Consumer Attitude Towards FMCGs: A Comparative Study Of Private Labels And National Brands

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INTRODUCTION

The Indian retail scene is all poised for a tremendous growth and is estimated to reach \$54 billion by the year 2012 with an annual growth rate of about 9 percent. The growth in the retail sector has made the consumers to experience Private Labels. With the approval of 51% direct investment by Government of India in single brand retail showrooms, foreign retail majors like Tesco, Walmart and Carrefour are all set in to enter the Indian market. All these companies are known for their Private label brands. Tasty treat of Food Bazaar has now become popular and comes in a wide range of product categories. Food Bazaar's in house tea-brand - which is 20-30% cheaper than the major National Brands has cornered 40% market share. In salt, Food bazaar has market share of 40-50% .Kishore Biyani of Future Group has even said that - Private Labels can be used to hedge the inflation.

According to the Private Label Manufacturers' Association (PLMA), "Private label products encompass all merchandise sold under a retailer's brand. That brand can be the retailer's own name or a name created exclusively by that retailer. In some cases, a retailer may belong to a wholesale group that owns the brands that are available only to the members of the group". According to (Baltas,1997), a Private Label is, "A consumer product produced by, or on behalf of, retailers and sold under the retailers' own name or trademarked through their own outlets".

Private labels or store brands are generally brands owned, controlled, and sold exclusively by retailers (**Sethuraman and Cole, 1999**). Store brand grocery items are products owned and branded by organizations, whose primary economic commitment is distribution rather than production (**Schutte, 1969**).

There are basically two kinds of Private Labels namely - Premium private labels and Value innovative private labels. Premium private labels are those Private Labels which are priced higher than the National Brands like Tesco Finest Brand (which competes against P&G and Coca-cola in U.K.). Value innovative Private Labels are those Private Labels which compete with the functional quality of National brands and are available at economical prices. The history of private labels dates back to 1869 with 'Sainsbury' (the father of modern supermarkets), which was established in Victorian England, followed by Marks and Spencer in 1884. In the Indian perspective, Foodworld (1996), Subhikhsa (1997), and Food Bazaar (2001-02) get the credit for pioneering Private Labels.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1. To study the salient attributes on which consumers evaluate both Private Labels and National Brands.
- 2. To compare the attitude of consumers towards Private labels and National Brands.

LITERATURE SURVEY

For the sake of clear understanding research articles reviewed have been classified into the following broad headings:

- **1.** Factors that impact the evolution of Private Labels.
- 2. Characteristics of the Private Label Brand Buyers.
- 3. Whether Private Labels are hedonic or functional?
- 4. Consumer attitude towards Private Label food products.
- 5. Various attitudinal and behavioral consumers' attributes on Private Labels buying.
- **& Factors That Impact The Evolution Of Private Labels :** The entire subject matter evolves around the basic question, why have Private Labels evolved? And researches and scholars have been in a quest to find a concrete set of reasons. One study showed that the introduction of Private Labels is more likely when the product market consists of a large

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number of National Brands (Raju et al, 1995). They also found a positive impact of the probability of the introduction of Private Labels on the amount of sales in the category. A different study, (Scott and Zettelmeyer, 2000) showed that the introduction of Private Labels is more likely when the leading National Brand has a large market share. Their results confirm the positive impact of the total value of category sales. Moreover, their results suggest that the advertising / total sales ratio has a positive impact on the probability of the introduction of Private Labels. Finally, they found that a large number of producers also favor the introduction of Private Labels. This may indicate that in such a situation, the retailer is more able to find a supplier for the production of the Private Labels. In this light, the landmark study (Dhar and Hoch, 1997) paved a way for future researchers; in this study, they tried to find the various reasons affecting the purchase of Private Labels. In a study of Private Labels, market share in 34 categories of products in 106 different locations in the U.S., showed that 40% of the variance of their sample (variance of the market share of PLBs across products, retailers and locations) was explained by differences across categories of products and that 17% of the variances by differences across retailers. The authors also showed that the main factors favoring a large market share for Private Labels were as follows:

- ₱ High quality relative to the National Brands.
- &Low variability of quality of Private Labels.
- ₱ High product category sales.
- ₱ High gross margins (in percent).
- **⊗** A small number of national manufacturers operating in the category.
- & Low national advertising expenditures.

These factors together explained 70% of the variance of the market share of Private Labels in a sample of 185 products. As per the study, the key determinants of the market share of Private Labels sold by a given retailer are:

- The lower the number of National Brands actually sold by the retailer has a negative impact on Private Labels' market share. The lower the number of National Brands, the larger the markets share of the Private Labels. This could be due to competition between products in a context of fixed retail capacity. The larger variety of products (in a specific market), the lower the market shares of each variety. The heterogeneity of the market share of National Brands (for each retailer) has a positive impact. This could be due to prices. A heterogeneous market share among National Brands could be linked to higher prices, which would facilitate the penetration of Private Labels.
- ♠Promotions on Private Labels and the differences in price between Private Labels and National Brands have a positive impact. Conversely, promotions on National Brands have a negative impact, even if the impact is lower than that of promotions on Private Labels.
- ♦ Overall strategy of retailers (for example: commitment to quality, use of own name for a Private Label, a premium brand offering) has a positive impact.
- & Wealthier consumers buy fewer Private Label brands.

The report of the French study **(LSA/Fournier, 1996)** also tried to find the causes for development and nurturing of Private Labels. As per the report, the main reasons for the retailers to develop Private Labels are to increase customer loyalty (16%), to improve their positioning (18%), to improve margins (25%), and to lower prices (33%). Thus, retailers consider Private Labels as a way to compete with other retailers through customer loyalty and positioning and a way to compete with their suppliers through improved margins and lower prices. Private Labels are specific to each retailer, their introduction thus enhances differentiation between retailers and this is also a way to lessen price competition.

Characteristics Of The Private Label Brand Buyers: There is a general belief that a particular segment of the society is the purchaser or customer of Private Label products. There have been different reflections in the literature regarding this belief. Efforts have been made in this area to establish that whether the propensity to buy private labels is associated with demographic or socio-economic characteristics of consumers. In this regard, a study (Frank and Boyd, 1965) concluded that both manufacturer brands and private label are consumed by households with virtually 89 identical socio-economic and total consumption characteristics. A different study (Myers, 1967) established that consumers are best classified by their perceptions toward own-label rather than their individual characteristics such as general personality variables and socio-economic factors. He also noted that respondents do treat private label products differently from national brands. Similarly, in a study it was (Burger and Schott, 1972) found that private-

label buyers were spread across all socio-economic groups and that differences in attitudinal and behavioral variables were better predictors. As it has been noted (Livesey and Lennon,1978), possible reasons for perception differences are degree of experience with own-labels, differential response to marketing activities, differences in needs, perceived risk and different product importance among consumers. In another study (Bettman, 1974), it was noticed that the variables reflecting lower perceived risk and greater information to be associated with leads to private-label proneness. A similar conclusion was established (Szymanski and Busch, 1987) about the poor performance of individual demographic and psychographic factors relative to the role of consumer perceptions regarding product qualities and price. However, in another study (Omar, 1996), it was found that personal characteristics among other variables were useful in identifying segments of national and store brand buyers. In a milestone work (Richardson et al, 1996), it was identified that the familiarity with store brands, extrinsic cues usage in product evaluation, perceived quality variation, perceived risk, and perceived value for money, income and family size work as factors influencing own-label proneness. Despite all this work, there remains a void in the subject about various factors which affect consumer propensity to buy private label products.

Whether Private Labels Are Hedonic Or Functional?: In a very interesting study conducted by Dongdae and Hyman (2008), they came out to classify products and their purchase into hedonic and functional. A rich amount of research exists on this topic. A consumer's choice of a product or store is driven by both hedonic and functional considerations (Childers et al. 2001, Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000, Hirshman and Holbrook, 1982, Kempf, 1999, Okada, 2005, Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann, 2003). Hedonic considerations relate to fantasies, feelings, fun, and enjoyment (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, Mano and Oliver, 1993); functional considerations relate to needs, value, fundamentals, necessity, essentials, and problem solving (Barbin, Darden, and Griffin, 1994, Mano and Oliver, 1993). Products may be classified as either hedonic or functional (Batra and Sinha, 2000, Sethuraman and Cole 1999).

Studies have further classified stores selling Private Labels as hedonic or functional. Hedonic stores generally differ from functional stores in terms of their atmosphere, floor layout, and shoppers' motivations. Specifically, hedonic stores have a high-quality and status orientation, higher prices, extensive services, a relaxed and affable atmosphere, many active and affable salespeople, a free-form store layout, an exciting and multi-sensory design, a fantasy-related and emotional environment, an affluent and extravagant image, and a capacity for wandering around pleasure (Baker, Levy, and Grewel, 1992; Roy 1994, Vrechopoulous et al., 2004; Wakefield and Baker, 1998). In contrast, functional stores have a value and convenience orientation, limited services, a busy and indifferent atmosphere, a few passive salespeople, a grid layout, a dull and simple design, a task-related and rational environment, and a modest and austere image. Membership warehouse clubs (Sam's Club), discount stores (Wal-Mart), supermarkets (Safeway), convenience stores (7-Eleven), and some category killers (Home Depot) exemplify functional stores.

The hedonic/functional nature of products and stores influences consumers' choices and their justifications for those choices. Because Private Labels are always store specific and often product-category specific, consumers' choice of Private Labels may be better understood by studying the hedonic/functional nature of products and stores.

**Consumer Attitude Towards Private Label Food Products: Food product is defined as an aggregation of attributes at different levels. According to Grunert et al. (2000) these are: Search attributes (e.g. price, color), Experience attributes (e.g. taste and flavor) and Credence attributes (e.g. health and safety). The consumer choice is transposed to consumer perception through a process of interaction of product characteristics and personal socio-demographic, economic, psychographic, behavioral and cognitive determinants (Mowen, 1993, Alvensleben, 1997). Food selection and consumption are ,therefore, a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of factors. As suggested by Tuorila et al., (1998), individual socio-demographic and economic characteristics are commonly included when consumers are making a purchasing decision and they have to form quality expectations based on quality cues. They further stated that consumers form their quality expectation for most of the food categories on extrinsic cues such as price, brand name, brand familiarity, advertisements, etc. Price has been considered as a very important cue and received a great part of the research attention. Del Vecchio (2001) founded that the consumers' perception and penetration success of private label is driven by the segment's complexity, quality variance, price and inter-purchase time. Guerrero et al. (2000) studied consumer attitude towards private labels and showed that consumers perceive private labeled products

as reliable, different from producer brands and are good value for money. Information about a brand can significantly affect consumers' hedonic sensory judgment of food. Consumer sensory judgment is ,therefore, influenced by experiences, familiarity; more than the taste of food itself and ,therefore, it influences preferences, advertising etc (Kuhar and Tenja, 2008).

Various Attitudinal And Behavioral Consumers' Attributes On Private Labels Buying: Burton et al. (1998) defined private brand attitude as, "A predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner due to product evaluation, purchase evaluations, and/or self-evaluations associated with private label grocery products". The study conducted by George Baltas (1997) is considered to be a milestone in the field of understanding consumer attitude and behavior towards private label brands. Thirteen predictor variables were identified and were classified into four broad types namely, (1) Descriptors of shopping behavior, (2) Reasons for buying store brands, (3) Indicators of consumer relationship with store products, and (4) Consumer involvement with the category. Under the first broad type of shopping behavior, the following variables were considered: Decide about the brand before going to the shop; Look for price promotions; Go for the cheapest brand; Buy the same brands; And try new/different things. The second broad type is the reasons for buying private labels and it comprised of lower price and higher preference. Store brands relationship, the third broad types included familiarity with store brands and proximity between consumer and brand personality. The last broad type is category involvement including importance of getting the right brand, number of brands tried, frequency of shopping category, and satisfaction with available brands. The study identifies the store brand shopper as a price-cautious but not promotion-sensitive consumer. Further, the importance of the psychological proximity, in the study, illuminates the appeal of the typical private label positioning for a particular segment of consumers. The managerial recommendations of the study gives a further insight and suggests that the private label buyer shops more frequently the particular categories and this propensity can be exploited by introducing bigger family sizes and bundle offers.

Another work conducted by **Richardson Jain and Dick (1996)** tried to study consumer level factors that moderate the success of Private Labels. In the study, the researches argued that consumers' propensity to purchase Private Labels depends on three broad functions namely- (a) Certain demographic factors, such as income, family size, age and education, (b) Certain individual difference variables, such as the degree of reliance by the consumer on extrinsic cues and the consumers' tolerance of ambiguity, and (c) Certain consumers' perceptions of the particular category as well as the degree of consumers' knowledge about the categories.

Sethuraman and Cole (1997) studied category-level variations including quality perception of Private Labels, average price, purchase frequency; individual demographics such as income, age, family size, gender and education, and individual difference perceptual variables such as the belief of a price-quality relationship, perceived deal frequency and familiarity with Private Labels.

In a very significant study carried out by **Rajeev Batra and Indrajit Sinha (2000)**, an effort was made towards understanding the different determinants of perceived risk, which help explain the variations in purchasing preferences for national brands versus private label brands across different product categories. The four determinants used to determine the perceived risk were consequences of purchase mistake, quality variation, search/experience, and degree of price consciousness. The findings of the research show that Private Labels buying increases as the perceived risk of making purchasing mistake declines. The results also indicate that consumers buy fewer Private Labels if a category's benefits require actual trial/experience instead of searching through package label information. Depending upon the different product categories, consumers react differently, for example, a product category with experience benefits, such as the taste of ground coffee, or a soft drink, leads to a greater felt purchase anxiety about quality than a category with purely search attributes, such as a single-ingredient OTC drug using a standard, quality-certified ingredient fully described on the label.

In the study conducted by **Kusum Ailawadi, Scott Neslin and Karen Gendek (2001)**, value conscious consumers' responses to national brand promotions and store brand promotions were evaluated through a combination of psychographic and demographic variables. Some psychographic variables like savings, product quality, entertainment, exploration, self-expression, switching cost, store loyalty, search cost, out-of-store promotions, thinking cost, and inventory holding cost were included. The demographic variables included in the study were income, employment status, children in the household, type of residence, age, sex, and education. The study gives some landmark results to pave the way for further studies. The study shows that not only deal buying, but also store

brand buying is driven by the economic/utilitarian returns, psychosocial/hedonic returns, and costs. Further, the study says that demographics have a significant association with psychographic characteristics and are ,therefore, useful in segmentation, targeting, and communication. Also that, education is positively related with quality consciousness and need for cognition, full-time employment and having young children are associated with time pressure, and higher income is associated with lower financial constraints and price consciousness. Another relevant finding is that planning and impulsiveness can go together and that in-store promotion usage is consistent with both. The study mentions that brand-loyal consumers are more likely to buy national brands using out-of-store promotions, also that, displays and in-store promotions may induce more brands switching, whereas coupons and other out-of-store promotions may be more likely to attract consumers who are loyal to the brand. Thus, there is no particular reason or attribute which effects the attitudes of the consumers' towards the private label brands. A variety of factors work upon for the consumer decision making (attitude) while deciding for a private label product purchase.

Table 1: Key Attributes Affecting PLBS Purchase Identified In The Literature Survey

Name of the attribute	Source
Positive feeling(e.g., love)	Medina, Saegert and Gresham(1996)
Negative feeling(e.g., distrust)	Medina, Saegert and Gresham(1996)
Money attitudes	Yamauchi and Templer (1982) (Robert and Jones 2001)
Acquisition utility	Thaler (1985)
Transaction utility	Thaler (1985)
Power-prestige	Yamauchi and Templer (1982)
Distrust	Yamauchi and Templer (1982)
Price sensitivity	Roberts and Jones (2001)
Price-consciousness	Lichtenstein, Bloch and Black (1988)
Price incentive	Blattberg and Neslin (1990)
Retention-time	Yamauchi and Templer (1982)
Anxiety	Yamauchi and Templer (1982)
Compulsive buying	Roberts and Jones (2001)
Service quality(Store environment, merchandise quality and value, and customer service)	Semeijn et al. (2004)
Store brand perceptions	Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003)
Quality consciousness	Ailawadi et. al., (2008)
Brand loyalty	Ailawadi et. al., (2008)
Propensity for PLBs	Ailawadi et. al., (2008)
Shopping enjoyment	Ailawadi et. al., (2008)
Education	Ailawadi et. al., (2008)
Income	Ailawadi et. al., (2008)
PL feature	Cotterill et. Al., (2000)
PL display	Cotterill et. Al., (2000)
PL distribution	Cotterill et. Al., (2000)
Description of shopping behavior	Baltas (1997)
Reasons for buying store brands	Baltas (1997)
Indicators of consumer relationship	Baltas (1997)
Consumer involvement with the category	Baltas (1997)

Attributes Selected For The Present Study: Out of the several attributes, eight attributes were selected for the main study. These are *Quality, Price, Risk-free, Freshness, Packaging, Healthy, Prestigious, And Image*. The selection of

these attributes was done from the study done by **Burton et al.**, in the year 1998. Given below is a general description of the attributes.

The literature on Private Labels identifies and mentions the specific consumer characteristics that lead to Private Labels' proneness. Several attempts have been made to investigate the effect of socio-economic variables on private-label purchase behavior. One of the interesting finding is that consumers benefit from the increase in the number of goods available and from the positive impact of the reduction in double marginalization. The studies also state that the consumer benefits from an increase in competition between Private Labels and National Brands, but the consumers may also suffer due to the lower degree of differentiation between products. There are a number of psychographic and demographic attributes affecting the purchasing decisions of the consumers'. Despite a plethora of theoretical and empirical work on the subject, a need is felt to integrate the literary standing to the present day consumers' attitude for comparing private label brands and national brands.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection: Out of the several attributes, eight attributes were selected for the main study. The selection of these attributes was done from the study done by Burton et al., in the year 1998. These attributes are Quality, Price, Risk-free, Freshness, Packaging, Healthy, Prestigious, And Image. On the basis of the above attributes, a questionnaire was made as per the requirements of 'Adequacy Importance' model. The questionnaire comprised of a total 24 items. Eight items each selected for importance of attributes, evaluation of private labels and evaluation of national brands. The instrument was tested for reliability and the cronbach alpha coefficient for the importance of attributes was .65. The cronbach alpha coefficient for the evaluation of private labels was .72 and that for evaluation of national brands was .76. The first eight questions were tested on a 5 point scale, where 1 meant least important and 5 meant most important. The eight questions for the evaluation of private labels were also tested on a 5 point Likert type scale where 1 meant strongly disagree and 5 meant strongly agree. The last eight questions for the evaluation of national brands were also tested on a 5 point Likert type scale where 1 meant strongly disagree and 5 meant strongly agree. For the collection of data, consumers coming out of Food bazaar shopping malls were asked whether the consumer had purchased private label brands. Those respondents who answered the screening question in affirmative were given a structured questionnaire and the responses were collected. The total number of respondents for the study were 200. A sample of at least 30 subjects was required for the study based on central limit theorem (statistics based on the mean). The 200 responses were collected from 5 different store locations of Food Bazaar.

Adequacy Importance Model (Cohen, Fishbein and Ahtola; 1972): Adequacy Importance model can be described as:

 $A=\sum P*D$

Where,

A=An individual's attitude towards the brand;

P = Importance of attribute (dimension like quality, price etc;) for an individual;

D = Individual's evaluation of brands with respect to the corresponding attribute (dimension like quality, price etc.).

Attribute of brand Attitude towards Private Attitude towards National Paired t-test for Labels Mean(std.dev.) Brands Mean(std.dev.) equality of means 14.08(1.92) 14.52(1.95) -2.293* Quality Price 15.06(1.38) 14.02(1.80) 6.697* Risk- Free 13.84(1.93) -4.116* 13.1(1.93) Freshness 13.72(2.08) 13.76(2.16) -.171 **Packaging** 13.26(1.81) 13.88(2.06) -2.859* Healthy 12.92(2.23) 12.76(2.08) -1.385 13.76(2.05) -7.505* Prestigious 12.34(1.80) 12.86(1.62) 14.48(1.71) -8.792* **Image**

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation And Paired T-test Values

The data collected in the study was fitted into the above model. Attitude towards PLBs (Apl) was calculated as:

Apl = P1*Dpl1 + P2*Dpl2 + P3*Dpl3 + + Pn*Dpln.

Attitude towards NBs (Anb) was calculated as:

Anb = P1*Dnb1 + P2*Dnb2 + P3*Dnb3 ++Pn*Dnbn.

The responses collected through the questionnaire were computed for mean and standard deviation. Paired t-test for equality of means has been used to check the equality of means. The t-test values denoted by asterix (*) interpret that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 5% level of significance calculated (t-value greater than 2). From the Table 2, it is reflected that in Quality, the higher mean of National Brand indicate that consumers' still believe that National Brands have a better quality as compared to Private Labels. The difference in the mean is .44. Thus, meaning that the gap between Private Label and National Brand has narrowed. **Regarding price:** The higher mean of Private Labels indicate that consumers' believe that Private Labels have higher value for money as compared to National Brands. Risk - Free: The higher mean value for national brand indicates that consumers' believe that National Brands are less risky to buy as compared to Private Labels. The gap between Private Labels and National Brands is only .74, which means that the consumers' attitude toward Private Labels being riskfree is very close to that of National Brands. Freshness: As the difference between the means is very small, it can be said that consumers' attitude towards freshness of Private Labels and National Brands is almost the same and the consumers' do not differentiate between Private Labels and National Brands as far as freshness is concerned. Packaging: With the mean of 13.26 for PLs and 13.88 for National Brands, it can be said the consumers' attitude towards the packaging of Private Labels and National Brands is more or less the same. **Healthy:** The difference in the mean of NB and PL is not statistically significant. Thus, the data suggests that on the profile of being healthy, consumers' do not differentiate much between Private Labels and National Brands. Prestigious: The comparison of means indicate that National Brands have a higher prestige as compared to Private Labels as far as consumers' attitude is concerned. Image: The difference in the mean value indicates that National Brands are perceived to have a better image as compared to Private Labels.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was conducted in the city of Hyderabad and the respondents were consumers of Food Bazaar only. The study can be extended for consumers of different retail chain stores in the city of Hyderabad or across a greater geographical area. In this study, only the product attributes have been considered. No particular product category has been selected for the study, which would have made the study more insightful. The various demographic profiles have not been considered for the study. The demographic variables like income, age, education and various others will have an impact on the attitude of the consumers. On of the major limitations of this study is that the study has been done only on the perceptions of the consumers'. This study can be further expanded by accessing the secondary data for some categories of the Private Label Brands and then comparing the consumers' attitude to the National Brands of the same category. The access to secondary data would also help to understand the relation between consumers' perceptions and the actual market scenario of private labels. Further, this work can also be extended by comparing similar product categories of different Private Label players.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research work are very interesting and encouraging for Private Labels. At the same time, it is a matter of concern for the National Brands. Consumers' attitude to the Private labels has been a very important research area in the modern consumer behavior study. Private Label Brands in India is in early phase and is all set to grow by leaps and bounds. As witnessed in other countries like United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, France etc; India will also experience an immense growth of Private Labels. As the gap between consumers' attitude towards the Private Labels and National brands become narrower, the consumers would start to consume greater amount of Private Label brands. Thus, the market size of Private Label Brands will expand and ,therefore, a lot of innovativeness and competition will creep in this segment of retailing. All these developments in the Private Labels segment would render the consumers with wider choices of Private Labels.

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CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, one can agree that Nokia has the potential to remain a major presence in the Indian mobile phone industry in the following years. The external mobile phone market environment in India is dynamic; Nokia has lost its market share due to the misinterpretation of the market trends and customer needs. But the market also brings the big potential opportunities to Nokia, such as the expanding market in the rural India, customized business user mobile phones and so on. Moreover, the most important of Nokia's internal strengths, such as the advanced technology, innovative products, economy of scale, could let it surpass the competitors and solidify its market leader position; Furthermore, Nokia can benefit further from its strong brand name and company image.

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