FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PURCHASE OF YOGURTS AND DAIRY DESSERTS OF PRIVATE LABEL

João Pedro Lopes

jprlopes12@gmail.com

Universidade de Évora, Doutoramento em Gestão, CEFAGE

Marta da Conceição Cruz Silvério

mcs@uevora.pt

Universidade de Évora, Departamento de Gestão, CEFAGE

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Abstract:

Private labels play a key role in Marketing strategy and they have been studied by several researchers.

In order to respond to adaptations to the market, private labels are fundamental to the retailers' strategies. These brands overlap with those of the manufacturers, as they are vital to improving the value proposition in terms of price, image and quality.

With this research, focused on the private labels and the category of yogurt and desserts, we try to understand the factors that influence the purchase of yogurts and desserts.

The study uses the Focus Group technique for the collection and treatment of data analysis of content.

It was concluded that the category of yogurt and dairy desserts is at a crossroads because there are antagonistic factors influencing the purchase and consumption. The category appears to be positively driven by the promotional pace and the greater capacity to assume as a substitute for milk at some moments of consumption. On the other hand, the category is also being pressured by unfavorable communicational and opinionated phenomena related to the drawbacks associated with milk consumption. The marks of reference seem to have reduced or stabilized the competitiveness of the private labels by the effect of the permanent promotional cycles.

Keywords: Private Labels, Strategies of retailers, Focus Group, Yogurt and dairy desserts, WOM, Loyalty

Topic: Brands and Branding

1. Introduction

As competition intensifies the contribution of brands to value creation increases, so branding becomes one of the few assets that can provide competitive advantage (Lindeman, 2005). The various concepts about the brand demonstrate the great importance it represents (Kim, 1990, Aaker, 1996, Ambler, 1996, Kapferer, 1998, Biel, 1999, Gronroos, 2001, Hatch & Schultz, 2002, and Keller, 2003, Côrte-Real, Brito, Perez, Azevedo, Machado, Mendes, Pedro, Lencastre, Elbux, and Pimentel, 2007. Ferreira, Reis & Serra, 2009).

In order to respond to the changes and adaptations to the market, there has been an exponential growth of private labels in recent years, with changes in the strategies of the retailers and the consumers' appetite for these brands (Bao & Sheng, 2011). Food retail is no exception with its brands or insignias. The creation of private labels, particularly at the level of food products, plays an even more important role due to the high investment in their development (Toledo, Giraldi & Prado, 2007).

Fernie, Fernie, Moore and Fernie (2003) claim that private brands are the way retailers can establish it position since consumers have perceptions and images about brands and the perceptions have a strong influence on the choice of stores and on the purchasing behavior. This means that the images associated by consumers with the brands available in a certain retail store will influence the decision-making processes and their buying behavior.

Some of the strategic decisions of retail concerning to the private labels use the name of its chain in these brands. In this way, the associations that the consumers make to the retail brand are transferred to the private labels, creating synergy between the marketing strategies of the retailer, causing that the decisions of price and positioning of the private labels follow the marketing strategy of the retailer as a whole (Paula, 2008).

Despite the positive role that the private labels play at the retail level, they can produce either positive or negative impacts on consumer perception (Tran, E; Balas, AN, Shao, CY, Dubinsky, AJ and Jackson, L., Baltas, 2004). Consequently , private labels products are not always bought by consumers as their choice goes to the manufacturer's brand, whose price is , in most cases , higher (Albayrak and Aslan, 2009; Dick, Jain and Richardson, 1995; Govender and Govender, 2013, Sethuraman and Cole 1999, Sethuraman 2000).

Nowadays, there is a strong relationship of trust and loyalty on the part of consumers toward private labels (Dodd & Lindley, 2003; Pepe, Abratt, & Dion, 2011; Horvat & Dosen, 2013).

Private labels currently play a fundamental role in the Marketing strategy, which can be recognized by the evolution that market shares have had in recent years. In Europe over a period of ten years (2005 to 2015) the share of sales increased from 24.6% to 30.5% (Nielsen, 2016). The expectation for the future is that the weight of private labels sales can reach values around 50%, which means that the market share of the private labels is expected to grow steadily over the next 15 years (Nielsen, 2016).

In the Portuguese market, the weight of private labels in sales increased more than double, as it was around 16% in 2005 and reached a value of 33% in 2015 (Nielsen, 2016). The concept of private labels in the food sector, in Portugal, is very focused on the main retail chains, Pingo Doce and Continente, in the use of its name in the label of the products. Auchan and Dia / Minipreço retailers have adopted the same brand strategy with the placement of their name on the products. However, in the Portuguese market, Lidl and Intermarché, use another strategy : they resort to private labels that differ from the name of its chain and categories of products. Those brands, in particular for yoghurts and dairy desserts, are: Pâturages in the case of Intermarché and Milbona in the case of Lidl.

According to Kantar (2013), consumption of private labels products in Portugal is widespread and is present in 99.9% of Portuguese households. The main operators are examples of this, with private labels products entering the basket of consumers who make daily purchases on various commercial surfaces.

The values range from 87% for Auchan consumers to 97% of consumers in the Continente, Lidl and Dia/Minipreço stores. Pingo Doce registers 96% and Intermarché 92% (Kantar, 2013).

Yogurts and dairy desserts are present in 87% of national households with an average purchase of € 25.4 per consumer, equivalent to almost 12 kg of product and a purchase frequency of 7 times a year. These products represent the fourth category in penetration of private labels products (32.4% in 2015 according to Nielsen, 2015), despite the strong promotional actions for the manufacturer's brands.

In this way, the brand has a fundamental role in the marketing strategy and therefore is the target of study by researchers such as Burton, Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Garretson (1998), Fernie and Pierrel (1998), Corstjens and Lal (2000), Sinha and Batra (1999), Jin and Suh (2005), Zielke and Dobbelstem (2007), Carvalho (2007), Ferreira (2010), Cunha (2011) and Machado (2012). Despite the studies carried out, it is necessary to understand how consumers develop different attitudes and buying habits concerning to private labels (Moraga, Campos & Nazel, 2007). This is the gap that this research seeks to address with the exploratory study about the main concern: What are the attitudes and behaviors when buying and consuming branded products at the level of yogurts and dairy desserts? Which factors ultimately determine consumers' choices through their shopping experiences? what is the impact promotions have on the consumers´decisions and what impact brands have on their purchasing options? This study is reliable because most of the studies performed took place more than fifteen years ago and in a completely different macro-environment than the one that is lived today.

The research was carried out based on the assumptions of perceived value (Kotler & Keller, 2007; Martinho *et al.*, 2012), in order to obtain information on the three dimensions that influence the process of opinion formation and that lead to acceptance or rejection of products at the point of sale (Oliver, 1999; Mart & *et al.*, (2012): cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral dimensions.

Once raised the problem, it was established as a general objective of the research to understand the attitudes that influence the purchase and consumption of private labels products, namely in the category of yogurts and dairy desserts, as well as the following specific objectives: to identify perceptions about the purchase and consumption of yoghurts and dairy desserts; to know the motivations for buying (purchase drivers) of yogurts and dairy desserts; to perceive the customer's involvement with the brand of yogurts and dairy desserts, and to analyze the consumption and purchase behavior of yogurts and dairy desserts in general and the brand in particular

2. Theoretical Background

The complexity of the markets has established a scenario marked by high competition, particularly in mass consumer markets. As a result, the challenge in retailing is to make private labels stand out in the market, attracting consumer attention and interest at the time of purchase (Toledo *et al.*, 2007).

2.1 Private Labels, Evolution and Definition

Trademarks are not a recent phenomenon, as Kapferer (1998) points out in the mid-19th century, when the English retailer Sainsburys launched the first brand of its own and this has emerged in various branches of the business coming to play a decisive role in the last 25 years. Through the creation, development, value and positioning of its brands, the major retailers have created a new paradigm of consumption, not only for their customers but also for the distribution market, for producers and competing brands.

In Portugal, the Pão de Açúcar (Auchan Group) launched the first private labels (call white labels) articles in 1984. A few years later, the brands of other retailers gradually extended to the retail chains present in Portugal (Cachinho, 2001).

Private labels is used in products belonging to retailers, wholesalers or other distributors of consumer goods, which in turn control brand and do not normally have production units (Pintel & Diamond, 1971;

Rothe and Lamont, 1973). In this paper, we present the results obtained by Burton *et al.* (1998) and Chen, Hsu and Lin (2010). Lepsch (1999), Spinelli, Giraldi and Campomar (2006) and Kumar and Steenkamp (2007) add that private labels may or may not contain the company name; Juhl, Esbjerg, Grunert, Bech-larsen & Brunsø (2006) report that some distributors use the name of their own store or chain to designate their brands, while others use the name of the store to designate only certain categories of products; there is also the possibility to use independent designations of the name of the store or chain, as well as differentiate ranges within the own distributor brands, depending on the quality offered.

Private labels bring advantages and benefits to the retailers (Toledo *et al.*, 2007) as they increase profit margins, build the image of the retailer, attract customers to the stores and constitute a tool for positioning and differentiation. However, they also present some risks (Toledo *et al.*, 2007) such as generating a reputation for supplying products with low quality and growth of first price (low price) brands.

2.2 Private Labels: consumer choice versus manufacturer brand

The markets´ complexity has established a scenario marked by high competition, particularly in mass consumer markets. Accordingly , the challenge in retailing is to make private labels stand out in the market, attracting consumer attention and interest at the time of purchase (Toledo *et al.*, 2007).

Due to increased advertising, manufacturers' brands have become widely recognized by consumers who have chosen them as their favorite brands. Retailers saw the margins sharply reduced, as well as their power to determine prices. Feeling the great pressure on loss of profitability, retailers were pushed to develop alternative ways, one of which was the development of proprietary brands exclusively present in their stores (Chernatony 1990, Cardoso & Alves 2008, Horvat & Dosen 2013).

Making customers loyal to private labels is a challenge and concern of retailers. In this sense, Corstjens and Lal (2000) have shown that quality private labels play an important role in store loyalty. As stated by the authors, customers that are loyal to a retail chain put a larger share of their private labels in their shopping basket. According to Dodd and Lindley (2003) the chain that can develop this relationship always wins. Thus private labels become essential for distribution chains, playing a leading role in the struggle for control of the distribution channel and consumer loyalty (Pepe *et al.*, 2011). The studies of Calvo-Porral, C. and Lévy-Manginb, J. (2017) emphasize the need to intensify the communication about private labels in order to consolidate them as a reliable option.

The distributor brands, especially when including the name or logo of the store on their products' packaging, can be interpreted as an extension of the store's own label, representing a global, intense and complex brand strategy by retailers (Dodd & Lindley, 2003).

One of the fundamental questions about private labels is knowing which consumer has a taste for private labels. At this level there are some empirical generalizations about these clients' characteristics: price sensitivity, reduced image sensitivity, average income and ability customers (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

However, retailers should consider that, at the beginning of the private labels' life cycle, the perceived risk is high when compared to the alternative that consumers have with manufacturer brands (Horvat & Dosen, 2013). Private labels' self-assertion on the market is not always easy and it is possible that consumers will not immediately trust them. In this way retailers must direct investments in quality based on value rather than price, explaining to consumers the value of each branded product, so consumers will not evaluate brands by who owns them, but rather based on their own value (Horvat & Dosen, 2013). According to Calvo-Porral, C. and Lévy-Manginb, J. (2017), the perceived value of private labels has a positive influence on the consumer's intention to buy. Hence developping private labels that can meet expectations and tastes of the consumer allows to overcome the barrier of confidence and become differentiating amount the competition, giving a competitive advantage to the retail companies that own them.

A wide range of private labels in various categories and including superior quality products can help improving the brand evaluation of a particular retailer, upgrating consumers' perception of the retailer's overall image. In addition to this, the strong image of a retailer helps to upgrade the rankings of private labels products (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

At this level, three critical factors must be considered: the role of supplier brands, the role of private labels and the role that the store itself plays in its private labels. The resulting perceived value can lead to brand loyalty thanks to the result obtained, namely the greater or less satisfaction with consumption that will foster positive or negative behaviors, intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Grewal, Levy & Lehmann, 2004).

2.3 Purchase and consumption behavior

For companies it is fundamental to know the consumers, in order to know what they need and how they make the purchase decisions, so, in addition to the socioeconomic and cultural variables of the consumer, the psychological variables such as motivation, personality and perception must be considered (Kotler & Keller, 2007). Through these influences, consumers are ready to act. Following his perception, the consumer learns to differentiate choice factors that help him decide.

The motivation to purchase is an internal force, which drives the individual to satisfy needs and desires, as well as to achieve his goals; however, at the time of purchase he can analyze how much he can spend, what purchasing conditions are the most convenient or what places he should consider, so the factors are diverse at the time of purchase. In the middle of this process, one cannot fail to consider the situational factor, which through a pleasant and comfortable environment in certain cases can determine the purchase, since the exhibition of products on shelves or aisles at the point of sale can be decisive (Castro, 2004).

According to Burton *et al*. (1998), the factors influencing consumers' perception and attitude toward distributor brands are: price awareness, value awareness, price associated with purchase, confidence in the internal price reference, price / quality perception, marketing to the level of brand loyalty, risk aversion, impulse buying, self-perception of small purchases and propensity for consumption in general.

According to Richardson *et al.* (1996) in addition to attitude, the following factors must also be considered in the propensity to buy private labels: demographic factors; individual variables such as the degree of confidence / dependence in extrinsic values and also the tolerance to ambiguity; perception by category and degree of consumer knowledge about each category (greater knowledge increases the choice of the private labels).

Social influence has also an impact on the consumer at the time of the purchase decision between the manufacturer's private labels and brand products (Zainuddin and Burt, 2007, Govender and Govender, 2013, Bedi, Lal and Kaur, 2014, Tran, E. *et al.*, 2014). In fact, Kavmark, Powers and Sandahl (2012, pp. 7, 8) argue that "the success of the private labels is greater in product categories where the social factor is less influential ..."

3. Research Methodology

The present study uses an exploratory research, since it seeks to obtain knowledge and understanding on the subject under study in order to clarify and define the nature of the problem (Churchill, 1996; Zikmund, 1997; Malhotra, 2001; Aaker *et al.*, 2004). This research is not conclusive, the main interest being the discovery of ideas and possible explanations for a fact or phenomenon that will be the future target of a deeper investigation.

In the present investigation, we used secondary data sources and the pilot study using Focus Group technique. At the level of secondary data sources (Aaker *et al.*, 2004) we used (1) the existing information system in the company, (2) the databases of other organizations, such as government professional and commercial associations (3) databases of Nielsen, Kantar, Passport Euromonitor International, Planet Retail and INE, (4) books, scientific articles and other documents.

Pilot studies are a technique that can be used to take opinions, points of view and experience into account. Therefore we used the Focus Group technique as a way to understand better the behavior and attitudes of consumers of yogurts and dairy desserts in their choice of private labels. Bloor *et al.* (2001) argue that the Focus Group are particularly suited to study decision-making processes and how people evaluate competing proposals.

With the application of the Focus Group, we intend to respond to three approaches at the level of the explanatory factors that can enhance and amplify the competitive capacity of the private labels. The first approach focuses on the prevailing attitudes and behaviors, meaning how the consumer behave accordingly to their perceptions, consumption motives and involvement. The second approach addresses the buying process and how consumers behave at the time of purchase; meaning how and where do they buy, what are the characteristics of their purchases and the motivations for their purchases. The third approach seeks to find factors that can boost and stimulate the purchase of yogurts and dairy desserts.

In order to ensure that all meetings were conducted in the same way, a semi-structured script was elaborated, so as to allow the researcher to focus on problems highlighted by the people under study instead of emphasizing preconceived ideas. Regarding this, the person's perspective, or "ethnic" perspective (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996) is highlighted. The script was developed sequentially and divided into four themes (consumer behavior, adherence to brands, buying behavior and future behaviors) that were very focused on the object of study, in order to understand the participants' perceptions when consuming yogurts and dairy desserts. Participants were also asked to report and compare their shopping experience, with a particular focus on the market-leading retail stores (Pingo Doce and Continente), since these two brands represent around 50% of the food retail market in Portugal (Nielsen, 2016).

Regarding the size of the sample, it was considered that the groups should contain 8 to 12 participants (Hill & Hill, 2009; Malhotra, 2001; Ceitil, 2007). In this way four groups were formed, each one made of buyers, in the various insignia of the market, of yogurts and dairy desserts. Each group consisted of 8 participants. In the constitution of the groups we tried to combine buyers with different characteristics to include individuals of both sexes, aged over 25 years, with or without children and who were in active life or retired.

Fieldwork took place during the month of February 2016 with the four Focus Groups: two Focus Groups in Lisbon and two in Porto, with a total of 32 participants. The physical context took place in a relaxed and informal atmosphere, lasting two and a half hours, the sessions being recorded in order to allow the investigator to retrieve the information more accurately (Hill & Hill, 2009; Malhotra, 2001). Subsequently, the sessions were transcribed in order to allow the analysis of the information collected.

The collected data were treated using the technique of content analysis that according to Bardin (2016) consists of a set of methodological instruments that apply to extremely diverse "discourses", being therefore a "set of techniques of communications' analysis aiming to obtain procedures for systematic and objective description of the indicators messages' content (quantitative or not), allowing the inference of knowledge regarding the production / reception conditions (inferred variables) of these messages. According to the author, this technique is widely used because of its operational nature, which consists in the decomposition of discourse into units or categories. The structure of the script was used as a basis for the content analysis matrix to gather in the four phases of the analysis: integral transcription of the material, pre-analysis, material exploration and treatment of results and interpretation (Esteves, 2009).

4. Results

The analysis of the data will be presented in four parts: positive and negative perceptions, motivations for the purchase, involvement with the category of yogurts and dairy desserts, and consumer and purchase behavior from yogurt and dairy desserts' buyers.

4.1 Positive and negative perceptions

The impact of positive and negative perceptions on the products under study has great implications for customers' choice of products (Tran, E., Balas, AN, Shao, CY, Dubinsky, AJ and Jackson, L., 2004). Therefore seven positive perceptions about the products under study were identified through the opinions of consumers:

- They are part of the basic diet - being a healthy food and based on routine consumption, these products are used at various times during the day, they have reduced contraindications and provide satiety. The impact on purchases results in a routine and impulsive purchase.
- They are generators of pleasure - these products arouse positive sensations in consumption, they work as self-compensation, they allow to experiment at a low cost. The impact is revealed in the sense of valuing the product and in the association with a more playful environment.
- There are no differences between the brands - the raw material is the same, the brands reproduce the innovations easily, there receptivity to the private labels is good. For the interviewees the involvement with the private labels happens when they perceive an adequacy in the taste and the physical characteristics.
- Provide convenience - because they are easy to access and allow consumption in and out of the home. Respondents emphasize that packaging is important to facilitate convenience.
- Transversal consumption of family members - the existence of multiple varieties of product suitable for all members of the family allows adherence to consumption by everyone. In this way, it is said by he interviewees that there is the need to exist a great variety of products.
- Frequent innovation which eliminates the routine of consumption - most innovations lead to pleasure and new sensations.
- Existence of promotions - in all stores there are always yogurts and dairy desserts on sale. Promotions are a factor of great importance to those interviewed. Consumers take the promotions for granted, not admitting that the distribution companies do not perpetuate them in time.

Regarding to the negative perceptions, were identified seven about the products under study:

- The need to contain excess consumption of dairy products - considering the information disseminated by the media, the influence of physicians and the greater receptiveness to emerging foods. This point is relevant to the interviewees leading some of them to react with assertiveness to the campaigns against dairy products.
- Excess calories in some subcategories notably in dairy desserts, have influenced respondents in the choice of more pleasure-related varieties, making them more sensitive to calorie identification codes.
- Existence of varieties with inadequate organoleptic characteristics - the consistency of the solid or liquid products are not adequate to the preferences of the interviewees, as well as the perception of the existence of health-damaging chemicals associated with the lowest price varieties.
- High price is a widely referred variable. Namely at the level of base prices without promotions that are pointed out as high, thus influencing the quantities to be purchased by the larger households.
- Less receptivity from the children - due to the shorter stay at home, the less interest in consuming yoghurts and dairy desserts outside the home due to the effect of group behaviors, the lower suitability of the products for consumption outside the home because of conservation

requirements and the existence of a greater appetite for the consumption of alternative products, which shows that children and young people tend to decrease this consumption.

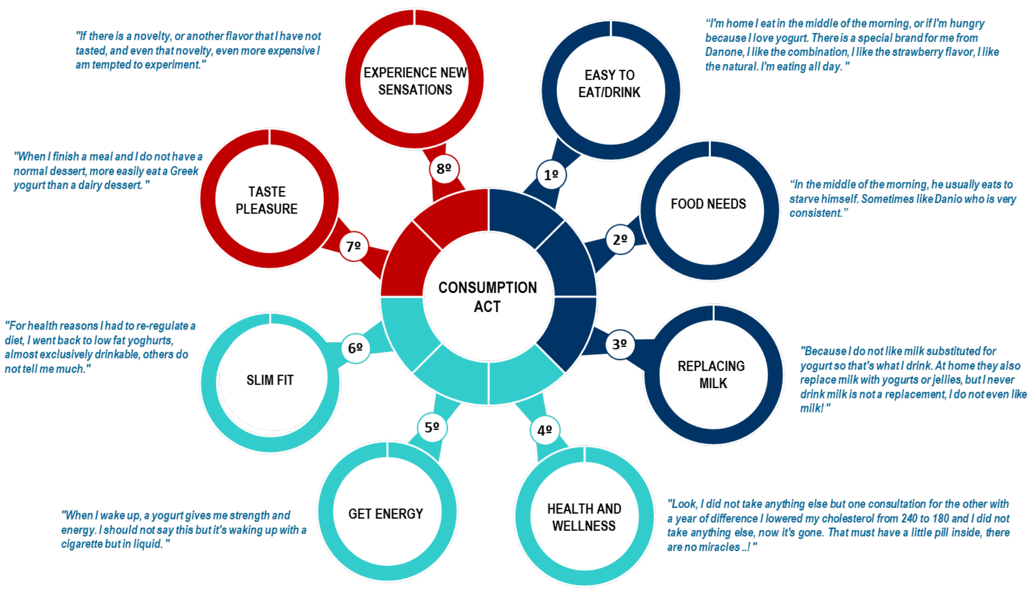
- Low predisposition to stay in exhibition aisles - due to the cold environment, in the case of hypermarkets, because of the large cold furniture; combined with the pressure of lack of time and with the diversity of choice as that purchase is made in the final phase of the visit to the store.
- Do not facilitate the purchase at the point of sale - difficulty in identifying the different types of products, references and prices. It was pointed out that there should be an easier identification of the products for greater ease of purchase.

4.2 Consumption Motivations

According to the interviewees' opinions, eight reasons (or purchase drivers) were identified to explain the actual consumption act (figure 1):

- Ease of consumption - yogurts and dairy desserts are associated with ease of consumption because they do not require supplementary treatment or supplementary utensils, and can be consumed in various places and at different times.
- Satisfaction of food needs - because they are considered complete and self-sufficient food, for the moments of consumption for which they were designed.
- Replace milk - Yogurt is considered a direct substitute for milk because of its consistency, the need for complementary food and for greater enjoyment.
- Health protection - due to variety, respondents associate some types with health protection.
- Energy intake – these products are considered as an energy generator, particularly in reinforcement meals.
- Take care of the physical form and the line - the consumption of these products takes care of the physical form and the weight, since there are several light alternatives which is positive for the consumers in diet.
- Pleasure in taste - consumption is also associated with pleasure, the experience of good times and good taste experiences, in addition to satisfying food needs.
- Experiencing new sensations - due to constant innovations, they raise as products that easily capture the customers' interest in experimentation, which can provide new sensations, even if this does not mean being convinced by these products.

Figure 1 - Reasons for consumption of yoghurts and dairy desserts

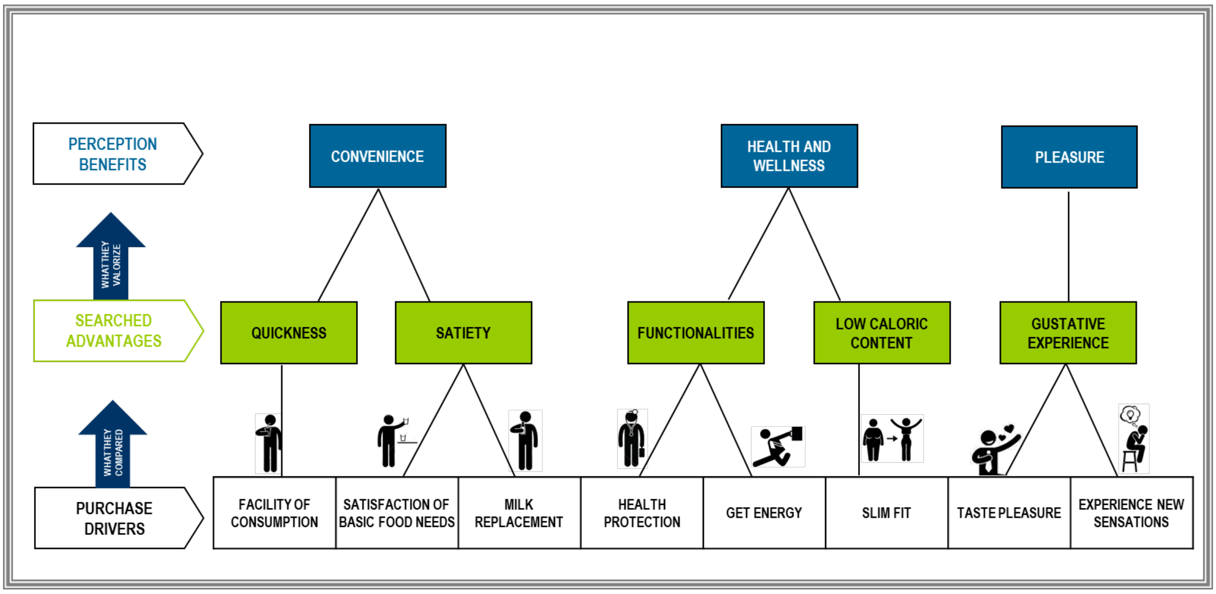


Source: Elaborated by the author´s

In summary it can be mentioned that (Figure 2):

- perceived benefits are: convenience, well-being and health, and pleasure;
- the advantages sought are: speed, satiety, functionalities, low caloric content and taste experience;
- the drivers of the purchase are: ease of consumption, satisfaction of basic food needs, substitution of milk, health protection, obtaining energy, watching the weight, pleasure in taste and experiencing new sensations.

Figure 2 - Summary of motivations for the consumption of yogurts and dairy desserts



Source: Elaborated by the author´s

4.3 Link to product category, yogurt and dairy desserts

According to the interviewees, the purchasing and consumption behaviors in this category reveal additional complexity because they show heterogeneity and antagonism.

Considering the interviewees opinion, the trend of buying products in this category is increasing due to the importance attributed to these purchases, the knowledge of the products and the weight that these purchases represent in the families' basket. The products are consumed with a certain purpose and criterion for each individual member of the family with a specific purpose and objective. This increase in involvement is even more noticeable when it comprehend the overvaluation attributed to promotions in the purchase decision.

Another reason for the involvement is the greater receptivity to innovation illustrated by the following statement: "Two, three years ago, I would barely consume yogurts but today, there are many yoghurts at home. I have a young daughter and we buy mainly for her, but then we consume too. I started to consume yogurt because I tried it and then I started to like it. As there are more varieties nowadays, I have been experimenting. "

The implication is also manifested by the increased propensity to replace milk consumption with yogurts, as someone said: "Not before, but now I think there is no big price difference between yogurts and milk. We eat more yogurts and less milk because it is not enough. With the milk goes a sandwich and it gets more expensive in the end. " Also noted was involvement in the greater propensity to add complementary foods as reported by study participants: "I have already surrendered to the seeds. I mix chia seeds with yogurts. I went to the nutritionist and she told me to do it. "

The purchase is product-oriented, but strongly driven by the reputation of each brand. There is an appreciation of the physical characteristics, although the purchase decision is defined by the price or associated promotion. The strong appreciation of the promotions leads to the fragmentation of the purchases. There is a tendency of customers to concentrate on buying the same type of products, but the purchase depends on much or little range at the point of sale. Validity dates are fundamental in the choice of products, however, if the price goes down and accompanies the end of validity period, consumers opt for this last. Moreover, yogurts are considered a complete food. The purchase of these products is conditioned by the space where these are displayed, since consumers do not like to stay in the cold environment.

To allow a better understanding of the most relevant factors in the dynamization of the category of products under study, the analysis was divided into: experience of purchase by insignia, impact of promotions and brand impact.

A. Buying Experience by Insignia

It was possible to perceive the experience that the interviewees have when they experience a purchase in the stores of the two main Portuguese retailers.

In the purchases made on the Continente versus Pingo Doce brand, the respondents positively evaluated the variety, less shortage and the existence of promotions, in particular card discount coupons. As less positive points the interviewees said that: the purchase is more difficult, it is difficult to identify the different types of yogurt and dairy desserts, the environment is unattractive and cold.

B. Impact of promotions

The promotions are one of the main factors driving the purchase, being transversal to all the categories of yogurts and dairy desserts, in this sense the study shows that: the promotions of the manufacturer's brands attenuate the attractiveness of the private labels, the clients that are most promotion sensitive move more in the place of product display, the quantity promotions are more easily accepted by customers of larger stores, the promotions are more relevant in the references with higher unit price, the customers want promotional communication based on price, if the main promotional pace of the brand decreases then adhesion to private labels will increase, customers are focused on promotions that design savings, promotions have a greater impact on the Pingo Doce brand because there is greater visibility due to concentration, the yogurts at Pingo Doce are located in a more favorable location to attract attention.

C. Impact of trademarks

Trademarks are undoubtedly a determining factor of choice (Ferreira *et al.*, 2009) and in the interviewees' understanding there is a clear difference between all the most relevant brands present in the Portuguese market. They refer that if there is a reduction in the price differential the preference will go to the manufacturer's brands (Albayrak and Aslan, 2009; Dick, Jain and Richardson, 1995; Govender and Govender, 2013; Sethuraman and Cole, 1999; Sethuraman, 2000). According to those interviewed, promotional pressure is reducing emotional ties with yogurt and dessert brands, so if the top brands decrease promotional pressure, they will lose market share. The brand has an effect on the subcategories of products in which the interviewees perceive differences in physical characteristics. The Danone brand continues to emerge as an anchor brand, as it was stated: "Of course if you ask me to think about brands, I tell you Danone already. They are good and advertise with Fernanda Serrano (Portuguese actress)."

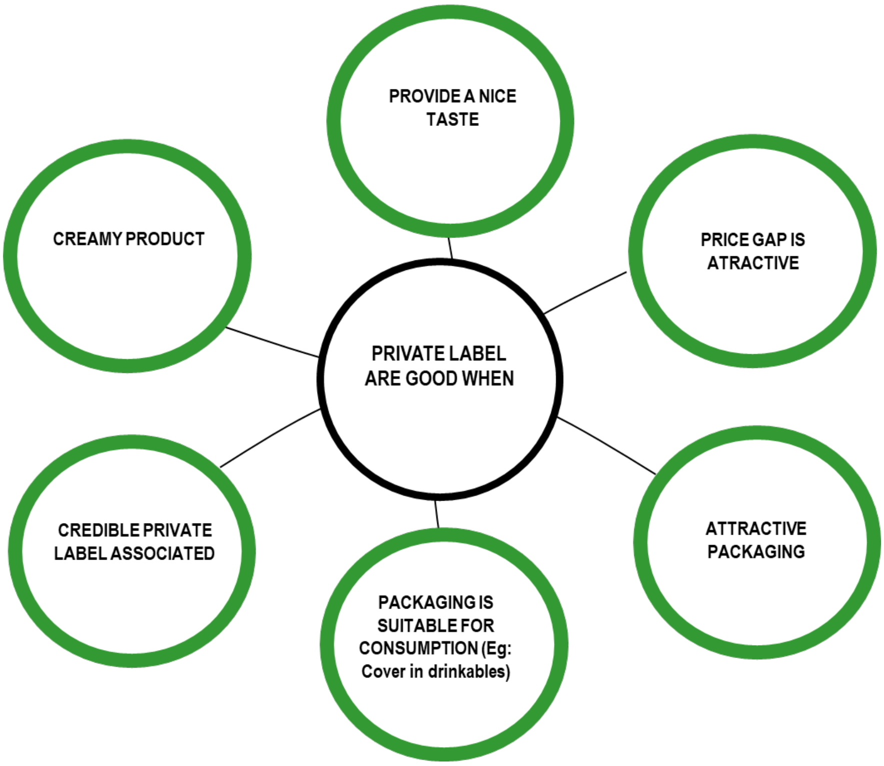
Given the specific impact of private labels, a few key ideas can be synthesized, in line with what was stated for brands in general:

- differences between the private labels are identified (Pingo Doce appears to have an advantage as a reference in this category);
- private labels are the reason for manufacturer brands to make promotions;
- private labels has an effect on subcategories where customers perceive differences in physical characteristics,

- private labels have evolved and for some customers are considered as another brand.

In the opinion of the interviewees the private labels for these products are considered as good and are distinguished by a set of factors (figure nº 3).

Figure 3 - Positive factors of the private labels



Source: Elaborated by the author´s

As far as private labels of the two main operators in the Portuguese market are concerned, some differences were mentioned: Continente private label is more innovative, has a greater variety, liquid yogurts have the right consistency, packaging is not very attractive and liquid yogurts do not have lid; the Pingo Doce brand has high quality, an attractive packaging, a good image, prominence in the store and it has little variety.

4.4 Consumer and Buying Behaviors

4.4.1 Consumer Behavior

Regarding the consumption behaviors toward yogurt and dairy desserts, it is observed that the factors identified by the interviewees have impacts on the purchase decision and consequent consumption of these products.

The participants refer mainly the consumption out of the main meals and also emphasize breakfast consumption mainly with the liquid version. Consumption is leveraged by the high diversity of solutions and the existence of alternatives for different moments of the day is consensual.

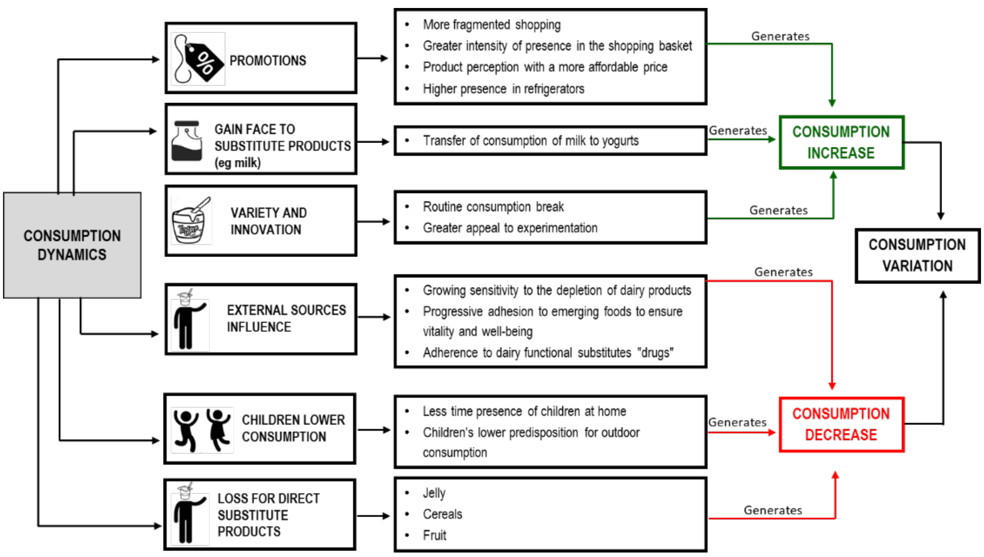
It is also mentioned that yogurts and dairy desserts have alternatives oriented to the various stages of the consumer life cycle. The most recent consumption trends show an inhomogeneous influence, with a clear emphasis on the influence of promotions and the progressive capture of milk consumers.

The factors that most contribute to recent consumption behavior are:

- The pace of life - sometimes intense, leads to less time available and therefore it is necessary to gain time, either because of the unavailability of the spouses due to their occupations, physical or mental fatigue on arrival at home, or the various activities each one of the household members has;
- Gain time by adhering to practical and quick solutions (with the exception of seniors) - as one of the participants points out: "Yes, as a rule, yes. When I go to the gym I usually take 3 yogurts, I take a bar (...), but I take 3 liquid yogurts. I think yogurt is very practical to drive and drink, I have not had an accident until today, so I will continue to do so.";
- The promotional impact - consumer concern is to save money resulting in discounts' attractiveness. Very often promotions weigh on the decision, especially when the price is favorable in relation to milk. The promotional impact leads to consumer behaviors with a large focus on promotions, less receptivity to private labels, fragmentation of purchases to capitalize on promotions and adherence to larger packages and product assemblies;
- The realization that there are promotional cycles that help customers not to lose contact with the product, even in times of major crisis;
- Concerns about food balance - respondents want products that help them to take care of their physical image, as they are more aware of the impact of eating habits on health and well-being. They are also interested in reconciling the vital function of eating with the attainment of pleasure with increasing importance of the "cult of the body." This behavior impacts on consumption making it less seasonal in relation to specific products such as lean or other more functional yogurts such as the Bio type;
- The need for taste compensation is another factor referred to as a determinant of the influence of yogurt consumption. Consumers want to take pleasure in their consumption, the food working as compensation for the difficulties in everyday life. There is therefore a greater presence at home of this type of products. The combination of physical need with pleasure leads consumers to adhere, at least punctually, to pleasure-generating yogurts such as Greek yogurts. In the taste compensation consumers intend to compensate and respond to the daily pressure in their lives, so part of the participants seeks this compensation effect in their diet. Yogurts and dairy desserts are among the alternatives used to meet these needs;
- The use on several occasions as they are used as main meals (breakfast), as well as refreshments (snack, after dinner or between meals) or other occasions such as recreational meals.

The identified consumption trends can be grouped in what can be called the consumption dynamics of yogurts and dairy desserts (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Consumption Dynamics of yogurts and dairy desserts

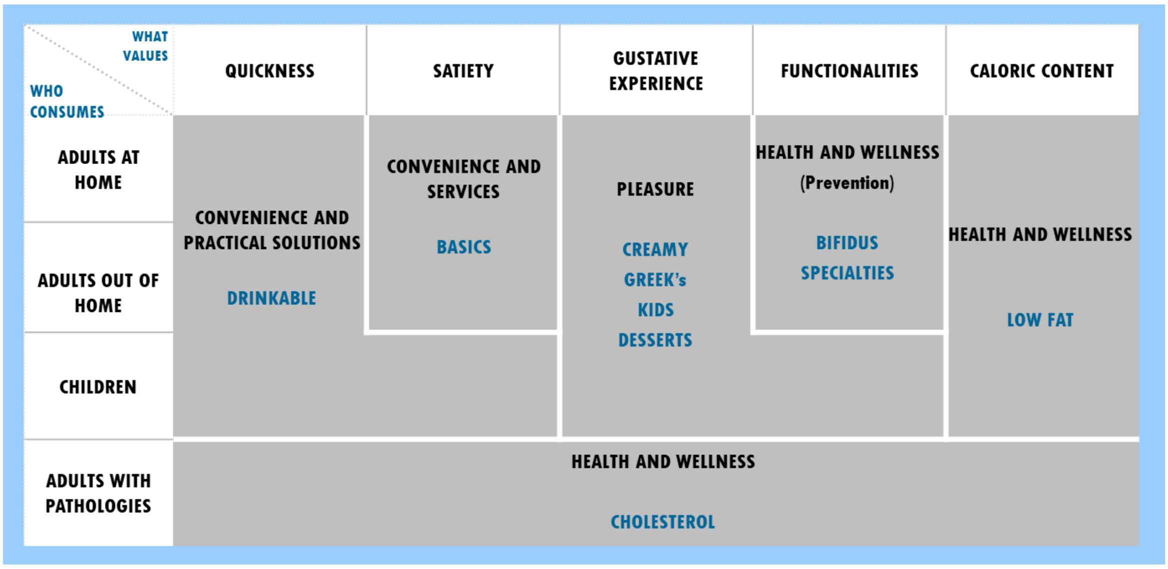


Source: Elaborated by the author´s

As there are several types of yogurts and dairy desserts, the respondents show a tendency to assimilate the structure of the category of products considering (Figure 5):

- who is intended to consume: adults at home or away from home, children and adults with pathologies;
- speed, satiety, taste experience, functionality and caloric content.

Figure 5 - Decomposition of the product category by type of consumer



Source: Elaborated by the author´s

At this level it has become apparent that the category by type of consumers and type of yoghurts is stabilized and there are no difficulties in their interpretation, with the exception of compartmentalized yoghurts.

4.4.2 Buying Behavior

After understanding consumer attitudes and behaviors, it is important to know how the interviewees materialize this involvement in the effective purchase of products and in the loyalty to the chain. In this sense, we try to understand how they organize their thoughts conserning to the choice of the place of purchase, what the behavior inside the store is, especially with the displayers and what is the decision process in the choice of products.

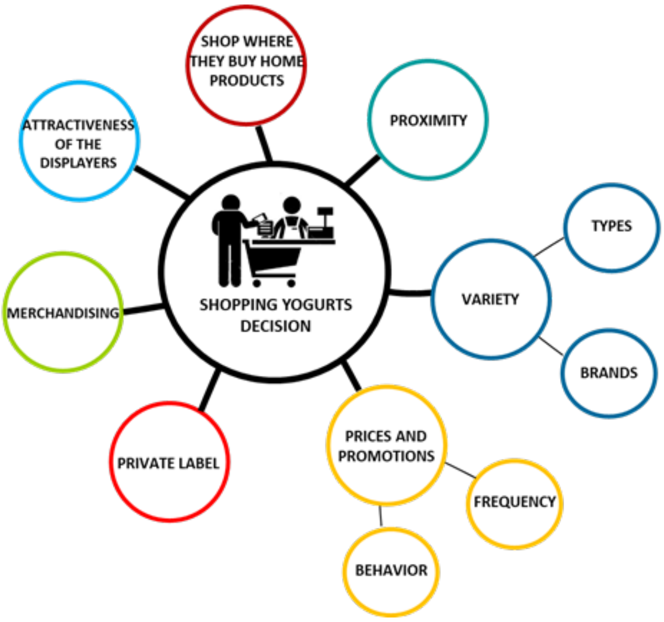
A. Decision purchase place

The interviewees revealed a certain receptiveness to the various chains where they can make the purchase, evidencing the factors that contribute to their decision. They have clearly demonstrated that they differentiate their choices at the level of the places where they buy. They establish differences between the various brands of retailers and between formats. Regarding the differences between retailers, one of the participants said: "In the Continent we have more options. At Pingo Doce we have more promotions and better private labels." Consumers also point out that when they go to the supermarket they choose depending on the speed and ease of purchase; when they go to a large hypermarket their option is by the variety of product, brands and more purchase options, because they say there is less shortage of goods. Yogurts and dairy desserts are not a destination category, since the choice of place is made by offering other types of products such as home products. As one stressed, "The purchase is made in the preferred store for household products." Or another more general statement: "I buy where I do the rest of the shopping."

However, regardless of favorite formats and retail chains, respondents are clear about their requirements to adhere to the value proposition and group them into four key ideas: having what they need, with an attractive price proposal, easily and in an organized and attractive environment. That is, they want to have access to what they need in adequate financial conditions by buying easily in an organized and attractive environment.

Regarding this, the interviewees evidenced a set of criteria for the selection process of a store (figure 6).

Figura 6 - Shop Selection Criteria



Source: Elaborated by the author´s

The interviewees also identified what they thought would be the ideal store for yogurts and dairy desserts: having a good linear organization with easy identification of types and brands, having a circulation facilitator space, having cold displayers with protection doors, low and attractive prices, attractive and visible promotions, attractive decoration, as well as luminosity and variety.

B. Behavior in store next to the displayers

According to the information collected from the participants, it is possible to systematize the operational behavior at the time of purchase:

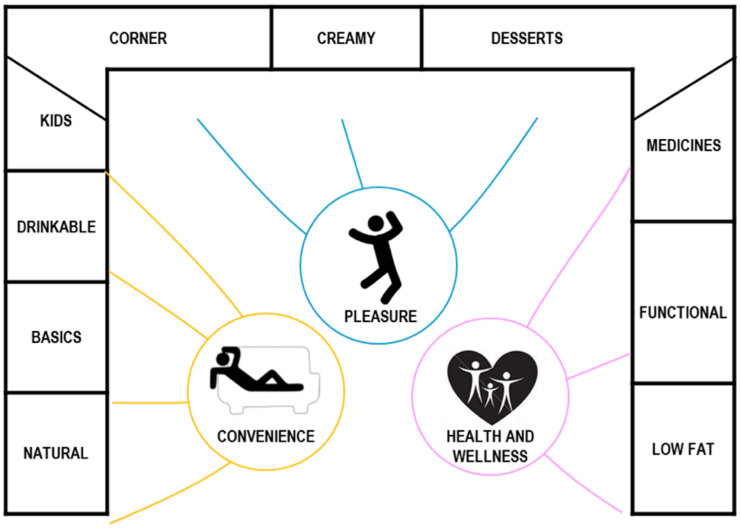
- <u>End of purchases</u> - entry into the yogurt zone usually occurs during the final stage of purchases and so there is a mental pressure to finish purchases quickly, the impact on products such as yoghurts and dairy desserts is great because customers are less inclined to increase purchases;
- <u>Decision by impulse</u> - the decision is often taken when already next to yogurt and dairy desserts hallways which gives greater impetus to the decision, for this reason highlight of promotions, prices and associated information are fundamental.
- <u>Weak propensity to purchase less common and specific products</u> in this category, which leads to lower average sales of these products per customer.

Regarding the organization of the mental process in the exhibition area, the following was referred regarding to the form and order: what is in promotion, quantity, flavors or aromas and expiration dates of the products. This is why an extended variety range of the products is important, as well as easiness to identify the types of yogurts and dairy desserts, the brands and the prices. It is also important not to have shortage of the wanted goods, to have larger packages or containing more units. Nutrition information is fundamental in choosing the product. The space of the store being attractive and comfortable is another aspect considered relevant in the behavior of consumers in store.

Regarding the ideal space for the purchase of the category of products, it was mentioned that it should occupy a specific and circumscribed space differentiated from the other categories in the food area and that would allow a complete visualization of the category of products (figure 7). In this way the interviewees intend:

- to see the space of the category associated to emotional axes that reinforce the valorization of the products;
- that the space provides an overview of the category as soon as it is entered;
- to perceive immediately the variety available;
- to see an organization in the hallways, especially when they are double

Figura 7 - Ideal displayers



Source: Elaborated by the author´s

The place should lead to a quick recognition of the three major areas associated with desired benefits: convenience, pleasure, health and wellness, thus facilitating a better understanding of the range available.

Participants also point out that promotions should be concentrated in one space. There should be some caution, however, because by concentrating promotions in one place the purchase may contain an excessive basket of promotions, thus restricting the likelihood of paying attention to categories not usually acquired.

C. Purchase decision process

Five behaviors were identified that build the decision of purchase in the category of yogurt and dairy desserts:

- customers with a focus on the price - buyers whose purchase decision occurs exclusively due to the lowest price at the point of sale including low prices;
- customers focused on promotions - promotions generate an effect of promotional pressure, the consumer's decision being subject to great variability both in the brands and in the type of products, that is, the promotions mark the decision and overlap at the moment of the choice;
- customers focused on the brands of manufacturers - concentrate on those brands most of their purchases and tend not to consider other possibilities, even in promotion;
- customers focused on private labels – without any loyalty to the manufacturer's brands, they tend to buy private labels exclusively, wasting no time analyzing other alternatives;
- customers running multiple brands - opt at all times for the one that offers the most attractive conditions at the point of sale.

5. Conclusion

The qualitative research carried out showed that the attitudes and behaviors while consuming yogurt and dairy desserts are explained by four dimensions: the prevailing perceptions (positive and negative), the involvement with the category, the consumption motivation and the consumer behavior and purchase. These dimensions directly impact the actual behaviors and the final purchasing decision.

The yogurt and dairy desserts category is at a crossroads because there are conflicting factors influencing the purchase and consumption. The category appears to be positively driven by the promotional pace and the greater capacity to assume as a substitute for milk in some moments of consumption. On the other hand, the category is also being pressured by unfavorable communicational and opinionated phenomena related to the drawbacks associated with milk consumption. The reference brands seem to have reduced or stabilized the private labels' competitiveness by the effect of the permanent promotional cycles.

Yogurts are not the destination category, being purchased mostly in the favorite store for the remaining household products. The more proximity-oriented customers tend to buy the yogurts and dairy desserts mostly in supermarkets, especially Pingo Doce. Variety-oriented customers buy yogurts and dairy desserts in hypermarkets.

From a customer's perspective, the category should be structured on three dimensions: convenience and practical solutions, wellness and health and pleasure. Ideally, customers buying dairy yogurts and dairy desserts value brands that offer variety, promotions, line organization and attractiveness in the section.

In addition to promotions, the second most relevant factor are the private labels. The retailer Pingo Doce appears to have a slight advantage over the Continent in the perception of the private labels for yogurt and dairy desserts. This advantage comes from a better attractiveness of the packaging and an association of the image with the quality. There is undoubtedly an affective connection from the clients that denote a degree of loyalty to this retail chain, resulting from their perception of the chain's private labels. Components associated with promotions in particular can distort this loyalty.

Within the displayers organization, the clients value the purpose of identification of the types of yoghurt. Customers associate the category with emotional factors, intending to see attractive decoration. Ideally, hypermarket clients would like the section organization to be a "closed loop" rather than in double aisles. The shopping experience at Pingo Doce is appreciated by the promotional pace, ease of purchase and private labels and penalized by the scarcity of variety. The shopping experience in the Continent chain is valued by the variety and penalized by the lower ease of purchase and physical section conditions.

However, this research has limitations: being an exploratory study; the study being applied to a specific market (Portuguese) and the use of a convenience sample.

As future research it is suggested: the validation of the factors found using a questionnaire applied to a representative sample of the population; the study carried out could be applied to different categories of private labels products; the realization of the Focus Group in other markets outside Portugal which would allow further generalizations; future research in the consumer purchasing decision area between private labels and manufacturer products; the use of mixed approaches using the Focus Group and in-depth interviews that could show how retail can motivate consumers to buy their private labels; to study whether loyalty to a retail chain is reflected in the purchase of private labels.

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