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Chapter

Private Label Brands Awareness: Advances and Prospects

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Abstract

Over the past decades, private label brands and private label research have come under the spotlight. The chapter aims to explore and integrate the literature on the advances by grocery retailers in creating and enhancing brand awareness for their private label branded products. A foundation is created to understand a brand, and branding and brand awareness are discussed. The chapter then discusses private label branding decisions and the types of brand decisions available for grocery retailers for their private label brand tiers, where light is shed on when best to adopt the type of branding decision and under what consumer-level awareness circumstances. More importantly, the chapter presents an overview of the advances by grocery retailers in their brand awareness practices; the varying successes and effectiveness were highlighted. Moreover, the chapter presents an overview of prospects that grocery retailers can consider in enhancing their existing or halting and formulating new creative private label brand awareness strategies and practices to achieve “top-of-mind” brand awareness status among consumers.

Keywords: branding, brand awareness, consumers, grocery retailers, private label brands

1. Introduction

The introduction of private label brands (PLBs) by grocery retailers has been a strategy to increase their sales volumes, in-store traffic, and store loyalty among consumers. In support, [1] offers that private label brands are rapidly growing faster than national brands. To do so, a growing need for private label brand product awareness has since emerged. As this battle wages on, [1] alludes that grocery retailers need to ponder the design and upraising of their awareness programmes. According to [2], brand awareness can be defined as how consumers and potential consumers are aware of a store and its products. On the other hand, brand awareness can be attributed to the brand’s information and its strength of consumers being able to identify with a brand, in this case, private label brands [3], thereby indicating the overarching significance of grocery retailers investing in brand awareness practices for their private label brand lines to thrive [3, 4].

Building brand awareness is a pivotal task for organisations. Therefore, [5] ascertained that while consumers and potential consumers might be aware and be able to recall a brand, it does not accrue to being fully aware and facilitating purchase

and repurchase intentions. In support, brand awareness does have an influence on consumers' brand and product choices. Within this context, it facilitates the choice for private label brand products to be a product of choice over national products. Moreover, in the presence of alternative choices, an earlier study [6] concluded that consumers aware of one brand generally do not spend time sampling other unknown brands, thereby providing a positive convenient choice for the known brand. In the process, it disregards other essential brand heuristics due to the significance brought by brand awareness. For the context of this chapter, it is contended that superior brand awareness practices by grocery retailers may be valuable. This contention arises from consumers' worries about searching for and choosing private label brands to be their brands of choice [7, 8]. With this, [9], the competition between private labels and national brands has expanded. Therefore, a brand with effective brand awareness strategies can win consumers better. In this case, private label brands can be averse to the perceived risk that persists and affect private label brands' purchases [10, 11]. Now a question remains about the strategies that have been previously trialled and tested to ensure brand awareness.

Over the years, several strategies and tools have been validated to ensure brand awareness. In this chapter, special attention will be given to private label brands and the creation of their brand awareness over time, particularly reviewing recent advancements and prospects by grocery retailers and marketing practitioners. To do so, the chapter is conceptualised as follows: the author delineates branding, brand awareness, private label branding, private label brands awareness, advances in private label brands awareness, and the prospects of private label brand awareness, and then concludes the chapter.

2. Research methodology

For this chapter, the author adopted an integrative research approach. The integrative review approach assists in reviewing and determining the state of knowledge within a specific field [12]. The adoption of the integrative literature review allowed the author to expand and diversify past and present knowledge on brand awareness, and for this chapter, integrate it into private label brands [13]. This integration of knowledge synthesis allows the uncovering of advances and prospects in private label brand awareness, which is the goal of integrative reviews. With this methodology, literature from various brand awareness contexts was extracted and reviewed and allowed the author to give balance and voice to the various literature findings, thereby allowing the presentation of this chapter in a coherent and consistent manner. In support, this approach equipped the author with the included literature for this chapter and more importantly, for private label brand awareness going forward [13]. Despite the capacity of the integrative review to successfully deliver this chapter, its lack of structure and objectivity can expose studies to biasness. However, to minimise such, the author was rigorous in the literature included, to ensure that it was relevant to this chapter.

3. Branding

The terms brand and branding, through the revolution of branding, have been used interchangeably. Firstly, a brand is addressed, followed by the unpacking of

branding. The work of [14] ascertained that a brand in its entirety, aside from its conventional functionality purposes, should strive to serve a purpose of creating some emotional benefits for the consumer pre- and post-purchasing the brand. Therefore, [15] put out that a brand is far more than its name or symbol. But a brand allows the differentiation of its proposition from competing brands [16]. This arouses perceptions, feelings, and emotions that consumers associate with that specific brand. To do so, organisations employ the use of symbols, marks, logos, names, words, or sentences and, in turn, these brands and their product offerings have to provide value to consumers [15–17]. Through the lens of the consumer, a brand is a product or service that they associate with consumers resulting in their trust in the product to satisfy their established needs and provide value [18]. From that interaction, consumers then formulate perceptions surrounding the brand and its products [19].

With that, there is a need to next focus on the branding of subsequent private label brands' branding.

According to [15], the branding of products assists and aides consumers the ease in their purchase decisions. Therefore, within this context, grocery retailers need precision in branding their private label products. Branding therefore relates to the myriad of activities that organisations constantly embark on. These activities include a strategy by organisations to create and shape a certain position in a consumer's mind [18]. Should this position be positive, branding guides the consumer to an organisation's product as opposed to competing alternative brands. This is essential to attract and retain consumers to an organisation's brand by constantly offering value-based products and delivering on the brand promise [17]. To maintain such consistency, in modern times, organisations will be ahead of consumers, which will allow for the differentiation of products, signalling that branding is a creative and distinctive process. Therefore, for this chapter, grocery retailers embark on differentiating their brands from copycatting national brands. A question arises as to why one should engage in branding activities in an organisation. [15] posit that branding builds loyalty and trust, offers competitive advantage, and builds tangible and intangible value of the products. For consumers, it serves a memory cue to retrieve brand information and perceptions, thereby creating a link between organisations and consumers. With the above statements in mind, it is fair to provide that branding and brand awareness are somehow a one-part process.

4. Brand awareness

Brand awareness, according to [20], relates to a consumer's ability to recognise and recall products of a specific brand. As one of the driving elements in the attainment of brand equity, this activity aides consumers' purchase decisions [21, 22]. In doing so, the more consumers and potential consumers are familiar with the brand offering and all other related information of its products, the higher the likeness for a brand to be considered will be. On the significance of brand awareness, [22] offers that familiarity is exhilarated, and allows for brand visibility, greater brand and product exposure, and ease of access to brand facts. On the other hand, brand awareness also creates value among consumers by (1) anchoring awareness links, (2) familiarity, (3) signal of substance, and (4) considering the brand [17]. This consistency in literature highlights the positive aspect of brand awareness.

For the perpetual success and relevance of a brand, it is in the best interest for organisations to invest in brand awareness activities. The question arises: How

can organisations create brand awareness? [2] offers that to create brand awareness, organisations need to detail their brand awareness plan. In that plan, there is a need for the identification of targeted consumers, the creation of a company name, logo, and relevant slogans, packaging and advertising, as well as effective customer relations management. Similarly, [23] holds that this creates association between the brand and consumers. In turn, this influences the feeling of a brand being unknown to being recognised and trusted. In addition, the creation of high-quality brands and services and consistent brand management stand to engage consumers with a brand.

In consideration of brand awareness, its significance, and how brand awareness can be created, a need arises to understand the stages, according to [17]'s stages of the awareness pyramid (**Figure 1**). These four stages aide organisations to execute and maintain their brand awareness strategies. For this chapter, it includes grocery retailers in creating brand awareness for their private label branded product lines. For consumers to be aware of a brand, they move in between four steps. Firstly, being unaware of the brand: at this level, the consumers do not have information and do not recognise the brand and its product; within this context, not being aware and not being able to recognise and recall PLBs. Secondly, brand recognition refers to the consumers' ability to identify and distinguish a brand when any of its components are shown [24]. This process is assisted by consumers viewing company images, logos, and some cues retried, relating to past exposures to the brand [17, 24, 25], which is termed the aided facet of brand awareness. Thirdly, brand recall, according to [24, 26, 27], refers to the ability to recall a brand without any assistance, as opposed to brand recognition, and this is termed the unaided facet of brand awareness. Fourthly, top of mind, this is the level that all organisations aspire to be at. The brand becomes the main brand in the consumer's mind in the presence of alternatives. For this chapter, a consumer will mention a grocery retailer's private label branded products when asked about private label brands over national brands [22].

The above sections dwelled on the foundations of a brand, branding and brand awareness. This builds an emphasis on the elements that might influence the brand awareness of private label brands over time.

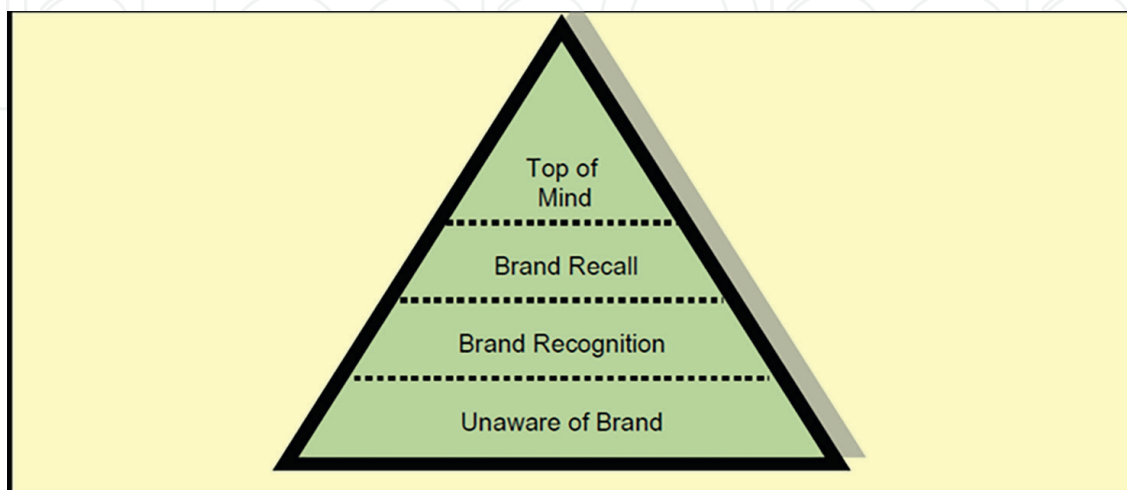


Figure 1.
The awareness pyramid. Source: [17].

5. Private label branding

Like any organisation, grocery retailers are faced with the momentous decision of branding decisions. This allows grocery retailers the opportunity to decide on their private label branding [28]. In this decision process, a range of branding decision strategies are at grocery retailers disposal. They can make use of own name branding or other name branding strategies. Name branding strategies refer to the branding strategy where a retailer adopts the use of its store or chain name or part of the store or chain name [29]. This practice enables grocery retailers to differentiate themselves from national brands. In undertaking this practice, retailers need to decide on the own name branding strategy. This must reflect the grocery retailer's image, denote PLB product quality, and appeal to consumers toward being a brand of choice [30]. In support of the own name branding strategy, Heider's balance theory assumes that consumers are likely to associate themselves with brands that are produced by firms with a reputable image. Within this context, consumers are more likely to relate and opt for private label brands with their store or chain's own name, if it has a reputable image [31]. With the former, the opposite is true if the store or chain name is not reputable. Here, consumers tend to be sceptical of its private label branded products.

On the other hand, a number of grocery retailers employ other name branding strategies. Ngobo [29] posit that aside from using a retailer's own name, some retailers use what they term "other branding" strategies. According to [32], retailers now and then choose newer branding methods. Some now use a different branding strategy in different product categories or a new name for specific product categories. However, [29], in line with Heider's balance theory, warns of the potential detrimental effect of using "other naming" branding, citing that, at times, consumers in the absence of knowledge, might be unfamiliar in differentiating where the private label products belong – the grocery retailer or national brands. Therefore, a good name branding strategy can yield brand success. In contrast, it is equally a momentous decision as retailers need to review the benefits of using their own name, or other naming branding decisions.

The following should be considered by retailers; firstly, the name should translate to consumers the private label brand product attributes, benefits, and qualities. Secondly, the name should be easy for consumers to recognise and the name should also allow for flexibility for it to be applicable to retailers' other private label brand lines [1]. Further to the latter, [16] emphasised that a brand naming strategy should create a foundation toward creating meaning for consumers, and in line with the retailer's branding policies. Fair to note, these considerations should be applicable in all private label branding strategies and decisions of private label brands' marketing practitioners. This is irrespective of the branding decision by the retailer, as different brand approaches are adopted by retailers. As it is evident that consumers have more acceptance if a PLB's name changes according to each product category. On the other side, some relate to the store image and translate it to the retailers private label products. This suggests that no size fits all in the branding decision for private label brands, but it is a decision that should be based on consumer research to ensure success and acceptance [33]. Furthering this, [34], on "How to brand your private labels" concluded on another significant consideration while deciding on the branding decision, which is that consumers view the types of PLBs differently. Economy PLBs have over the years succeeded with store own name branding, as they are familiar with the grocery retail store's name. With standard and premium tier private label

brands, standalone branding has proven a winner over the years. Cautiously, these considerations will not equally succeed in the same retail and economic environments, given the differences within context in developed and emerging grocery retail and economic environments. Having discussed private label branding decisions, it is important to explore how private label brands have over the years advanced in creating awareness.

6. Private label brand awareness

Figure 1 above delved into the levels of brand awareness, with brand identification being at the lowest level. This arises the need for organisations to introduce or accelerate their brand awareness strategies. Ref. [22], contend that, the more consumers are aware of, the more probable they are to associate and consider purchasing private label brands. To achieve this, many organisations have taken to social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among others [26]. Other strategies include word-of-mouth, display advertising, business listings, brand communities, host sponsorship of events for visibility, and print advertising. To add, [35] allude that providing value, the use of podcasts and LinkedIn newsletters interacts with and incentivises followers, publishing positive organisational product stories that are also strategies to enhance brand awareness. This alludes to the multitude of strategies that grocery retailers can adopt in creating PLBs awareness.

6.1 Advances in private label brand awareness

It is argued that brand awareness plays a key role in consumers potentially associating with private label brands. To enhance brand awareness, grocery retailers in the past have leveraged their advantage of the decision on how to disperse shelf space, prices, and most importantly, which product to feature on promotional circulars and in traditional and electronic platforms [1]. Further to this, it promotes extensive investment toward widespread marketing communications and promotional practices. This includes in-store sales promotion, endorsements, and sponsorships, and this create some advertising alertness [36, 37]. In support, positive brand awareness from consumers is said to form and expand private label brands' perceived value proposition among consumers [38]. Furthermore, PLB awareness was found to assist in inclining consumers toward private label brands. Grocery retailers have achieved the latter through information asymmetry evaluation, product knowledge, price, content, packaging, and product positioning [39]. As this provides grocery retailers with an advantage of reversing the risk perceptions that have surrounded private label brands in the past, and in the now, particularly within emerging contexts where consumers are still somewhat sceptical of PLBs for not being aptly aware of them.

Contrary to this, brand awareness was found not having an effect on consumers' purchasing of private label brands [40, 41]. This creates contrasting results of PLB awareness strategies and their success. Despite the extant consistent findings in the literature that brand awareness provides benefits, in emerging economies such as Asia and the Middle East, consumers in these regions over the years have been underexposed to PLBs, lacking awareness [42]. This makes grocery retailers within these contexts prone to slow private label growth. It is worth noting that through these contrasting outcomes of brand awareness, [22] concludes that improvement by grocery retailers in this practice and strategies employed is necessary to achieve

private label brands' success. Appraising these assertions, it fair to note the lethargy by grocery retailers in their brand awareness strategies and the concern on the recommendations of repentance in brand awareness strategies. This includes the known use of in-store promotional activities, social media presence, billboards, and tv and radio advertisements as means to augment PLB awareness [22, 41]. Therefore, a need arises to explore prospects for grocery retailers to consider in future, to assist them in creating effectiveness with their present brand awareness strategies.

6.2 Prospects in private label brand awareness

As consumer behaviour changes with time, so does the need for grocery retailers to embrace the changes in their practices by halting or revising their strategies. With the introduction of revolutionising aspects such as industry 4.0, it will require effective brand management to successfully position private label brands in the minds of consumers [43]. The future point toward transformation of the industry includes the rise of e-commerce, online and offline store formats, hard discounters, express sales and delivery [44]. These grocery retail industry developments leave marketing practitioners and retailers with questions and opportunities to explore the future for their PLBs. To prevent grocery retailers' brand awareness strategies to be obsolete, insights into the possible future are critical [45].

It is worth noting that, despite the investments in brand awareness, this has yielded varying results for grocery retailers. Consequently, [46] found that consumers are still largely familiar with national brands as opposed to private label brands. As a result, [47] encourage grocery retailers in the future to subside their investments on private label brand awareness. In future, to counter this misfortune, grocery retailers can explore the following brand awareness enhancement avenues. Consistent with prior practices, consumer behaviour changes over time; first there is need for grocery retailers to continuously be in the know of their consumers. In doing so, they can move on to adopt or alter their existing brand awareness practices. Bergkvist and Taylor [48] offers that there is a rise in alternatives to creating brand awareness, social media advertising assisted by influencer marketing, and creating E-word of mouth for brands. Most importantly, the prospects of brand awareness strategies going forward for grocery retailers is the adoption and inclusion of technology to mediate the enhancement of brand awareness. In recognition of the work of [49], it is postulated that brand awareness can be aided by advertising and promotion on tv and social media and retailers' catalogues. In addition, [50] allude that promotion and word-of-mouth through family and friends are significant. However, for grocery retailers in this chapter, it reiterated that new media and technologies provide a new field of opportunities for PLB awareness enhancement. This has the potential to flexibly link consumers and grocery retailers' PLB products, both in online and offline store environments [51]. The adoption of these technological mediated brand awareness strategies and programmes can allow the raising of product awareness and choice assortment, tracking and use of data to create customised awareness material and influence consumers' private label brand purchase.

7. Chapter summary

This chapter looked at the advancements and prospects in the creation and enhancement of brand awareness, with a particular focus on private label brands.

In doing so, brand awareness being the first element of brand equity, a need arose to create a foundation for the discussion of a brand, branding, brand awareness and further integrate these elements to private label brands. These elements were solely introduced and discussed. Then, stages of awareness levels were discussed and their significance for brands. With that, this chapter noted the importance of brands achieving a “top of mind” level status in consumers’ awareness of a brand.

As the chapter progressed, a discussion on private label branding, in the advancement of the discussion, branding decisions available for private label brands were dwelled upon. More so, the benefits and drawbacks of each branding decision were presented, appraised, and critiqued. It arose that grocery retailers, for their different types of PLBs (standard, economy and premium), are suited for being branded through the retailer’s own name, or “other naming” strategies. In this regard, this chapter also noted the emergence of newer branding decisions available for grocery retailers, such as providing new branding decisions and brand names for PLB products in different product segments. Therefore, this section of the chapter gives perspective to ponder effect of broader decision-making on their decision-making, given their assessment of the current state of PLBs.

On private label brands awareness, its advances, it is noted that, in the past and present, to create brand awareness, retailers have largely relied on traditional and non-traditional communication and marketing practices to ensure awareness among consumers. This includes the frequent in-store sales promotion, retailer catalogues, advertising in offline and online channels, billboards, and event sponsorships. This chapter notes the variation in the effectiveness of these awareness building strategies, as national brands remain a more popular “top of mind” brand among consumers. Representing the unequal success of PLBs across the globe, which is a result of differences in economic conditions giving rise to differences in demand, grocery retail industry structure, innovation, among other market characteristics giving rise to the differences. Therefore, this chapter provides awareness in the application of brand awareness strategies and programmes, that they are not a one-size-fits-all in all grocery industry contexts. Therefore, this chapter provides prospects to aid the prominently utilised brand awareness strategies that grocery retailers can consider. This includes consistent analysis of consumer behaviour and shopping patterns, venturing into latest technological developments such E-word of mouth, influencer marketing to create further online brand engagements with consumers and potential consumers. These are a few examples of strategic directions that can be prospects to enhance brand awareness for private label brands. With that, it can be concluded that this chapter adequately explored and integrated brand awareness knowledge and foundations toward the advancements and prospects of private label brands awareness.

8. Limitations and perspectives for future research

Because of the dynamism of economies, consumer behaviour, and industry change, a need arises for further empirical studies on the effectiveness of prominent brand awareness strategies employed by grocery retailers and their relevance within the current context. It is also fair to note that the author employed an integrative literature review approach in tackling this chapter. Therefore, this approach posed limitations such a clear structure and process. Therefore, a future systematic review of this topic could yield other interesting insights due to following a structured and well-defined process of searching, including, excluding, and reviewing the literature.

In creating brand awareness, grocery retailers can utilise various activities. However, the scope and effectiveness of these brand awareness activities can, in future, be empirically evaluated, as they cannot be a one size fits all for grocery retailers and their PLB products.

Further research is recommended to shed light on the brand equity dimension of brand awareness among other dimensions of trust and loyalty to assess how consumers' private label brands' purchase behaviours evolve from each brand equity dimension. This can enrich the explanation of how private label brand equity is built, taking into cognisance that brand awareness since the latter is beyond the scope of this chapter. This can yield significant implications for grocery retailers and marketing practitioners alike.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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