



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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UNDERSTANDING PREDISPOSITION OF CONSUMERS TOWARDS PRIVATE LABELS IN INDIAN GROCERY RETAIL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the quality of private label products and their market shares have grown to such an extent that most consumer goods manufacturers and retailers cannot afford to ignore them. What consumers think about private labels? It all depends on consumer perception and attitude towards emerging private labels. We carried out a survey of 102 respondents who are aware of private labels in grocery stores. The results showed that perception, education, income, occupation, marital status, earning members in the family and family size significantly influence their attitude towards private labels. Our study provides insights in Indian grocery retail context.

KEYWORDS

Demographic Characteristics, Indian Grocery Retail, Private Label, Perception.

MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Brands are considered units of meaning in the language of the consumer market culture (Pennington 2000). Brand perception is consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions, as reflected by their brand recognition or recall performance (Kotler and Lane 2006). Brand recall refers to consumer's ability to retrieve the brand from the memory (Keller 1993). The brands success depends on the degree of its significance to consumers and how they use them. Although brands tend to be created by attachment to products, they are not identical to products. They provide consumers with a level of quality and a name that can be trusted. Since brands provide additional value, they are priced higher.

Consumers interested in saving money at grocery retailer often attempt to do so by taking advantage of two different options. The first option is to purchase a national brand offered "on deal" (e.g., coupons, discounted prices). The second is to consider a private label brand, which is typically priced below non-price promoted national brands on an everyday basis. While consumers choosing either one of these options have a common goal of saving money, they have different attitudes and purchase behaviors regarding national brand and private label brands.

Food selection and consumption are complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of factors. They are transposed to consumer perception through a process of interaction of product characteristics and personal, socio-demographic, economic, psychographic, behavioural and cognitive determinants (Alvensleben 1997, Mowen 1993, Tuorila et al. 1998).

Keller (2002) identified the following key functions of the brand for consumers: identification of origin; definition of responsibility of producer; risk reduction; search cost reduction and a virtual contract with producer (promise, guarantee). While Deliza and MacFie (1996) put the main focus of brand on informational cue. Consumers combine actual information from shopping environment with past experiences and use them to make purchase decision, but they strive for a "cognitive efficiency" and try to use minimum of information. As a result, they use a brand as a simplifier of a decision making process and hence the foundation of brand power. Filser, (1994) and Schifferstein (2001) pointed out that the effect of a brand in the food choice is largely dependent on individual characteristics of consumers and it is possible to distinguish them according to their sensitivity to brand and loyalty to the brand (the persistent buying of a specific brand within a well defined context and having a positive attitude towards it).

Many grocery chains and standalone stores now sell primarily private label products. Private-label products are one of the ways a grocery chain can stand out when all of its competitors sell the same national brands. Plus, profit margins are higher on private-label goods because national brands need to include the cost of advertising in their prices; whereas grocery stores' advertising costs are distributed among everything in the store, not just the private label products.

PRIVATE LABELS CONCEPT

Private label products have become a global phenomenon and are of increasing interest to practitioners and academics alike. Private labels have gained a sizeable share of global grocery sales and further growth is predicted for the future (Ailawadi et al. 2008). These brands, owned and controlled by retailers, have become a significant threat to national brand manufacturers as the quality gap between the two closes (Herstein and Gamliel 2004). From the retailer's perspective, private labels are seen as a strategy to improve profitability and store image (Quelch and Harding 1996). The image of a store in turn is regarded as critical to retail success given the impact it is considered to have on store patronage, loyalty and profitability (Hansen and Solgaard 2004)

According to the ownership, two types of brands are distinguished. Manufacturer brand (also producer brand, national brand), which is owned and coordinated by a producer and sold through, a specific chain of stores and private label (also retailer's brand, own label) being owned, coordinated and sold exclusively by a retailer (Baltas 1997) as well as produced by a contracted manufacturer under license (Berthon et al. 1999). Kumar and Steenkamp (2007) have defined store brands to be any brand that is owned by the retailer or distributor and is sold only in its own outlets.

Originally, manufacturer brands dwarfed retailer brands in size and, through extensive marketing and sales by suggesting their brands were synonymous with "trust, quality and affluence" (Nirmalya 2007). However, in the early 1970s the balance of power began to shift in favour of retailers. Due to rapid expansion, retailers seized this power advantage and the inevitable negotiating prowess. With this size advantage, private label brands began to gain a stronger foothold in the market.

Private label brands which were first introduced over 100 years ago in few product categories, had seen an impressive growth in past few decades (Tarzijan 2004) and private label share is expected to grab almost 22 per cent of sales in developed markets by 2010 (Badhe 2010). Private labels proliferated in a number of product categories and garnered major market share as retailers perceived numerous benefits by their introduction. Apart from providing higher retail margins in comparison to national brands (Ashley 1998), private labels added diversity to the product line in a retail category (Raju et al. 1995). Added benefits accrued to the retailer in terms of differentiating its offerings from competing retailers as well as having greater leverage with manufacturers of national brands (Quelch and Harding 1996).

The presence of private labels nowadays is increasing rapidly and they are becoming one of the major factors in the developed food market from one side, and from the other are being considered as a significant threat to producers' brands and manufacturers' profitability (Baltas 1997, Guerrero et al. 2000). Viewed in another way, the retailers are transforming themselves from the role of pure customers to the manufacturers to the role of direct competitors to the manufactures (Dhar and Hoch 1997).

According to Images Retail Report 2009, as quoted in "Indian Retail: Time to Change Lanes" by KPMG; private label brands constitute 10-12% of organized retail in India and private-label market is expected to touch a value of Rs 6,500 crore by 2010-11. Of this, the highest penetration of private label brands is by Trent at 90%, followed by Reliance at 80% and Pantaloons at 75%. Big retailers such as Shoppers Stop and Spencer's have a penetration of 20% and 10% respectively.

PURPOSE

National and private label products have been in competition for decades. But the battle for market share has intensified in recent years due to a variety of reasons including changes in the marketplace, evolution in the channel of distribution and the proactive strategic options taken by national and manufacturers as well as private label retailers.

Both the manufacturers' brands and private label brands are fighting to attract the consumers on these factors. In the past, lower priced private label brands were equated with lower quality products when they were first introduced (Steiner 2004). However, in recent times, major retailers have increased the quality level of their private label brands to near or, in some cases, even better than that of the national brand leaders (Quelch and Harding 1996). There are evidences that quality private label brands can help differentiate a retail store and create store loyalty (Corstjens and Lal 2000, Sudhir and Talukdar 2004). Sudhir and Talukdar (2004) also find that a retailer's profit can go up when the sale of private label brands increases.

Major retailers see consumers as the main driving force for the continued existence and future development of private label brands (Chronsell and Naucèr 2006). Given this context, it is important to understand consumer's predisposition towards private label brands and the antecedent perceptions towards private labels in grocery retail stores. Therefore the purpose of the study is to study the perception and attitude of grocery buyers towards private label brands? In addition, do consumers' profiles influence their attitudes towards private label grocery products?

Toward this, the researcher proposes specific research objectives based on the literature in marketing and consumer behavior.

- To investigate the relationship between consumers' perception and attitudes towards private label grocery products.
- To understand whether consumer demographics influence attitude towards private labels.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Large research attention has been devoted to the effect of brand on overall liking and sensory evaluation of food (Cardello 1994, Deliza and MacFie 1996). Filser (1994) and Schifferstein (2001) pointed out that the effect of a brand in the food choice is largely dependent on individual characteristics of consumers and it is possible to distinguish them regarding to their sensitivity to brand and loyalty to the brand (the persistent buying of a specific brand within a well defined context and having a positive attitude towards it).

With the rise of well-organized retail chains, private labels have emerged as a key weapon in the battle between manufacturers and retailers over channel control and consumer loyalty (Patti and Fisk 1982). Quelch and Harding (1996) argued that the strength of private label varies with the economic conditions and generally increase when the economy is weak and decrease during better economic condition.

Private label attitude is —a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner due to product evaluations, purchase evaluations, and/or self-evaluations associated with private label grocery products (Burton et al. 1998, p.298). These researchers reported that consumers with highly favourable attitudes to private labels purchased fifty percent more private label products than those who gave low ratings to private labels, indicating that favourable private label attitude translates to purchase behaviour. Consequently it is important to understand the drivers of those perception and attitudes.

Mills (1995) poses the question "Why do Retailers Sell Private Labels?" and finds that private labels increase the channel's overall profits, while the incentive to introduce private labels is a direct consequence of the retailers' increase in their share of total channel profits. It is noticeable that store brands can be found mainly in products having a low added value, which seems to indicate that consumers rather than looking to save money are aiming to minimize the risk (Mendez 1997).

Raju et al. (1995) assert that retailers have become more proficient at managing their private label brands. However, Esbjerg et al. (2004) note that retailers face conflicting demands in their brand architecture decisions, when the combination of private labels, national brands and generic products are all offered together by the retailer. On the one hand retailers attempt to differentiate themselves by offering products that are unique to their stores, yet on the other hand they need to meet consumer expectations by offering national brands that are available elsewhere.

Similarly other studies support that private labels result in increased retailer's profits (Hoch and Banerji 1993, Raju et al. 1995), provide a strategic weapon to elicit concessions from the national brand manufacturers (Narasimhan and Wilcox 1998), assist in developing loyalty to a retailer and in the creation of a distinct corporate identity for a business (Herstein and Gamliel 2006) and to compete with leading national brands by creating brand loyalty by differentiating the retailer (Hoch et al. 2002, Labeaga et al. 2007)

Fernie et al. (2003) have identified various advantages to retailers for the development of a private label brand: (1) increased profitability through cost saving and increased margins; (2) increased store loyalty and creation of a distinct corporate identity; (3) opportunities to seize new market ventures; and (4) increased bargaining leverage with suppliers. A further key motivation is to create competitive advantage through store differentiation by offering products unique to the store (Juhl et al. 2006).

Herstein and Gamliel (2006) contend that a private label brand can provide retailers with the ability to better control shelf-space and increase bargaining leverage with suppliers.

PRICE AND QUALITY OF PRIVATE LABEL

Consumer perceptions of private labels have changed as retailers have repositioned them over time. The reduction in the gap between own labels and national brands in terms of price and quality, together with the increasing promotion of retailer names and their own brands, has changed consumer perceptions of own labels and reduced perceived risk associated with their purchase (McGoldrick 1984). Nevertheless, studies continue to show that private labels are perceived as inferior in quality to national brands. —Private labels suffer from a lack of a strong, quality image (Vaidyanathan and Agrawal 2000).

Early studies offered mixed evidence about consumer perceptions of private label price and quality. Some indicated that users of private labels had more favourable perceptions than non-users. In Myers's (1967) study nearly one half of respondents considered private labels to have lower prices and lower quality than national brands, but regular private label users considered private labels to be the same quality as national brands. Similarly, researchers (Murphy and Laczniak 1979, Rosen 1984, Wheatley 1981) reported that buyers of generic products perceived their price to be lower than that of national brands, but that they perceived the quality of generics to be comparable to that offered by national brands.

Private labels were seen as offering the best value for money, although on most other attributes they were perceived as sitting between national brands and generics (Bellizzi et al. 1981). In contrast, Cunningham et al. (1982) found that shoppers shared similar perceptions of both private labels and national brands on all product characteristics such as quality, reliability, nutrition, appearance and taste regardless of which they purchased. However, private label users perceived private labels to be more favourably priced and national brand users rated national brands higher on quality. Interestingly, national brand buyers perceived the prices of national brands and private labels to be similar even though they were not, suggesting that their purchase decisions were driven by non-price factors. Dick et al. (1995) found that private label prone consumers rate the quality and value for money of private labels higher than consumers not prone to private labels.

Studies (for e.g., Hoch and Banerji 1993, Miranda and Joshi 2003, Sethuraman 2003) have found that quality is more important than price in terms of consumer satisfaction with private labels, the decision to purchase private labels and private label market share.

National brands were perceived to be less variability in product quality than private brands. The greater variability in quality across the private label products increases the risk that a given private label will not perform in a satisfactory manner (Bettman 1994, Montgomery and Wernerfelt 1992). Such result suggests that consumers who are more risk averse would be less receptive.

DeVecchio (2001) found private label quality perceptions to be higher in categories where functional risk is low, specifically, where consumers believe products are less complex to produce, and where they perceive there is little variation in functional quality or product performance across brands. Similarly, Zielke and Dobbelstein (2007) found that consumers are more willing to trial new private labels in categories where perceived risk is low, and conversely less willing in categories with high perceived risk. Where social risk is high, premium private labels are preferred over classic private labels and generics.

Hoch and Lodish (1998) reported that as the price gap between private labels and national brands increases, consumers perceived value for money (quality in relation to price) increases although the degree of value diminishes as the price gap gets larger. While some studies indicate that consumers who associate quality with price have less favourable attitudes to private labels (Burton et al. 1998, Garretson et al. 2002). The latter found that consumers who have strong price-quality associations in a category tend not to buy private labels in the category, and that this affect is moderated by perceived risk.

A number of studies have shown that attitudes to private labels are positively affected by price consciousness (for e.g., Anselmsson and Johansson 2007, Burton et al. 1998, Sinha and Batra 1999). Sinha and Batra (1999) also found that perceived category risk reduces price consciousness and hence reduces private label purchase in the category. In other words, consumers are willing to pay the higher prices for national brands in categories perceived as being higher risk. Other studies confirmed that private label prone consumers are price conscious (Baltas and Argouslidis 2007, Burger and Schott 1972), although interestingly Martinez and Montaner (2008) found that while the most price sensitive consumers are more prone to private labels, they are not characterized as budget-constrained.

Some studies have found that private label prone consumers are price conscious but not quality conscious (Ailawadi et al. 2001, Martinez and Montaner 2008), although this finding is apparently contradicted by studies that found perceived quality is an important factor in private label preference (Baltas and Argouslidis 2007, Richardson et al. 1994, Veloutsou et al. 2004). As a result consumers are more willing to try a new private label when there is a small or a large price differential between the private label and the national brand, but least willing when there is only a medium differential (Zielke and Duberstein 2007). However, Anselmsson and Johansson (2007) reported that consumers are more concerned with the value of private labels than with quality per se.

PRIVATE LABEL AND STORE IMAGE

We review studies investigating the relationship between private labels and store image. Livesey and Lennon's (1978) study found that the degree of private label acceptance is store-specific. Richardson et al. (1996) investigated the effect of one aspect of store image - store aesthetics - on consumer evaluations of private label grocery products. They found that whereas consumers judge the quality of national brands to be the same regardless of store aesthetics, evaluations of private labels are influenced by store attractiveness. Guerrero et al. (2000) found that the perception of private label quality depends on the store, which again suggests that store image plays a role in private label attitudes. The research indicates that consumers who purchase private label brands regularly do not only become loyal to that particular brand but also to the retailer through which it is sold (Collins and Burt 2003).

Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003) drew on cue utilization theory and the brand extension construct to posit that consumer perceptions of stores can be generalized to specific private labels. Their study confirmed the hypothesis that consumer perceptions of store image and specific private labels are positively associated. The authors also posited that because retailers are positioned differently in consumers' minds, perceptions of specific private labels also differ across stores. This hypothesis was not confirmed, however, since private labels were perceived most favourably by consumers who shopped most at the store.

Consumers tend to associate the retailer with its respective private label brand. Therefore negative perceptions of the retailer may impact negatively on its fascia (that is store) brand and vice versa (Ailawadi and Keller 2004, Veloutsou et al. 2004). Semeijn et al. (2004) found that consumer judgements of private labels are influenced by their perceptions of store image as it can act as a risk reducer by reducing functional and psychosocial risk associated with buying private labels in certain categories. Adding to these findings, Vahie and Paswan (2006) reported that consumer perceptions of the quality of private labels in the apparel market are influenced by the store image dimensions of store atmosphere and store quality.

Liu and Wang (2008) found that store image is a strong predictor of general attitudes to private labels while store image does not affect attitudes to national brands. Looking specifically at service, Huang (2009) found that the quality of service offered by retailers is a strong predictor of the perceived quality of private labels. Against these positive findings, however, Lee and Hyman (2008) found that store attitude had only a weak effect on attitudes to private labels, although the authors note that the significance of the relationship may depend on which stores and store image factors are studied.

THE RESEARCH GAP

Past studies on private labels have mostly concentrated on mature markets like United States and United Kingdom where private labels are well established. There has been relatively little research of emerging markets where private labels are not so well established or where they are in earlier stages of development (Anselmsson and Johansson 2007). Perhaps in response to this gap, recent studies have examined private labels in these countries, for example Greece, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Israel and Taiwan. These studies largely found that consumers in different countries have different perceptions of private labels.

Furthermore, research of attitudes to private labels has largely examined attitudes to private labels in general, even though there is some evidence to suggest that attitude to specific private labels category is more important than generalised attitudes. Consequently the research problem to be addressed in the current study is: How does perception and attitude affect customers purchase behaviour.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To achieve and test the objectives an empirical study was conducted. Consumer survey was undertaken to collect the data. A self-report measure was employed by designing a simple structured questionnaire.

SAMPLE

Research reveals that the proximity of a store to a consumer's home exerts a significant influence on the consumer's evaluation and patronage of the store (Eplli and Shilling 1996). W collected data from consumers residing in a single neighborhood. A researcher personally contacted each household at their

residence. The family member responsible for household grocery purchases was asked to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaires were subsequently collected in person from each household.

DATA COLLECTION TOOL

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section assessed shopping behaviour. The second section of the questionnaire assessed perception and attitude towards private labels using a 7-point likert scale anchored by (1) strongly disagree (7) strongly agree.

Several questions were asked to measure the general perception on private label and several items from Richardson et al. (1996) and Burton et al. (1998) concerning national and store brands in general were used to gauge overall attitude towards store brands. These were: always purchase store brands, purchase store brands in certain categories, purchase national brands only when on sale, purchase store brands when economical, store brands offer substantial savings. A pre-test was completed with 30 respondents to test for the reliability and appropriateness of the questionnaire before the main study was carried out.

RESULTS

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Consistent with the previous research findings in the Indian context, majority (76 percent) of the respondents were female. Nearly 33.33 percent of respondents were in the age group between 31-41 years of age. Majority of the respondents (55 percent) were post graduates. 22.55 percent of the respondents belonged to annual family income group of less than Rs. 2.5 lakh, with majority of 38.24 percent in the income group between Rs. 5 lakh to Rs. 10 lakh, and only 9.8 percent of respondents in the income group of below Rs. 1 lakh. Majority of the respondents who were responsible for grocery buying were unemployed house wives (42.16%) and followed by private employees (27.45%). Most of the family were nuclear family with 3 and 4 members in the family i.e. 41.18% and 22.55% respectively.

SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR

Analysis of the shopping behaviour of the respondents revealed the all respondents were aware of the availability of the private labels in the grocery category in general and private labels in the store the shop. Major categories of the private labels bought by the respondents are staple food and spice items (82.35%) with bakery items being 8.82%. Shopping for the grocery items once in a month is a common phenomena among the majority of respondents (65.69%) followed by weekly fill-in shopping (25.49). Only 3.92% of the respondents shop grocery items on daily basis.

Among the respondents 61.76% do their shopping in the evening time followed by afternoon by (17.65%). In today's scenario grocery shopping is a family activity with 58.82% of the respondents shop with their spouse, similar to the findings of McKinsey Quarterly report 2007 where 70 percent of respondents shop in groups. Majority of the respondents carry shopping list (68.63%).

For most of the respondents (38.24%) 'Other Sources' other than advertisement, family and friends act as a major source of information. Friends were the source of information for 19.61% of the respondents. 55.88% of the respondents were associated with the same shop for 1-5 years and for 58.82 % of the shopper's monthly expenses on grocery is less than Rs.4000.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this section we first examine the reliability of the factors under consideration. Correlation and analysis of variance (ANOVA) is performed to understand differences in perception and attitude towards private label across demographic characteristics. And finally regression analysis is carried out to test the relationship between perception and attitude towards private label.

RELIABILITY

Reliability refers to the extent to which a scale produces consistent results if repeated measurements are made (Malhotra 2004). Cronbach's alpha (or coefficient alpha) is the most commonly used measure to judge the internal reliability of factors or constructs (Bryman and Bell 2003). The Cronbach's alpha generally varies from 1 to 0 and a value of 0.60 or above is normally regarded as satisfactory for internal reliability (Malhotra 2004). The reliability tests show that each of the identified factors was 0.705 and 0.716 for perception and attitude about private label and were within the acceptable range.

PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRIVATE LABELS ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The aim of this section is to explore how respondents differ in terms of their perception and attitude towards private label across demographic characteristics. To achieve this aim, correlation test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed. In the case of ANOVA, perception and attitude were utilized as the dependent variables and age, gender, income level, educational qualification, occupation, marital status, family size and earning members in the family are considered as independent variables.

TABLE 1: RESULT OF CORRELATION BETWEEN PERCEPTION, ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRIVATE LABEL ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic variables	Perception		Attitude	
	Pearson Correlation (r)	p	Pearson Correlation(r)	p
Family size	-.081	.421	-.171	.086
Earning Members in the Family	-.081	.421	-.100	.316

The correlation result showed that there was no significant correlation between perception towards private label and family size ($r = -.081, n = 102, p = .421$), earning members in the family ($r = -.081, n = 102, p = .421$). Similarly there was no correlation between attitude towards private label and family size ($r = -.171, n = 102, p = .086$), earning members in the family ($r = -.100, n = 102, p = .316$). The result is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 2: RESULT OF ANOVA BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRIVATE LABEL ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic Variables	Perception		Attitude	
	F	p	F	p
Age	3.910	.005	15.127	.000
Gender	6.424	.013	.719	.398
Annual Family Income	1.907	.115	7.580	.000
Educational Qualifications	4.538	.013	7.201	.001
Occupation	3.940	.005	13.538	.000
Marital Status	9.821	.002	10.807	.001

The ANOVA result (Table 2) showed significant difference in perception towards private label across age ($F_{(4, 97)} = 3.910, p < .05$), gender ($F_{(1, 100)} = 6.424, p < .01$), educational qualification ($F_{(2, 99)} = 4.538, p < .01$), occupation ($F_{(4, 97)} = 3.940, p < .05$), and marital status ($F_{(1, 100)} = 9.821, p < .05$), but no significant difference across annual family income ($F_{(4, 97)} = 1.907, p = .115$). Similarly ANOVA result showed significant difference in attitude towards private label across age ($F_{(4, 97)} = 15.127, p < .001$), annual family income ($F_{(4, 97)} = 7.580, p < .001$), educational qualification ($F_{(2, 99)} = 7.201, p < .001$), occupation ($F_{(4, 97)} = 13.538, p < .001$), and marital status ($F_{(1, 100)} = 10.807, p < .001$), but no significant difference across gender ($F_{(1, 101)} = .719, p = .398$).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Regression analysis was used to investigate the relationship between private label perception, consumer demographics and attitude towards private label.

TABLE 3: REGRESSION RESULTS FOR ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRIVATE LABEL

Variables	Adjusted R Square	β	t-value	P
Attitude towards Private Label	.689			.000
Perception		.475	6.906	.000
Age		-.025	-.324	.747
Family size		-.175	-2.499	.014
Gender		-.060	-.825	.411
Marital Status		.193	2.971	.004
Earning Members in Family		.235	2.846	.005
Income Level		-.244	-3.301	.001
Education level		.199	2.996	.004
Occupation		-.374	-5.435	.000

To investigate which of the identified antecedents of attitude towards private label were salient in determining the attitude, a multiple liner regression analysis was performed. In the analysis, attitude was used as the dependent variable and perception, age, family size, gender, marital status, earning members in the family; income, educational level, and occupation of the respondents were used as the independent variables.

The results (Table 3) of the multiple regression using enter method, shows that attitude towards private label is significantly ($F_{9, 92} = 25.842$; $p < .001$), and adjusted $R^2 = .689$. Perception ($\beta = .475$, $p < .001$), family size ($\beta = -.175$, $p < .05$), marital status ($\beta = .193$, $p < .01$), earning members in the family ($\beta = .235$, $p < .01$), income level ($\beta = -.244$, $p < .05$) education level ($\beta = .199$, $p < .05$) and occupation ($\beta = -.374$, $p < .001$) are significantly influencing attitude towards private label. However age ($\beta = .025$, $p = .747$) and gender ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .411$) are not significant in predicting attitude towards private label.

CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The objective of the study was to observe grocery shopping behavior and determine the effect of consumer perception dimensions and demographics on attitude toward private label brands among grocery consumers. The result of the multiple regression analysis shows that perception of private label brand has the major influence on attitude towards private label brands. Among the demographic characteristics age and gender of the respondents did not influence but family size, income and occupation negatively influenced the attitude towards private label brands among grocery buyers'.

There are several implications for the retailers who are willing to target consumers with through private labels. First, the study finds that perception is an important instrument in developing attitude toward private label brands among consumers. This implies that retailers should engage in generating positive reviews about their private label brands and at the same time counter any negative perception of their private label brands. They could accomplish this through in-store promotions, store image building and advertising.

Other factors that were found to be important are consumers' education level, earning members in the family and marital status. Retailers should, therefore, focus on targeting these segments. Our results showed that occupation, income and family size of the respondents had an indirect effect on attitude toward private label brands.

This seems to stem from the fact that better occupational level and higher income level of the consumers result in them not considering private label brands as providing value for money and symbol of status. Thus, the retailers should engage in promotional activities to promote their private label brands as providing value for money.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study focuses on the grocery consumers. As the current study does not consider the effect of product categories on attitude toward private label brands the results cannot be generalized to other consumer. Differences in product categories have been found to affect the purchase behavior of private label brands (Batra and Sinha 2000, Chen, 2005, Sinha and Batra 1999). Future research could expand the current research across product categories to investigate whether consumer perception influence on attitude toward private label brands as found in the current study. Another area that has not been investigated is the influence of antecedents of perception of private labels. For example, reputation dimension factors, consumer orientation and motives could have an impact on perception. Marketing construct and deal proneness construct which can also affect attitude toward private label brands. Research could expand the current study to include these constructs.

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