

## **Why Choose to Shop Physically rather than Online for Purchasing Fresh Produce? A Study of Brick-and-Mortar Shoppers in Battaramulla Shopping Strip**

**Wellagiriya I. K. D. U., Kumar S.\* and Rajapaksha C.C.<sup>1</sup>**

Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management,  
Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Although traditional shoppers must travel to retail outlets to purchase fresh produce, they can purchase the produce from the convenience of their homes through online platforms. Yet online purchasing rates for fresh produce remain low. This research examines why customers physically visit brick-and-mortar supermarkets. It also examines the extent to which fresh produce is bought online relative to other products and services, and changes in the use of online retail outlets before, during, and after the COVID pandemic. Finally, the study explores the reasons for not engaging in purchasing online fresh produce, and identifies the key determinants affecting attitude towards the intention of purchasing fresh produce online. The conceptual model is built on the Technology Acceptance Model and Theory of Reasoned Action. First, a preliminary study was conducted to develop the questionnaire within the Battaramulla shopping strip, the study site. In the main study, using an exit poll method, 218 consumers' behaviours and perceptions were studied. Results indicate that online purchasing of fresh produce is lower relative to rates of use of online platforms for banking, purchasing of food and beverages, and textiles. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage who used online platforms was higher compared to before or after the pandemic. The reasons for not purchasing online were related to technological and quality issues. Hierarchical linear regression analyses on attitudes and intention to purchase online, demonstrated significant effects for age, educational level, occupation, and family size. Further of the variables related to purchasing behaviour only whether online purchasing was done during the COVID-19 lockdown period was significant, and of the attitudinal variables, personal awareness of security, personal innovativeness, and perceived ease of use were predictive ( $p < 0.05$ ). Using these findings e-grocers, retailers can develop better marketing and virtual platforms to develop better online services for their customers

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<sup>1</sup>Marketing Division, CIC Seeds PVT LTD, Kandy, Sri Lanka

\*skumar@agri.pdn.ac.lk