CUSTOMERS' BRAND AWARENESS, BRAND TRUST, AND BRAND LOYALTY FOR PRIVATE LABEL BRANDS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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ABSTRACT

Private label brands have over the years gained insurgence in the grocery retail sector, creating opportunities for grocery retailers to increase variety in product offerings for their customers. Grocery retailers' efforts in creating brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty are essential in building favorable customer perceptions towards private label brands. Therefore, in this paper, we explore South African customers' brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty for private label brands. We used a convergent parallel mixed-method approach, first consisting of a quantitative phase where 389 structured questionnaires were collected and useable to measure customers' brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty for private label brands; followed by the qualitative phase using semi-structured interviews with 10 grocery retail managers. The results from both customers and grocery retail managers indicated that customers were aware of private label brands, revealing that customers do not entirely trust private label brands and as a result, they are attitudinally loyal.

Keywords: Private Label Brands, Brand Awareness, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty

INTRODUCTION

The prominent rise of private label brands over the years has not been achieved easily by grocery retailers, since private label brands have held the status of being cheap alternates for manufacturer brands (Dick et al, 1995). Traditionally, this has been the perception of customers towards private label brands. However, previous research suggests that the growth of private label brands naturally occurs during tough economic conditions (Mukherji, 2017). During this period customers are likely to have less disposable income and their spending is limited. Therefore, they are likely to opt for private label brands over manufacturer brands. Even though customers still question the quality and reliability of these brands (Boon et al., 2018). Grocery retailers are still left with the mammoth task of convincing customers to repeatedly opt for the purchase of private label brands over manufacturer brands. Hence, the objective of this present study was to analyse customers' brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty of customers towards private label brands, in the South African grocery retail sector.

In South Africa, private label brands amounted to R56 billion in sales for the year 2019. In the process accounting for 22% of market share in the FMCG industry, a 1% yearly increase from 2018 (21%) and 2017 (20%). This growth is accounted for by the constraints in customer spending as a result of continuous increases in fuel prices and taxes (Biz Community, 2019). Notwithstanding, that as more customers become constrained, the more customers shift their awareness towards private label brands. In the future, grocery retailers can strive to create more awareness and private label products that customers see as value for their money (Nielsen, 2014). For this study, we argue on the importance of grocery retailers analysing the components of brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty to understand the strides made by their respective private label brands, where it is found that private label brands are on the path of growth (Nielsen, 2014; 2018; Biz Community, 2019).

Since customers are said to be somehow still skeptical of private label brands in favor of manufacturer brands, they do so by having first evaluated both brands. Firstly, customers will collect information about both brands using their set criteria (Lamb et al, 2015). For example, customers consider the issue of private label brand pricing as an indicator for their quality, where often their lower pricing is associated with lower quality. However, if grocery retailers are to increase their pricing. As Nielsen (2014) supports that grocery retailers in the future might need to adjust their low pricing strategies of private label brands. This will however be contradictory to what customers are familiarized with, the savvy pricing of private label brands. In the process leaving more uncertainty or approval by customers.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Branding

According to Lamb et al (2015), a brand can be identified as a name, term, symbol, a design, or an arrangement of the abovementioned. A brand, therefore, exists to set apart a grocery retailer's private label product from the already established manufacturer brands. This presents grocery retailers with an opportunity to choose the names and logos for their private label products (Geyskens et al, 2018). Furthermore, they can choose to use the grocery retail name or create a distinct name for their private label brands that customers will identify with. In addition, branding thus enables grocery retailers to set apart their private label brands from manufacturer brands and making them recognisable towards customers (Roper and Parker, 2006). In their book, Lamb et al (2015) write that branding results in customers forming positive relations, increased confidence, and familiarity in a brand. As a result, this allows grocery retailers to attain increased support, in the process increasing private label brands sales. In addition, branding is essential for grocery retailers that offer private label brands as it improves and retains product memory within the minds of customers (Cunningham, 2018).

Lamb et al (2015) offer that branding brings a bond between customers and a product. This is a result of effective awareness, reliability, and loyalty created by grocery retailers to attract and maintain customers in continuously purchasing private label brands. Hence, branding is a multi-faceted process. Whereby;

Brand awareness

Aaker (1996) in the words of Chi et al (2009) understood that brand awareness is the capability of a customer to identify and remember a specific brand or product. For customers to purchase private label brands; they need to be aware of private label brands (Barreda et al, 2015). Therefore, when making purchasing decisions, the customer can be able to identify and recall private label brands and their related products (Chi et al, 2009). Where 1) brand recognition of private label bands – refers to the capability of customers to recognize a private label brand from manufacturer brands (Aaker, 2000). 2) Brand recall–A situation where customers easily recall a brand without being aided (Aaker, 2000). As a result, Kaiser (2014) suggests that grocery retailers currently offering private label brands, in current states can no longer be alternates of manufacturer brands. In support, Rubio et al (2014) stressed the significance of grocery retailers in investing towards communicating to customers about their private label brands. As a result, Rubio et al (2014) commend grocery retailers who communicate their private label brands as their private label brands have taken off. Therefore, those that have minimally invested in brand awareness activities; their private label brands have somehow struggled to compete with manufacturer brands.

The conclusions of Barreda et al (2015) affirm that brand awareness is essential for achieving other brand elements. Therefore, brand awareness lays an important foundation for brand trust and brand loyalty (Chi et al, 2009; Rubio et al, 2014). As a result, customers will positively identify and be familiarized with private label brands. The findings of Chi et al (2009) confirm the findings of Aaker and Keller (1990) that brand awareness leads to other brand elements, affirming the positive relatedness with brand loyalty. Agreeing with previous research, Mathews et al (2014) in the words of Han et al (2015) further affirm that the positive reputation created via brand awareness constitutes brand trust and brand loyalty amongst customers. Hence, retailers are expected to strive to create positive communication for their brands.

H1: Customers' demographic variables are more likely to affect awareness of private label brands.

Brand trust

Brand trust for this present study can be defined as the amount of confidence that customers have in private label brands towards their satisfaction, according to private label brands' functionality (Chinomona, 2016). Song et al (2019) allude that brand trust entails customers having a positive emotional attachment to a brand, in this regard private label brands. Roberts (2004) in the words of Song et al (2019) affirms that brand trust amongst customers is party to positive awareness about the private label brand. In support, it is argued that grocery retailers actively expose their private label brands to customers. In this case, such exposure leads to increased brand awareness of private label brands amongst customers, in turn, customers repeatedly purchase private label brands to a point that they trust their provision to satisfy their needs (Su and Rao, 2010; Saarkjarvi and Samiee, 2011, in Chinomona, 2016).

Matzler et al (2008) in their study suggested that retailers build strategies that result in customers being personally attached and committed to the use of private label brands. 1) Chinomona (2016) offers that South African brands can build brand trust through extensive brand communication with their customers to a point where customers perceive private label brands to be trustworthy. Therefore, customers grow confidence and trust in the brand meeting their needs (Erkmen and Hancer, 2019). 2) The practical implications of Han et al (2015) offer that managers of retailers ensure that measures are in place to make certain that private label brands deliver their quality promise to customers. In this regard, increasing customers' trust towards a brand. 3) Doney and Cannon (1997) in Kabadayi and Alan (2012) postulate that achieving brand trust can be viewed as the process where grocery retailers ensure customers of the following: safety, honesty, and reliability in the brands they consume, thus, brand trust will be automatically created. The conclusions and recommendations of Kabadayi and Alan (2012) importantly posit retailers understand that brand trust is affected by customers' experience with private label brands.

H2: Customers' demographic variables are more likely to affect brand trust for private label brands.

Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty according to Oliver (1999) in Pappu and Quester (2016) can be seen as the behaviour by a customer to actively purchase and re-purchase a brand continuously, in the process advocating for its value (Mao, 2010). However, brand loyalty is also distinguished by scholars, behavioural and attitudinal brand loyalty. Behavioural brand loyalty is the process of actively frequenting a brand purchase (Odin et al, 2001), this loyalty can be measured through apparent behaviours. Whereas attitudinal brand loyalty comprises the customer's intended intention to be loyal to that brand reasoning from the advantages associated with the brand (Dekimpe et al, 1997). Brand loyalty allows the customers to be consistent in the purchase of the specific brand, no matter the change in situations; they are loyal to the brand (Palazon and Delgado, 2009, in Song et al, 2019). Meanwhile, to reach the process of brand loyalty, the customer places utmost trust in the brand and its offering in this case private label brands (Moorman et al, 1992) in (Song et al, 2019). However, the managerial implications of Han et al (2015) suggest that the foundation of brand loyalty is customer satisfaction.

To create brand loyalty for private label brands, grocery retailers can partake in the following; 1) grocery managers need to ensure the satisfaction of customers with private label brands (Han et al, 2018), 2) Understanding the needs of customers and meeting their expectations (Coelho et al, 2018), 3) Managers should strive to establish emotional connections between customers and their private label brands; thus, leading to customers being attached with the brand (Song et al, 2019; Han et al, 2018). This eventually leads to brand loyalty. 5) Fournier (1994); (1998); Ching and Chang (2006) in Zehir et al (2011) maintained that firms need to create and maintain consumer-brand relationships, since it helps facilitates brand loyalty. Such actions can thus help grocery retailers to retain and lure new customers to purchase their private label brands, hoping that they will positively perceive PLBs, and in the process be loyal towards them. Aaker (1991) as cited by Ishak and Ghani (2013) presumes that when customers are closely associated with a brand, they are more likely to be loyal to it. Hence, Aaker (1991) in Ishak and Ghani (2013) classified loyalty in the following ascending stages:

- Non- customer: buy the brands of competitors.
- Price switcher: sensitive to price.
- Passive loyal: as a result of habit.
- Fence sitters: indifferent between several brands.
- Committed: honestly loyal.

H3: Customers' demographic variables are more likely to affect brand loyalty for private label brands.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To explore customers' brand awareness, brand trust and, brand loyalty of customers towards private label brands in South Africa, we resort to the use of a mixed methodology approach. Bryman & Bell (2011:62) define a mixed method research as a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods. For this study, this method allowed the researcher to collect and analyze quantitative data from customers and qualitative data from retail managers separately and then triangulating both methods.

A structured questionnaire and interview schedule were developed to collect data from both customers and grocery retail managers in the eThekwini Municipality, which is the third biggest municipality in South Africa after Johannesburg and Cape Town respectively. Customers were systematically sampled, while judgement sampling was used in sampling grocery retail managers. The sample size for this study was determined by employing the following techniques: the 1970 Krejcir & Morgan sampling table was used in determining the acceptable sample size of customers to collect data from. Where for a population of 1 million, Krejcir and Morgan's (1970) table cited in Sekaran and Bougie (2013) affirm that 384 is an acceptable sample to draw generalization of a population above 1 million. Data were collected from 389 customers through structured questionnaires and from 10 grocery retail managers via face-to-face interviews; where data were collected from grocery retail managers till saturation was reached after interviewing 10 grocery retail managers (Faulkner and Trotter, 2017).

Customers who were 18 years and older were approached to participate in the study. To analyse customers' brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty towards private label brands, 5-point Likert scales were adopted. Where; (1) strongly disagree, (5) strongly agree. Each Likert scale measured all three brand elements: 5 statements measuring brand awareness, 5 statements measuring brand trust, and 5 statements measuring brand loyalty. Then, an interview schedule was used in collecting data from grocery retail managers. The interview schedule included three sections: brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Where retail managers were asked different questions about the three elements.

The next step entailed testing if all items on the questionnaire were reliable, where internal reliability was used. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed in testing the reliability of items on the questionnaire (Cronbach, 1946 in Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). This included pretesting the questionnaire with 20 customers. Then, The SPSS version 25 statistical package was used in computing and testing the Cronbach alpha coefficient, where an alpha of 0.798 was attained, between 0.5 – 1, considered to be an acceptable level of internal consistency and showing higher reliability of the statements in the questionnaire. Further indicating that the instrument was dependable. In addition, 5 experts were used to test the interview schedule and its questions to avoid ambiguous questions when interviewing grocery retail managers.

Data was then collected, the researcher administered the questionnaires in the following regions of the municipality, starting in the Northern region (100), Southern region (100), Western region (100), and Central region (89). Self-Administering 389 questionnaires in total. Following the collection of quantitative data from customers, qualitative data were obtained from 10 grocery retail managers by the researcher, where grocery retail managers' responses were transcribed and diarized. Moreover, data was analysed; Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25 was employed in entering and coding the quantitative data into the variable view of SPSS. Then, data were analysed using descriptive statistics to present demographic variables of customers. In addition, inferential statistics were also used in this study; where one-way ANOVA and the Spearman's rank correlation were used to determine the significant correlations and the significant differences between demographics and variables of brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Lastly, content analysis was used in analysing qualitative data obtained from grocery retail managers.

Following the collection and analysis of quantitative data obtained from customers, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data from retail managers. Interestingly, the use of the convergent parallel mixed method approach allowed the researcher the opportunity to interpret, cross-validate, and substantiate the results from both approaches (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

TABLE 1: BRAND AWARENESS, BRAND TRUST, AND BRAND LOYALTY GRADING TABLE

Grading	Mean	Median
High	3.6 and above	4 and 5
Neutral	2.6 to 3.5	3
Low	2.5 and less	1 and 2

Table 1 represents the grading of customers' brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Where the first column represents the grading of whether customers have either positive, neutral, or negative brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Furthermore, individual items on the questionnaire were scored from the developed Likert scales measuring brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty. In addition, after the single items were scored, the mean scores were computed; where if customers obtained a mean score of 2.5 and less than indicated they had a low, 2.6 to 3.5 indicated that they were neutral and 3.6 or more meant customers had a high brand awareness, brand trust or

TABLE 2: CUSTOMERS PRIVATE LABEL BRAND AWARENESS

Private label brand awareness						
Item	**Label**	**Low (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**High (%)**	**Mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (SD)**
Q1	I have some knowledge of private label brands.	1	2	97	4.83	0.516
Q2	I am able to distinguish private label brands from manufacturer brands.	1	3	96	4.8	0.592
Q3	The promotional activities allow me to easily recall private label brands.	19	14	67	3.78	1.452
Q4	Private label brands are hugely advertised.	56	18	27	2.42	1.463
Q5	I am only familiar with manufacturer brands.	93	2	5	1.41	0.879

brand loyalty.

Table 2 shows the basic descriptive statistics of customers' private label brand awareness. The main significant finding was the statement "I have some knowledge of private label brands", with a mean score of 4.83. Indicating that customers were highly aware of private label brands. Suffice to state that also grocery retail managers provided that customers are made to be aware of private label brands, "We have introduced adverts to attract and bring awareness amongst customers about our store branded products". Thus, confirming the submission of customers regarding their awareness for private label brands.

Table 3 profiles customers' brand awareness toward private label brands, one-way ANOVA and the spearman correlation test were performed against the demographics of customers as shown in table 3 above. The ANOVA (F) and Spearman Correlation test found no statistically significant difference and significant correlation between brand awareness and all demographic factors, as all P-values were > 0.05. Therefore, the results suggest that participants' brand awareness was not influenced by their demographic characteristics. Yet, they are aware of private label brands.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of customers' trust towards private label brands. Where, it was found that the statement "I will continue purchasing private label brands" had a mean score of 4.14, suggesting that participants were very sure that they will continue using private label brands. Therefore, the above results suggest that though customers actively purchase private label brands, they remain unsure about their quality and satisfaction. In support, grocery retail managers indicated that customers show trust in their store products brands because they are always in high stock turnover due to the high demand for their private label brands.

Table 5 presents the correlation of customers' demographics against brand trust, to test the significant difference between brand trust and demographic factors. One-way ANOVA (F) and the Spearman correlation test were used. The findings disclose that there was a positive (rho= 0.141) and a significant difference (0.005) between brand trust and the age groups of customers. Correspondingly, a significant correlation of (0.005) was attained between brand trust and the age groups of participants. The above findings suggest that as customers get older, they are probable to trust private

TABLE 3: CORRELATIONS OF BRAND AWARENESS WITH DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6"></th><th>(F)</th><th colspan="2">Correlation</th></tr>
<tr><th></th><th>Age group</th><th>Mean</th><th>Median</th><th>Mode</th><th>Standard deviation</th><th>p-value</th><th>Rho</th><th>p-value</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="30">Brand Awareness</td><td>18 – 23</td><td>2.37</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.485</td><td rowspan="7">0.859</td><td rowspan="7">0.023</td><td rowspan="7">0.656</td></tr>
<tr><td>24 – 29</td><td>2.46</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.531</td></tr>
<tr><td>30 – 34</td><td>2.41</td><td>2.00</td><td>3.00</td><td>0.610</td></tr>
<tr><td>35 – 39</td><td>2.37</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.541</td></tr>
<tr><td>40 -44</td><td>2.33</td><td>2.00</td><td>3.00</td><td>0.730</td></tr>
<tr><td>45 – 49</td><td>2.50</td><td>2.50</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.535</td></tr>
<tr><td>50 – 65</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.001</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Education Level</td></tr>
<tr><td>Primary</td><td>2.50</td><td>2.50</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.707</td><td rowspan="3">0.599</td><td rowspan="3">-0.020</td><td rowspan="3">0.700</td></tr>
<tr><td>Secondary</td><td>2.42</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.530</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tertiary</td><td>2.40</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.561</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Monthly salary scales</td></tr>
<tr><td>R0 -R1, 583</td><td>2.41</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.510</td><td rowspan="5">0.79</td><td rowspan="5">0.012</td><td rowspan="5">0.815</td></tr>
<tr><td>R1, 584–R7, 167</td><td>2.43</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.540</td></tr>
<tr><td>R7,168–R16, 417</td><td>2.34</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.587</td></tr>
<tr><td>R16, 418–R33, 333</td><td>2.55</td><td>3.00</td><td>3.00</td><td>0.605</td></tr>
<tr><td>R33, 334–R57, 333</td><td>2.75</td><td>3.00</td><td>3.00</td><td>0.500</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Employment status</td></tr>
<tr><td>Employed</td><td>2.34</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.585</td><td rowspan="4">0.276</td><td rowspan="4">0.056</td><td rowspan="4">0.273</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unemployed</td><td>2.44</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.514</td></tr>
<tr><td>Partly employed</td><td>2.45</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.530</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other</td><td>2.42</td><td>2.00</td><td>3.00</td><td>0.559</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Household size</td></tr>
<tr><td>1–5 members</td><td>2.42</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.551</td><td rowspan="3">0.601</td><td rowspan="3">0.019</td><td rowspan="3">0.708</td></tr>
<tr><td>6–9 members</td><td>2.36</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.554</td></tr>
<tr><td>10 and above</td><td>2.48</td><td>2.00</td><td>2.00</td><td>0.525</td></tr>
</table>

*Note: α 0.05= significance level; *** = Correlation significance level.*

label brands. Moreover, a positive (rho= 0.121) was found, in addition, a significant difference of (0.01) was found and a significant correlation of (0.017). Indicating the existence of a positive relationship between brand trust and the monthly salary scales of customers. These results suggest that as the monthly salary scales of customers increase, so does their brand trust for private label brands. The results

TABLE 4: CUSTOMERS TRUST FOR PRIVATE LABEL BRANDS

Brand trust for private label brands						
Item	**Label**	**Low (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**High (%)**	**Mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (SD)**
Q6	I will continue purchasing private label brands.	14	10	75	4.14	1.398
Q7	Private label brands provide me with satisfaction.	36	15	48	3.13	1.589
Q8	Private label brands do not disappoint me.	43	14	43	3.04	1.616
Q9	Private label brands always deliver on its quality.	50	15	36	2.66	1.525
Q10	I do not rely on the quality of private label brands.	62	8	31	2.43	1.674

were consistent with the literature. Erkmen and Hancer (2019) who ascertain that customers grow confidence and trust in a brand meeting their needs as they continue consuming private label brand. In support, Kabadayi and Alan (2012) importantly posit that retailers understand that brand trust is affected by the customer's experience with private label brands.

Table 6 is the presentation of the descriptive statistics of customers brand loyalty for private label brands, where the statement "I repeatedly purchase private label brands" had a high mean score of 3.91. This finding resonates with the literature of Mao (2010) who holds the view that brand loyalty results from customers' repeated purchase and repurchase of a brand. Likewise, the qualitative results from grocery retail managers' sample unquestionably have confidence that customers remain loyal to their private label brands. Admitting that customers repeated purchase of their private label products signals for customers' loyalty. However, Aaker (1991); Ishak and Ghani (2013) who in the Aaker loyalty ladder, opine that some consumers are not brand loyal, but they are price switchers. Interestingly, Diallo and Seck (2018), further cement that customers prefer manufacturer brands before considering private label brands.

Table 7 is an indication of the correlation for brand loyalty against the age groups, educational level, monthly salary scales, employment status, and household sizes

TABLE 6 CUSTOMERS BRAND LOYALTY FOR PRIVATE LABEL BRANDS

Brand loyalty for private label brands						
Item	**Label**	**Low (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**High (%)**	**Mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (S.D)**
Q11	I repeatedly purchase private label brands.	27	2	72	3.91	1.572
Q12	Private label brands always meet my expectations.	39	16	46	3.07	1.615
Q13	I buy manufactured brands if they are on special offers.	48	8	44	2.96	1.784
Q14	I often convince others to purchase private label brands.	63	6	30	2.38	1.613

TABLE 5 CORRELATION OF BRAND TRUST WITH DEMOGRAPHICS

						(F)	Correlation	
	Age group	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation	p-value	Rho	p-value
Brand Trust	18 – 23	1.97	2.00	1.00	0.839	0.005***	0.141	0.005***
	24 – 29	2.07	2.00	3.00	0.825			
	30 – 34	2.15	2.00	3.00	0.828			
	35 – 39	2.26	2.50	3.00	0.828			
	40 -44	2.38	3.00	3.00	0.740			
	45 – 49	2.63	3.00	3.00	0.744			
	50 – 65	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.001			
	Education Level							
	Primary	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.001	0.224	-0.056	0.269
	Secondary	2.14	2.00	3.00	0.824			
	Tertiary	2.06	2.00	3.00	0.836			
	Monthly salary scales							
	R0 -R1, 583	1.98	2.00	1.00	0.818	0.01**	0.121	0.017**
	R1, 584–R7, 167	2.12	2.00	3.00	0.835			
	R7,168–R16, 417	2.16	2.00	3.00	0.826			
	R16, 418–R33, 333	2.40	3.00	3.00	0.821			
	R33, 334–R57, 333	2.50	3.00	3.00	1.000			
	Employment status							
	Employed	2.17	2.00	3.00	0.559	0.927	0.001	0.997
	Unemployed	1.98	2.00	3.00	0.841			
	Partly employed	2.19	2.00	3.00	0.791			
	Other	2.09	2.00	3.00	0.834			
	Household size							
	1–5 members	2.05	2.00	2.00	0.780	0.601	0.019	0.708
	6–9 members	2.09	2.00	3.00	0.872			
	10 and above	2.06	2.00	2.00	0.830			

*Note: α 0.05= significance level; *** = Correlation significance level.*

of customers. One-way ANOVA and the Spearman rank correlation were used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between brand loyalty and the demographics of customers. The results found a positive (rho= 0.101) and a significant difference of (0.04) between brand loyalty and the monthly salary scales of customers. Furthermore, a significant correlation of (0.047) was also found between brand loyalty and the monthly salary scales of customers, consequently, indicating that a positive relationship exists between the two variables. However, this contradicts the literature of Dimitrieska et al (2017), who in their study revealed that

TABLE 7 CORRELATIONS OF BRAND LOYALTY WITH DEMOGRAPHICS

						(F)	Correlation	
	Age group	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation	p-value	Rho	p-value
Brand Loyalty	18 – 23	1.94	2.00	1.00	0.827	0.194	0.077	0.129
	24 – 29	2.09	2.00	3.00	0.818			
	30 – 34	2.04	2.00	2.00	0.787			
	35 – 39	2.29	3.00	3.00	0.867			
	40 -44	1.86	2.00	1.00	0.793			
	45 – 49	2.50	3.00	3.00	0.926			
	50 – 65	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.001			
	Education Level							
	Primary	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.001	0.505	-0.027	0.601
	Secondary	2.06	2.00	2.00	0.805			
	Tertiary	2.03	2.00	3.00	0.841			
	Monthly salary scales							
	R0 -R1, 583	1.90	2.00	1.00	0.827	0.04*	0.101	0.047*
	R1, 584–R7, 167	2.14	2.00	3.00	0.806			
	R7,168–R16, 417	2.05	2.00	3.00	0.833			
	R16, 418–R33, 333	2.25	2.00	3.00	0.786			
	R33, 334–R57, 333	2.50	3.00	3.00	1.000			
	Employment status							
	Employed	2.05	2.00	3.00	0.829	0.302	0.050	0.321
	Unemployed	1.93	2.00	1.00	0.828			
	Partly employed	2.22	2.00	3.00	0.783			
	Other	2.09	2.00	3.00	0.834			
	Household size							
	1–5 members	2.04	2.00	3.00	0.830	0.970	-0.001	0.988
	6–9 members	2.06	2.00	3.00	0.120			
	10 and above	2.03	2.00	3.00	0.850			

*Note: α 0.05= significance level; *** = Correlation significance level.*

middle class to low-income earners would be more likely to purchase private label brands for convenience, customers are likely to be loyal towards private label brands due to their reasonable pricing than manufacturer brands. Compared to high-income earners who actively purchase manufacturer brands due to their high-quality product ranges as well as having the desired income to afford the higher prices.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, we discussed customers' brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty for private label brands in South Africa. The researchers pursued to analyse whether customers were aware, trust, and loyal to private label brands. Hypotheses H2 and H3, apart from H1 were statistically significant, surmising that theoretical assertions are in line with findings from the present study. The findings suggested that customers were fully aware of private label brands. Moreover, it was further found that demographic variables had no association with customers' brand awareness for PLBs, therefore finding no statistically significant difference. Thereafter, findings from grocery retail managers advocated that customers are constantly alerted of their store brands through investments in brand awareness campaigns. Whereby grocery retailers continually undertake support activities that create awareness among customers. As Kaiser (2014) notes that grocery retailers employ other strategies towards creating brand awareness, such as social media platforms, in the process have succeeded in creating awareness for private label brands. Moreover, the study of Barreda et al (2015) confirms that for customers to buy private label products, there is a need for them to be aware of private label brands. Therefore, acknowledging that familiarity significantly influences a consumer's choice through several channels as it encourages private label brands' purchase.

From the findings of this present study, customers repeatedly purchase private label brands. However, it was established that customers do purchase private label brands but for the sole reason of their cheaper prices when compared to manufacturer brands. The present study further revealed that customers do not entirely trust private label brands. Hence, Erkmen and Hancer (2019) provide that customers grow confidence and trust in a brand meeting their needs as they continue consuming it. Suggesting that as customers constantly opt for the purchase of private label brands, the potential connections between customers and the brand come into effect in turn customers trusting private label brands (Coelho et al, 2018).

However, H2 from the findings, brand trust correlates with age groups and monthly salaries of customers. Establishing that as customers age and when their salary scale improves, they are probable to trust private label brands. Grocery retail managers in this study strongly believe that customers trust their private label products. This can be explained by that elderly customers tend to save in anticipation for the future and state of the economy. Further deepening the rise of private label brands in tough economic conditions.

Regarding H3, findings revealed that customers heavily rely on private label brands during tough economic conditions where private label brands are cheaper than manufacturer brands. Such customers are not loyal to private label brands. Previous studies of Aaker (1991) confirm that customers in this present study are attitudinally loyal, or they are price switchers to private label brands, hence they frequently purchase PLBs due to a situation of being cheaper than manufacturer brands or being forced by tougher economic conditions. Henceforth, a correlation exists between brand loyalty and the monthly salary scale of customers. Suggesting that customers are loyal to PLBs due to their monthly salary scale. Yet, grocery retail managers identify customers as being loyal towards their private label brands since results from the customers proved that customers repeatedly purchase private label products. In addition, Pappu and Quester (2016) support that brand loyalty can be seen as the behaviour of customers actively purchasing and re-purchasing a brand continuously, in this regard private label brands. Customers in this study do regularly purchase private label brands, as a result, that they are mostly on special offers (as indicated in table 6, Q13). This can be the reason for their association with private label brands, not that they are satisfied with private labels.

This study has some limitations. First, the study was limited to the eThekwini Municipality, located in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province. Hence, the results for this study cannot be fully generalized towards the South African population at large because customer perceptions might differ from region to region. In addition, the use of a judgmental sampling approach in sampling grocery retail managers constituted a limitation for the study. This is because of a non-probability sampling technique where the sample was not representative of the entire sample of grocery retail managers, as it was not known to the researchers.

Further research should be aimed at generating more knowledge on private label brands in South Africa, understanding customer behavioral patterns and their concerns around private label brands. Firstly, exploring the composition of the private label brand industry in South Africa, its history, current state, and future direction. Thus, allowing the grocery retail industry to reflect on the actual state of private label brands and further enabling industry players to make informed future decisions. Furthermore, a comparative study, investigating the perceptions of customers towards private label brands across different regions in South Africa, to fully generalize customer perceptions toward private label brands in the grocery retail sector. This will provide broad and comparable evidence of customers' interpretations concerning private label brands. Therefore, allowing grocery retailers to devise strategies to change the skeptical views and uncertainties surrounding private label brands, specifically in South Africa. In addition, this can enable grocery retailers to develop, improve their private label brands and in the process actively compete with manufacturer brands.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author, [S.G].

ETHICAL STATEMENT

An ethical clearance certificate was sought from the University of Zululand research ethics committee to undertake this study (Reg no: UZREC 171110-30). Furthermore, participants were given an informed written consent to sign when they agreed to partake in this study.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests.

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