

# *Demographic Affects on Consumers' Awareness and Source of Awareness for Private-Label Brands*

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper presents the findings of a research regarding the effect of demographic factors on consumers' awareness and source of awareness for food-related private-label brands. Results of the field research indicate that the majority of the consumers are aware of private label brands, with main source of awareness being advertisement leaflets and store shopping situations. Age and gender affects were tested for awareness, source of awareness and recall of private label store carrying food-related private-label brands. Results revealed that gender affects brand awareness and source of awareness, while age affects recall of the supermarket. Implications of the research findings in marketing and retailing are also discussed for helping marketing managers.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Indian retail industry is the fifth largest in the world. Indian retail industry is one of the fastest growing industries in India, especially over the last few years. Though initially, the retail industry in India was mostly unorganized with a dominance of small Mom and Pop Stores, however with changing Governmental policies and the change of tastes and preferences of the consumers, the industry is witnessing many changes these days. The retail industry in India is expected to grow at a pace of 25-30% annually. The India retail industry is expected to grow from Rs. 35,000 crore in 2004-05 to Rs. 109,000 crore by the year 2010.

According to the 8th Annual Global Retail Development Index (GRDI) of AT Kearney, Indian retail industry is the most promising emerging market for investment. In 2007, the retail trade in India had a share of 8-10% in the GDP of the country. In 2009, it rose to 12%. It is also expected to reach 22% by 2010. According to a report by Northbridge Capital, the Indian retail industry is expected to grow to US\$ 700 billion by 2010. By the same time, the organized sector will be 20% of the total market share from its share of 7.5% in 2007.

With this volume growth, retail industry in India is also witnessing many structural changes in terms of new and organized players, increasing competition, retail formats etc. In order to remain competitive the players in the market are experimenting with many strategies. One of the strategies being adopted by most of the organized players is the

introduction of Private Labels. Private labels are defined as consumer products produced by or on behalf of, retailers and sold under the retailer's own name or trademark through the retailer's own outlets.

Private labels account for a large share in developed markets — they account for 40 per cent of Wal-Mart sales (\$126 billion or Rs 5,16,600 crore), 50 per cent for Tesco (\$36 billion or Rs 1,47,600). In Germany share of private label is 34 per cent in total retail sales. This has, in effect, changed the balance of power between brand manufacturers and retailers, giving the latter a definite advantage when negotiating terms with the national brand manufacturers. Apart from the multi-brand retailers, a category of private label-only retailers has also emerged — Ikea, Wills LifeStyle, Zara — who sell only private label brands. Main reasons for the emergence of Private Labels are an increased concentration and competition among retailers, increased pressure on their profit margins, an improved quality perception among consumers, and a rising social acceptance of private labels consumption. In addition, the current economic downturn has further boosted the appeal of private labels because of their price utility. Private labels play an important role in retailers' strategy beyond adding value through convenient pricing for consumers. Many retailers consider private labels as key in their effort to create consumer loyalty and to differentiate themselves from the competition. This may explain retailers' intensifying involvement with private labels.

In order for a brand to have future sales and moreover a respectable market share the managers' first job is to create and enhance brand awareness (Pitts and Katsanis, 1996). Alerk (Po and Settle (1999) in outlining strategies for building strong brand preferences, state that the first strategy is to develop "need association" through developing brand name awareness. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) suggest that brand equity arise from brand awareness, while Farquhar (1994) argues that in order to develop brand power, brand awareness must pre-exist. Lastly, Alba and Chattopadhyay (1986) state that with enhancing brand name awareness substantial competitive consequences result, because it may hinder consumer's memory for competitive brand names. Brand awareness seems to be very important for brand managers. The by att as as

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Macdonald and Sharp (1996) determined the level of understanding of brand awareness among marketing practitioners in Australia. They also investigated the use of brand awareness as measures of their marketing effectiveness. They found that 46% of the managers could provide a reasonable definition, while only 44% measured brand awareness of their brands either during advertising campaigns or during the initial commercialization of a new product. Ken Hendricks & Alan Sorensen (2009) studied the impact of information availability (awareness) on the sales of Music Albums of the Rock Bands in US and found that Rock groups can lose as much as 40% of their potential sales because consumers don't know enough about them.

Brand awareness is essential for the communication process to occur as it precedes all other steps in the process. Establishing brand awareness is the first step for creating brand knowledge (Keller, 1993), brand evaluation (Holden and Lutz, 1992; Nedungadi, 1990) and brand choice (Crowley and Williams, 1991; Nedungadi and Hutchinson, 1985).

In order for a consumer to buy a brand he must be aware of it, otherwise brand attitude, preference, nor intention to buy will occur (Rossiter et al. 1991). When a consumer is aware of a brand, he imports it in the awareness set, which comprises of all the brands, he is aware of (Crowley and Williams, 1991). After eliminating some brands, he produces a consideration set, which is a subset of the awareness set. The consideration set comprises of brands considered for future purchases. Lastly, after evaluating the brands in the consideration set the consumer forms the evoked set. The evoked set is a subset of the consideration set, and contains the brands considered for the next purchase (Howard and Sheth, 1969). Thus, a brand that has some level of awareness is more likely to be considered by the consumer, than one that he is unaware of. Aaker (1991) state that there are four types of awareness: Top-of-mind awareness, brand recall, brand recognition, and unaware of a brand; though in the retailing situation, recognition or recall typically measures brand awareness (Pope, 1998). With recognition, one only needs to identify a presented stimulus that he has seen, heard or felt before (Singh et al., 1988), meaning that recognition gives cues to the subject which can trigger memory to retrieve the desired information (Monroe, 1991). Recognition is a relevant brand awareness measure, when consumers' purchase decisions are stimulus-based (MacInnis et al., 1999). Thus, when the brands are presented, researchers typically take a recognition measure in which they present the brand name and ask respondents whether they know the brand or not (Holden, 1993).

The second measure of brand awareness, recall, as indicated by Chattapadhyay and Alba (1988) is a significant predictor of attitude. Various standard measures of brand awareness, such as aided and unaided (free) brand name recall, rest on the assumption that the ability of the consumer to remember a

brand or a product will strongly affect the probability of considering purchasing it (Nedungadi and Hutchinson, 1985). Recall is the mental reproduction of a response or item that has been experienced or learned before. With recall, one requires two steps in memory, first search and then recognition (Singh et al., 1988). Holden (1993), states that when the brands are not present, the appropriate measure of brand awareness is recall, measured by presenting a product category and asking the participants to recall brands from the category.

Nevertheless, either assessed in terms of recognition or in terms of recall, awareness is essential for the consumers to retrieve the target brand with or without associated cues (Keller, 1993).

Researches on different aspects of awareness, focused mainly on recall and recognition of brands or products. However, none of which were in the specific context of private label brands. In addition, no previous research emphasized on the source of awareness and none investigated consumers' demographic effects on private label brand awareness.

Considering the importance of food-related private-label brand awareness, especially for retailers, this paper focuses on both concepts of awareness: recognition and recall. Bearing in mind that this research is basically exploratory in nature, it has three specific objectives:

1. To investigate Indian consumers' awareness of food-related private-label brands, as well as the source that produced awareness;
2. On free recall basis, to record which supermarket carrying food-related private-label brands is first recalled by consumers;
3. To investigate whether consumers' demographic components are related to food-related private-label brand awareness, as well as to the source that produced awareness.

To address the above issues, a research approach as presented below was undertaken. Then presentation of the research findings follows. This paper concludes with the discussion, conclusions and implications for retail managers.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Following literature on consumer behaviour and in view of the exploratory nature of this study, researchers opted for qualitative research (Milliken, 2001; Threlfall, 1999; Cahill, 1996). Qualitative research employed discussions in three focus groups with twelve persons in each in the NCR, using the same questionnaire for all sessions. Participants were selected within friends and family, but they varied in different demographic components. Specifically, seven participants were females and five males, while ages varied from 17 to 68 years old, with eight consumers belonging equally in the following age groups: 17-25; 26-35; 36-45 and 46-55. Also,

three participants were 56-65, and one was more than 68 years of age. The main findings of the focus group discussions were the following:

1. Initially, an explanation of the term 'private-label brands' was provided to the participants, as they were not familiar with this term. Thereafter, it was found that the majority of the participants were aware of private-label brands.
2. Females were more aware of food-related private-label brands than males, while age did not seem to have any affect on awareness.
3. Regarding information source from where awareness was obtained, younger subjects reported shopping situation; females reported price-advertising leaflets and news paper advertisements, while older subjects reported mainly friends and relatives.
4. When asked to recall some supermarkets carrying food-related private-label brands, older subjects reported neighborhood private label store that they usually purchase from and have access to by foot. Younger subjects mentioned first the large stores located in Malls.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

With the observations of qualitative research in the background, and taking into account the objectives of this study, the following research hypotheses arose:

1. Hypothesis 1: in the case of food-related private-label brands, gender effects on food-related private-label brand awareness.
2. Hypothesis 2: in the case of food-related private-label brands, gender effects on the source which produced awareness.
3. Hypothesis 3: in the case of food-related private-label brands, age effects on recall of the private label stores which carry these brands.

## METHODOLOGY OF FIELD RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

For the purpose of verifying the above hypotheses, a structured questionnaire was developed based on the results of qualitative research and taking into consideration the objectives of this study. It was divided into four parts: demographic variables, private-label awareness, source of awareness and purchasing behavior of consumers.

## FIELD RESEARCH

To accomplish the foregoing research objectives, the survey approach was adopted. The questionnaire was pretested with a sample of 20 respondents selected with the mall intercept technique. After making the necessary modifications, field research was undertaken in the same area over a three-week period.

The current study was conducted using a non probability convenience sampling due to limited finance and time. This

type of sample allows the researcher to basically choose who, where and when to research and gather data. The method used is selected on the basis of assumption that the population is almost homogenous on the factor under study. One of the disadvantages of this method is that the result may be non representative of the entire population. However this method can ensure a high response rate whereas probability sampling involves a lot of difficulty and costs. Sample unit was one adult per family, where 222 valid questionnaires were collected. The sample was also found efficient for the statistical analysis performed, since Lehmann et al. (1998) indicated that the minimum sample size for chi-square tests is 120 respondents. Statistical analysis of the survey data includes descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics, i.e., cross tabulation, and degree of association (Cramer's V).

## RESULTS SAMPLE PROFILE

Gender distribution of the respondents was 45.9% males and 54.1% females. Age varied from 18 to 65+, with the largest proportion divided into three age categories: Less than 25, 26-35, 36-45 categories (20.3%, 29.3% and 20.3% respectively). There were 13.5 respondent in above 55 category. Most respondents were married (87.8%), had a university degree (80.6%), and were salaried employees (71.6%).

## FIRST OBJECTIVE: PRIVATE LABEL BRAND AWARENESS AND SOURCE OF AWARENESS

Since qualitative research revealed that most respondents were not familiar with the term "private-label brands", and in order to decrease bias in the field study, when respondents answered that they were not aware of food-related private-label brands, they were given a definition of the term. If respondents then answered that they were aware of these brands or could give an example, then they were placed in the "aware" category. If respondents stated once again that they still do not know what private-label brands are, they were placed in the "not-aware" category. Employing this method, results of this study revealed that from 222 respondents that took part in the survey, 201 (90.4%) were aware of private label brands' existence, while 192 (86.5 %) respondents were aware of the food-related private-label brands.

In order to investigate source of awareness, recognition measures were used (MacInnis, 1999; Holden, 1993). In this case, four options, which were derived from qualitative research, were given to the respondents. Respondents were then asked to recognise the source which produced brand awareness. Results revealed that main source of food-related private-label brand awareness were advertisement leaflets. Shopping Situations and Friends and relatives, came next (Table 1).

**Table 1. Consumers' source of awareness for food-related private label brands**

Sources of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Advertisement Leaflets	72	32.4
Shopping Situations	64	28.8
Friends and Relatives	61	27.5
Other Sources	25	11.3
Total	222	100.0

**SECOND OBJECTIVE: RECALL OF SUPERMARKET CARRYING FOOD RELATED PRIVATE LABEL BRANDS**

Unaided awareness and specifically free recall measures in an unconstrained task was used to investigate recall of supermarkets carrying food-related private-label brands. Specifically, respondents had a few minutes to name the first store that comes to their mind carrying food-related private-label brands. With this method, consumers named six stores, as the main ones carrying food-related private-label brands in NCR (Table 2).

**Table 2. The first supermarket consumers recalled carrying food-related private-label brands**

Supermarket	Frequencies	Percentage of sample
Food Bazaar	44	19.8
Reliance Super	62	27.3
Vishal Megamart	32	14.4
Sabka Bazaar	39	17.6
Local Stores	45	20.3
Total	222	100.0

**THIRD OBJECTIVE: HYPOTHESES TESTS.**

*First hypothesis: in the case of food-related private-label brands, gender effects on food-related private-label brand awareness.*

Awareness of food-related private-label brands did vary significantly over gender groups ( $\chi^2 = 13.181$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.244$ ). Awareness for food-related private-label brands was significantly higher for females (50.9 %) than males (35.6 %), though Cramer's  $V$  measure of association was medium.

*Second hypothesis: in the case of food-related private-label brands, gender effects on the source which produced awareness.*

Source of food-related private-label brand awareness did vary significantly over gender groups ( $\chi^2 = 18.007$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.285$ ). Specifically, significantly more females obtained awareness of food-related private-label brands from the price advertising leaflets (40.0%) and from friends and relatives (33.0%) as opposed to males (23.0% and 21.0% respectively). While the latter, obtained food-related private-label brand awareness primarily during shopping situation (41.0% for males and 18.0% for females). Cramer's  $V$  measure of association was medium (Table 3).

Gender	Source of awareness of food-related private - label brands			
	Advertisement Leaflets	Shopping Situations	Friends and Relatives	Other Sources
<b>Males</b>				
Frequencies	24	42	22	
Percentages	10.8%	18.9%	9.9%	14
<b>Females</b>				
Frequencies	48	22	39	6.3%
Percentages	21.6%	9.9%	17.6%	11
<b>Total</b>				
Frequencies	72	64	61	5.0%
Percentages	32.4%	28.8%	27.5%	25
				11.3%

$\chi^2=18.007$ ,  $p= .000$ , Cramer's  $V=0.285$

*Third hypothesis: in the case of food-related private-label brands, age effects on recall of the store which carries these brands.*  
 Recall of a store that carry food-related private-label brands did vary significantly over the age groups ( $\chi^2=29.228$ ,  $p= .022$ , Cramer's  $V=0.181$ ). Specifically, older aged subjects named neighborhood stores, while younger subjects named large supermarkets located in big malls (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Statistical differences between consumers' age and recall of stores carrying food-related private - label brands**

Store first Recalled	Respondents age					Total
	Less than 25	26-35	36-45	46-55	above 55	
<b>Food Bazaar</b>						
Frequency	13	13	7	6	5	44
Percentage	5.9%	5.9%	3.2%	2.7%	2.3%	19.8%
<b>Reliance Super</b>						
Frequency	13	29	9	5	6	62
Percentage	5.9%	13.1%	4.1%	2.3%	2.7%	27.9%
<b>Vishal Megamart</b>						
Frequency	5	8	8	5	6	32
Percentage	2.3%	3.6%	3.6%	2.3%	2.7%	14.7%
<b>Sabka Bazaar</b>						
Frequency	7	7	13	7	5	39
Percentage	3.2%	3.2%	5.9%	3.2%	2.3%	17.6%
<b>Local Stores</b>						
Frequency	7	8	8	14	8	45
Percentage	3.2%	3.6%	3.6%	6.3%	3.6%	20.3%
<b>Total</b>						
Frequency	45	65	45	37	30	222
Percentage	20.3%	29.3%	20.3%	16.7%	13.5%	100.0%

$\chi^2=29.228$ ,  $p= .022$ , Cramer's  $V=0.181$

## DISCUSSION

### First objective: Private label brand awareness and source of awareness

The first objective of this study was to explore Indian consumers' awareness of food-related private-label brands and source of awareness. Results reveal that awareness about private labels in general and specifically with food related private labels does exist. At first sight, this percentage could be considered very high and satisfactory. But on the other hand, 13.5% of the respondents are not aware that food-related private-label brands are distributed in the market. This percentage cannot be considered small and should not be overlooked, since it may consist of future purchasers. Macdonald and Sharp (1996) state that brand awareness offers a great deal of potential value to the marketing manager and it should be an important goal of the marketing communications efforts of a firm. This means that marketing managers of these stores, need to enhance brand awareness of their brands, to all potential consumers. Previous researchers (e.g. Macdonald and Sharp, 1996; Roberts and Nedungadi, 1995; Crowley and Williams, 1991; Hower and Brown, 1990) showed that if brand awareness does not exist, then it is unlikely that a brand will be considered for purchase. Taking this into account and with the results of this study in the background, private label marketing managers should make all out efforts to make these 13.5% of customers aware of food-related private-label brands.

This study is the first attempting to identify the source of food-related private-label brand awareness. Results revealed that the main source of food-related private-label brand awareness is advertisements in news papers and price leaflets, which is in fact the most common promotional tool, especially for large supermarkets. Customer shopping situations and friends and relatives as source of food-related private-label brand awareness comes second and third in importance, while other sources of awareness, such as the internet etc are very insignificant.

### Second objective: Recall of store carrying food related private label brands

The second objective of this study was to record which private label store is first recalled by consumers as the one that carries food-related private-label brands. Since this study, does not deal with a single private label food product category, recall of private label store was considered as an element which leads consumers to recall of food-related private label brands. Recall of the private label store, revealed four stores, being the dominants in the NCR. Even though the four private label store recalled are the dominant of food-related private label brands in NCR, about half of the respondents (47.7%) recalled only

two supermarkets, Food Bazaar and Reliance Super which are well established, while the third private label store Sabka Bazaar is an old established retail chain typically having its store located at convenient locations near residential areas but not in big malls. The fourth private label store recalled is Vishal Mega-Mart. A significant proportion (20.3%) of respondents recalled local grocery stores, which indicates that these stores are also preferred by the customers and they have a significant share.

### Third objective: hypotheses tests.

*First hypothesis: in the case of food-related private-label brands, gender effects on food-related private-label brand awareness.*

The results of this research strongly suggest that significant differences between males and females do exist regarding awareness of food-related private label brands. In general, results suggest that female respondents have a higher level of awareness than males. This argument is premised on the assumption that females remain dominant shoppers in the family for food products, as Dholakia (1999) and Williams et al. (1997) have found in previous studies.

*Second hypothesis: in the case of food-related private-label brands, gender effects on the source which produced awareness.*

Shopping situation is more common source of awareness for males than females, probably because they are "hassle-free bargain hunters", while females being "informed bargain hunters" and do not go searching for lower price brands, unless they are informed (Williams et al., 1997). Discussions about food brands tried and prices among females, due to the existence of interpersonal relationships, are also recognized as another source of awareness. Awareness obtained from price shopping leaflets is much higher for females than males, probably because they are more interested and likely to browse through them when they are free.

*Third hypothesis: in the case of food-related private-label brands, age effects on recall of the stores which carry these brands.*

The empirical results strongly suggest that significant differences in recall of stores carrying food-related private label brands do exist between age groups. In general, results suggest that older respondents have a higher level of recall for neighborhood private label stores and local stores carrying private labels. This can be explained by the fact that they purchase mostly from such outlets and they are generally more attached to the neighborhood spirit. However younger people first recalled large stores located in large malls. This indicates that younger people visits malls more frequently and do their purchases from the stores located there.

## IMPLICATIONS

Developing and maintaining successful brands is the heart of marketing strategy, thus, retail marketers attempt to gain entry into the consumer's awareness set through promotional efforts.

The results of the present study will help retail marketers to develop an effective approach towards Indian consumers. Specifically, identifying consumer awareness source can be of practical value to retail marketers as it may be an important feature in specifying target markets requiring different marketing strategies. It can be useful in helping the manager to decide how to influence the awareness process, in order to ensure that consumers will perceive the brand positively, and will include the brand among those considered for purchase.

These results will help retail marketers to concentrate on an effective way of developing brand awareness. In order to increase their private label brands market share, the small supermarkets should enhance their interpersonal relations and encourage word of mouth (WOM) communication. Literature indicates that WOM communication is one of the most widely accepted concepts in consumer behavior, having a significant effect in consumers' attitudes and behavior in the purchasing process of products and services (Murray, 1991). Local stores can achieve this more easily, since they operate on a neighborhood base, and have an advantage in comparison to large ones.

On the other hand large stores should concentrate on promotional techniques, such as on advertisements in news papers, price advertising leaflets, in store promotions, etc. Lastly, the present study suggests to retail marketers the need to segment consumers on the basis of brand awareness and source of awareness for an effective approach and marketing communication.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is important to recognize several limitations of this study, which offer opportunities for further research. Firstly, Indian retail environment is changing very fast. Since the research was conducted, a lot of changes have taken place; not only in the retailing market, but in the market in general. Second, this research due to time and resource constraints encompassed only respondents from the NCR, and so, results may not be representative for the whole of the country. Third, this study does not consider a specific food category, mainly because it has an exploratory nature. Lastly, it does not deal with consumers buying behavior in general; it specifically focuses on food-related private-label brand awareness.

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