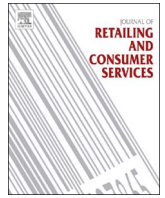




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## Buying private label in durables: Gender and other psychological variables

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### ABSTRACT

In the context of durables, this paper analyzes some key psychological variables identified in convenience goods literature, for individuals facing private label purchase decisions: private label attitude, price consciousness, brand consciousness and involvement with the product. The role of gender in the relationships among those variables is also examined. On two different durables and with a sample of 432 individuals, all the proposed relationships are significant, except for price consciousness. Additionally, some gender differences among those relationships appear. Data suggest that being a woman (not a man) plays a key role in private label purchase intention.

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### 1. Introduction

Private labels (PL) are quite popular in different product categories (Private Label Manufacturers Association – PLMA- website, 2015), but market share is heterogeneous across product categories and countries. Research on factors that influence PL choice is critical for better understanding of consumer choice (Sethuraman and Gielens, 2014).

Three reasons motivate this research. First of all, there are major differences in PL market penetration between countries and product categories. Although PL in convenience goods is accepted in all countries, there are major differences in durables. USA's PL market share in durables is over 30%, and Spain's is around 5%. Research on PL in durables remains scarce.

Second, the recession is influencing consumers' shopping attitudes and behaviors (Hampson and McGoldrick, 2013), forcing individuals to adapt their shopping basket to the new scenario. According to Gooner and Nadler's research (2012), this situation greatly favors PL, whose market share tends to grow rapidly in times of crisis. In fact, PL market share climbed in 14 of the 20 countries tracked by Nielsen data (PLMA, 2015). Gooner and Nadler's research (2012) also shows that PL market share expands and contracts asymmetrically, depending on the economic period; it grows fastest during recessions and partially retreats during subsequent periods of economic expansion. In the particular case of Spain recession has meant that: (1) consumers choose products with lower prices; (2) consumers look for promotions and

products with best value for money; (3) consumers purchase more private labels (PLs) and do not hesitate to visit different establishments in order to take advantage of their best deals (Nielsen, 2009).

Finally, recent social changes related to household composition are affecting purchasing decisions. There is an increasing trend towards single parents and single-person households in Europe. In Spain, the number of households with a single adult increased by 26% between 2006 and 2012 (INE, 2013). Additionally, socio-economic development and democratization have favored the spread of egalitarianism values (Schwartz, 2006), that is, a value system that emphasizes equality in marital relationships (Bott, 1957), and equality plays an important role in family purchasing decision-making (Green et al., 1983; Sullivan and O'Connor, 1988). In developed countries, role distinctions between men and women have diminished (Sidin et al., 2004; Nielsen, 2011; Klasson and Ulver, 2015) and nowadays, both sexes face the same purchasing situations, although, according to the literature, they approach these situations in a different way (Lupton et al., 2010; Chang, 2007; Wood, 1998). In this vein gender remains unexplored in PL durable goods.

The goals of this paper are twofold. First, to analyze whether traditional consumer variables in convenience products are valid for explaining PL purchase intention in durables. The variables considered in this paper are: attitude towards PL (due to increasing PL presence), involvement with the product (as it differs compared to convenience products), and price consciousness and brand consciousness (as they are key variables in the context of economic recession). Second, this paper aims to determine whether gender influences the relationship between these variables and its possible role in PL purchase intention.

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We contribute to the existing literature in three ways. First, traditional variables widely considered in PL purchase intention in convenience goods are analyzed for durables, confirming the relevance of some of them, but not all. Second, changes in men's and women's roles in purchasing are highly relevant; a better understanding of how each gender faces the purchase decision process can help marketers to develop effective marketing segmentation strategies and communication programs. Third, the introduction of fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to the retailing literature: compared to other methodologies, fsQCA is hardly used in marketing. We only find some studies in online shopping (eg. Pappas et al., 2016) or virtual reality (eg. Bigné et al., 2016) but far as we know, this is the first pure retailing study based on fsQCA. In fact, the complementary use of fsQCA has allowed us to identify the role that not only gender, but also other variables, play in PL buying, some of whose presence in past literature has yielded mixed results.

## 2. Literature review: hypotheses and research questions

### 2.1. Antecedents of private label purchase intention: hypotheses

PL in convenience goods is widely known and accepted (PLMA, 2015). A wide range of previous studies have identified variables analyzed in this paper as being antecedents of PL purchase intention in that product category (Ailawadi et al., 2001; Batra and Sinha, 2000; Steenkamp et al., 2010). Today retailers have extended their brand strategy to virtually all the categories of products they sell, including durables. However, research is still scarce in this product category. In this study we analyze the impact of the aforementioned variables on PL buyers' intentions to purchase durables. Despite the effect of the PL on store evaluation (Bigné et al., 2013), this study focuses attention only on the product itself, preventing the influence of store reputation.

#### 2.1.1. General attitude toward private label

Attitude is a consumer's favorable or unfavorable predisposition towards PL in general and is the result of the individual's experience of PL (Burton et al., 1998). Choosing PL for the first time in the category of durables is a critical moment and it is influenced by the consumer's previous experience with PL in other product categories (Zielke and Dobbstein, 2007). Even if consumers have no previous experience of their usual PL in durables, the attitude already generated by prior consumption of PL in other frequently purchased categories will positively influence PL purchase intention (Fernández and Martínez, 2004; Zielke and Dobbstein, 2007). In the case of PL in convenience goods, attitude toward PL is the most important variable due to its positive influence on the PL purchase decision (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Zielke and Dobbstein, 2007). In this line, it is suggested that a previous generally positive PL attitude positively influences the decision to purchase the PL in new categories (Kelmecci-Schneider, 2004; Zielke and Dobbstein, 2007). Therefore we posit:

**Hypothesis 1.** Attitude toward PL has a positive influence on the purchase intention of PL durables.

#### 2.1.2. Price consciousness

Not all consumers attach the same importance to the price of a product. Price consciousness refers to the degree to which consumers focus exclusively on paying a low price (Lichtenstein et al., 1993), and it varies across products and situations for the same individual (Lichtenstein et al., 1993) where unfair price perceptions for national brands have a significant influence (Xia et al., 2004). The most obvious benefit to consumers buying PL is lower prices

(Baltas, 1997). Price conscious consumers will appreciate PL as they are usually cheaper than national brands in all product categories. In fact, Spain is one of the countries where the price difference between national brands and PL remains quite large (ProfessionalRetail, 2013). Hence, we expect that:

**Hypothesis 2.** Price consciousness has a positive influence on the overall attitude toward PL.

Consumers may trade off the high price with an increase in quality and a reduction in purchase risks depending on product category (Sinha and Batra, 1999). In the case of product categories where individuals perceive greater risk (as with durables), consumers are more price conscious (Sinha and Batra, 1999). Moreover, previous studies focusing on convenience products have demonstrated that price consciousness has a positive effect on PL purchase intention (Burton et al., 1998; Sinha and Batra, 1999). So we propose:

**Hypothesis 3.** Price consciousness has a positive influence on the intention to purchase PL durables.

#### 2.1.3. Brand consciousness

Brand consciousness is the consumer's willingness to buy products whose brand manufacturer is the most popular, the most expensive, the most advertised, or the best seller (Sproles and Kendall, 1986). Brand consciousness acts as a barrier to PL purchase, especially when PL is perceived as low quality (Walsh and Mitchel, 2010). Therefore it is suggested that:

**Hypothesis 4.** Brand consciousness has a negative effect on general PL attitude.

Buying a well-known manufacturer's brand simplifies the purchasing decision, as it reduces the risk associated with the purchase and allows consumers to associate with a certain social status (Baltas, 1997; Laroche et al., 2010). In the purchase of durables, the brand becomes even more important for the information it provides. Therefore, we posit:

**Hypothesis 5.** Brand consciousness has a negative effect on the intention to purchase PL durables.

#### 2.1.4. Personal involvement with the product

Involvement is defined as a state of motivation, arousal or interest (Rothschild, 1984), that is, the extent to which a consumer is committed to various elements of the consumption process and its relation to the product, advertising and purchase (Broderick and Mueller, 1999). Involvement plays an important role in shaping attitudes, the behavior of individuals and the way they make decisions (Foxall et al., 1998; Josiam et al., 2005; Kinley et al., 2000).

Previous studies with convenience products have not provided conclusive results on the relevance of involvement in PL purchase, or on the direction of the relationship (Miquel et al., 2002; Berkowitz et al., 2005; Steenkamp et al., 2010). Taking into consideration the significant efforts made by retailers to reduce the price and quality gaps between national brands and PLs, Miquel et al. (2002) posit that people more involved with a product (and so with greater knowledge of that product) may be more inclined to buy PL than consumers who are less involved (and, therefore, have less knowledge). So, we propose:

**Hypothesis 6.** Involvement with the product has a positive effect on intention to purchase PL durables.

### 2.2. The role of gender on private label purchase intention: research questions

Previous research suggests differences between men and

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