chinese version of the questionnaire and the Irish employees in Dublin got the English version. Participation was agreed between the researchers and the managing directors and those employees in office at that day participated in the survey. The questionnaire was filled in, in the presence of the researchers providing a response rate of 100%. Eighty-two questionnaires were returned from the Irish branch and 118 from the Chinese one. There were 51.2% female respondents in the Irish sample compared to 44.9% female respondents in the Chinese sample. There were 60.9% respondents in the Irish sample who were aged below 34 compared to 68.1% in the Chinese sample. About 65.9% respondents in

the Irish sample had worked in the organisation for less than 18 months compared to 85.3% in the Chinese sample. About 26.8% Irish respondents had a salary level lower than €30,000 compared to 77.9% in the Chinese sample.

Variables

The dependent variables are three components of organisational commitment. Organisational commitment was measured by using the revised 18-item three-component scale of affective, continuance and normative commitment (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002), which has been adopted in a myriad of studies, such as Jacobsen (2000), Rashid *et al.* (2003), Cheng and Stockdale (2003). Sample questions for the three components of organisational commitment are 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career working with this organisation', 'It would be very hard for me to leave my organisation right now, even if I wanted to', and 'I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer'. Tenure was measured by the duration an employee has worked in the MNC.

ANCOVA and Covariate

In a cross-cultural study, it is recommended to control economic factors to test for the effect of other factors (Dawar and Parker, 1994). In the study, the focus is to investigate the differences of the organisational commitment of Irish and Chinese employees working in the MNC. Data were compared using ANCOVA with income level being chosen as the covariate. As previous studies have shown that tenure is a significant variable on organisational commitment, it was treated as the second covariate in the analysis.

Data Analysis and Findings

In the first step, the two sets of data were merged into one for comparative analyses with a new variable created, Country, for which Ireland was coded as 0 and China was coded as 1. Factor analysis was performed and oblique rotation was adopted. To have three factors generated, 3 items were dropped as their factor loadings were less than .40. The reliability of the 3 factors was examined using Cronbach's alpha. Results are presented in Table 2. The standardised factor scores were used in the subsequent ANCOVA analysis.

Items	Affective commitment	Continuance commitment	Normative commitment
1	.60		
2	.54		
3	.70		
4	.56		
5	.67		
7		.59	
8		.64	
10		.60	
11		.72	
12		.56	
13			.62
14			.73
16			.79
17			.68
18			.72
Cronbach a	.75	.76	.83

Table 2: Factor analysis of the organisational commitment

In order to proceed with ANCOVA, z scores, the linearity for each group and homogeneity of regression slopes were checked. There were no outliers or abnormalities detected. ANCOVA was performed to analyse data with income and tenure being set as the covariates. The two covariates were compared using a t-test by using country as the grouping variables.

t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	Sig.
Income	-10.234	.000
Tenure	-.962	.337

Table 3: t-test of the Income levels and Tenure of the Irish and Chinese employees

Table 3 showed an obvious difference between the two groups in their income levels. The Irish employees enjoy much higher income than their Chinese counterparts, t being -10.234 at the significance level of .000. But there is no significant difference in tenure between the Irish and Chinese employees in the MNC.

Results for ANCOVA analysis of affective commitment are shown in Table 4; results for continuance commitment are shown in Table 5; and results of normative commitment are shown in Table 6.

	Mean square	F	Sig.
Tenure	14.87	19.16	.00
Income	.79	1.02	.32
Country	20.53	26.44	.00
Gender	.24	.31	.58

Table 4: ANCOVA analysis of affective commitment for the Chinese and Irish employee

Table 4 showed that there is a significant country difference between the Chinese and Irish employees working in the same MNC. The mean square is 20.53 at a significance of .00. It indicated that the Chinese employees have a higher level of affective commitment than their Irish counterparts, which supports H1. Table 4 also showed the significant effect of one of the covariates, tenure on affective commitment. The mean square is 14.87 at the significance level of .00. It indicated that those employees who have worked longer in the MNC are more affectively committed to the organisation. Table 2 confirmed the fact that there is no significant difference of tenure between the Chinese and Irish employees. Therefore, the country difference of affective commitment is not as a result of tenure.

	Mean square	F	Sig.
Tenure	.16	.18	.67
Income	11.20	12.32	.00
Country	.00	.00	.26
Gender	1.14	1.25	.96

Table 5: ANCOVA analysis of continuance commitment of the Chinese and Irish employees

Table 5 showed that there is no country difference of continuance commitment of the Irish and Chinese employees working in the MNC. H2 is not supported. This is very interesting as continuance commitment is about whether an employee feels he or she needs to stay as a result of analysing the alternatives (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Therefore, the cultural effect of continuance commitment seems to be weak. It is worth noting that income has a significant effect on continuance commitment at the significance level of .00. It implies that the higher the income an employee is earning, the higher continuance commitment she/he has and therefore the higher risk they perceive in leaving the MNC.

	Mean square	F	Sig.
Tenure	3.07	4.94	.03
Income	12.64	20.30	.00
Country	55.64	89.37	.00
Gender	.06	.09	.77

Table 6: ANCOVA analysis of normative commitment of the Chinese and Irish employees

Table 6 showed there is a significant country difference detected among the Irish and Chinese employees' normative commitment. The F value is 89.37 at the significance level of .00, indicating that the Chinese employees in the MNC demonstrate a higher level of normative commitment than the Irish employees. H3 is thus supported. Both covariates, Income and Tenure, have significant positive impacts on normative commitment. This is certainly supporting those studies that include salary or pay as the antecedents to organisational commitment (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Stevens *et al.*, 1978).

Discussion

The present research set out to investigate whether organisational commitment is culturally bound as prescribed by some American-based studies such as Randall (1993), Clugston *et al.* (2000) given the fact that the USA is highly individualist. The main argument in the present paper is that if organisational commitment is culturally bound, then the Hofstede's culture scores on the four dimensions are sufficient to compare organisational commitment of different cultures. Ireland and China were chosen as Ireland is highly individualist while China is highly collectivist compared to the highly individualist USA. It compared a three-dimensional model of organisational commitment across the Irish and Chinese employees working in the same MNC by using Herschcovit and Meyer's (2002) 18-item scale of organisational commitment. ANCOVA was performed to analyse the data with the results providing a number of insights.

Affective Commitment

It is found that in the MNC, the Chinese employees' affective commitment is higher than that of the Irish employees. Such a finding supports Randall (1993)'s meta-analysis findings: people coming from more individualistic cultures tend to be more idiocentric (Earley, 1989) and more calculative on self achievement (Randall, 1993). Having a higher individualism score, the Irish employees working in the same MNC have a lower level of affection attachment to the organisation than their Chinese counterparts. This is also in support of Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) in which they postulate people from collectivist cultures (in this case, China) are more committed as they form closely-knit ties with their co-workers, managers or owners.

According to Porter *et al.* (1974) and Meyer and Allen (1991), affective commitment is associated with the emotional attachment of employees to their employer and the goals and values of the employer. It can be inferred that the MNC's goals and values are better shared by the Chinese employees as they are more emotionally attached to their employer than the Irish employees based in Dublin. Therefore, the Chinese employees are more willing compared to their Irish counterparts to put effort into the MNC.

Continuance Commitment

There is no country difference identified in the present study between the Irish and Chinese employees on continuance commitment. There are two possible reasons to explain our results: 1) both the Chinese and the Irish employees might find it easy to find alternative jobs at the time of the survey; or 2) as Clugston *et al.* (2000) indicated that uncertainty avoidance is to do with continuance commitment, we think that both the Chinese and Irish people are both risk-taking people, compared to cultures such as the French, their uncertainty avoidance scores are 36, 30 and 80 respectively (Hofstede, 1980). Therefore both nationalities share a commonality of association of changing jobs as low risk and low cost. Additionally, in the present study it is found that continuance commitment is highly correlated with income. We concluded that the employees with higher income associate leaving the MNC as risky and costly (O'Driscoll and Randall, 1999). Our finding confirmed the significance of linking internal marketing with organisational commitment, particularly continuance commitment.

Normative Commitment

It is found in the present study that the Chinese employees have higher levels of normative commitment compared to their Irish counterparts in the MNC. This supports Randall (1993), Clugston *et al.* (2000) and Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) on the argument that people from more collectivist cultures have higher normative commitment. It also supports Stanley *et al.* (2007) and Stanley *et al.* (2007) on the argument that people from cultures with high power distance tend to demonstrate higher normative commitment. It also supports Randall (1993) on people from a feminine culture demonstrating higher level of normative commitment. As normative commitment deals with one's feeling of commitment towards an organisation as an obligation, duty or loyalty (Meyer and Allen 1991), it is inferred that the Chinese employees see being loyal to their employer as more of an obligation than their Irish counterparts in the MNC.

Conclusion

Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) posit 'it is therefore not surprising, and yet highly unfortunate, that American theoretical structures fail to include a full range of explanations for organisational commitment and the lack thereof.' (p.274-275). An American MNC was used to examine how much the American-generated theories could be applied on two cultures other than American. If the generalizability is high, then Hofstede's cultural scores are sufficient to understand organisational commitment. The findings are reasonably satisfactory. The literature proposed that employees from a culture with higher power distance scores are more affectively and normatively committed to their organisations. The present research also finds out that the Chinese culture having higher power distance and collectivism scores than the Irish, has more affectively and normatively committed employees than the Irish counterpart. The literature proposed that employees from a culture with higher individualism scores are less affectively and normatively committed. The present research also finds out that the Irish culture having higher individualism scores, has less affectively and normatively committed employees than the Chinese. Therefore, it is concluded that affective and normative commitment are culturally bound. Since there was no evidence found in the present research about the cultural link with continuance commitment, it is concluded that continuance commitment is not culturally bound. It is believed that continuance commitment be highly related to the income and benefit of the employees as indicated in some studies. Nevertheless, we have to point out that in the present study, Ireland and China were included but their scores on Hofstede's cultural model are very close to each other on the dimension of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. As uncertainty avoidance is linked with continuance commitment, we would recommend future studies to include cultures with significant differences on the latter two dimensions to further investigate the generalisation of the American theories on organisational commitment in other cultures.

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A Comparative Study: The Impact of the SW3 Armband and Physical Activity Logbook in Promoting Physical Activity Adherence

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to compare the impact of portable body sensing technology (SW3 Armband) to a traditional approach, a Physical Activity Logbook (PAL) in promoting physical activity adherence. Participant's physical activity adherence levels were recorded over a six month period. The primary research involved a six month physical activity programme that commenced in October 2010 and finished in April 2011. Females (n=30) were recruited through a local newspaper and a radio advertisement. Participants were randomised to an Intervention Group (n=15) or a Control Group (n=15). To be eligible to participate in the study the following criteria applied: (1) age range: 30-50 years, (2) gender: female, (3) location: live in the Letterkenny or surrounding area, (4) physical activity levels: did not meet the World Health Organisations (WHO, 2011) recommendations for physical activity, (5) have access to windows XP. Participants were assessed at Baseline, Time 1 (week eight), Time 2 (week eighteen) and Time 3 (week twenty-six) regarding the amount of physical activity minutes accumulated. The results of this study specify that the Control Group (CG) performed a greater amount of moderate intensity minutes of physical activity compared to the Intervention Group (IG). At the end of Time 3, the CG was performing three times more moderate physical activity than that of the IG. Therefore, the traditional method of a PAL has proved to be an effective method of promoting physical activity adherence when compared to that of the SW3 Armband. The SW3 Armband is a wireless technological device consisting of an armband worn on the upper right arm and a wrist watch. The SW3 Armband and wrist watch displays real time, collective and significant data such as daily step count and minutes of moderate and vigorous physical activity.

Keywords: *Physical Activity, Physical Activity Logbook (PAL), SW3 Armband*

Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011) approximately 31% of adults worldwide fail to meet the minimum recommendations for health related physical activity, and 46% of Irish adults do not meet the guidelines (SLAN, 2007). The WHO (2011) minimum physical activity recommendations designed for health benefits for adults aged between eighteen and sixty-five are as follows:

Minutes	Intensity	Days per week
30	Moderate	5
OR		
25	Vigorous	3
AND		
Muscular endurance training at least two days or more per week		

Table 1: World Health Organisations (WHO, 2011) Guidelines for Minimum Physical Activity

How Much Physical Activity?

Trying to support individuals to initiate and maintain physical activity in the long term is a challenge (Brawley *et al.* 2003, Marcus *et al.* 1998 and Hasler *et al.* 2000). As individuals age their participation in physical activity drops off (Hughes *et al.* 2008 and Thurston & Green, 2004). Thirty minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week is considered as a sufficient amount of physical activity for health benefits (Pate *et al.* 1995). Authors vary in their opinions about the type, duration, and intensity of physical activity. Jakicic *et al.* (1999 and 1995) report that short bouts of moderate cardiovascular physical activity (i.e. 4 by 10 minutes daily) assist in promoting physical activity adherence, compared to one forty minute session of physical activity. The WHO (2011) have adopted the findings of the ACSM (2008) who recommend that thirty minutes of physical activity per day will provide health related benefits. Research studies accept these guidelines from the WHO (Frank *et al.* 2005, Schumann *et al.* 2003 and Dunn *et al.* 1999) but also acknowledge that short bouts are sufficient to achieve physiological and psychological benefits of physical activity (Jackicic *et al.* 1999 and 1995).

Research signifies that females are the least active segment of the population and consequently are at a greater risk of developing diseases that are associated with a sedentary lifestyle (Findorff *et al.* 2009, Arbour & Ginis, 2009, Aaron *et al.* 1995 and Bonheur & Young, 1991). In Ireland, ten thousand people die each year from cardiovascular disease (Irish Heart Foundation, 2010). Participation in regular physical activity can enhance health and induce a greater lifespan (Paffenbarger *et al.*, 1993).

Subjective and Objective Measurement Tools

Traditionally, physical activity has been measured via subjective measurements such as questionnaires and record logbooks. Questionnaires have been a popular research tool (Philippaerts *et al.* 2001 and Elosua *et al.* 2000). However, participants self-report their physical activity levels and can over estimate their physical activity minutes which can often decrease accuracy of results (Aoyagi & Shepard, 2009). Research indicates that a combination of subjective and objective data collection enhances the accuracy of measuring physical activity (Harris *et al.* 2008 and MacFarlene *et al.* 2006).

More recently, objective measurements such as accelerometers and the SW3 Armband have been introduced to assess physical activity (Taraldsen *et al.* 2011, Andre *et al.* 2006, Bassett 2000 and Sallis & Saelens, 2000). Wearable body sensor devices are being used increasingly in medical and clinical settings to monitor and analyse body functions (De Bruin *et al.* 2008, Corder *et al.* 2007, Stovitz *et al.* 2005 and Bjorgaas *et al.* 2004). Research by Liden *et al.* (2002, p.1) suggests that 'As technology rapidly decreases in size, wearable monitoring devices has become a viable and practical reality', allowing individuals to wear body sensor devices for extended periods. Motion sensor devices have provided greater accuracy in detecting physical activity patterns in a wide variety of settings (Clemes *et al.* 2008, Gerdhem *et al.* 2008 and Steele *et al.* 2003). Additionally, technological devices have a positive affect on adherence levels, preventing drop-outs from programmes (Henderick *et al.* 2010). King *et al.* (2008, p.138) state that 'few systematic efforts to evaluate the efficacy of hand-held computers and similar devices for enhancing physical activity levels have occurred'. Consequently, this study evaluated the effectiveness of the SW3 Armband in promoting physical activity adherence in comparison to a PAL.

A range of studies to date have used subjective measures to quantify participation levels in physical activity (Schumann *et al.* 2003, Elosua *et al.* 2000 and Sarkin *et al.* 2000). The measurement of physical activity objectively through the use of a technical device is more accurate than assessing physical activity through a formal questionnaire (Bassett *et al.* 2000). Technological devices that are accompanied by a formal instrument such as a PAL can help highlight the significance of physical activity adherence issues (Tudor-Locke & Lutes, 2009, Lauzon *et al.* 2008; Tudor-Locke *et al.* 2000).

Portable body sensing technology may assist in motivating individuals to adhere to physical activity because of the real time physiological data that the user can access (Baker *et al.* 2008, Bravata *et al.* 2007, Merom *et al.* 2007; Mutrie *et al.* 2004; Tudor-Locke, 2002). A range of studies to date have used subjective measures to quantify participation levels in physical activity (Lawrence & Shank, 1995). Future research studies on physical activity adherence should consider incorporating a combination of both subjective and objective methods in order to increase our understanding of the effectiveness of such technological devices and formal instruments.

The SW3 Armband and Physiological Characteristics

With advancements in technological innovation, physical activity is becoming easier to monitor and analyse. Marketable devices such as pedometers, accelerometers and more recently the SW3 Armband provide individuals with real time physiological data and are accessible to the recreational enthusiast. According to King *et al.* (2008, p. 138) 'efforts to achieve population wide increases in physical activities potentially can be enhanced through relevant applications of interactive communication technologies'. Research has shown that motion sensors are a valid and reliable means of gathering data (Bender *et al.* 2005, Duncan *et al.* 2005; Yamanouchi *et al.* 1995).

The SW3 comprises an armband worn on the upper right arm and a wrist watch display. The SW3 is a wireless device comprising a transmitter worn on the upper arm that captures real time, collective and significant data. It is recommended that the SW3 is worn twenty four hours per day and is only removed when the individual is bathing or swimming. The data stored can be acquired by connecting the armband to a computer system and using the online activity manager to download and access the information. Real time data such as how many steps an individual has taken within twenty four hours can be retrieved in real time from the wrist watch display. The SW3 has been clinically validated to be over ninety per cent accurate when determining calorie burn (Johannes, 2009).

Kasabach *et al.* (2002, p. 2) noted that ‘energy expenditure, level of physical activity, sleep quality, heart rate, stress, and contextual awareness were the most significant states worth obtaining continuously’. The SW3 processes the following information: (i) Total Energy Expenditure and Active Energy Expenditure, (ii) Duration of Physical Activity, (iii) Sleep Duration, (iv) Number of Steps, (v) Duration the SW3 Armband is worn. The SW3 Armband provides an easy and efficient digital device to individuals to assess daily physiological characteristics (Andre *et al.* 2006) and can offer assistance to health and fitness instructors in supporting clients to make healthier lifestyle choices. This information can be captured and calculated every minute of the day as long as the user is wearing the armband (Fruin & Rankin, 2004). The SW3 captures averages and variances on all features, but also can detect peak phases (i.e. a day of the week in which a user has walked the most number of steps (Andre *et al.* 2006).

Research Methodology

The research study was completed by means of a quantitative approach. Participants were required to self-report their activity, duration and intensity of physical activity in their PAL's. The quantitative method involved analysing the accumulated minutes of moderate and vigorous physical activity within the PALs. These were collected at the end of T1 (week eight), T2 (week eighteen) and T3 (week twenty-six). All participants filled out a questionnaire regarding the ease of use of the PAL. The IG also completed a questionnaire on the ease of use of the SW3 Armband. Intensity of physical activity was measured using the Omnibus Scale of Perceived Exertion (OMNI), adult: walking to running format (Robertson, 2004). OMNI is short for ‘omnibus’ which means that the perceived exertion picture scale used to measure intensity is appropriate for a wide diversity of individuals and physical activity settings.

Participants

Female volunteers were recruited through local media inviting applicants to join the research programme. A total of eighty-nine volunteers applied for the programme, entitled ‘Get Started and Stick with it’. Thirty females were selected from a total of the fifty-eight applicants that met the recruitment criteria. The researcher chose to use a set of random numbers proposed by Spiegel *et al.* (2008, p. 419) to select and assign participants at Baseline to one

of two treatment conditions. Participants in the IG had the use of a digital body monitoring device known as the SW3 Armband, in conjunction with a PAL that tracked their physical activity participation. The remaining fifteen participants in the CG did not have access to the SW3 Armband, but kept a PAL only. For the duration of the study a trained research assistant responded to queries from participants and withdrawals from the study. In addition, the research assistant completed four structured assessments with the participants at Baseline, at the end of T1, T2, and T3 and was responsible for distributing and administering the PALs and questionnaires.

Definition of Regular, Moderate and Vigorous Physical Activity

For the purposes of this study regular, moderate, and vigorous physical activity was defined as follows:

1. Regular physical activity was defined in accordance with the WHO (2011) recommended guidelines for physical activity of thirty minutes of moderate intensity physical activity five days per week OR an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous physical activity.
2. Moderate physical activity exertion should result in being slightly out of breath and categorised from 'number five to number seven' on the Omnibus Scale of Perceived Exertion (Robertson, 2004).
3. Vigorous physical activity should result in deep rapid breathing and categorised from 'number eight to ten' on the Omnibus Scale of Perceived Exertion (Robertson, 2004).

Intervention Group and Control Group

The physical activity levels of participants (n = 30) in the IG and CG was assessed via a PAL. Participants followed a generic physical activity programme that included activities such as walking, swimming, home workout, fitness classes and an open activity option classified as 'other'. Participants recorded the type and duration of their physical activity and the intensity of their workouts in the PAL on a pre-determined scale (Robertson, 2004). Participants in the IG also had the use of the SW3 Armband and direct access to the data it stored, as a potential motivational tool to aid physical activity adherence. The difference between the IG and the CG was that the IG had the use of both a PAL and the SW3 Armband, whilst the CG had use of a PAL only as a means of potential motivation.

The Study: Baseline, T1 (week 1-week 8), T2 (week 9-week 18) and T3 (week 19-week 26)

Before commencing the programme participants were screened for any medical conditions using a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire. A summary of the purpose of the study and the benefits of physical activity was presented by the research assistant. The research

assistant inducted the relevant participants to the use of the PAL and the SW3 Armband. A generic fitness programme was given to participants. The research assistant supported the participants, offering an optional accompanied physical activity session once per week during the first eight weeks. At the end of T1 (week eight), the research assistant collected the PALs for the first eight weeks of the programme and the quantitative questionnaires on the use of the SW3 Armband and PAL were distributed and collected. An updated generic physical activity programme was distributed to participants. Participants were also provided with a second PAL. The optional accompanied weekly physical activity session with the research assistant was discontinued after week eight. Support from the research assistant was also withdrawn after week eight. Participants who were having technical problems with the SW3 Armband or needed to contact the research assistant after T1, did so via email only, thus no direct contact.

At the end of T2 (week eighteen), the research assistant collected the PALs and the quantitative questionnaires on the SW3 Armband were distributed and collected for a second time. An updated generic physical activity programme was distributed to participants. Participants were also provided with a third PAL. At the end of T3 (week twenty-six), the research assistant collected the PALs and the quantitative questionnaires on the SW3 Armband were distributed and collected for a third time. Participants returned the SW3 Armbands and this marked the end of the twenty-six week research intervention. Participants were rewarded with a thank you card for their commitment to the programme.

Variable	Measure	IG	CG
Age (years)	Average	40.26	40.46
Work Status (%)	Employed	60	53
	Self-Employed	0	7
	Unemployed	20	27
	Student	7	0
	Housewife	13	13
Smokers (%)	Yes	7	7
	No	93	93
Marital Status (%)	Single	33	27
	Married	67	60
	Other	0	13
Baseline Activity	Sedentary	53	33
Level (%)	Irregularly active	47	67

Table 2: Profile of Participants: Comparison between the Intervention Group (IG) and the Control Group (CG)

Table 2 presents a demographic synopsis of all participants in the study. Participants' age, work, marital status and their physical activity levels before commencing the programme are displayed. As it is evident, similar findings can be found regarding the profile of the IG and CG in terms of age, work status, physical activity behavioural habit and marital status. The average age of participants in both groups was forty years of age. However, the table reports a difference between both groups baseline physical activity levels. The control group exhibited a significantly higher baseline activity level when compared to the intervention group. A significance difference was also notable at baseline regarding irregular activity, with the intervention group more likely to engage in irregular activity than the control group.

Findings

As stated previously, the aim of this quantitative study was to compare the impact of SW3 Armband to a PAL in promoting physical activity adherence. The findings are presented by comparing both groups' total accumulated minutes of moderate and vigorous physical activity. The effectiveness of using a PAL as part of a physical activity programme is examined and the efficacy of the SW3 Armband is also assessed.

Time	Moderate (IG)	Moderate (CG)	Vigorous (IG)	Vigorous (CG)
T1	5261	8248	870	1005
T2	5680	17745	1365	1125
T3	6980	20808	1695	1053
Total	17921	46801	3930	3183

Table 3: The total accumulated minutes of moderate and vigorous physical activity performed over T1, T2, and T3 for both the IG and CG

Table 3 provides evidence that the CG performed more moderate minutes of physical activity over T1, T2, and T3 compared to the IG. The most preferred activity was walking, followed by attending a fitness class (pilates, aerobics, and circuit training classes). Unseasonably heavy snowfall in the North West of Ireland in November and December, 2010 affected both groups physical activity patterns for a four week period. Both the IG and CG accumulated fewer minutes of vigorous physical activity over T1, T2 and T3. The IG accumulated more minutes of vigorous physical activity over T2 and T3 compared to the CG. At the end of T3, the CG had accumulated three times more moderate physical activity levels than the IG. Therefore, these results outline that given the conditions of this study, a PAL is a motivational tool in aiding physical activity adherence because the CG accumulated more minutes of moderate physical activity over the six month period of the study, compared to the IG. In addition, the CG met the WHO (2011) minimum recommendations for physical activity at the end of T3.

Group	Extremely Convenient		Convenient		Somewhat Convenient		Somewhat Inconvenient		Inconvenient		Extremely Inconvenient	
	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG
T1 (%)	17	38	17	38	33	15	25	8	8	0	0	0
T2 (%)	25	33	25	33	42	25	0	0	8	8	0	0
T3 (%)	8	25	25	42	58	25	0	0	0	8	8	0

Table 4: The percentage of participants in the IG and CG who found use of Physical Activity Logbook (PAL) to be convenient or inconvenient

The majority of participants within both groups found that a PAL is a convenient method to track participation in physical activity. Few participants acknowledged the PAL as an inconvenience.

Group	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG
Time	T1	T1	T2	T2	T3	T3
Yes (%)	42	38	25	58	17	33
No (%)	58	62	75	42	83	67

Table 5: The percentage of participants in the IG and CG who completed their PAL daily

Completing a daily PAL proved to be a challenge for participants in both groups. At the end of T3, 83% of participants in the IG and 67% of participants in the CG revealed that they did not complete a daily PAL. The PAL relies on a twenty-four hour recall; thus participants can overestimate or underestimate their physical activity levels by not completing their PAL daily (MacFarlane *et al.* 2006).

Group	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG
Time	T1	T1	T2	T2	T3	T3
Yes (%)	50	69	42	75	58	67
No (%)	50	31	58	25	42	33

Table 6: The percentage of participants in the IG and CG who found a PAL was a motivational tool for physical activity adherence

The PAL is a consistent motivational tool and technique to record physical activity. At the end of T3, 58% of participants in the IG and 67% of participants in the CG found a PAL to be a form of motivation for physical activity adherence.

Time	Extremely Easy	Easy	Somewhat Easy	Somewhat Hard	Hard	Extremely Hard
T1 (%)	8	50	8	33	0	0
T2 (%)	33	17	25	25	0	0
T3 (%)	17	42	8	33	0	0

Table 7: The percentage of participants in the IG that found the SW3 Armband easy or difficult to operate

Table 7 shows that the majority of participants confirmed that the SW3 Armband is easy to operate. A small percentage of participants stated that the SW3 Armband was ‘somewhat hard’ to operate during T1, T2 and T3. Participants encountered some technical difficulties with the SW3 Armband during the programme and these issues were logged and resolved with the research assistant.

Did you find the SW3 Armband comfortable to wear?

Time	T1	T2	T3
Yes (%)	50	42	50
No (%)	50	58	50

Barriers associated with wearing the SW3 Armband

Time	Size	Irritating	Self-Consciousness	Dress Code
T1 (%)	8	33	8	17
T2 (%)	8	42	8	17
T3 (%)	8	42	8	17

Was the SW3 Armband a form of motivation for physical activity adherence?

Time	T1	T2	T3
Yes (%)	62	58	67
No (%)	38	42	33

Table 8: The percentage of participants in the IG and their perception of the SW3 Armband as part of a physical activity programme

Table 8 displays results relating to the comfort of wearing the device, the barriers relating to the SW3 Armband and the device as a supportive mechanism for promoting physical activity adherence. At the end of T3, 50% of participants acknowledged that the SW3 Armband was uncomfortable to wear; these figures were consistent for T1 and T2. As a result, participants perceived barriers to wearing the device. The main barrier to using the SW3 Armband was

irritation of the strap on the upper arm when worn for long periods of time. Although the SW3 Armband presents some barriers, 67% of participants found that the SW3 Armband was a motivational tool in aiding physical activity adherence. Conversely, 58% of participants in the IG found a PAL to be a motivational method of promoting physical activity adherence.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the research that in the conditions imposed by the study, a traditional method of recording physical activity levels through the use of a PAL is more effective when compared to the SW3 Armband. The main barrier to wearing the SW3 Armband is 'irritation' of the upper arm caused when the device is worn for long periods of time. However, the SW3 Armband also acted as a motivational instrument but did not provide adequate support to assist participants in meeting the WHO (2011) physical activity guidelines.

Walking is a popular choice of physical activity for females in the age categories stated. Women are at a greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease and sustaining an inactive lifestyle (Findorff *et al.* 2009, Arbour & Ginis, 2009). Therefore, walking programmes and interventions should be administered in various physical activity settings to promote walking amongst female participants within this age range. This type of intervention offers greater potential in promoting physical activity and increasing female participation.

Future research studies could encourage the use of a PAL, especially for this age category (thirty to fifty years of age). Attitudes towards apprehensiveness in using technological devices to track physical activity adherence is also recommended. To tackle the burden of cardiovascular disease and associated mortality rates in Ireland amongst females, government agencies could focus on interventions that focus on walking, and physical activity tracking via a formal PAL, as a means of motivational support to increase physical activity levels.

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Dark tourism: An assessment of the motivations of visitors to Auschwitz – Birkenau, Poland

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Abstract

Travel to sites of death and destruction is not a new concept. It is however, a phenomenon that has in recent years emerged as a clearly identifiable tourism product from a supply perspective and a growing tourism trend throughout the world. An element of human nature is this fascination with death and disaster, which has been catered for through the emergence of tourism sites associated with death, disaster and destruction. Today, many places of death and disaster attract millions of tourists from around the world such as Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, Anne Frank's House in Amsterdam, Ground Zero in New York, Arlington National Cemetery and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa to name but a few. This paper seeks to establish an understanding of the concept of dark tourism and its growth throughout the world. It will then assess the role of dark tourism in a Polish context with a particular emphasis on Auschwitz – Birkenau (a German World War 2 concentration camp). The empirical research for this paper seeks to develop a profile of visitors to Auschwitz and examine the key motivations of visitors. A triangulation approach was adopted incorporating qualitative focus groups and a questionnaire survey in order to identify the motivations of visitors to this site. It emerged that education, curiosity and remembrance were the dominant motivations of visitors while almost all expressed the emotional impact of the visit.

Keywords: *Dark tourism, Thanatourism, Poland, Auschwitz, Motivations*

Introduction

From as early as travel became possible people have been drawn to places where tragedies have occurred (Stone, 2005). Evidence of this form of travel can be garnered from the gladiatorial games, pilgrimages and travel to sites of medieval executions (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Seaton, (1999) spoke of visits to battlefields such as Waterloo from 1816 onwards as an example of what he referred to as 'Thanotourism', while Mac Cannell (1989) identified visits to the morgue as a feature of 19th Century tours of Paris.

There is no disputing that dark tourism itself is not a new phenomenon, although it has not until very recently been categorised as such within the tourism literature. Dark tourism is now a recognised niche tourism product and there has been substantial growth in the supply of dark tourism attractions which are marketed and promoted to the visitor (Sharpley and Stone, 2009). The focus of this paper is exploratory in nature and seeks to address how dark tourism has been defined in the literature, identify the motivations of visitors to dark tourism destinations and to identify the motivations of visitors to Auschwitz in Poland.

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Definition of Dark Tourism

Several definitions of dark tourism have emerged in the literature over the last number of decades. According to Smith (1998) the most dominant form of dark tourism are those trips that are associated with war, such as visits to battlefields or commemorative sites. These comprise the most significant category of tourist attractions in the world (Henderson, 2000; Ryan, 2007). However, other forms of dark tourism also exist including; visits to graveyards (Seaton, 2002); Holocaust tourism (Ashworth, 1996; Beech, 2000); Atrocity tourism (Ashworth and Hartman, 2005); Prison tourism (Strange and Kempa, 2003); or Slavery-heritage tourism (Dann and Seaton, 2001). Sites of famous deaths such as James Dean and Buddy Holly (Alderman, 2002) and areas where major disasters (Ground Zero) occurred are also included. In addition, more novel forms of dark tourism have emerged such as murder mystery trips, Dracula tours and visits to the Body Worlds exhibitions (www.bodyworlds.com, 2011).

The range and complexity of dark tourism attractions makes it difficult to pinpoint one clear definition although some theorists have succeeded in doing just this. Table I summarises the key dark tourism terms as identified in the literature.

Dark Tourism Term	Author, Year	Definition
Dark tourism	Foley & Lennon	'The presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites' (1996a:198)
Thanotourism	Seaton (1996)	Travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death (1996:240)
Morbid tourism	Blom (2000)	Tourism that 'focuses on sudden death and which quickly attracts large numbers of people' and, on the other hand, 'an attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism (Blom, 2000:32)
Black Spot tourism	Rojek (1993)	'the commercial [touristic] developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death' (1993:136)
Grief tourism	www.grief-tourism.com	Travel to areas affected by natural disasters, places where people were murdered, etc
Milking the Macabre	Dann (1994)	'The commercialisation or promotion of destinations or sites linked to dark tourism'. (1994:61)
Fright tourism	Bristow & Newman (2004)	'A variation of dark tourism where individuals may seek a thrill or shock from the experience' (2004: 215)
Dicing with Death	Dann (1998)	Experiences that relate to an individual's concept of their own mortality
Holidays in Hell	(O' Rourke, 1988; Pelton, 2003)	Holidays that challenge tourists an increase their own sense of mortality.

Table 1: *The Range of Dark Tourism Definitions*
Source Adapted from Sharpley and Stone (2009)

Although Foley and Lennon (1996) were the first to describe and categorise the term Dark tourism, as is evident from the above table several researchers have further defined and categorised the dark tourism phenomena. Furthermore, there are clear correlations with all of these definitions and the concept of dark tourism. However, the degree of complexity, the motivations involved and the level of authenticity of each theory varies greatly.

In order to understand this concept in greater detail, Seaton (1996) proposed there were in fact five categories of dark travel activities including;

- Travel to witness public enactments of death – this concept is linked with Rojek's (1997) sensation tourism located at disaster sites (e.g. Ground Zero).
- Travel to see sites of mass or individual deaths after they have taken place – numerous sites including battlefields and World War 2 concentration camps (e.g. Waterloo or Auschwitz).
- Travel to memorials or internment sites – graveyards where famous people are laid to rest, or old prisons (e.g. Kilmainham jail and Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin)
- Travel to see evidence or symbolic representations of death at unconnected sites – museums or attractions that reconstruct specific events (e.g. Holocaust museum in Washington).
- Travel for re-enactments or simulation of death – traditionally religion and now characterised through plays, festivals and re-enactments (e.g. The Passion of our Lord on Good Friday).

This is further substantiated by Dann (1998) who also devised a categorisation of dark tourism. Although this in itself is not a definitive classification as it is based on preliminary research in the field of dark tourism. Table 2 details the categorisation of dark tourism as identified by Dann.

Divisions of the dark	Examples
Perilous places – dangerous destinations from the past and present	Towns of horror Dangerous destinations
Houses of horror – Buildings associated with death and horror, either actual or represented	Dungeons of death Heinous hotels
Fields of fatality – Areas/lands commemorating death, fear, fame or infamy.	Bloody battlegrounds The hell of the Holocaust Cemeteries for celebrities
Tours of Torment – Tours/visits to attractions associated with death, murder and mayhem	Mayhem and Murder The now notorious
Themed Thanatos – Collections/museums themed around death and suffering	Morbid museums Monuments to morality

Table 2: *A Categorisation of Dark Tourism*
Source: *Adapted from Dann (1998).*

As is evident from Table 2 there is a vast range of dark tourism experiences available which may not have been categorised as such in the past. These include anything from a visit to a cemetery where famous historical or celebrity figures are buried (e.g Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin where many historical Irish figures are buried) to Auschwitz in Poland, the site of the greatest mass murder in history. Furthermore, there are clear correlations between both the classification of Seaton and Dann, which assist in supporting the framework of each study.

Motivations for Tourism

The study of tourism motivations has become a prominent area of discovery over the last few decades with the necessity to understand the reasons why people travel and what impacts on their tourism decision making process. In a general context Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) was one of the first studies which provided a framework for understanding motivation. Maslow’s hierarchy involved five orders of needs including; physiological needs, safety and security needs, social needs, self-esteem needs and self-actualisation. This needs based theory worked on the assumption that individuals will seek to move up the hierarchy once the lower order needs are established. Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) developed Maslow’s theory in a tourism context and created the Travel Career Ladder which noted that an individual’s motives to travel will change as they become more experienced travellers. Similar to Maslow’s model, the travel career ladder followed a hierarchical framework which was

based on the premise that tourists would only travel up the ladder and may not necessarily return back down the ladder. Therefore it failed to take into consideration a change in an individual's circumstances that would impact on their behaviour. In response to this Pearce and Lee (2005) adapted the original ladder to resemble a pattern which allowed for tourists to travel in both directions depending on their personal circumstances in any given time and place. The five categories of needs were similar to Maslow's and included in hierarchical order; relaxation; stimulation; relationship; self-esteem, and development and fulfilment.

Dann's (1977) Push and Pull model of tourism motivation is possibly one of the most cited tourism motivation frameworks and is grounded on the premise that tourists are motivated to travel based on an internal push or external pull to a destination. Dann (1977) proposed two dominant motives for travel namely, *anomie and ego-enhancement*. Anomie refers to a push factor in which the individual seeks to "...transcend the feeling of isolation obtained in everyday life, where the tourist simply wishes to 'get away from it all'" (Dann, 1977: 187). Ego-enhancement also relates to personality needs and is the desire "...to have one's ego enhanced or boosted from time to time" (Dann 1977:187). It can therefore be surmised that the needs as outlined by Maslow are associated with push factors while the attractiveness of a destination act as pull factors.

Motivations for Dark Tourism

There is a dearth of information in the literature with regard to the motivations of dark tourists. The research in relation to dark tourism, has to date focussed on the supply side of the dark tourism product and has to a lesser extent looked at the demand for dark tourism. Therefore, there has been little emphasis on the analysis of why people visit dark tourism sites and the motivations of these individuals. In addition to this, the exploration of visitor motivations to dark tourism sites is a pivotal element for understanding the reasons why people visit. However, it is difficult to identify these motivations due to the range and variety of tourism attractions which fall under the broad category of dark tourism. Furthermore, due to the fact that many dark tourism sites involve the death of one or thousands of individuals, there is a level of sensitivity required in assessing the reasons for visiting and some individuals may be reluctant to admit to motivations that may not be regarded as appropriate. Nevertheless, some research has been conducted in this area.

In 1998, Dann put forward a preliminary list of motives for dark tourism including the desire to overcome phantom; search for novelty; nostalgia; celebration of crime and deviance; basic bloodlust and interest in challenging one's sense of mortality. According to an initial study by Ashworth (2002) on dark tourism there are four main motivations for participating in this form of tourism. These include; curiosity; empathic identification; entertainment through horrific occurrences and the suffering of others and seeking self-identification and self-understanding. In Ashworth's (2004) later research, dark tourism motives extended from on the one hand motivations such as pilgrimage, search for identity and a sense of social responsibility towards darker motives of an interest and indulgence in violence and suffering.

Seaton and Lennon (2004) identified two key motives for dark tourism namely *Schadenfreude* (the pleasure in viewing others misfortune) and the contemplation of death. From the above analysis, there seems to be a two-tier framework emerging from the literature in the analysis of dark tourism motivations. These range from lighter more general motivations such as curiosity, novelty, nostalgia and remembrance towards more darker and sinister motivations such as a type of bloodlust and a warped interest in the suffering and pain of others. This is summarised in Table 3.

Author	Lighter motivations	Darker motivations
Dann (1998)	Desire to overcome phantom Search for novelty Nostalgia	Celebration of crime and deviance Basic bloodlust Interest in challenging one's mortality
Ashworth (2002)	Curiosity Emphatic identification	Entertainment through horrific occurrences and suffering of others Self-identification and self-understanding
Ashworth (2004)	Pilgrimage Search for identity A sense of social responsibility	Interest and indulgence in violence and suffering

Table 3: *Motivations of Dark Tourists*
(Source: As Above)

A completely different framework for analysing dark tourism motivations was put forward by Yuill in 2003. Yuill (2003) adopted Dann's Push and Pull theory in her assessment of visitor's motivations to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC. From this research she examined eleven key motivations for dark tourism categorised into push and pull factors. The push factors included; heritage and identity; historical; survivors guilt; remembrance; death and dying; nostalgia and education, while the pull factors incorporated are; curiosity and novelty seeking; the artefacts at the visitor attraction, sight sacralisation and the role of the media. However, the findings of this research indicated that in fact there were only two dominant motivations for visitors to the Holocaust Museum, namely remembrance and education.

Similar findings to Yuill were noted in a more recent study on the motivations of visitors to Auschwitz by Biran *et al.* in 2011. They concluded that tourist motivations are varied but focus particularly on a desire to learn and understand the history presented and an interest in the emotional experience of a visit. However, they also noted that further research would be required in this area to corroborate with their findings and develop existing knowledge on dark tourism motivations. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to conduct a study on the motivations of dark tourists to the most well-known site of dark tourism, namely Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Auschwitz is generally considered to be the darkest of dark tourism sites in the world (Stone, 2006). It is estimated that approximately 1,300,000 individuals perished in Auschwitz between 1942 and liberation in 1945 with almost 90 per cent of these being Jewish (Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, 2011). The history of Auschwitz is harrowing and is the most cited example of dark tourism in the literature (e.g. Lennon and Foley, 2000; Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Biran *et al.*, 2011), hence the reason for the choice of this site for this study.

Methodology

The methodology for this exploratory study was a mixed methods approach. Therefore a two-stage process of research was adopted incorporating qualitative focus groups and a quantitative questionnaire survey. The unique characteristic of focus groups is the involvement of several respondents in the research process, with the explicit use of group interaction to generate data (Morgan, 1988). In essence, ‘the focus group will seek to gain insights into meaningful constructs of phenomena which emerge out of sharing and discussing issues’ (Carson *et al.*, 2001: 115). A focus group allows for more in-depth understanding of the research concept and can help in the development of further research stages. One focus group was conducted with employees of the Auschwitz museum in January 2011. There were five participants in total in the focus group (3 men and 2 women). Table 4 identifies the people who participated in the focus group.

Title of Participant	Role of Participant in Museum
Dr Wojciech Plosa	Head of the museum archives and the historical teacher on SS (Soldier Nazi Organisation) everyday life;
Elzbieta Brzozka	Collection department of the museum
Krystyna Oleksy	Deputy director for education in the museum
Prof. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski	Member of the International Auschwitz Council, former prisoner and a professor of philosophy and humanities
Stefan Wilkanowicz	Member of the International Auschwitz Council

Table 4: Focus Group Participants

Source: Primary Research (respondents in focus groups approved the use of their real names and titles)

² A similar methodology has been adopted by other authors in the assessment of dark tourism motivations. Yuill, 2003 used both focus groups and a quantitative survey incorporating closed questions on motivations; Biran *et al.* (2011) similarly used in-depth interviews and quantitative surveys to determine motivations of visitors to dark tourism attractions

In developing the focus group the Auschwitz museum was contacted and a detailed explanation of the research being conducted was presented with the objective of gaining participation by employees in the focus group. As is evident from the above table the members of the focus group would be considered experts in their field, are all employees in Auschwitz, have differing levels of experience and would be very knowledgeable about the behaviour of visitors to the museum.

The second stage of the triangulation process involved a questionnaire survey with visitors to the museum and was also conducted in January of 2011. Whilst qualitative methods seek to explore and discover attitudes and motivations on an individual basis, questionnaire surveys allow the researcher gather data on the frequency of these attitudes and motivations among the population as a whole (Veal, 1997). Two methods of questionnaire administration were incorporated; firstly, 30 previous visitors to Auschwitz were contacted by e-mail and asked to complete the questionnaire. The e-mails of these visitors were provided by the employees of the museum. The reason for conducting an e-mail survey was due to the sensitive nature of a visit to Auschwitz as some tourists may not want to complete a face to face survey. The second stage of the survey was a self-administered questionnaire. A further seventy questionnaires were distributed over a two-day period to visitors to the Auschwitz museum in order to determine their motivations for visiting and to develop a profile of visitors.

The questionnaire was designed based on findings from the literature review in relation to the motivations of tourists in general and those of visitors to dark tourism sites. Both the e-mail survey and the self-administered questionnaire resulted in a one hundred per cent response rate. This is due to the fact that the e-mail participants were chosen by the employees of Auschwitz and had already agreed to complete the questionnaire and the nature of a self-administered questionnaire allows for a one hundred per cent response rate.

Research Findings

An agenda of eight discussion topics was created for the focus group in order to develop a profile of the visitor to Auschwitz and to gain an understanding of the motivations of visitors to the museum based on the interpretation of those working in Auschwitz. The first issue related to the development of a visitor profile and the identification of their characteristics. It was found that the age profile of visitors was not distinctive ranging from 18 to 80. Polish people tend to be the number one in terms of nationality, however, a large proportion of Germans and Jews also visit. This is not surprising due to the history of the site and as one focus group participant noted *"...everyone knows, the most affected were Jews and Poles"* (Polsa, 2011). This indicates that the desire to visit may be motivated by the need to remember those who perished in this site of mass destruction. This is further emphasised by Oleksy who noted that *"...the memory of the victims of Auschwitz ensures the existence of this place today and tomorrow"*. Furthermore, another focus group respondent noted that for some visitors, it is out of a fascination with death that they are motivated to visit Auschwitz *"...People are fascinated with death, and therefore from year to year, more and more visitors are coming"*

to the Museum...". This is clearly linked with the darker tourism motivations described in the literature (Table 3).

The next topic for discussion in the focus group centered on the exhibitions in Auschwitz, and the overall experience of the visitor as they tour the site. The exhibitions themselves convey the enormity of the devastation that took place at the hands of the Nazis and according to the focus group respondents have a huge bearing on the overall experience of the visitors.

"at the Memorial, we preserve and protect the camp objects and part of the property brought by Jewish inmates, which Germans did not manage to destroy or send to the Reich. These include: over 110 thousand shoes, about 3.8 thousand trunks, including 2.1 thousand with names, more than 12 thousand pots and pans, nearly 470 prostheses and 350 pieces of camp clothing, so called striped uniforms. Also under the care of the Museum are close to two tons of hair." (Wilkanowicz, 2011)

In addition to this, Brzozka noted that many people who visit the gas chamber and the execution wall in Auschwitz find *"...it hard to control emotions and imagination, many people mentioned that in this place they felt the presence of the people who died there"*. According to the respondents another exhibit at the museum which causes much emotional distress for visitors is that where the letters home from inmates are contained. Many of these individuals knew they were going to die and this is conveyed in the letters. As Brzozka stated: *"It is sad to see people who are crying when reading these letters, but it is authentic, and it will make people cry"*.

It is worth mentioning that there is no one who walks through the gate of Auschwitz where the infamous inscription "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Works Make Free) is presented, and does not stop there or take pictures. But it is not the only inscription which raises emotions. Other inscriptions include: *"The Jews are a race which has to be completely destroyed"*, *"We need to free German people from Poles, Russians, Jews and Gypsies"*, etc. Therefore, many people who visit Auschwitz have a hugely emotional experience which may not have been anticipated prior to the visit.

For those visitors who were survivors of the camp or relatives of those who died there, the motivations to visit are very much driven by a desire to maintain the memory of their loved ones and ensure that their story is told. As Oleksy stated: *"People come to us who talk about how it was in the camp and who want to tell about their experiences, about what had happened and what to do to guard against similar disasters"*. People need to have a place to pay their respects and remember those who died. The focus group participants noted the significance of memory in the decision to visit Auschwitz. According to Plosa: *"The memory and learning are the hope that such an event will never happen again"*.

Historical and educational reasons are also dominant in the decision to visit the camp, many history teachers will visit and many students will visit to learn first-hand about the devastation

which occurred during World War 2. *"I think they are the people who are interested in history, and when they learn about the Holocaust, they want to see these places. People know the stories, statistics, but otherwise it is to see with their own eyes"* (Brzozka, 2011).

The focus group respondents also noted that curiosity plays a big part in deciding to visit Auschwitz. *"People have always been curious, and even more when it comes to the Holocaust ... sometimes it is a sick curiosity ... lots of people lost their lives in the camp, and people are interested only on how they died"* (Wilkanowicz, 2011) . The dark tourism literature also noted that curiosity can be a factor in the decision to visit dark tourism sites. However, it is not known the extent to which this curiosity is driven by education or whether it relates to a more sinister curiosity.

Guilt was a factor rarely mentioned by the participants. Wilkanowicz said: *"People come that have a sense of guilt, but do not want to talk about it, and their face is not expressing any emotions"*. However, guilt is not an emotion which would be readily expressed by visitors; therefore it would be difficult to identify the extent to which guilt drives people to visit Auschwitz.

Finally, respondents agreed that the number of people visiting Auschwitz is on the increase and that people will continue to visit this place to remember those who died. Oleksy stated that: *"Auschwitz is the most visited of all the former German Nazi concentration camps throughout Europe and has the highest museum attendance in Poland"*. The most important thing is to pass the information on to the next generation and to be aware of the things people can do, in order to prevent such atrocities from occurring in the future.

Survey Analysis

Following on from the focus group research a survey was conducted with visitors to Auschwitz as outlined in the methodology above. The first section of the questionnaire revolved around the demographic profile of visitors to Auschwitz. In terms of nationality 37% were Polish, 19% from Israel, 18% were German, 11% from France and 5% from the US, the remainder included visitors from Japan, Italy and Spain. The age group breakdown indicated that almost 35% were between the age of 18-24 and clearly would have no memory of the atrocities that occurred in this dark tourism site. A further 20% were aged between 25 and 34. The very young age groups visiting Auschwitz during the course of this research could be linked to the educational motivating factor discussed earlier. Correlating with this finding is the fact that those people visiting the museum at Auschwitz appear to be very well educated, with 72% having attained some form of third level education and a further 5% with postgraduate qualifications. As a reflection of the high educational attainment of respondents, the income levels were also relatively high. The majority of respondents were Christian (70%), while 26% were Jews. Finally, the gender divide of respondents was rather even with slightly more female respondents (56%) than male (44%).

The next series of questions sought to gauge whether respondents had visited other dark tourism sites throughout the world. Sixty four per cent had been to other dark tourism sites. When asked to expand on which sites were visited responses included other concentration camps in Poland (Majdanek and Stutthof) and Germany (Dachau); Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam and Ground Zero in New York. This indicates the overall interest of respondents in Dark Tourism, and suggests the experience of the sample under investigation.

Motivations for Visiting Auschwitz

Following on from this, respondents were presented with a series of motivations, derived from the literature on dark tourism and were asked to rate each of these motivations on a scale of one to five, to determine which were of most importance to them in choosing to visit the Auschwitz site. From this analysis it was identified that education was indeed the overwhelming motivation for visiting Auschwitz. This corresponds with both the education level and age profile of respondents. Historical factors and remembrance were also particularly dominant amongst respondents with 70% and 63% respectively responding that they found these motivations to be either important or very important in the decision to visit Auschwitz. Curiosity was also an important motivating factor for visitors to Auschwitz. This motivation could be very much linked with the Bloodlust concept identified by Dann (1998) in the literature. Table 5 summarises each of the motivational variables in terms of their importance to the respondents in choosing to visit Auschwitz.

Motivation	Not at all important or not important	Not influential in the decision	Important or very important
Education	24%	4%	72%
History	22%	8%	70%
Remembrance	28%	9%	63%
Curiosity	19%	22%	59%
Exhibits	28%	15%	57%
Nostalgia	20%	25%	55%

Table 5: Motivational importance in the decision to visit Auschwitz

Source: Primary Research (2011)

All of the motivations identified in the primary research of this paper relate to the lighter dark tourism motivations and as discussed in the literature review, the darker tourism motivations can be much more difficult to determine as people are less likely to admit to these. In addition there is a clear correlation between the motivations presented by respondents in the focus group research and the motivations identified in the questionnaire survey and summarised in Table 5. Education, history, and remembrance being dominant in both stages of the research process.

The final series of questions in the survey related to the respondents personal connection to Auschwitz and whether there were any feelings of guilt experienced following the visit. Twenty seven per cent of respondents noted a personal connection to their visit and when asked to develop this further it was determined that five per cent of these individuals were actual survivors of the Holocaust while a further twenty-two per cent were related to or knew someone who had perished in the concentration camp. There was an overwhelming sense of loss as well as guilt with 7 per cent of participants noting the feelings of guilt experienced during their visit.

Implications and Conclusion

The results of the focus group analysis and supported by the questionnaire survey have indicated there are several motivations instigating a visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The key motivators identified include; history, remembrance, education, curiosity, guilt, emotional experience, the various exhibitions at the site and the infamous nature of Auschwitz. These findings correlate with some of the results of other dark tourism motivational studies as identified in the literature (Table 3). However, there seems to be less significance placed on a fascination with death so fervently put forward by the earlier dark tourism motivation studies. Nevertheless, it must also be noted that these more sinister motivations may not be openly identified and communicated. Conversely, there are in particular clear associations between this study and that of Yuill (2003) and Biran et.al. (2011). Yuill's (2003) and Biran et.al.'s (2011) more recent study categorised dark tourism motivations into push and pull factors which can similarly be applied to this study. These are summarised in Table 6.

Research	Push Factors	Pull Factors
Yuill (2003)	Heritage and identity Historical Survivors guilt Remembrance Death and dying Nostalgia Education	Curiosity and novelty seeking Artefacts at the visitor attraction Sight sacralisation The role of the media
Biran et.al. (2011)	History Heritage Emotional experience Learning and understanding	Famous death Tourist attraction See it to believe it.
Ward and Stessel (2011)	Historical Educational Remembrance Emotional experience	Curiosity Exhibitions Infamous nature of the site

Table 6: *Dark Tourism Push and Pull Motivations*

Source: *As Above*

As is evident from Table 6, history, education, emotion and remembrance are the key push factors emerging from the literature and also apparent from this exploratory study. On the other hand the curiosity element, the various events and exhibitions in Auschwitz and the familiarity of this site in general draw individuals to choose to visit Auschwitz rather than any other concentration camps or dark tourism sites. The link between some of these motivations is relevant. Those students who learn in history class about Nazi crimes and are interested in finding out more on this subject may often choose to visit, linking both the educational and historical motivations. There is also a correlation between the emotional experience of a visit and the need to remember particularly for those who are survivors of the camp or relatives of survivors.

Auschwitz remains a place of memory, after more than sixty years, people around the world continue to visit this place to see the ruins of a factory of death. *“Millions of people in the world know what Auschwitz was, but still we need to maintain awareness and memory of the camp to prevent similar tragedy. Only people are able to do so, and only people cannot allow for it” (Wladyslaw Bartoszewski).*

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Organisational Factors Determining Export Performance and Electronic Commerce Adoption: An Empirical Investigation

Dr Breda Kenny and Mairéad Clohessy

Abstract

Ireland's economic performance over the past two decades was largely driven by the exporting sector of the economy. Vigorous export growth largely reflected the success of the economy in securing inward foreign direct investments flows, mainly from the United States (Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland, 2009). Given that Ireland has a population of just over 4.23 million (CSO, 2006) it is imperative that Irish organisations expand into foreign markets to gain a larger market base.

It is against this background of international trade that this paper is set. This is a study of export performance and electronic commerce and it seeks to ascertain the extent to which organisational factors impact on export performance and electronic commerce adoption in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector in Ireland.

The core objectives of this study are: to identify the internal organisational characteristics of both export performance and electronic commerce adoption and to examine the key organisational internal determinants of export performance in the ICT sector in Ireland. The empirical findings provide evidence of a relation between organisational age, managerial education, international experience and export performance, and electronic commerce adoption.

Keywords: *Export Performance, Organisational Age, Managerial Education, International Experience, Electronic Commerce Adoption*

Introduction

The importance of export as an economic activity and a driver of growth are well established in relevant literature. As international competition has become more innovation and knowledge-based, understanding trade performance has gone beyond the parameters of trade theories and now incorporates the role of technology in affecting international competitiveness. Given that Ireland has a population of just over 4.23 million (CSO, 2006) it is imperative that Irish organisations expand into foreign markets to gain a larger market base. Internationally a site on the internet gives a small organisation a vast potential reach, while the same message can penetrate the narrowest of niche markets among information seekers (Bennett, 1997). In the current economic climate both in Ireland and globally international trade and specifically exporting is of increasing importance for Ireland, as recent figures show that net export has increased in from 2009 to 2010 by €4954 million (CSO, 2011).

It is against this background of international business and internet penetration that this study is set. This paper focuses specifically on the key determinants of export performance and electronic commerce adoption amongst small and medium sized organisations (SMEs) in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. SMEs are the focus of this study as they are a key economic sector in Ireland, where they constitute 97% of enterprises and contribute to the flexibility and resilience of the economy as well being active in international markets. This study draws on research from high tech small and medium firms (HTSMEs) in the ICT sector in Ireland.

The internationalisation process of small and specialised high-technology firms is often different from that of more mature industries (Saarenketo *et al.* 2004). In dynamic high-tech markets, one of the factors influencing high performance appears to be speed of internationalisation. Research has shown that these firms are growing and expanding their operations to other countries at a relatively faster pace than others (Fan and Phan, 2007). These firms are often driven to become international at or near inception as a result of the idiosyncrasy of the sector. Previous empirical research indicate that SMEs operating in the ICT sector are frequently required to engage in early internationalisation in order to survive, grow and succeed (Oakley, 1996; Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, Oakley (1996) and Johnson, (2004) found that intense international competition and the extensive internationalisation of their high technology industries necessitated rapid internationalisation.

Consequently, HTSMEs may not necessarily have the time to integrate prior knowledge and to fully develop their international strategies before implementing them as suggested by Johanson and Vahlne (1977). Instead, these companies need to react rapidly, develop mechanisms to assess opportunities quickly and allocate resources to take advantage of them. The results of these actions, some being previously labelled 'reactive strategies' have become the basis for survival in dynamic environments (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). SMEs face internal scarcity of information, capital, and management time and experience (Lu and Beamish, 2001), while externally these firms face constraints arising from their exposure to environmental changes. These constraints inflate the liabilities of foreignness (Hymer, 1979) and of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965) and make internationalisation a challenge.

The paper is organised as follows: First, the theoretical and conceptual considerations and framework are outlined. Second, the research method and the empirical results are outlined. The final section provides a discussion of these findings along with some limitations and areas of further research.

Electronic Commerce

One of the continuing issues of electronic commerce adoption is that of identifying the factors that cause people or organisations to accept and make use of systems developed and implemented by others (King and He, 2006). Identifying why and how organisations adopt

technological innovations, and more specifically 'information technology', is fundamental for ensuring a successful adoption process (Swanson and Wang, 2005). A research stream has identified variables that can explain why organisations adopt information technology with different intensities and speeds (Mehrtens *et al.* 2001; Teo and Pian, 2003). However, there has been little research on the factors inducing SMEs to introduce electronic commerce (Riemenschneider *et al.* 2003; Morgan *et al.*, 2006).

According to Katz and Murray (2002) the use of electronic commerce enables SMEs to improve their efficiency and develop new ways to co-ordinate their activities often in an international context. The internet offers such organisations an invaluable resource for use in international activities, as at a stroke of a key they may have global reach via a website (Sloane, 2006). The internet offers a new means of maintaining and developing relations with clients, channel partners, suppliers and network partners, and provides organisations with the means to co-ordinate and maintain communication across many locations easily and effectively (Herbig and Hale, 1997). Fletcher (2000) found that the effect of the internet on the SME sector led to firms becoming global more quickly in their business development than was the case previously, which has added to the notion of the 'born global' phenomenon.

According to the Central Statistics Office (2009) access to the internet using broadband remained high in 2009 with 84 percent of all enterprises having a broadband connection. High-speed DSL broadband was used by 45 percent of enterprises compared with 41 percent in 2008. As a consequence there has been a decline in the use of lower-speed DSL broadband and other fixed connections (e.g. cable, leased line).

Export Performance and E-Commerce

The globalisation of organisations is heralded as a key driver of electronic commerce adoption and diffusion (Steinfeld and Klein, 1999). It can be expected that highly global organisations are likely to employ electronic commerce more intensively than less global organisations, for two main reasons. First, organisations facing foreign competition are under greater pressure to adopt technologies such as electronic commerce that enable them to protect or expand market share and operate more efficiently. Second, organisations doing business outside their own country may be more motivated to lower their transaction costs (such as search for information, negotiation, and monitoring of performance) by using information technology (Malone *et al.* 1987). Finally, organisations that buy and sell in international markets are under pressure from trading partners to adopt electronic commerce (especially B2B) to improve coordination with other members of the value chain. This is especially true in the case of global production networks dominated by multi-national organisations that may require partners to adopt ecommerce in order to do business with other organisations (Chen, 2002).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1 has been developed based on the literature pertaining to internationalisation and electronic commerce adoption. The framework proposes that two contextual groups namely internal and external determinants of export performance and electronic commerce adoption.

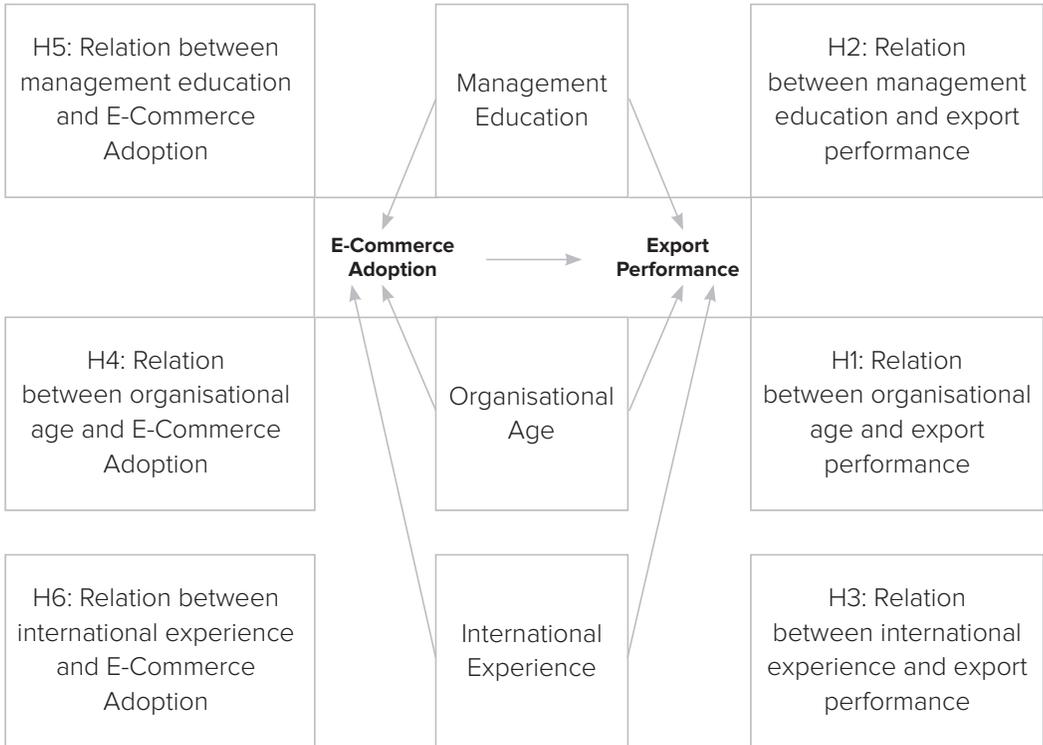


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The overall research question is to investigate the effect of internal organisational factors on export performance and electronic commerce adoption amongst SMEs. This is achieved by examining the effect of the following organisational characteristics on the export performance and electronic commerce adoption: organisation age, international experience and management education.

Method

The population consists of organisations operating in the SME sector within the ICT sector in Ireland from a list made available from the Irish Internet Association. This was chosen as it contained the most up-to-date and detailed listing of companies operating within the sector. This study was based on a mail survey of 364 SMEs drawn from this population. The focus was on a single industry in one country to control for industry- and country-specific factors affecting export performance. A valid response rate of 25 percent was attained. The questionnaire underwent multiple pre-tests. Whenever possible, multiple-item measures were used to minimize measurement error and to enhance the content coverage for constructs. Statement-style items were measured on six-point Likert-scales.

Using an independent sample t-test, early and late respondents were compared on several key characteristics such as, number of employees, level of education attained, access to the internet, percentage of total purchases and total turnover via the internet, export experience and number of countries exported to. No significant difference was found at the 0.05 level. Thus based on these results and considering that the response rate was relatively high, it was concluded that non-response bias does not appear to be a significant problem.

Method of Analysis

The questionnaire was designed for analysis using the statistical package SPSS. Questions were analysed using descriptive statistics, most notably frequencies, cross-tabs and comparisons of means. The Pearson's r and the Spearman's ρ , most commonly used methods of comparing proportions, were employed to identify findings that were significantly related to each other, to the extent of the relation between variables was not explained by coincidence. With the Pearson's correlation coefficient it is assumed that the joint distribution of the variables in the population is normal, which is that the sample is from a bivariate normal distribution. In the analysis of this data, Spearman rank order correlation was used for ordinal variables, such as organisational age.

Measured Used

Table 1 outlines the measures used in this research for each of the key variables.

Variables	Measures used	Why variables were chosen
Organisation Age	<i>The measure employed for organisation age in this study is the number of years in operation.</i>	Previous studies have shown conflicting results between organisational age and both export performance and electronic commerce adoption
International experience	<i>Two fundamental dimensions of an organisation's exporting experience are considered in this study. Length is operationalised as the number of years the manufacturer had been engaged in exporting activities. The scope of an organisation's exporting experience is operationalised as the number of countries that the organisation is involved in through regular exporting operations.</i>	International experience was chosen as a variable as it is an importance factor when examining export performance and has not been studied to a great deal when examining the determinates of electronic commerce adoption
Management Education	<i>The measure employed for management education in this study was the highest qualification level attained, ranging from secondary school education to doctorate level.</i>	Little research has been done in resent years in relation to management education and export performance
Export Performance	<i>This study employs the three dimensions of the EXPERF scale for the measurement of export performance, these measures are financial export performance, strategic export performance and satisfaction with export programme</i>	While there has been a great deal of research in both export performance and electronic commerce adoption, little has been carried out on whether they impact on each other.
Electronic Commerce Adoption	<i>Electronic commerce adoption was measured through two measures, percentage of total purchases carried out through the internet, and percentage of total turnover via the internet.</i>	

Table 1: Measures of organisational characteristics, export performance and electronic commerce adoption

Findings

The organisational variables were examined by testing seven main hypotheses, which were broken into sub hypotheses dealing with the issue of export performance and electronic commerce adoption. Table 2 outlines a summary of the findings and also indicates whether or not a relation was established between the organisational variables and export performance and/or electronic commerce adoption.

Summary of Findings		
	<i>Export Performance</i>	<i>Electronic Commerce Adoption</i>
Organisation Age	(H1) Partial Negative Relation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant negative relation exists between organisational age and export sales as a percentage of total sales • No relation exists between organisational age and international sales growth 	(H4) Partial Positive relation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant positive relation exists between organisational age and percentage of total purchases via the internet • No relation exists between organisational age and percentage of total turnover via the internet
Management Education	(H2) Partial Positive relation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant positive relation exists between management education and export sales as a percentage of total sales • No relation exists between management education and international sales growth 	(H5) Partial Negative relation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant positive relation exists between management education and percentage of total purchases via the internet • No relation exists between management education and percentage of total turnover via the internet
International Experience	(H3) Partial Positive relation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant positive relation exists between international experience or number of countries exported to and export sales as a percentage of total sales • No relation exists between export experience or number of countries exported to and international sales growth 	(H6) Partial Positive relation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant positive relation exists between number of countries exported to and percentage of both total purchases and total turnover via the internet • No relation exists between export experience and either percentage of total purchases or turnover via the internet

Table 2 continued overleaf

<p>Export Performance</p>		<p>(H7) Partial Positive relation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant positive relation exists between export sales as a percentage of total sales and percentage of total purchases via the internet and also between international sales growth and percentage of total purchases via the internet • No relation exists between satisfaction with export performance and percentage of total purchases and turnover via the internet
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Table 2: Measures of organisational characteristics, export performance and electronic commerce adoption

Discussion

Organisational Age and Export Performance

This study found that a negative relation exists between organisational age and export sales as a percentage of total sales. Research evidence exploring the relation between organisational age and exporting is mixed since both positive (Westhead, 1995; Burgel *et al.* 2001), and negative (Balabanis and Katsikea, 2002; Westhead *et al.* 2002) associations have been found between organisation age and export performance.

Management Education and Export Performance

This study found a partial relation between managerial education and the level of export performance. A positive relation was found between the level of managerial education and export sales as a percentage of total sales, however, no relation was found between managerial education and international sales growth or satisfaction with export performance. In other words, as the level of managerial education increases so too does the organisational level of export sales as a percentage of total sales. There is little empirical evidence on the relation between management education and export performance. However, better educated decision makers are expected to be more open-minded and interested in foreign affairs, thus being more willing to objectively evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of exporting (Garnier, 1982).

International Experience and Export Performance

The results on the relation between international experience and export performance were mixed. Strong positive relations were found to exist between export experience and number of countries exported to and export sales as a percentage of total sales. While no significant relations were found between export experience and international sales growth or satisfaction with export performance and between number of countries export to and international sales growth or satisfaction with export performance. The positive relation between international experience and export performance as measured by export sales as a percentage of total sales may be due to the fact that organisations that have more international experience have a better understanding of foreign markets, which may help the organisation to identify opportunities while avoiding threats in international markets. A great deal of research has been carried out on the relation between international experience and export performance and international experience has emerged as a key determinant of export performance (Sousa *et al.* 2008). In previous studies, both positive (O’Cass and Julian, 2003; Lado *et al.* 2004) and no associations (Katsikeas *et al.*, 1996; Mavrogiannis *et al.* 2008) have been found between international experience and export performance.

Organisational Level Determinants of Electronic Commerce Adoption

Identifying why and how organisations adopt technological innovations, and more specifically ‘information technology’, is fundamental for ensuring a successful adoption process (Swanson and Wang, 2005). A research stream has identified variables that can explain why organisations adopt information technology with different intensities and speeds (Mehrtens *et al.* 2001; Teo and Pian, 2003). There has been little research carried out on the factors that induce SMEs to introduce information technology (Premkumar, 2003; Morgan *et al.* 2006). Given the lack of consensus on the internal organisational determinants of electronic commerce adoption and usage it was deemed appropriate to examine the extent organisation age, international experience, and management education are determinants of the level of internet adoption and usage in this study.

Organisational Age and Electronic Commerce Adoption

In contrast to the finding of Goode and Stevens (2000), and in support of the findings of Winklhofer (2006) this study found a positive relation between organisational age and electronic commerce adoption under the measure of percentage of purchases via the internet. Little empirical evidence is available on the relation between organisational age and electronic commerce adoption. Goode and Stevens (2000), however, hypothesised that as the greater the level of experience in terms of the number of years in operation the more likely the organisation was to adopt new technologies. Interestingly, research conducted by Goode and Stevens (2000) proved the opposite; it was younger organisation that had a highest propensity to adopt new technologies.

Management Education and Electronic Commerce Adoption

It was found that a negative relation exists between the level of managerial education and the percentage of total purchases via the internet. Considering the sector in which this study was set it would be expected that electronic commerce adoption would be positively related to the level of managerial education, as managers would have specialised training and education in internet technologies and would be aware of the benefits of adopting such technologies. High-skilled workers can make electronic commerce investment and adoption easier (Arvanitis, 2005; Fabiani *et al.* 2005) because their higher educational level enhances electronic commerce usage and impacts. There are a small number of studies in which only a weak relation (Maliranta and Rouvinen, 2004), or not at all (Rai and Patnayakuni, 1996), is found between educational level and electronic commerce adoption.

International Experience and Electronic Commerce Adoption

The findings of this study supports earlier studies carried out by Braga and Willmore, (1991), Kumar and Saqib, (1996) and Hollenstein (2004) in that positive relations were found between number of years exporting and number of countries exported to and percentage of total turnover via the internet. However, no relations were found between export experience and number of countries exported to and percentage of total purchases via the Internet. The empirical literature on technological innovation reveals a positive relation between exports and innovation (Braga and Willmore, 1991; Kumar and Saqib, 1996), due to the fact that internationalisation implies growth in competitiveness and market size. Website development may be aimed at raising the organisation's visibility and attracting new customers. This is especially relevant when customers are far away, as is the case in organisations exporting a high percentage of their sales (Teo and Pian, 2003).

Export Performance and Electronic Commerce Adoption

From this study it was found that organisations tend to use the Internet primarily for the following activities: market monitoring, marketing products, providing after sales support and facilitating access to product catalogues and price lists. Further to this, 76 percent of those surveyed believed that using the Internet and electronic commerce would enable their organisation to accomplish specific tasks in a more productive manner. The findings of this study shows that a partial relation exists between export performance and electronic commerce adoption, in that it was found that a moderate negative relation exists between export sales as a percentage of total sales and percentage of total purchases via the Internet, which would suggest that as the level of export sales increases the level of back end value chain electronic commerce diminishes. However, a positive relation between export sales as a percentage of total sales and percentage of total turnover via the internet, which suggests that the more an organisation exports the higher the level of turnover via the internet. This is an important finding as it would suggest that electronic commerce adoption and usage are a key aspect of successful export performance.

No associations, however, were found between international sales growth or performance of organisation's international activities over the past three years and percentage of total purchases via the Internet or percentage of total turnover via the Internet. This would suggest that whether an organisation is actively involved in electronic commerce or not does not have a significant bearing on the level of international sales growth.

The cost of adoption and maintenance of system is indeed an important factor for SMEs (Alam *et al.* 2011). SMEs will not be interested in the adoption of electronic commerce unless the benefits outweigh the costs of developing and maintaining the system (Vatanasakdakul *et al.* 2004). They argue that SMEs are generally concerned about the costs of establishing and maintaining e-commerce since they generally suffer from budget constraints and are less sure of the expected returns on the investment. Given that the population of this study contained companies in the ICT sector a surprising finding of the study was that management were cautious in their investment in additional electronic commerce infrastructure. When export marketing strategies are co-aligned in the context of an export venture, positive performance can be expected for the venture (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Morgan *et al.* 2004).

Limitations and Further Research Opportunities

As with any research, certain limitations must be noted. First, the external validity of this study may be limited to the type of firm under investigation. This single context is, however, considered appropriate to control for industry effects. A cross sectoral study would shed further light on possible differences in firm level determinants of both export performance and of electronic commerce adoption.

This study followed the approach of Contractor *et al.* (2005) in asking CEOs or their equivalents to rate the relative importance of export performance in their organisation and Hong and Zhu (2006) in seeking information from managers about the levels of electronic commerce adoption and usage patterns. The study is, therefore, limited to the views of these single informants, but, it is believed that these key informants are best placed to make an overall judgement of both the organisations electronic commerce adoption and usage rates and the overall export performance levels. While it was deemed appropriate to use a single respondent during the research instrument development future research could look at the possibility of carrying out research with number of high end managers specific to the area for example, export or international market manager, and IT managers to gain a holistic view of the operation within the respondent organisations.

The focus of this study was primarily on the internationalisation and electronic commerce adoption of SMEs a comparative study on the extent of the differences between the internationalisation and electronic commerce adoption rates of large organisations and SMEs could also be a fruitful area of further research.

Conclusion

This study examined the micro issues of export performance and electronic commerce adoption in Irish SMEs operating in the ICT sector in Ireland. The empirical findings presented here provide evidence of a relation between organisational age, managerial education, international experience and export performance and electronic commerce adoption. These findings have some practical implications. In terms of this study an interesting finding was that a positive relation exists between organisational age and purchases via the Internet but no relation exists between organisational age and sales via the Internet, this implies that companies are willing to carry out purchases via the Internet but are not succeeding in terms of sales via the Internet.

Another interesting finding was that in terms of both international sales growth and performance of the organisation's international activities no associations were found with percentage of total purchases via the internet or percentage of total turnover via the Internet. This would suggest that whether an organisation is actively involved in electronic commerce or not does not have a significant bearing on the level of international sales growth. A possible reason for this finding is that the organisation may have reached full international potential with their product or service, or may have reached a level of maturity in the products life cycle therefore negating the potential of electronic commerce for increases in international sales growth.

Before taking any adoption initiatives SMEs need to execute an incisive and comprehensive investigation of the external pressures that they are facing. Firms operating in this sector need to leverage their resources to ensure that they are utilising their capabilities and attaining an optimum level of success from the technology which they adopt. Organisations must ensure that they adopt technologies best suited to them and not adopting technologies due to the bandwagon effect. For successful adoption and implementation of a technology it must be tailored to the needs of the organisation and compatible with other value chain members, particularly in the international trade arena.

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Fair Trade, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

This paper examines different aspects of fair trade marketing. Firstly, secondary research examines the development, advantages and challenges of fair trade. Secondly, primary research explores consumer buying behaviour in Ireland and Austria in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) market. Thirdly, the attitudes of consumers towards mainstreaming and clean-washing are explored. Phase one of the data collection involved one hundred and twenty consumer surveys. In phase two exploratory research using mixed modes collected data from nine suppliers of fair trade FMCGs. The findings suggest that the effects of mainstreaming are perceived to be predominantly positive. The research findings also suggest that more needs to be done to manage consumer perceptions of fair trade. Specifically, consumers need to be convinced that their purchasing behaviour can actually make a difference. This paper will be of interest to marketing professionals and stakeholders in the fair trade and the FMCG sector in relation to: merchandising strategy for fair trade products; developing tailored brand communications for fair trade; and new fair trade product development.

Keywords: *Fair trade, Mainstreaming, Clean-washing, Marketing*

Introduction

Consumers can choose from a wide range of competitively priced fair trade products which are available from the main FMCGs providers and new products are becoming available on a continuous basis. In addition to traditional fair trade products such as coffee and tea, large retailers are extending their ranges to include products such as wine, rice, chocolate, fruit, juices, snacks and clothing. According to Low and Davenport (2005) the use of mainstream marketing tools appears to have changed the message of fair trade from participation in an international programme of trade reform, to a message of shopping for a better world. Doherty and Tranchell (2007) argue that mainstream marketing increases sales of fair trade products substantially. However, there is a risk from mainstream business of absorption and dilution of the fair trade brand. This can then lead to clean-washing which occurs when a company derives positive benefits from its association with fair trade, however minimal its efforts to uphold the value of fair trade (Jones and Comfort, 2003).

The Characteristics of Fair Trade

Low and Davenport (2005) explain that fair trade has evolved into a global social movement that combines an alternative model of business with political activism – a business and

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a campaign. According to Jones *et al.* (2003) the purpose of fair trade is to improve the position of poor and disadvantaged food producers in the developing world by helping them to become more involved in world trade and providing them with better trading conditions. Fair trade has a positive impact on the establishment of conditions that foster a higher level of social and environmental protection in developing countries and is particularly helpful to small-scale producers that live in isolated, rural areas. Davies (2007) classifies the development of fair trade into three eras. The eras are the *Solidarity Era* (1970-1990), the *Niche Market Era* (1990-2002) and the *Mass Market Era* (2002-present). He states that supporters of fair trade in the solidarity era were predominantly Alternative Trade Organisations (ATOs). The ATOs aimed to raise awareness and demonstrate solidarity with the developing world. The product range was very limited and quality was generally perceived to be poor. Products that were marketed in this era were mainly craft products and coffee. Distribution relied on mail order and a limited number of world shops (for example www.giftswithhumanity.com). The niche market era saw an increase in participants. In addition to ATOs fair trade companies started to emerge. The target market was ethical consumers. The product range and brands extended to a wider choice of commodity products, such as tea, chocolate, cocoa, sugar, nuts and fruits. Furthermore, quality levels and consistency improved. During the niche market era the distribution of fair trade products extended to supermarkets. The mass market era saw a shift from ATOs to companies, adopters and branders. This made it possible for fair trade to reach a larger customer base and appeal to a wider range of consumers in different segments. Product ranges increased and quality and consistency improved substantially. Fair trade products are now available in supermarkets, corner shops, world shops, online, and through mail order.

According to Nicholls (2002) the most significant influence on fair trade has been the emergence of ethical consumerism and cultural and informational changes in western society. Furthermore, Carrigan and Attalla (2001) and Jones and Comfort (2003) explain that the increased demand for ethically produced products is based on consumers' increased levels of awareness and concerns about economic, ethical, environmental and social issues linked to food production. Price, quality and safety are still the most important factors that influence consumer buying behaviour in the food sector. However, ethical factors are becoming increasingly important. Low and Davenport (2005) believe that the mainstream success of fair trade FMCGs is also based on the development of the fair trade label. This is significant because Crispell and Brandenburg (1993) found that consumers spend less than four seconds evaluating a supermarket shelf before making a purchase decision and brands make this decision easier. According to Jones *et al.* (2003) there are two main routes to market for fair trade products. The first route is through the work of ATOs and the second is through labeling initiatives. In the early stages fair trade initiatives were dependent on ATOs which were often established by charities or churches. Later ATOs developed into independent companies which sold food and handcrafts from disadvantaged producers in the developing world. The main aim of this activity was to raise awareness and to campaign

for changes in conventional international trade. Products were sold through a variety of channels, such as charity shops, church groups, mail order, internet and fair trade shops. This route to market is characterized by a lack of labeling. However, the reputation of the organizations acts as a guarantee that the products meet fair trade standards. The second route to market is labeling initiatives (the certification of products that are produced under fair trade principles) as described by Jones *et al.* (2003). This allows fair trade products access to traditional retail distribution channels and makes fair trade products more accessible for a larger number of customers. The importers and retailers are commercial organisations and products are marked by a fair trade logo or label which is awarded by a fair trade certification agency. Criteria concerning production and marketing processes are set by these agencies. Criteria are harmonised internationally and cover a wide range of factors, such as employment conditions, environmental regulations and freedom for workers to participate in trade union activities.

Fair Trade and Consumer Behaviour

According to Nicholls and Opal (2005) one of the main challenges facing fair trade companies is how to reach a wider audience for their products; an audience that goes beyond the segment of ethically aware and concerned consumers. Nicholls (2002) reports that in the last decade there was a shift from focusing marketing efforts on process to a focus that incorporates the product and more recently also the place. Alexander and Nicholls (2006) build on this and describe the three Ps of fair trade marketing. These are *Process Focus*, *Product Focus* and *Place Focus*. Process focus is explained by the Cafédirect example. In the early 1990s, in contrast to other fair trade organizations, Cafédirect was competing directly with conventional coffee suppliers and was a “for-profit” organization. In addition, they were the first fair trade company that achieved direct and sustained success from their marketing activities. For example, they raised awareness by highlighting stories of individual coffee farmers and thereby created an emotional link between the producer and the user. This provision of information to the customer was imperative to the early success of fair trade marketing. Process focus is also about building trust in the authenticity of fair trade standards, which involved the introduction of the fair trade mark. Product focus involves communicating the quality, range and differentiation of products to a wider range of customer segments. In 2000, Cafédirect did this by producing coffee that was of very high quality and using this as their main selling point. This allowed Cafédirect to move out of a niche market and target mainstream customer segments (McDonagh, 2002). The third phase of fair trade marketing, place focus, is designed to target additional consumers. According to Alexander and Nicholls (2006) this target segment includes consumers that are not very concerned about ethics in business but worry about issues that may affect their local area. This phase of fair trade marketing is about involving people in the fair trade movement on a local level, such as gaining the title of a “fair trade town” (examples available at www.fairtrade.org.uk). De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) argue that in addition to in-store marketing efforts, such as

labels, it is important that a fair trade company effectively uses promotion, distribution and branding tools to market their products. They also claim that continuous promotional reminders are needed in order to entice consumers to purchase – even committed fair trade buyers. According to de Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) the type of promotional reminders used is important. For example, consumers of fair trade goods tend to prefer package information, leaflets and brochures over mass media advertising.

De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) also highlight the problem of locating fair trade products in stores. Jones *et al.* (2003) explain that to a large extent fair trade products are not grouped together (unlike organic food) but are mixed with products of the same category. Why? Keller (2002) believes that many retailers have negative attitudes towards stocking ethically produced products as they believe that these goods may have a negative effect on customer perceptions of conventionally produced products. This is often used as an excuse for the reluctance to stock fair trade products. However, Ingenbleek and Binnekamp (2008) found that the “spin-off effects” are very subtle and that retailers should not be concerned with negative effects.

Methodology

The decision to conduct this research in Ireland and Austria is guided by Jorgens (2006) who studied a country where consumer acceptance was high (64 German consumers) and another (53 English consumers) where consumers had little awareness of the product. Data was collected in two phases: firstly, one hundred and twenty consumers were surveyed. Sixty surveys were conducted in Ireland and sixty in Austria. The surveys were administered through personal street interviews outside supermarkets. A mix of multiple choice questions, rank-order rating scales, attitudinal scales, and dichotomous questions were used. The questionnaire examined four key issues: the respondents purchasing behaviour; their reasons for purchasing fair trade; the factors which facilitate/obstruct the purchasing of fair trade; and attitudes towards the provision of fair trade products by multinational corporations. Secondly, indepth interviews were conducted to explore the key issues arising from the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted with suppliers of fair trade products. The authors acknowledge that an alternative approach would have been to reengage the consumers in focus groups. However, the approach adopted in this paper is in line with (Campbell *et al.* 2008 and Doohan *et al.* 2009). Guided by Foley (2008) and Stephens and Coyle (2010), snowball sampling was used to identify respondents. Twelve individuals with a wide variety of experience were approached to participate in this study. Nine agreed. The interviews explored three issues: factors that impact on the purchase of fair trade products; the effects of the mainstreaming of fair trade; and if clean-washing dilutes the value of the fair trade brand. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and superfluous material removed such as digressions and repetitions to assist the analysis. Narrative structuring (Kvale, 1996) was used to create a coherent story of the interviewee’s experience(s) of the marketing of fair trade products.

Findings

The results of the survey indicate that less people are aware of fair trade in Austria than in Ireland. However, both countries show a very high rate of awareness (88.5 % and 81.7 % respectively). Austrian consumers purchase fair trade products more regularly than Irish consumers (57% and 46%). However, figures for both countries are quite low which suggests that fair trade still has not been completely embraced. Purchasing patterns are similar in both countries, with the main difference being that the most popular fair trade product purchased in the Irish market is coffee, compared to chocolate in the Austrian market. The main rationale (37%) behind the purchase of fair trade products is to help underprivileged producers in the developing world which, according to Jones *et al.* (2003) is also the main purpose of fair trade. Another important factor is the perceived feel-good-factor respondents experience when they purchase fair trade products. More Austrian consumers (15% compared to 11% respectively) purchase fair trade products because they believe that the quality, taste and appearance are better than comparable conventional products. More Austrian consumers (9.2% compared to 2.2% respectively) purchase fair trade products in order to boycott multinational firms. Neither Irish nor Austrian respondents appear to be influenced by packaging or fashion.

Impediments to the purchasing of fair trade in Ireland are a lack of knowledge about the fair trade movement (42%) and perceived higher prices (34%). This finding supports research conducted by Radmann (2005) who found that the main barrier to purchasing fair trade is the perceived higher price, compared to conventional products. In Austria the impediments to purchasing fair trade are a lack of knowledge (53%) and belief that the purchase of fair trade does not make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged producers (37%). According to Carrigan and Attalla (2001) consumers need increased levels of information and they need to be convinced that their buying behaviour makes a difference. The factors which encourage the purchase of fair trade products are more information about the effects (38% and 33% respectively), lower price (36% and 45% respectively) and special offers (36% and 41% respectively). It is clear that better information would deal with the lack of knowledge and help to reduce doubts about whether consumers can actually make a difference. Indeed, some fair trade suppliers are attempting to address this factor, such as Cafédirect who try to counteract this by highlighting stories of individual coffee farmers on the packaging of their products (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006). This research indicates that consumers would be persuaded to purchase fair trade frequently if it was easier to find in-store (25% and 33%), and marketed as higher quality (15% and 31%).

De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) and Comfort and Hillier (2003) report that inconvenience and a lack of availability are the primary reasons for not buying fair trade. A bigger assortment (15%) and the introduction of fair trade lines by mainstream companies (17%) would positively affect purchasing behaviour in Ireland. Similarly increased availability (20%) and a bigger assortment (20%) have a strong effect on Austrian consumers. According to Doherty and Tranchell (2007) mainstreaming strengthens the fair trade message by bringing it to a larger

audience. Nicholls and Opal (2005) report that fair trade leads to the improvement of the lives of producers, and this needs to be fostered. Respondents in both markets believe that mainstreaming instils a trust in the quality of fair trade products. According to Crane and Matten (2007) and Carrigan and Attalla (2001) companies that follow a clean washing strategy simply introduce fair trade lines for commercial, profit focused reasons. When asked why companies follow a clean-washing strategy twenty four percent of Austrian consumers and nineteen percent of Irish consumers believed it was to profit from the fair trade movement. Low and Davenport (2005) argue that the introduction of fair trade lines by mainstream companies may lead to consumer confusion about fair trade. However, respondents (54% and 63% respectively) do not perceive clean-washing as unethical.

Findings from the Interviews

Three significant problems faced by fair trade suppliers are the lack of awareness/ understanding of the fair trade logo and consumer confusion about what fair trade represents and in some cases consumer apathy to the fair trade cause. One respondent elaborated:

People don't have a practical understanding of how it works.
(Respondent 3).

Carrigan and Attalla (2001) claim that consumers need increased levels of information in order to make educated purchase decisions and need to be convinced that their buying behaviour can make a difference. Furthermore, it was stated by three respondents that consumers do not believe in the fair trade cause, for example some consumers do not believe that the extra money is really going to the producer but in fact big corporations profit from it. The lack of brand awareness compared to established brands hinders the purchase of fair trade goods. An example provided by one respondent was:

Specialised fair trade chocolate producers may struggle to compete with Cadbury's/ Nestlè, who have been on the market for years.
(Respondent 5).

Four respondents stated that fair trade is not marketed properly, for example, many companies supply fair trade products and do not advertise these products effectively. Others inaccurately advertise their products as fair trade. This contributes to consumer confusion. Furthermore, according to two respondents, consumers are likely to purchase fair trade goods if the product is a substitute for an existing product. It was stated that consumers are also more likely to choose fair trade over conventional products if it complements an already purchased product. For example a fair trade snack with a fair trade coffee. It was suggested by three respondents that the one approach to increase fair trade consumption would be to supply more information on what fair trade actually is:

There is a correlation between how much people know about fair trade and how often they purchase fair trade products.
(Respondent 4).

Eight respondents believe that fair trade branding usually has a positive effect on the perception of a product or brand as introducing fair trade lines can make a company seem more socially responsible or “ethical” as it implies ‘concern and caring for the greater good’ and this is rewarded in the market. Three of the respondents believe that:

People who see the fair trade brand on a product then have confidence in the quality of that product. Often these products will be organic as well and even if they do not contain the organic logo the consumer who is familiar with fair trade will know that the conditions for organics are very much part of the fair trade way of production.
(Respondent 3).

Fair trade gives a perception of superior quality, as consumers are aware that ingredients used are sourced from legitimate suppliers.
(Respondent 1).

The fair trade logo is recognised more now and especially by children where they have part of their school programme built around it, for example a question on fair trade has appeared in the Junior Cert examination recently.
(Respondent 8).

Three respondents commented that a large portion of fair trade consumers are not affected by fair trade branding at all, but simply choose fair trade because they believe in the cause. It was added that in general fair trade was not well branded and not well explained as there exists a lack of funding for marketing. According to Doherty and Tranchell (2007) mainstreaming strengthens the message of fair trade. The majority of respondents commented that the availability of fair trade products in supermarket chains will help raise awareness amongst the general public about the issues of poor labour practices in developing countries.

It is a positive movement to have fair trade goods available alongside other goods. It will heighten the awareness of the consumers to the wide availability of fair trade goods. Some time ago the only fair trade products people could think of were tea, coffee and bananas.
(Respondent 8).

This potentially increases benefits and revenues for fair trade producers, as products become widely available which leads to increased fair trade production. Higher fair trade consumption and additional access to markets will eventually leads to economies of scale.

With volume comes efficiency and lower prices thus increasing fair trade consumption and production. One respondent proposed that the way forward would be to have fair trade as a standard, not a choice.

Fair trade doesn't go far enough. Fair trade doesn't have to be more expensive than conventionally produced goods. Huge mark-ups are placed on fair trade goods by greedy corporations. They simply charge as much for it, as consumers are willing to pay.

(Respondent 2).

However, the mainstreaming of fair trade can have a negative impact. According to Low and Davenport (2005) the message may get lost, it may lead to clean-washing and fair trade might lose its radical edge. As stated by one of the respondents the “special” nature of the fair trade brand may get diluted as it becomes mainstream:

As more and more producers adopt a fair trade policy, the ‘uniqueness’ of only sourcing from ethical suppliers diminishes, and therefore the fair trade brand will no longer be a unique selling point for marketers or important in the eyes of the consumer.

(Respondent 6).

In addition, one respondent commented that pioneering, small companies may suffer because they cannot compete on price, nor have sufficient promotional resources. Two respondents commented that mainstreaming may also lead to consumer confusion when a company supplies only a very limited amount of fair trade products, like Nestlè’s fair trade Partners Blend Coffee. Indeed Crane and Matten (2007) report that Nestlè admit to simply introducing a fair trade line for commercial reasons. Furthermore, one respondent suggested that consumers may feel that they are making charitable donations by purchasing fair trade products and hence may reduce their charitable donations to other causes. According to Hira and Ferrie (2006) some companies take advantage of the positive effects attached to fair trade branding and state that the consumer’s image of a company improves if the company is viewed as ethical. The majority of respondents believe that a business that follows a clean-washing strategy appears ethical. One respondent agreed:

That introducing fair trade products to a range does make a company seem more ethical than before.

(Respondent 7).

However, it was claimed by two respondents that clean-washing only works if the company undertakes extensive advertising. In addition, one respondent proposed that more organisations should be encouraged to add fair trade lines, ‘like Cadbury, Starbucks, Unilever, and Ben and Jerrys have done recently, as the more fair trade products that are on the

market, the more indigenous producers are going to benefit'. One opinion that emerged was that often corporations are simply 'window dressing' and introducing fair trade lines only to appear more ethical. Two respondents explained that:

I believe some large corporations see the introduction of fair trade lines as a good business move but I am not sure whether the motivation to do so is based solely on giving cocoa farmers in developing countries a better way of life.
(Respondent 2).

I think that many organisations may 'stretch the truth' when it comes to fair trade. For example, only a small percentage of their products are actually fair trade, as opposed to their entire range. You either believe in it or you don't.
(Respondent 8).

These findings indicate that companies can take advantage of the positive effects attached to fair trade branding and use it to improve consumer satisfaction. However, clean-washing only works if consumers know about fair trade and if the company significantly invests in marketing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this research illustrate that mainstream marketing can increase sales of fair trade products significantly. However, there is a risk of absorption and dilution of the fair trade movement. This research reveals that the rationale behind the purchase of fair trade products is the desire to help underprivileged producers in the developing world, which in turn provides consumers with a feel-good-factor. The factors that hinder fair trade consumption are: a lack of knowledge; perceived higher prices; and a lack of awareness/understanding of the fair trade logo. Fair trade companies also struggle to compete against established brands due to the lack of brand awareness. In addition, consumers are sceptical that their purchase makes a difference. Factors which positively affect consumer behaviour are the provision of extra information on the benefits of fair trade consumption and lower prices. Fair trade is still perceived to be of a lower quality than conventional goods. Less than fifteen per cent of consumers surveyed believe that the quality, taste and appearance of fair trade products are better than conventional products. According to fair trade suppliers this is due to lower standards when the products first came to market. Fair trade branding usually has a positive effect on the perception of a product or brand and makes a company appear ethical. However, it only has a positive spin-off effect if consumers know what fair trade is. The mainstreaming that most influenced the consumers' buying behaviour was increased availability of a range of fair trade products. In addition, consumers are also influenced by the introduction of fair trade lines by mainstream businesses. Consumers believe that mainstreaming has predominantly positive effects and it helps raise awareness of the fair trade movement. However, mainstreaming can have negative effects. There is a

risk that the message is diluted as fair trade becomes mainstream. In addition, small fair trade companies may suffer as they cannot compete with larger organisations. Furthermore, some companies take advantage of the positive effects attached to fair trade branding and use it to improve their image. Clean-washing only works if consumers know what fair trade is and if the company heavily advertises. Consumers do not perceive clean-washing as unethical or that it dilutes trust in the fair trade message.

Based on the evidence collected the following three recommendations in relation to the marketing of fair trade FMCGs are presented: first, marketers must manage the perceptions of the fair trade brand by providing consumers with quality and accessible information about the benefits and effects of fair trade. Second, consumers need to be convinced that their purchase behaviour makes a difference. Even though awareness of the fair trade brand is high, it has not been completely embraced in both markets and marketing communications should be used to counteract this. Third, and finally, the perception that fair trade is of a low quality needs to be addressed. This could be achieved by placing more emphasis on quality, rather than focusing on fair trade issues. These recommendations if implemented would help: retailers to deliver an appropriate merchandising strategy for fair trade products and allow brand consultancies to develop tailored brand communications for fair trade, specifically addressing the existing negative perceptions; and assist new fair trade product development

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Advertising the Thin Ideal-The Effect on Women

Christine Murphy

Abstract

Debate on the thin ideal has been prevalent for many decades, however given the substantial increase in eating disorders and the omnipresent influence of the media the time is now ripe for decisive action in the area of women in advertising. Most research in this area has focused on the psychological impact of the thin ideal. The new research presented in this paper is important as it explores the marketing implications of the portrayal of women in the fashion and cosmetic industry. The success of this industry depends entirely on how receptive consumers are to the images portrayed. This paper explores the effect advertising in the form of television, magazine and billboard media has on the female consumer with regard to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. It is conclusive from the research that respondents believe that there is an association between the advertising of the thin ideal and body dissatisfaction and eating disorders.

Keywords: *Thin Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction, Unattainable Ideals, Socio-cultural Ideals, Airbrushing*

Introduction

From a young age women are brought up to believe that to be thin is to be perfect. Women are subjected to pressure from family and friends to adhere to this idea of perfection and the media, in the form of advertising influence women to believe that the tall slim women they use in adverts are perfect. Traditionally, companies have used advertising campaigns featuring tall, thin, beautiful women known as the thin ideal to advertise their products. By using these tall, slim women, marketers create aspirational attributes associated with their products, which entices women to purchase their product in the hope they will look like the women in the adverts.

According to The Eating Association of Ireland (2007), eating disorders occur in societies that promote thinness as a means of achieving health, success and happiness and there is overwhelming evidence for the existence of the *thin ideal* for women (Wiseman *et al.* 1992). The link between media and body dissatisfaction and eating disorders is supported by women and girls own reports (Tiggeman *et al.* 2000; Milkie, 1999). While evidence of the use of thin women in advertising is not sufficient in itself to lay the responsibility of eating disorders on advertisers, the crucial issue is the connection between them. For the second half of the twentieth century, there is evidence – anecdotal, interpretive and to an extent scientific – that the culturally ideal shape for female bodies has become much thinner.

It is evident that for at least the past four decades, companies have used idealised body images by means of thin models in their advertisements to promote their products. Even

though there is growing evidence to indicate that consumers realise that the slender models portrayed in the media are unattainable ideals (Lockwood *et al.* 1997), consumers continue to purchase products from companies in the hope that they are purchasing the image of that ideal. Some researchers believe that advertisers purposely endeavor to make unrealistically thin bodies “normal” in order to create an unattainable urge that can drive product consumption (Cusumano, 1997). The portrayal of super-slim women as more fashionable, desirable, and successful can contribute to eating disorders that can kill, and the mass media have been identified as one of the most influential socio-cultural factors contributing to anorexia (Gustafson *et al.* 1999).

The Thin Ideal and Body Dissatisfaction

Although the practice of including highly attractive women may be effective from a marketing standpoint, physical attractiveness and the thin ideal is a very sensitive issue for many women (Gustafson *et al.* 1999). It has been proven through a growing body of research that the exposure to ultra thin women, ubiquitous in the media and advertising industry, leads to body dissatisfaction amongst a large proportion of women (Irving, 1990). The mass media due to their pervasiveness and reach are probably the single most powerful transmitters of sociocultural ideals. Certain formal content analyses of the visual media such as fashion magazines, television advertising and programming, document a ponderance of young, tall and extremely thin women who epitomize the current beauty ideal (Malkin *et al.* 1999). Through television, magazines, billboards and other media, women frequently encounter images of female beauty, that are highly uncommon and largely unattainable (Levine *et al.* 1996). Due to the idealised ultra thin women that are used in advertisements, studies show a decrease in self evaluation following exposure to idealised media portrayals (Posavac *et al.* 1998).

In a celebrity and weight obsessed culture women compare themselves with women who are anomalies of nature. These women are naturally thin and have incredibly long legs and high cheekbones, yet women will still diet and feel body dissatisfaction when they see these women in airbrushed advertisements and will strive to resemble these anomalies of nature. As the media try, on the surface to sort through the weight debate, what is being communicated underneath, in many cases, is society’s strongly held moral and aesthetic prejudice against being heavier than the thin ideal (Hofschire, 2002). It has been suggested that pressure to be thin from ones’ social environment encourages body dissatisfaction because repeated messages that one is not thin enough would be expected to produce discontent with physical appearance (Thompson *et al.* 1999).

Women’s magazines, probably more than any other form of mass media, have been criticised as being advocates and promoters of the desirability of an unrealistic and dangerously thin ideal (Wolf, 1990). A study conducted by Nichter *et al.* (1991) showed that adolescent girls endorsed their ideal as the women found in fashion magazines. In addition to print media,

research indicates that television may also be a powerful influence on perceptions of ideal body image in the average home, where the television is on for more than 7 hours a day (Harris, 1995) and unrealistic ideals similar to those found in the print media can be found on television shows. The average woman sees 400-600 advertisements per day, and by the time she is 60 years old, she has received 40 to 50 million commercial messages through the media (Milkie, 1999). Television commercials influence female self concept and achievement aspirations, and television often depicts situations in which thin people prosper and large people are ridiculed (Field, 2000). This constant exposure to female-oriented advertisements may influence girls to become self-conscious about their bodies and to obsess over and consider their physical appearance as a measure of their worth. (Heinberg, 1995)

A meta-analysis of experimental studies indicated that exposure to thin ideal images led to increased levels of body dissatisfaction among women (Grosez *et al.* 2002). Other experimental research showed that exposure to thin media ideals resulted in negative affect (Irving, 1990), or overeating (Seddon *et al.* 1996). It has been proven that brief exposure to print media images of thin female models has been shown to induce greater weight concern, body dissatisfaction, self consciousness, negative mood and decreased perception of ones' own attractiveness (Posavac *et al.* 2001; Shaw, 1995; Wegner *et al.* 2000; Stice *et al.* 1994; Ogden *et al.* 1999). In addition to these studies experimental studies have the potential to identify the psychological processes that translate media content into body dissatisfaction, however as yet relatively little research attention has been directed specifically at the underlying processes (Tiggemann *et al.* 2004).

The Thin Ideal and Eating Disorders

Anorexia nervosa is a psychiatric disorder characterised by an unrealistic fear of weight gain, self starvation and conspicuous distortion of body image. Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder characterised by recurrent binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors. Both of these eating disorders have existed for a very long time. A disorder similar to anorexia nervosa was first written about by Physician and Minister John Reynolds in 1669 and Philosopher Thomas Hobbes in 1688. Recognition of the disorder as a clinical condition dates from work completed separately in London and Paris in 1873. Anorexia has been characterised as a biopsychosocial disorder resulting in self-image and self-perception distortions that lead some women to develop an intense fear of food and weight gain to the point that many starve themselves to death (Gustafson *et al.* 1999). Bulimia nervosa was not recognised as a clinical condition until Gerald Russell's paper published in the UK in 1979. In Ireland, there are no national statistics available on the prevalence of eating disorders in the country, however, a study in the area was conducted on behalf of Bodywhys, The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland by the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy in 2007. The study reports that up to 200,000 people in Ireland have an eating disorder. The report however, only contains information on the sample of people who have approached Bodywhys for support; it is not viewed as a national statistic. Most research on eating disorders has been conducted with American and British samples.

In the UK, nearly two in every 100 secondary school girls suffer from anorexia nervosa. In 1992 the Royal College of Psychiatrists estimated that about 60,000 people may be receiving treatment for anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa at any one time in the UK. However, Beat (2000) currently believes the number receiving treatment to be much nearer to 90,000, with many more people whose eating disorders have not been diagnosed, in particular those with bulimia nervosa.

The unrealistically thin ideals portrayed in the media have been linked to increased rates of body-image disturbance and disordered eating in women. Several surveys have examined the relation between media exposure and eating disorder symptoms. In a sample of undergraduate students, Stice *et al.* (1994) found a positive relation between exposure to media containing ideal body images and disordered eating symptoms associated with bulimia and anorexia nervosa. Harrison and Cantor (1997) examined the relationship between media consumption and eating disorders in college women and found that frequent media use was associated with disordered eating symptoms, drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction.

Research Methodology

To ensure that the necessary information would be generated, qualitative research was conducted for this study. Qualitative research consists of a body of research techniques that do not attempt to make measurements, but seek insights through a less structured, more flexible approach (Birn *et al.* 1990). In short, focus groups create settings in which diverse perceptions, judgements and experiences on a particular topic can surface (Lindlof, 1995) and thus are ideally suited to the present study. Babbie (1998) is of the opinion that the group dynamics that occur in focus groups frequently bring out aspects of the topic that would not have been anticipated by the researcher and would not have emerged from interviews with individuals.

The definition of the research problem was open ended but centered on understanding female consumers' attitudes towards advertising the thin ideal. The reason for this was to ensure that respondents were in a position to discuss any issues that they felt were important to them in relation to this issue.

Selection for focus groups is purposive rather than random or convenience selection. Theoretical sampling involves choosing informants driven by the conceptual question and not by a concern for representativeness (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The respondents chosen were women between the ages of 18-35 across different socio-economic backgrounds. Friends and family members were initially chosen for the sample on the basis of convenience. To expand the sample a technique called snowballing, where one gives the name of another subject who in turn provides the name of another and so on was used (Vogt, 1999). The focus groups for this research were demographically homogeneous groups, where same sex and similar age groups were recruited. This is to promote a positive and open atmosphere conducive to information sharing (Calder, 1977). After conducting six focus groups with

32 participating women the researcher believed that no new information was likely to be forthcoming, that saturation had been reached and that a sufficient number of groups had been conducted to fully address the research issues.

The focus groups were generally run in the home of the researcher, but in a number of cases were run in the homes or workplaces of some of the participants. Both lent themselves to informal settings where the participants were both comfortable and relaxed. The sessions lasted on average 1.5 hours. In all circumstances it was believed that this was sufficient time to allow for discussion on all areas of interest that arose. In a number of situations the session lasted two hours, as the groups were particularly open to debate and discussion.

A loosely structured approach to the discussions was followed to allow the moderator to adjust and direct the flow of conversation to ensure that all relevant issues were addressed. A number of topics were identified as important for discussion prior to the focus group sessions, but the discussion was not limited to these, as respondents identified many other topics as being significant. All the group discussions were taped and full transcripts produced as soon as possible after the sessions. Analysis of the data began with an initial reading of the transcripts. This initial reading was focused upon evaluation of the main issues that arose, while subsequent readings focused on making sense of and seeking out points that were relevant and interesting to the subject matter.

Research Findings

The loosely structured interview guide and the open coding process of analysis resulted in the generation of rich detailed information. This section of the paper presents an in-depth exploration on the research data generated. The data will be discussed under the headings of peer influence, age effect, airbrushing and other effects.

The dominant perception among respondents when questioned about the way women have traditionally been portrayed in advertisements is that in general they are extremely thin, beautiful women. Respondents to this research articulated that women generally appear in advertisements as:

They look fabulous. Their skin and teeth always looks fabulous, their body shape and their hair always looks shiny, the type of women you would like to look like (Shirley, 28).

Role of Peer Influence

Interestingly, respondents believe that adverts do not cause as much dissatisfaction among women as women's own peers do. It is noted that the thin ideal is interiorised to such an extent that quite often women themselves are the first to stigmatise other women for not conforming to the standard image:

I think the women you are surrounded by daily do have an influence but I think we are more influenced by the media than we would like to admit. I think the reason we want to look good is fashion, fitness, and body image created by the media and women you go out and see out are the women that are wearing the style that they have seen in a magazine and a look from a magazine so I think it all trickles through regardless (Louise, 25).

Difference between High End Fashion Models and Celebrities

New significant findings to emerge from this current research, identify that from the female consumers' perspective women are portrayed at either the high end of the fashion industry where models are typically used, or are portrayed at the lower end of the fashion market where the use of female celebrities are prevalent. Respondents to the research differentiate between the way that women are portrayed at both ends and react differently to both portrayals:

I think there is a difference in the way women are portrayed. When you are looking at high fashion they are anorexic giraffe type women, whereas if you are looking at celeb magazines, while the women are still portrayed as thin and beautiful, maybe they appear as more attainable (Elizabeth, 32).

Models at the high end of the fashion industry appear untouchable and unattainable because of their slim tall physique, yet celebrities such as actresses who endorse products appear more realistic and tangible to respondents because of the media coverage of their lifestyles and their fluctuating weight:

I think that the celebrities are more realistic, because they can be normal people. Their lives are to look good that is their job, their job is to advertise products and to look good, I think celebrities are much more attainable (Jennifer, 24).

It is insightful to discover that although the respondents to the research regard the image of many women as portrayed in adverts to be unattainable and unrealistic they still aspire to that ideal and are encouraged to buy the advertised product. It can be concluded from this that female consumers want aspirational images of women portrayed in advertisements.

Age Effect

A dominant perception that emerged among respondents is that women feel dissatisfied because they are constantly being exposed to this ideal of young, tall and thin women since they were young. They are ever more aware that if they do not try to fit into this ideal they will become more dissatisfied with their appearance and physique as it does not fit into society's idea of perfection. This supports research by Malkin *et al.* (1999) who suggests that the mass media due to their pervasiveness and reach are probably the single most powerful transmitters of sociocultural ideals:

I don't think it is a conscious thing to feel dissatisfied. I would think people become dissatisfied, because you are being exposed to this ideal and you become even more aware over time as you get older how you don't conform to that ideal that is in society and that is celebrated. I think that is how you develop dissatisfaction, as a child you are manipulated. I think dissatisfaction starts young. (Alison, 24)

Airbrushing

The dominant perception among respondents is that the image of women used in adverts is unattainable and unrealistic and that these women do not portray the “real” woman.

The women in the ads are completely unattainable. They have perfect skin, toned body, nothing ever seems to be out of place, every part of them is perfect and of course they have great jobs so that only increases how unattainable they are (Linda, 24).

When further probed on the impact of airbrushing and digital enhancements, respondents indicated that activity such as airbrushing and computer modification further differentiates women in adverts from women in real life and heightens their unattainability:

I don't think the portrayal of women in ads is attainable or realistic because a lot of the pictures are digitally perfected before they are inputted for a magazine so therefore it is not reality (Karen, 35).

Respondents are aware that the women used in adverts are digitally enhanced and computer modified to such an extent that the shape of any woman can be changed from lengthening her body to changing her skin tone. Despite this awareness, however, it emerges from the research that when viewing women in adverts the reality of airbrushing etc. does not appear to register. They still prefer to adhere to the ideal of perfection broadcasted by the media and fashion and cosmetic industry.

Other Effects

Predominantly respondents believe that women in advertisements are portrayed as thin, and interestingly respondents articulated that they are often portrayed as housewives. This supports findings by Gustafson *et al.* (1999) who states that women are portrayed as dumb blondes, indecisive, childlike, frivolous, obsessed with or submissive to men, simple housewives, superwomen, sexual objects, beautifully or successfully slim or dieting for a “waif” look:

Look at the use of women in advertising, there is the housewife who believes that germs are her worst enemy, there is the skinny model and there is no in between. The yummy mummy might be in for one or two things but its either housewives or skinny models. That's how women are portrayed (Elizabeth, 32).

A dominant perception among respondents was that the media via advertising portray the thin ideal to encourage women to want to look like the women in the adverts and to encourage them to want to be excessively thin.

The advertising industry portrays the thin ideal to make women want to be excessively thin. I think that is the way it is portrayed in the media (Margaret, 24).

Respondents are also of the opinion that when consumers are viewing the adverts they are aware that they are unrealistic and unattainable yet they still watch the adverts and they still buy into the ideal behind the products.

You are aware that they are unattainable and unrealistic when you are looking at the advert yet you still look (Martina, 35).

A leading observation among respondents indicated that being subjected to thin attractive women in adverts can lead the respondents to develop dissatisfaction with regard to their own self image and physique.

I would definitely develop dissatisfaction, you obviously see the women in the ads and think God I wish I looked like her (Niamh, 22).

Further discussion on the issue of extreme dieting highlighted that although extreme dieting is complex with many contributing factors, respondents do believe the portrayal of women in adverts can be a contributing factor. Respondents believe that some women can develop an obsession with the tall thin women portrayed as perfection in adverts. This obsession results in these women wanting to mirror the perfect physique and lifestyle that is portrayed, perhaps in an attempt to fit with a socio-cultural idea of perfection. In these situations low self esteem and extreme dieting can occur as these women want to feel and look like the women they aspire to be. Therefore, the media can play a dangerous role influencing women through adverts into extreme dieting:

I suppose you are looking at larger people saying "thank God I don't look like that", but then you look at skinny women in adverts and think "but I wish I looked like that" (Caroline, 31).

It further emerges from the research that respondents accept as true that to be thin and project this ideal means that one has one's life under control and not just your weight. Respondents believe that in general employers are also influenced by the thin ideal as projected in the media and are more likely to employ a woman who is thin than they are to employ an overweight woman:

From the outside you see that thin women have their looks under control and so everything else must be under control. I got this email in college telling us that in interviews employers automatically are drawn to people who look good, who are well presented and not overweight (Jennifer, 24).

Respondents essentially believe that the media continue to encourage women to want to be thin by using the thin ideal in their adverts. While some elements of the media might portray the thin ideal as inappropriate, the majority of adverts continue to promote the thin ideal.

Codes of the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland

Ireland currently has no legislation preventing thin or extremely thin models appearing on magazine covers and television adverts, however, there is an organisation that monitors the content of advertising in the fashion and cosmetic industry. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI) is a founder member of the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) who aim to extend effective advertising self regulation across the European Union. The ASAI is not a law enforcement body and does not provide legal advice. The self-regulatory system is subordinate to and complements legislative controls on advertising and sales promotions and provides an alternative low cost and easily accessible means of resolving disputes. Section 9 of the Advertising Standards deals with health and slimming advertising. This section is divided into subsections two of the subsections relating to weight are 9.8 and 9.13:

- 9.8: Marketing communications for products and services in this category should not suggest that to be underweight is acceptable or desirable. Where testimonials or case histories are used, they must not refer to subjects who are or appear to be underweight.
- 9.13: For the purpose of the advertising code, normal weight means a body mass index between 18.5 and 24.9. Underweight means a body mass index of below 18.5.

Conclusion

It emerged from the current research findings that there are different factors operating at different levels that influence women to adhere to the thin ideal as female perfection. Firstly, it can be noted that respondents see a difference between the use of high end fashion models and low end fashion icons where celebrities are prevalent. It is apparent from the research that in general women do not aspire to look like the women at the high end of the fashion industry as they appear untouchable and unattainable because of their tall “giraffe like” slim physique. As evidenced by Ruggerone (2006) the objective at this end of the fashion industry is often to create sophisticated images to comply with high aesthetic standards. This research recommends closer collaboration between the creators of these images and the marketers of these images given the possibility of negative responses among the audience.

An interesting finding to emerge from the research suggests that women influence other women to conform to the “thin ideal” as the standard image of perfection. This suggests that women can cause dissatisfaction among each other as much as the media and adverts, if not more so. This influence among ones peers can cause dissatisfaction to develop into

extreme dieting and in worse cases eating disorders, and is dangerously prevalent among young women. It can be concluded that the media largely determines society's standard of perfection and women in turn perceive the thin ideal as the standard of perfection, resulting in them influencing each other to adhere to this perfect ideal.

Developing this conclusion in more depth it could be said that an overall cultural change regarding ideal body image is needed. Respondents in the research assumed that to be thin is to have ones life under control. This research concludes however that health as an aspirational issue would be more appropriate than thinness. A cultural change from thinness to healthiness could be suggested. Women need to be made aware that to be healthy is more important than to be thin e.g. a woman that is a size 8-10 can be perfectly healthy while the same applies for larger women e.g. a woman can be a size 14-16 and still be healthy. Therefore, the issue should not be the size of women but their health in relation to their size.

It was discussed during the research that culturally women are growing up too fast and that from a young age the idea of female perfection is implanted in young minds. To be thin and pretty is a standard as is evidenced in children stories such as Cinderella, where Cinderella was thin and beautiful while the sisters were larger and ugly. This influences girls from a young age and enhanced with the media's perceptions of beauty and their peers, puts significant amounts of pressure on young women to adhere to this thin perfect image. Therefore, culturally a focus on health issues instead of size issues might be required. In the long term this might have a positive impact on eating disorders and extreme dieting.

Airbrushing, computer modification and digital enhancements are widely becoming accepted as normal in adverts. Indeed, airbrushing is prevalent in the fashion and cosmetic industry so much so that it can lengthen a woman's neck and change her hair colour. The respondents were aware that airbrushing took place in advertisements that women are subjected to on a daily basis.

Developing this in more detail it is suggested throughout the research that although respondents are aware of what occurs behind the scenes of the adverts, women will still develop dissatisfaction from comparing themselves to the thin ideal in adverts. This is particularly insightful considering that the respondents know that the women in the adverts are altered and their appearance changed and enhanced.

In particular, the research generated data which paves the way for immediate action at a practical level for the industry to promote more positive body images for women. It could be said that an overall cultural change regarding ideal body image is needed. Respondents in the research assumed that to be thin is to have ones life under control. This research concludes however that health as an aspirational issue would be more appropriate than thinness. A cultural change from thinness to healthiness could be suggested. In the long term this might have a positive impact on eating disorders and extreme dieting.

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