Private Label Perception Of Customers : Effects Of Socio Demographic Variables

Subodh Saxena*, Ritu Srivastava**

subodh.praj@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Private labels brands (PLBs) or store brands have shown remarkable growth for the last few years in Indian Retail market. The major reason for this remarkable success is that Private labels help Retail chain store to attract customers, build loyalty, generate large sales and enhance profit margins. The response of retail customer for private label brands (PLBs) is quite encouraging, especially in food and grocery segment, in spite of presence of leading national manufacturers brands in most of the categories. Though, initially PLBs were just considered as a cheap substitute of national brand but today they are a part of well defined retail mix strategy and have acquired large space in retail stores including premium categories for profit maximization and customer loyalty. This is an emerging opportunity and retail market is now keen to understand consumer dynamics towards PLBs. It is important to identify what drives private-label market and to understand the characteristics of the modern shopper. With growing levels of disposable income, shoppers are far more open to experimenting with products than ever before. With the rise of modern retail store, the perceptions about shopping have changed. Rather than viewing shopping as a chore, more and more Indians are finding it to be an enjoyable experience.

This exploratory study examines the consumer's psychographic motivations for private labels with respect to national brands and their involvement in purchasing of PLBs in modern retail stores. The objective is to study consumer behavior with respect to socio-demographic variable such as gender, age, occupation and income. An exploratory research has been conducted among consumers in NCR, who purchase from modern retail stores. The study findings reveal that respondent's gender, household income, occupation and age did not influence their perception towards private labels.

Key Words: India, Retailing, Private Labels

INTRODUCTION

Private labels are great assets for retail firms, as they help attract customers, build loyalty and generate large sales margins. Though private labels have evolved worldwide from being cheap substitutes for manufacturers' brands to strong contenders for them over the years, their role in the Indian market at present is limited. Many Indian retail firms have launched their private labels, but several of them have not been very successful.

Private labels like Food Bazaar's Fresh-n-Pure, Reliance fresh's Select and TATA-Trent's Westside are very popular among Indian consumers. Indian consumers have begun to acknowledge the modern form of retailing as a better option for purchasing their requirements due to the shopping convenience that it provides them on many counts. This has led to manufacturers queuing up for the prominent

* *Senior Manager - Bidding & Estimation, Simon India Ltd, Gurgaon (Haryana)*

** *Asssitant Professor, Management Development Institute, Gurgaon (Haryana)*

stocking of their brands on the retail-store-shelves so as to influence consumer'spurchase decisions effectively (Kumar and Jawahar , 2013). The competition to a manufacturers' brand, of late, comes not only in the form of popularity of other manufacturer brands, but also in the form of predominant presence of private labels in these retail outlets. Retailers are more likely to gain an increase in their category profits by introducing private labels in product categories which have a lot of manufacturers' brands.

As private label brands account for an increasing percentage of a consumer's shopping basket, several scholars and marketers have attempted to understand and explain consumer behavior towards private label brands. Extant academic research on private label brands has attempted to profile the private label brand consumers on a variety of psychographic variables. These include studies focusing on price and price consciousness, quality perceptions, brand and store loyalty, deal proneness, search and risk assessment and product involvement. Although psychographics are undeniably important, in terms of business practice, many consumer product and service companies primarily, or even completely, focus on socio-demographics ((Shukla, Banerjee and Adidam, 2013)) Socio-demographics are important to marketers as these can be applied to segmenting and targeting private label brand consumers. Socio-demographic variables such as sex, age, income and occupation may have significant influence on consumer purchase decisions. This exploratory study attempts to observe the socio-demographic effect on perception and motive of buying private label brands with respect to national brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing importance of private labels has given rise to a number of research works in recent years worldwide and India as well. These researches are related to private labels, investigating the consumer, retailer and market factors for their success. Broadly categorized, researches are related to investigating motivations and benefits of private labels for retailers, consumer segmentation studies, studies of consumer perceptions, attitudes and behavior, retailer positioning of private labels and the strategic responses of national brand manufacturers.

One such study on developing a conceptual framework that guides the investigation of the role of four moderating factors in strengthening the private label brand share-store loyalty link: (1) customers' price-oriented behavior, (2) degree of commoditization of the product category, (3) product category involvement, and (4) the retailer's price positioning draws on a large-scale empirical study using a household panel and questionnaire data for 35 diverse fast-moving consumer goods product categories. The results of this study show that the relationship between private label share and store loyalty is more complex, specifically, the private label brand share-store loyalty link is stronger for customers with high price oriented behavior, retailers with a low price positioning, and product categories that are less commoditized and have relatively higher involvement (Fischer, Cramer and Hoyer, 2014)). Šeštokait?, (2010) offers more insights into consumers' store brand products' buying motives and, by applying the Means-end Chains methodology and the corresponding "laddering" interviewing technique, to design cognitive structures (i.e. product attributes - use benefits - consumers' values links) of the consumers' purchasing behavior towards the national brands and the private labels. Burton, Donald, Richard and Judith, 1998 have assessed measure of consumers' attitude towards private label brands. Predictions are then tested regarding relationships between private label attitude and (1) latent perceptual and sales promotions constructs and (2) purchase behaviors measured in a field setting. The measure is positively related to price consciousness, deal proneness and smart shopper self perceptions and negatively related to propensity to be brand loyal and hold price-quality perceptions. Predictive validity of private label measure is supported by positive relationship with private label purchases from a grocery store shopping trip. Despite a positive relationship between the latent constructs of private label attitude and deal proneness, the consumer segment that allocated a high percentage of total purchase to private label products made fewer purchases on sale or with a coupon. These findings suggest that consumer may choose between price related deals and private label purchases.

Richardsoii, Dick and Jain, 1994, examined the relative importance of extrinsic versus intrinsic cues in determining perceptions of store brand. Results of the experiment suggest that consumers' evaluations of store brand items are driven primarily by the extrinsic cues that these products display rather than intrinsic characteristics. In addition they found that price consciousness for money orientation taken by retailers in the marketing of their private label lines may represent a suboptimal strategy and recommend a quality orientation. Scattone, 1997 examined the attitude strength and conceptualized it in the domain of consumers' brand attitudes. A comprehensive set of attitudinal characteristics pertaining to strength were submitted to a factor analysis. The results confirmed a multidimensional structure and reveal the following seven unique dimensions: engagement, commitment, centrality, intensity, knowledge, evaluative structural consistency and personal approbation. Relationships between each of these with intended purchase and sampling behavior support the contention that the dimensions do not have wholly similar relationships with the consequences of attitude strength i.e. prediction of behavior. The findings indicate the strongest relationships between evaluative structural consistency, engagement and commitment with consumers' intended behavior (Scattone, 1997). The study also indicated that the moderating role of attitude strength on persuasion is most evident when indicated by evaluative structural consistency, knowledge, commitment or engagement. In addition, examinations of the underlying cognitive processes find resistance to persuasion marked by selectivity in elaboration, recall and judgment of incongruent product information contained in the message. The major research work related to consumer perception towards private labels and their buying preference category include Shukla, Banerjee and Adidam, 2013 examined the moderating influence of socio-demographic variables; gender, age, education, income and family size on the relationship between psychographic measures; deal proneness, price-related deal proneness, end-of-aisle display proneness, impulsiveness, smart-shopper self-perceptions and brand loyalty and consumer's attitude towards private label brands. The proposed hypotheses were tested by collecting data at three different British supermarkets and assessed using structural equation modeling. The study findings revealed;

(i) the significance of deal proneness among high-income consumers;

(ii) the end-of-aisle display proneness among older, high-income and highly educated consumers and

(iii) the relationship between impulsiveness and brand attitude among low-income and less-educated consumers.

In India, a few research papers on private labels have published in recent years. These research works include study by Gala, Ramchandra and Patil, 2013 on consumer attitude towards private label and national brand and their behavior towards various retail outlets and Kirana stores available in the Sangli district, Maharashtra India. The study concluded that the customers see private label as a local product which is not been considered same as the national brand. The majority of respondents prefer both national and private label as compared to individual specific brand, but has changed along with change in demographic profile. Product wise preferences shows that, majority customers prefer national brands for purchasing electronic, luxury, sanitary and clothing items whereas they prefer private label for food and other miscellaneous items. Private labels purchase is influenced by positive world of mouth. On other hand, poor quality is a major reason for people do not prefer to buy private label products. The major reasons of purchasing private labels are quality followed by price and then availability in the retail outlet. Joshua, Selvakumarand Varadharajan, 2013 studied similar study in Coimbatore, India and revealed that preference pattern changes with respect to demographic profile of respondents for private label brand and national brand. They examined three categories of private labels, namely food and non food FMCG, apparel and consumer durables and found that freshness is the most important factor that contributes the sales growth of private labels. Respondents prefer excellent packaging towards brand and value for money towards private labels. It is inferred that quality and price of national brand products are high when compare to private label products, packaging of national brand products are attractive when compare to the private label products, risk of buying national brand products are less risk when compare to the private label products and brand image of buying national brand products are high when compare to the private label products. SenthilvelKumar, David and Jawahar , 2013 also performed study in Coimbatore, India to understand perception and intention of consumer while purchasing private labels. The study revealed that the buyers of private labels could be classified into three and two clusters respectively. The respondent's age and income did not influence their perception and intention, but their gender did.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study on private labels assumes importance in the light of the fact that very few Indian-market-specific findings are presently available for understanding the buying behavior related to private labels in India. This research has beenconducted with the aim to examine how socio-demographic variables of gender, age, occupation and income influence the attitude and perception (psychographic motivations) of modern retail store consumer towards private label brands in comparison to national brands.

RESEARCH OUTCOME

This exploratory study investigates the relationships between psychographic variables and socio-demographic variables for profiling private label brand consumers. The reasons for analyzing the interrelationship between the roles played by psychographics and socio-demographics in profiling private label consumers include the following :

i. It may help retailers to focus on demographic segment of importance.
ii. Second, psychographic factors, which are important and have positive influence on consumer buying behavior can help retailers to have better focus on those attributes while making strategic decisions.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted for the present research paper is exploratory and descriptive in nature asthe study is based on theoretical frameworks and research work done earlier in other parts of the world. It is descriptive in nature as it attempts to describe, explain and interpret the consumer behavior by collecting responses through survey method. The primary data in the form of responses to a structured questionnaire was collected from working executives in private and government organizations in the NCR of Delhi. The questionnaire design considered two dimensions;

(i) demographics of the respondent such as gender, age, occupation and personal income,
(ii) perception of respondents towards private labels in comparison to national brands on ten psychographic variables as mentioned in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 CONSUMER PSYCHOGRAPHIC MOTIVATIONS DEFINED

Consumer Psychographic Motivations	Definitions
1. Quality	Product quality of Private labels in comparison to national label brands
2. Price consciousness	Price of private labels in comparison to available substitute/ equivalent products in national brands
3. Pack size	Availability of convenient pack size of product in private label in comparison to national brands
4. Variety	Availability of variety of private label products in comparison to national brands
5. Packaging	Attractiveness of product packaging of private labels in comparison to national brands
6. Need Satisfier	Product orientation to fulfill consumer need - Private labels products in comparison to national brands
7. Discount /Promotion	In terms of providing promotional benefits such as discount/ extra quantity/ freebies / coupons etc. - private labels in comparison to national brands
8. Pre-sales Counseling	In terms of getting pre-sales information (quality, offers, features etc.) from store executive for private labels in comparison to national brands
9. After Sales Support	In terms of getting after-sales support (exchange, return, warrantee etc.) for private labels in comparison to national brands
10. Credibility associated with retail store name	How strongly retail store leverage their store brand goodwill associated with private labels in comparison to national brands.

Since a readymade questionnaire was not available on the subject, the questionnaire was prepared through literature by indentifying major parameters of consumer attitude and perception being considered for private labels. The perception of private labels as compared to national brands was measured on a five point Likert scale; 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. While designing the survey questionnaire, it was observed that people were not aware about definition of private label brand. To avoid any misinterpretation a brief description of private label brands was introduced in the beginning of the survey. The respondents, who do not visit/purchase from modern retail stores, were filtered at the first question from the responses. 171 responses were considered out of 227 responses received.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents data analysis using SPSS software for testing hypotheses listed in the last section. The analysis includes the following:

i. Frequency distribution of socio-demographic variables of the respondents
ii. Frequency analysis of data with respect to psychographic variablesand frequency distribution of modern retail stores customer

from the total survey sample and

iii. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test the variance caused by socio demographic variables of age, gender, occupation and income, if any.

TABLE 2 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE DATA: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO BOUGHT FROM MODERN RETAIL STORES

Respondent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Purchase from Modern Retail Stores	171	80.7	80.7
Do not Purchase from Modern Retail Stores	41	19.3	100.0
Total	**212**	**100.0**	

TABLE 3 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE DATA: GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	69	40.4	40.4
Male	102	59.6	100.0
Total	**171**	**100.0**	

TABLE 4 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE DATA: AGE GROUP

Age Group (years)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-25	26	15.2	15.2
26-30	53	31.0	46.2
31-35	34	19.9	66.1
36-40	20	11.7	77.8
41-50	18	10.5	88.3
51 and above	20	11.7	100.0
Total	**171**	**100.0**	

TABLE 5 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE DATA: INCOME GROUP

Income Group (Rs)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below 100000	10	5.8	5.8
100000-250000	27	15.8	21.6
251000-500000	30	17.5	39.2
500001-1000000	46	26.9	66.1
1000001 and Above	58	33.9	100.0
Total	**171**	**100.0**	

TABLE 6 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE DATA: OCCUPATION

Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Salaried	105	61.4	61.4
Self Employed	23	13.5	74.9
Student	14	8.2	83.0
Home maker	29	17.0	100.0
Total	**171**	**100.0**	

RESULT OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The demographic composition of the sample has been presented from Table 1 to 6. Table 7 shows the ratings given by respondents to the psychographic reasons for buying private labels in comparison to national brands as listed in table 1. It was measured on Likert scale, 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. As evident from the results on psychographic variables, respondents have given maximum score to 'discount /promotions' and 'store floor assistance' followed by 'price consciousness'. Median value is 4 for all psychographic variables except for quality and packaging. Distribution of most of the questions/variables is skewed towards left as indicated by negative values of Skewness coefficient.

TABLE 7: PSYCHOGRAHIC CUSTOMER MOTIVATIONS TOWARDS PRIVATE LABELS W.R.T TO NATIONAL BRANDS

Statement/ Questions/ Variables	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness
	Valid	Median				
Quality	171	3.00	3.38	.760	-.196	.186
Price consciousness	171	4.00	3.92	.633	-1.774	.186
Pack size	171	4.00	3.68	.715	-.818	.186
Variety	171	4.00	3.61	.807	-.866	.186
Packaging	171	3.00	2.99	1.063	.023	.186
Need Satisfier	171	4.00	3.60	.755	-.768	.186
Discount /Promotion	171	4.00	3.96	.631	-1.108	.186
Pre-sales Counseling	171	4.00	3.96	.694	-1.237	.186
After Sales Support	171	4.00	3.87	.878	-.588	.186
Credibility associated with retail store name	171	4.00	3.94	.652	-.837	.186

TABLE 8 : RELIABILITY OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.861	20

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the questionnaire responses is higher than 0.8, which suggest that the data is internally consistent

Effect Of Socio Demographic Variables on Psychographic Customer Motivations towards Private Labels w.r.t to National Brands

The task of profiling the target customer begins with consumer demographics. Demographics are objective, quantifiable, easily identifiable and measurable population data. To begin the identification demographic profiling based on variables such as gender, age, education, population growth rate, life expectancy, literacy, education, language spoken, household size, marital status, income, occupation is typically done. These factors affect retail shopping and retailer's actions (Bermans and Evans, 2010). Four established demographic factors that influence market segmentation strategies; Gender, Occupation, Age and Household Income are being considered in this study (Crask and Reynolds, 1978; Sampson and Tigert, 1992; Arnold, 1994; Fox et.al., 2004, Carpenter and Moore, 2006).

To examine whether the demographic factors of age, occupation, income and gender have an effect on different consumer perceptions towards private labels as compared to national brands, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted. Dependent variables consisted of the ten psychographic variables on which the customer perceptions towards private labels as compared to national brands were captured (Table 1)

Categorical independent variables included Age with six levels (20-25 years, 26-30 years, 31-35 years, 36-40 years, 41-50 years and 51 years and above), Occupation with four levels (Salaried, Self Employed, Student and Homemaker), Household Income with five levels (less than INR 100000, 100000-250000, 251000-500000, 500001-1000000 and more than 1000001.) and Gender (Male and Female). The Wilks Lambda test results are displayed in Table no. 9.

TABLE 9 RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR SELECT DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS, WILKS LAMBDA (AT 95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL)

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Gender	Wilks' Lambda	.927	.783a	10.000	99.000	.645
Income	Wilks' Lambda	.650	1.136	40.000	377.252	.270
Occupation	Wilks' Lambda	.813	.711	30.000	291.261	.870
Age	Wilks' Lambda	.632	.962	50.000	454.874	.550

a. Exact statistic

Results from MANOVA revealed insignificant effect on the psychological motivations for purchasing private labels as compared to national brands because of occupation, household income, age and gender. These results led to further probing of the situation as household income, occupation age and gender do display significant differences in the consumer behaviour in markets, where retail is an application area.

To explore the results of MANOVA, the Tests of Between Subjects Effects were analyzed. The tests show effect of each demographic variable on ten psychological consumer motivations for private labels as compared to national brands. The results are reported in Table no. 6 and summarized in following sections.

TABLE 10 TESTS OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS EFFECTS

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Quality	.088	1	.088	.153	.697
	Value	.007	1	.007	.016	.901
	Pack size	.645	1	.645	1.238	.268
	Variety	1.004	1	1.004	1.705	.194
	Packaging	1.026	1	1.026	1.054	.307
	Need Satisfier	.124	1	.124	.226	.636
	Additional Benefits	.005	1	.005	.010	.922
	Pre-Sales Counseling	.064	1	.064	.144	.705
	After Sales Support	6.833E-5	1	6.833E-5	.000	.992
	Reliability Association	.475	1	.475	1.279	.261
Income	Quality	1.425	4	.356	.619	.650
	Value	.796	4	.199	.423	.792
	Pack size	.458	4	.114	.220	.927
	Variety	3.182	4	.796	1.352	.256
	Packaging	17.006	4	4.251	4.365	.003
	Need Satisfier	2.814	4	.704	1.280	.283
	Additional Benefits	1.415	4	.354	.709	.587
	Pre-Sales Counseling	.858	4	.214	.486	.746
	After Sales Support	1.416	4	.354	.581	.677
	Reliability Association	.995	4	.249	.670	.614
Occupation	Quality	.285	3	.095	.165	.920
	Value	.114	3	.038	.081	.970
	Pack size	.466	3	.155	.298	.827
	Variety	1.107	3	.369	.627	.599
	Packaging	5.371	3	1.790	1.838	.145
	Need Satisfier	1.302	3	.434	.789	.503
	Additional Benefits	.158	3	.053	.106	.957
	Pre-Sales Counseling	1.027	3	.342	.776	.510
	After Sales Support	.567	3	.189	.310	.818
	Reliability Association	1.453	3	.484	1.305	.277

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	Quality	2.039	5	.408	.708	.619
	Value	2.146	5	.429	.912	.476
	Pack size	4.117	5	.823	1.580	.172
	Variety	3.805	5	.761	1.293	.272
	Packaging	2.525	5	.505	.518	.762
	Need Satisfier	1.805	5	.361	.657	.657
	Additional Benefits	.754	5	.151	.303	.910
	Pre-Sales Counseling	2.580	5	.516	1.169	.329
	After Sales Support	4.657	5	.931	1.529	.187
	Reliability Association	1.682	5	.336	.906	.480

The Test of Between subject effects also showed insignificant influence of the select demographic variables on the consumer psychological motivation towards private labels as compared to national brands at 95% confidence interval. The two way and three way interactions of the categorical independent variable on the dependent variables were also insignificant.This finding could carry meaningful insight for retail theory as these demographic variables are the first layer of segmentation variables on which the marketing strategy starts building coupled with other variables. Since this is an exploratory study being done in a limited context, the finding would warrant a more structured cross sectional study across contexts. If the outcome is in line with the present finding then segmentation in retail especially for private labels need to use other variables from other categories.

The second insight that is got is that for private labels, the consumers do not differentiate them from national brands on pyschographical motivations that typically drive private labels. This could be important as an implication would be that private labels have gained customer acceptance and it is time to build on differentiation in them with brands.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The managerial implications for this could be two;

i. To start with branding initiatives and develop them as the market is now evolving for private labels

ii. To understand the retail today has advanced beyond that static variable of age, gender, occupation and income to hit the right segment and a better understanding of attitudes and perceptions is required to woo the customers.

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