Effect of Extrinsic Cues on Perception of Private Label Quality and Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract

The increasing cost of living has affected one and all in India. It has become virtually impossible to bring down the grocery and other household products' bills. Store brands may act as a rescuer in this situation. Average store share of private labels in India isn't high, but it is constantly increasing. The pilot study showed that customers are pretty unaware about the quality standard of private labels. This can be attributed to negligible marketing communication of private labels. Thus, this study was aimed to know whether extrinsic cues like perceived private label quality, perceived private label price, perceived store image had any impact on attitude of customers towards private labels' quality and customer satisfaction. The results showed that perceived private label price and perceived store image, unlike perceived private label quality, positively affected attitude of customers towards private label quality, and eventually, customer satisfaction. The study might help store managers to devise strategic plans to use extrinsic cues to have a favorable perception about private labels to make customers loyal towards store and store brands.

Keywords: extrinsic cues, private labels, customer satisfaction

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Store brands or private label brands are brands owned, controlled, and sold exclusively by a retailer (Batlas & Doyle, 1998). Private labels are normally manufactured by a firm under contract manufacturing arrangement under another firm's brand. These are available in a wide range of product categories from groceries to food to electronics. These are positioned as cost effective alternatives to national brands.

Private labels can be categorized into four main categories (PLMA, 2003) :

(i) Large national brand manufacturers who utilize their expertise and excess plant capacity to supply store brands.

(ii) Small, quality manufacturers who specialize, in particular, in product lines and concentrate on producing store brands almost exclusively. Often, these companies are owned by corporations that also produce national brands.

(iii) Major retailers and wholesalers that own their own manufacturing facilities and provide store brand products for themselves.

(iv) Regional brand manufacturers that produce private label products for specific markets.

Private labels can play a significant role in generating volumes for organized retailers in the Indian market full

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of both kinds of retailers fighting to coexist. These can seriously boost the profitability levels of organized retailers in India suffering from low acceptance and less penetration in semi-urban areas and tier B & C cities. A food marketing institute's study titled *"The Food Retailing Industry Speaks 2009"* in the U.S. found that a retailer earned more gross margin (35%) as compared to a national brand (25.9%). Private labels are now being perceived as close to quality of national brands unlike when these were introduced in the Indian market (Balan & Prashant, 2013). As a result, organized retailers are reanalyzing the quantity levels of private labels they may have as compared to national brands in the store (Colangelo, 2008).

✎ **Private Label Growth in India :** Organized retail in India constitutes somewhere around 8% of the Indian retail market of $ 450 billion, but it is still in the elementary stages. Some of the Indian organized retailers like Westside, Shoppers Stop, Reliance Fresh, and Big Bazaar have got as much as 40% share of private labels in categories like grocery & apparels in their stores, but the average is somewhere around 10-12%, with a growth rate of 8% (KPMG, 2009).

Review of Literature

(1) Extrinsic and Intrinsic Cues : Teas and Agarwal (2000) and Lee and Lou (1996) reported that products and services can be termed as a cluster of attributes that is used as 'cues' by customers to take decisions regarding a purchase decision. Consumers evaluate products after and before experiencing it through intrinsic and extrinsic cues (Veale & Quester, 2009). An intrinsic product cue may be any product attribute that is internal to that product like taste of a food item ; whereas, an extrinsic cue may be an attribute of the product that is not inherited in the good or service like brand or store image. Veale and Quester (2009) were of the opinion that even when most of the extrinsic cues are readily available to customers, dependence on intrinsic cues plays a significant role in overall evaluation of the product. In contrast, Rezvani, Shenyari, Dehkordi, Salehi, Nahid, and Soleimani (2012) found that it is extrinsic cues, which are considered more significant by customers as compared to intrinsic cues.

Kardes, Kim, and Lim (2001) and Alba (2000) reported that research has actually shown that customers use intrinsic as well as extrinsic cues to analyze before taking a purchase decision ; whereas, Idoko, Ireneus, Nkamnebe, and Okoye (2011) found that though both extrinsic and intrinsic cues play a significant role in overall evaluation, but this largely varies with product to product. In cases of some products, like alcoholic beverages, extrinsic cue like packaging, brand name influence decision making unlike in case of some other convenience products. Pezoldt, Michaelis, Roschk, and Geigenmueller (2014) empirically showed that when it comes to hedonic products, intrinsic cues influence decision making more than extrinsic cues. This was supported by Micu and Coulter (2012), as according to them, hedonic products are bought for affective and sensory benefits ; whereas, these are functional benefits in case of utilitarian products.

Miyazaki, Grewal, and Goodstein (2005) reported that it becomes important for marketers to understand the effect of extrinsic cues in consumers' decision-making process to make sure that they focus on attributes that influence consumers' purchase decisions more than other attributes. As not only it is true in case of a retail store environment, but it is equally pivotal in enhancing customer loyalty in other services. For instance, Hussain, Ullah, Manzoor, and Iqbal (2011) found that extrinsic cues play a significant role in even an industry like hospitality.

Many attributes are used by customers as factors to take a purchase decision. Most of the times, it is a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic cues to evaluate products and brands. Odin, Odin, and Valette - Florence (1999) reported that brands' strategic success depended upon how many loyal customers it has. So, frequent and repeat purchases are two factors considered very significant by marketers. Only those consumers purchase repetitively those who perceive or get a unique value that no other brand can satisfy. This kind of a unique value can be extracted from more trust on the brand or a positive experience after a consumer uses products associated with that brand.

(2) Perceived Store Image : As per cue-utilization theory, extrinsic cues that are more significant are store name, price, and brand name (Erdem, Keane, & Sun, 2008). Richardson, Jain, and Dick (1996) reported that different types of perceptions regarding store image are due to distinct retail strategies, store layout & design, and service level of store. Store image and perception of customers towards the private labels are positively related. A positive store image would push customers to perceive about private labels positively also. Semeijn, van Riel, and Ambrosini (2004) reported that image of a store is, more often than not, positive for those stores where store layout and design, merchandise, and service quality level are good. So, a store image must be taken into account when attitude towards a private label is to be analyzed. As a result, retailers emphasize a lot on positioning themselves as a store with a distinct, but positive image than other retailers.

Lindquist (1974) reported that store image was created with the help of physical and psychological factors that a customer may perceive. Ailawadi, Kusum, and Keller (2004) reported that image in the minds of customers about a store is multifaceted. The variables in this construct are (a) access/proximity to the store, (b) store layout & design, (c) pricing & promotion, (d) merchandise mix, and (e) variety.

Collins - Dodd and Lindley (2003) reported that private labels are considered another significant variable that adds to store image as far as perception of customers is concerned. Semeijn et al. (2004) reported that merchandise assortment, service quality, and merchandise quality affected the attitude of customers two folds when it came to attitude towards private labels. De Wulf, Odekerken - Schröder, Goedertier, and Van Ossel (2005) reported that a positive attitude towards a store would result into a favorable attitude towards the brands it carries and would ultimately develop satisfaction and loyalty. Apart from it, it would develop a sense of trust in that store.

Richardson et al. (1996) reported that a positive store image improved perception about value and quality, and on the other hand, reduced perceived risk and price sensitivity. Among all the attributes that created a store image, store layout and design is the most significant one and is a substantial determinant of customer attitude towards private labels. Stores with a better layout and design had a positive perception and attitude of customers towards its private labels ; whereas, stores with not so good store layout and design had an average or negative attitude towards private labels of that store.

Hsieh, Pan, and Setiono (2004) reported that brand image helps a customer to recognize the needs that can be satisfied by a specific brand and differentiating a brand from others. Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) reported that a positive brand image pushed customers to buy that brand. If a firm or products and services it offers maintain a consistent image in the minds of customers, the firm would enjoy a better market position, a competitive edge, and a relatively high market share. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000), Koo (2003), and Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) reported that a positive image in the minds of customers about a store or a store brand lead to loyalty.

(3) Perceived Private Label Price : Lee and Lou (2011) reported that different product attributes are considered by different customers in terms of price schema, knowledge, and involvement level. Price has a significant negative effect on overall private label quality. The relationship can be opposite in case of different product categories of private labels and evaluation situations. But familiarity with the private label product isn't significantly correlated with consumer dependence on price. Jacoby, Olson, and Haddock (1971) reported that quite a few existing studies showed that price of a product associated with a specific brand plays a significant role in assessing the value a customer may associate with that brand. Perceived relative price of a private label is the price figured out by a customer with reference to price of other options or substitutes available to him/her. These can be national brands or private labels of other stores. Shekhar and Raveendran (2013) found that perceived price was the most significant variable in decision making of chocolate bars ; whereas, variables related to packaging were not as important as perceived price.

Sweeney, Soutar, and Johnson (1999) reported that a private label perceived relative price is the customer perception of its price in comparison to other substitute brands, but in the same product class. Wangenheim and Bayon (2007) reported that perceived price is considered as one of the significant attributes while evaluating a

brand as a part of the decision making process and is a significant extrinsic cue as well. Price is an important factor that influences customers' perception about value. Zeithaml (1988) reported that an expensive product is perceived as a product associated with a brand with higher brand equity or brand image and vice versa.

DeSarbo, Jedidi, and Sinha (2001) and Kashyap and Bojanic (2000) reported that perceived price and perceived value are negatively correlated. Zeithaml (1988) reported that perceived price is the perception of a customer about the worth of a specific product on the basis of benefits and cost associated with that product. Rao and Monroe (1988), Zeithaml (1988), and Parvin and Chowdhury (2006) reported that price affects a customer in two ways. One is that for perceived quality, it is an extrinsic cue and its strength and effect decreased by non price attributes. Second is that it shows the quantum of money to be paid for an exchange for a product associated with a private label brand. Price in many ways affects the decision of potential customers on the basis of their expectations of product quality and service levels. Relatively, low price would push customers to perceive a low quality and a high level of risk and vice versa, especially in case of credence products. Sweeney et al. (1999) and Zeithaml (1988) reported that through perceived value, a lot can be analyzed in relation to consumer behavior as it is related to price sacrificed by consumer and quality involved.

(4) Perceived Private Label Quality : Richardson, Jain, and Dick (1996) reported that customers who are of the opinion that brand elements are a significant indicator for quality would purchase private label brands less frequently ; whereas, in case of national brands, customers analyze quality by brand elements and overall private label quality by high prices. Private label quality perception can significantly be affected by country of origin as an extrinsic cue (Beriain, Purroy, Treacher, & Bas, 2000). This signifies that two different customer groups can actually be differentiated significantly on the basis of private label product attributes by them. Zeithaml (1988) reported that in consumer decision making for purchasing private label products, perceived value was the most important criteria. Other significant factors are perceived risk, perceived quality, perceived price, packaging, marketing communication, and store image. Darby and Karni (1973) and Nelson (1970, 1974) reported that perceived quality is a perception or judgment of a consumer on the basis of his/her experiences about a product's superiority over alternatives.

Perceived quality is multidimensional as it is a combination of quite a few quality attributes. Intrinsic attributes can only be experienced after the product associated with a specific brand is used or consumed. However, extrinsic attributes can be judged on the basis of external attributes like experience of other consumers, perceived image of the private label brand, and store brand. Andersen (1994) reported that there are certain attributes that cannot be validated like whether or not a product is 100% organic. So, a manager has to develop brand image in such a way that the trust factor is maximum. However, private labels don't have adequate marketing communication to establish themselves in the minds of consumers. Jacoby et al. (1971) reported that difference between customer experience and those attributes that develop trust have been used in multidimensional models by extrinsic and intrinsic attributes of products.

Grunert (1995) reported that intrinsic attributes are related to physical product. On the other hand, extrinsic attributes are related to anything apart from those attributes inherited in product. An attribute related to product becomes important when a customer associates it with a positive or negative consequence. Positive and negative consequences is a subjective factor as it varies from customers to customers and is most of the times shaped by customers' own experiences or experiences of others in his/her reference group. Of course, a customer is going to purchase a product with positive consequences.

Conceptual Framework

After exploratory study and literature review, the conceptual framework is designed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
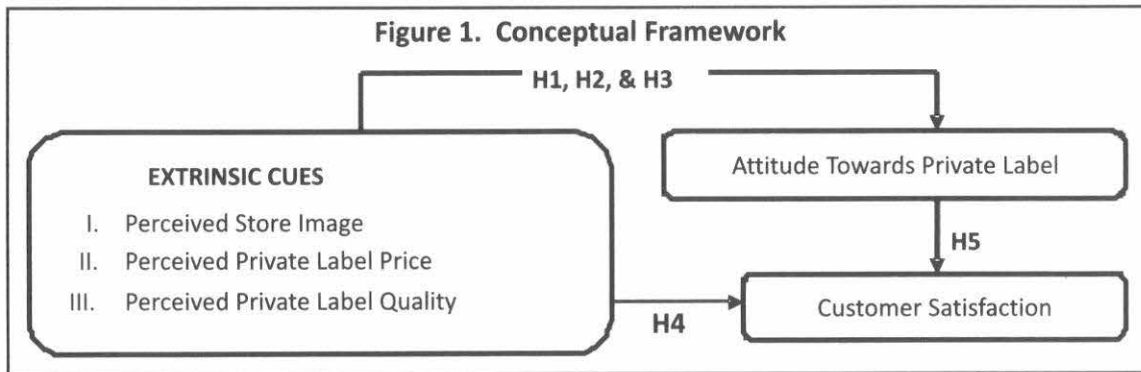
Hypotheses

✎ **H1:** Perceived store image (higher/positive store image perception) results in a positive attitude towards private labels.

✎ **H2:** Perceived price of a private label product (high against low) results in a positive attitude towards private labels.

✎ **H3:** Perceived quality of a private label product (high against low) results in a positive attitude towards private labels.

✎ **H4:** Extrinsic cues result in customer satisfaction.

✎ **H5:** Attitude towards private labels is a mediating factor in between extrinsic cues and customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

A study was conducted in Chandigarh Tri-City [Chandigarh (UT), Mohali (Punjab), and Panchkula (Haryana)]. Data was collected through a self administered questionnaire in couple of weeks in April 2015. A sample of 150 customers of organized retailers namely Big Bazaar and Reliance Fresh, having their average grocery bill more than ₹ 3000 agreed to participate in the study as respondents. It was designed taking into consideration the constructs (perceived store image, perceived private label price, and perceived private label quality) that came out of the exploratory study. Under every construct, variables in the form of statements were designed, taking inputs from literature review. Statistical tests like Cronbach's alpha, regression, and factor analysis were used to analyze the data through SPSS 16.0.

Analysis and Results

The Table 1 shows the respondents' profile. Respondents in the age bracket of 22-27 years were least, that is, they comprised of 14% of the total sample ; whereas, the maximum percentage of respondents, that is, 36% were in the age bracket of 28-33 years. Majority of the respondents, that is, 80% were graduates. Majority of them, that is, approximately 65% had income in the income bracket of ₹ 2.5 - 4 lakhs. More than 80% of them were salaried and self employed.

The Table 2 shows internal consistency and reliability among variables being studied. Cronbach's alpha values are above seven in case of all six variables, which signifies a significant amount of internal consistency and reliability of these variables. In case of external cues, the mean ranges in between 3.64 and 3.89 ; 0.605 - 0.712 is

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

Particulars	Frequency	%age
Age		
22-27 years	21	14.0
28-33 years	54	36.0
34-39 years	34	22.7
40 & Above years	41	27.3
Education		
Under Graduate	23	15.3
Graduate	120	80.0
Post Graduate	7	4.7
Income		
₹ 2.5-4 Lakhs	97	64.7
₹ 4-6 Lakhs	29	19.3
Above ₹ 6 Lakhs	24	16.0
Occupation		
Salaried	67	44.7
Self Employed	63	42.0
Others	20	13.3

Table 2. Internal Consistency Among Variables

Internal Consistency & Reliability

Constructs	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha Value
Perceived Store Image	3	3.89	0.712	0.818
Perceived Private Label Price	3	3.97	0.678	0.709
Perceived Private Label Quality	4	3.64	0.605	0.789
Attitude Towards Private Labels	4	3.91	0.608	0.721
Customer Satisfaction	4	3.324	0.499	0.712

the range in case of standard deviation for external cues. Mean and standard deviation is 3.91, 0.608, and 3.324 ; it is 0.499 in case of attitude towards private label and customer satisfaction, respectively.

The Table 3 shows regression analysis of perceived store image, perceived private label price, and perceived private label quality with customer satisfaction. The Table 3 signifies that 37.5% ($p < 0.01$) variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by external cues. It further shows that perceived store image with a beta value 0.261(Sig. 0.006) and perceived private label price with a beta value 0.468 (Sig. 0.000) impacts customer satisfaction of private labels. The same is not true in case of perceived private label quality with a beta value -0.149 (Sig. 0.99). Two out of three variables have a significant impact of dependent variable, which is customer satisfaction of private labels, so we can't say that external cues impact customer satisfaction wholly, but to a considerable amount, these do. However, this model only explains 37.5% of the variance in dependent variables, so we can say that H4 is rejected despite of two independent variables (perceived store image and perceived private label price) affecting the dependent variable (extrinsic cues) significantly.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

	R	R^2	Standard Error Estimate	Significance (F)
	0.613	0.375	0.4999	0.000
	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficient**	
	B	Standard Error	β	T
Perceived Store Image	0.299	0.101	0.261	0.612 (Sig. 0.006)
Perceived Private Label Price	0.434	0.87	0.468	4.459 (Sig. 0.000)
Perceived Private Label Quality	-0.121	0.087	-0.149	-1.678 (Sig. 0.99)

Level of Significance (α) = 0.01

Table 4. Regression Analysis

Regression Analysis

	R	R^2	Standard Error Estimate	Significance F
	0.569	0.323	0.516	0.000
	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficient**	
	β	Standard Error	β	t
Perceived Store Image	0.201	0.091	0.227	2.056 (Sig. 0.001)
Perceived Private Label Price	0.141	0.078	0.234	2.165 (Sig. 0.000)
Perceived Private Label Quality	-0.048	0.056	-0.135	-0.138 (Sig. 0.176)

Level of Significance (α) = 0.01

Table 5. Regression Analysis

	R	R^2	Standard Error Estimate	Significance (F)
	0.391	0.212	0.478	0.000
	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standard Coefficient**	
	β	Standard Error	β	T
Attitude towards Private Labels	0.543	0.99	0.415 (Sig. 0.000)	4.89

Level of Significance (α) = 0.01

The Table 4 shows regression analysis of perceived store image, perceived private label price, and perceived private label quality with attitude towards private labels. The Table 3 signifies that 32.3% ($p < 0.01$) variance in attitude towards private labels can be explained by external cues. Perceived store image with a beta value 0.227 (Sig. 0.01) and perceived private label price with a beta value 0.234 (Sig. 0.00) significantly impact attitude towards private labels. However, perceived private label quality with a beta value -0.135 (Sig. -0.176) does not significantly impact attitude towards private labels. As two out of three variables significantly impact the dependent variable, which is attitude towards private labels, we can only state that external cues impact attitude towards private labels considerably, but not completely. So, we can say that H1 and H2 are accepted ; whereas, H3 is rejected.

The Table 5 shows regression analysis of customer satisfaction with attitude towards private labels. The Table 5 shows that 21.2% ($p < 0.01$) variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by attitude towards private labels. Attitude towards private labels with a beta value 0.415 ($p < 0.01$) significantly impacts customer satisfaction.

The Table 6 shows that attitude towards private labels mediates in between extrinsic cues and customer satisfaction. It further shows that extrinsic cues directly and significantly impact customer satisfaction with a beta

Table 6. Regression Analysis

		Standard β (1)	Standard β (2)
Customer Satisfaction	Extrinsic Cues	0.503	0.399
	Attitude Towards Private Label		0.314
R^2		0.296	0.325
Adjusted R^2		0.286	0.331
$p<0.01$			

Level of Significance (α) = 0.01

value of 0.503 (Sig. p <0.01). Extrinsic cues, at the same time, impact customer satisfaction indirectly as well with a beta value of 0.399 (Sig. p <0.01). On the basis of the results of Table 5 and Table 6, we may say that H5 is accepted. This means attitude towards private labels is a mediating factor in between extrinsic cues and customer satisfaction.

The results are in line with the results obtained by Imonen (2010). The author concluded that extrinsic cues like written package statements on labels effectively influenced and reinforced perception of consumers in case of premium product categories. According to Jacoby et al. (1971) and Simonson (1989), customers paid attention to both extrinsic and intrinsic cues while making a decision to a buy a product associated with a specific brand/label. Use of extrinsic cues becomes more profound when they don't have any consumption background of a specific private label ; whereas, Sayman, Hoch, and Raju (2002) found that extrinsic cues like packaging, when done similar to a national brand, might not impact the quality perceptions of a private label.

Managerial Implications

If results can be generalized, then the work of a retail store manager and private label team at high level becomes a little tough as they have to make sure that customers get exposed to ins & outs of private labels they have, especially the private label quality without seriously disturbing the marketing communication budgets for private labels. Otherwise, inherited competency in the form of low prices that private labels have would no more be there. It can be done by slightly increasing promotion budget of private labels at the store level after carefully going through target audience, merchandise mix, stock turnover of both private labels and national brands. Above all, a retail store manager has to strike a perfect balance between marketing communication and branding through extrinsic and intrinsic cues as these have different effects on consumer decision making.

Conclusion

The study shows that attitude towards private labels affects customer satisfaction. It further shows that perceived store image and perceived private label prices are the extrinsic cues' variables that impact customer satisfaction and attitude towards private labels. But perceived private label quality neither contributes as a part of extrinsic cues to affect customer satisfaction nor it affects attitude towards private labels. The reasons are quite evident. Organized retailing is not a very old phenomenon in India, and its penetration is restricted to urban centers like metros, tier A, tier B, and very few tier C cities, where only 30% of the Indian population resides. Store image has been developed by all organized retailers operating in India through extensive marketing communication. Low price compared to national brands is a core competitive advantage enjoyed by private labels which customers can see and compare when they visit a store. Plus, a major percentage of the Indian market is price conscious as well. So, quite naturally, these two variables may result into customer satisfaction and may have a positive attitude towards private labels as

exposure to these variables is quite high. The same is not the case with private label quality as there is very less exposure since private labels don't enjoy a hefty marketing communication budget.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

(1) Generalisabilty can be an issue as the sample size was 150 and data was collected from just three cities. So, somebody working on a similar study should take sample size in excess of 300 respondents, and area can be multiple cities with less sample size to improve the generalizability.

(2) Private labels are something which is still new to Indian shoppers. Their information about private labels is only confined to price. In the pilot study, it was found that customers did not pay much attention to particulars of private labels as much as they did in case of national brands. This fact decreased the effectiveness of the questionnaire a bit, although it was checked for reliability with an adequate score. So, those stores can be taken in upcoming studies where private labels to national brand ratio is better in favour of private labels so that familiarity of shoppers with private labels would improve the effectiveness of the questionnaire.

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