





## An investigation into marketing activities role on the purchase of private label brands: A systematic review of trends in literature

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### ABSTRACT

*The upsurge of private label brands has allowed retailers to expand their product offerings. However, these brands have been met with varying perceptions among consumers across the world. Therefore, this study investigated the role that marketing might have on the purchase intentions of customers opting to/not to purchase private label brands. The marketing instruments in question for this study were advertising, pricing, and price promotion, and their effect on customers' purchase intention for private label brands. An integrative systematic review methodology in searching, screening, selecting, including, and excluding research articles; search strings were also formulated in searching for articles was followed. In this paper, a synthesis of the literature was undertaken, and future research direction was provided, giving future research and retailers three propositions to understand the effect of pricing, price promotions, and advertising in the purchase of private label brands.*

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## Introduction

Marketing is defined by authors from various perspectives. According to the America Association (1985), "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of goods, ideas, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals". In addition, Marketing and Giesler (2013) further label marketing as a set of activities and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers. During that process, retailers must find moderating ways to cater to customers' preferences and choices.

In a highly competitive grocery retail environment, where consumers are faced with numerous brand choices when making purchases, it is vital for retailers to create awareness, as well as promote and correctly price their brands, for them to appeal to targeted consumers. As a result, retailers need to continuously study the marketing instruments of advertising, pricing, and promotion. Therefore, for modern businesses to survive and thrive in their industry; investment in marketing instruments is critical (Tarasova et al., 2020). Previous studies (Bennett et al., 2020; Dawes, 2018; Lamey et al., 2018; Mihajlović & Trajković, 2020) concluded that a correct study of the marketing instruments such as advertising, pricing, and promotion is a catalyst for a product's success. Furthermore, Aw and Chong (2019) in their study found that marketing instruments such as advertising, pricing, and promotion influenced customers' attitudes towards private label brands. As a result, retailers have come to realise the importance of studying factors that influence customers when making purchasing decisions. However, the current study focuses on the marketing instruments of advertising, price, and promotion, specifically for private label brands (PLBs) as opposed to that of Lamey *et al.* (2018), who focused on the marketing activities that influenced consumers' purchasing intentions for new products (NPs). Although much research is being done in the area of private label brands and purchase intentions for them, Calvo-Porrall and Lévy-Mangin (2017), in their study, encouraged

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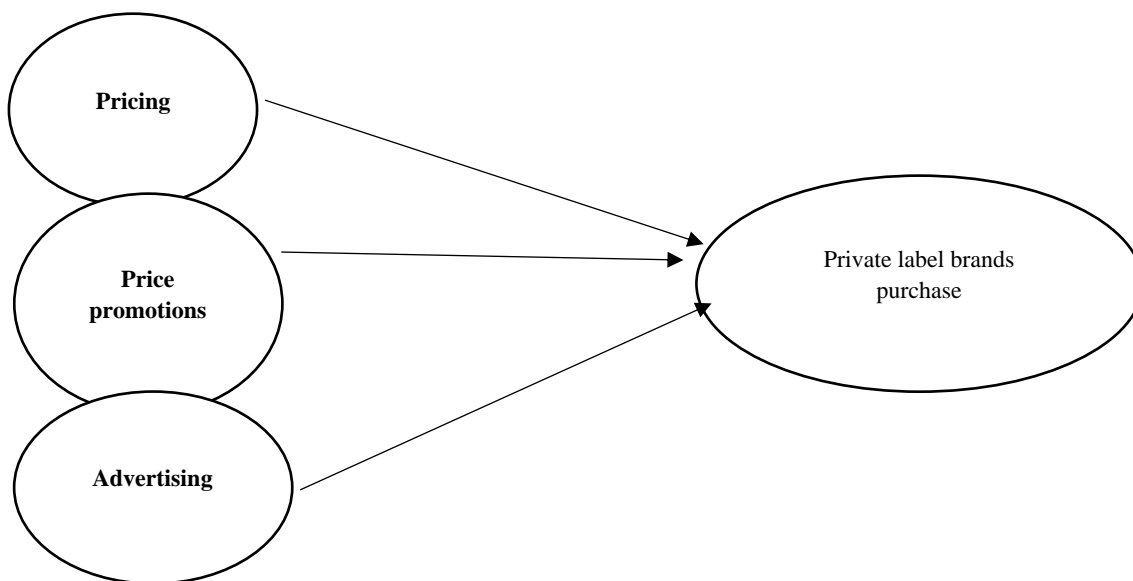
factors that affect private label brands' purchase intentions to be studied more. Consequently, this present study ought to further knowledge within that aspect.

Previous empirical research points out the importance for retailers to study customers' attitudes. However, it is equally essential for retailers to invest in marketing mix activities that will appropriately respond to customers' attitudes towards private label brands. Therefore, there is a need to use different research methods to fully understand a phenomenon. Therefore, this study is undertaken rigorously and systematically conjoining the latest empirical research to uncover new trends in literature of private label brands and the role of marketing mix activities of advertising, pricing, and promotion on customers' intention to purchase private label brands. Moreover, the in-depth synthesis of the latest literature will provide the retail industry with the most recent and prevalent insights from literature, suggest possible managerial implications, and provide further direction for future studies on private label brands. Therefore, to achieve the aim of this study, two objectives were set. Firstly, to understand the trends and study the role of pricing, advertising, and price promotion on customers purchase of private label brands, to achieve this, reviewing of articles from various countries and their findings are explored. Secondly, to provide propositions for grocery retailers on identified gaps upon the review of the literature.

The following sections comprise a synthesis of the literature, detailing the methodology used in the searching, inclusion, and exclusion of articles, literature findings and managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

## Literature review

As the previous section explains, the essentiality of grocery retailers in understanding how their marketing activities can influence customers purchase of private label brands. Thus, comprehension of the marketing activities of pricing, price promotion, and advertising is indispensable. These components are within the control of grocery retailers (Abril & Rodríguez-Cánovas, 2016). Therefore, this current research contributes through conceptualising the above-mentioned marketing elements. Consequently, following the conceptual model, an in-depth discussion of each element in question for this current research is undertaken.



**Figure 1:** Authors' construct of marketing activities as a conceptual framework on customers purchase for PLBs

Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework that has been constructed and used to elucidate the main findings of this study. The framework consists of the marketing instruments that were in question and reviewed for this study, namely pricing, price promotion, and advertising. Additionally, the study posits that these instruments play a role in customers' intentions to purchase private label brands.

### Pricing of private label brands

Price is one of the marketing mix tools mainly used to position and differentiate a product from competing products (Yoo *et al.*, 2000; in the words of (Abril & Rodríguez-Cánovas, 2016). Pricing is one of the most important marketing aspects for private label brands. With price-conscious customers said too often pay more attention to lower pricing when considering the purchase of private label brands, providing a positive correlation between price conscious customers and private label brand purchases is essential (Boon *et al.*, 2018; Thanasuta, 2015). The lowering of price for private label brands has been beneficial to grocery retailers over the years, with the introduction of this pricing component in their marketing mix. It has led to an increase in PLBs sales over the years (Zwanka, 2018). Pricing has a significant influence on customer purchase decisions for private label brands (Singh *et al.*, 2018), thereby

appealing to price sensitive customers. The choice to lower their (private label brands) prices from competing manufacturer brands, is a result of pricing having a significant role in the successful management of private labels as brands (Abril & Rodriguez-Cánovas, 2016; Steinmann et al., 2018; Thanasuta & Chiaravutthi, 2018). Numerous empirical studies have pointed out private label brands' success through adopting lower pricing strategies as opposed to higher pricing by manufacturer brands (Ashely, 1998; Dhar & Hoch, 1997; Raju, Sethuraman & Dhar, 1995; Sethuraman & Cole, 1999; Sinha & Bhattacharya, 1999) per (Abril & Rodriguez-Cánovas, 2016). Notably, this strategy has persistently delivered for retailers throughout the world over the years. As the main factor related to customers purchasing private label brands is due to their constant low prices, in the process, trading-off quality manufacturer products (Boon et al., 2018; Ndlovu & Heeralal, 2021). However, Boyle et al. (2018), in their recent study, interestingly found very few quality differentials between private label brands and manufacturer brands; only that manufacturer brands are priced higher, and the opposite is also true. In addition, higher prices are often associated with high value propositions (Abril & Rodriguez-Cánovas, 2016). Interestingly, Cuneo *et al.* (2019) found that customers do not solely opt for private label brands based on their low pricing; rather opt for PLBs that offer value at a lower price.

**Table 1:** Detailed description of pricing articles included, country, and their major findings

Author/s and year	Country	Major findings
Abril & Rodriguez-Cánovas (2016)	Spain	Concerning the price, private label brands' price is a key factor for their success, in that private label consumers expect valuable prices.
Boon <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Malaysia	Price has a positive influence on the purchase of private label brands.
Thanasuta (2015)	Thailand	There was a significant relationship between price-conscious customers and private label brands' purchases.
Zwanka (2018)	USA	Low pricing as a marketing mix addition increases purchases and sales of private label brands.
Singh <i>et al.</i> (2018)	India	There was a significant relationship between price and purchase of private label brands.
Steinmann <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Germany	Price remains a sensitive component towards the purchase, evaluation, and brand management of private label brands.
Thanasuta & Chiaravutthi (2018)	Thailand	Customers are willing to purchase private label brands at discounted low prices when compared to premium private labels, for which they are willing to pay higher prices.
Boyle <i>et al.</i> (2018)	USA	Customers continuously opt to purchase private labels because of their low pricing when they compare with manufacturer brands, as their quality is not too different from that of manufacturer brands.
Cuneo <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Spain	Customers are drawn to purchasing private label brands to obtain value for their purchase, not necessarily for their low prices.

### Price promotion for private label brands

Price promotions can be defined as a short-term reduction in prices of products, aimed at increasing revenues and building customer loyalty (Backholer et al., 2019). With private label brands, just like any brand, the more intense and rigorous retailers' investment in promoting these products, the more likely it is that customers will buy private label brands. As a result, customers are always looking to purchase high quality products at a lower price (Brata et al., 2017). Therefore, promotions (price promotion included) are key to enticing customers in purchasing their products (Arce-Urriza et al., 2017). Consequently, private label brands are characterised by their relatively low pricing when compared to manufacturer brands. Therefore, promotional pricing is essential in attracting price conscious customers. A recent study by Backholer et al. (2019)B, studying food and beverage price promotion, found that price promotions were responsible for the large product purchases in many countries. As price promotion influences the purchase intention for a product, the study further highlighted that price promotion is touted for increasing sales and revenues for retailers. Since customers spend considerable amounts of time in search for products on price promotions (Bennet *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, a study by Dawes (2018), which examined price promotion for 18 consumer goods across the UK and US, interestingly, found that customers often search for and choose price promotions in brands they are already aware of, and as a result, customers are less likely to trust brands they have never used. Luckily for retailers, customers are now aware of private label brands (Ndlovu & Heeralal, 2021). Furthermore, the study of Jang and Moutinho (2019) highlighted the notion that price conscious customers are more pleased to buy discounted priced products as they are interested in the transaction value, for this study, the purchase of private label products. Nonetheless, the study of Jang and Moutinho (2020) was based on whether price promotions drive customers' spending on luxury hotel services. However, this damages the image and reputation of quality-oriented customers. Highlighting the difference in customers' perceptions and preferences, which Ramanathan *et al.* (2017) in their study of customers' loyalty and service promotions impacting on customer behaviour concluded that the importance of retailers understanding prevalent customer preferences, affects their choice in their purchase for retailers' products. Moreover, to cope with the competitiveness of the grocery retail sector, customers are loyal to retailers offering convenience in the shopping experience. As a result, retailers can adopt the marketing activity of offering

repeated price promotions, to lure customers in purchasing private label brands (Ramanathan et al., 2017). This was advocated in the recent interesting study by Gielens *et al.* (2021), where they propose that future strategies should change to build private label brands to be “smart brands”. This study highlighted the importance of revisiting the marketing mix elements, price promotion included, to drive the transformation of private label brands into being more appealing to customers. It is suggested that retailers should frequently and proactively price promote private label brands. In the process, this makes them desirable to customers who are price sensitive (Gielens *et al.*, 2021).

**Table 2:** Detailed description of price promotions articles included, country and their major findings

<b>Author/s and year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Major findings</b>
Backholer, Sacks & Cameron (2019)	Australia	Price is a critical influence on food purchase decisions and as a result, a large proportion of all food purchases in many countries are products that are price promoted.
Brata, Husani & Ali (2017)	Indonesia	It was found that the more price promotion is introduced, it will, in turn, increase the purchasing decisions of customers.
Arce-Urriza, Cebollada & Tarira (2017)	Spain	Customers were found to be positively responsive and enthusiastically willing to purchase products on promotion, describing these customers as promotion sensitive, as they strongly respond to price promotions.
Bennet <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Sweden	Price promotions were found to be dominant within the grocery retail context, as customers actively seek and purchase products on price promotion.
Dawes (2018)	UK and USA	The study indicates price promotions are unlikely to be purchased by customers who have never, or rarely, bought the brand in their past purchases.
Ndlovu & Heeralal (2021)	South Africa	The study found customers being aware of private label brands; however, still sceptical of their quality. This emanates from their consumption experience and comparison with manufacturer brands.
Jang & Moutinho (2020)	Turkey	Price promotions were found to have a negative effect on consumer spending, as customers have different expectations and preferences. Associating price promotion with lesser quality on items, products, or services on promotion.
Ramanathan, Subramanian, Yu & Vijaygopal (2017)	UK	As economies are faced with downturns and shifting customer preferences, retailers have resorted to price promotions to entice sales and survive. However, it was found that frequent price promotions confuse customers and, in the process, drive them away to other brands or competing retailers, should they find their favourite brands, not on promotion.
Gielens, Ma, Namin, Sethuraman, Smith, Bachtel & Davis (2021)	USA	This study looked at the current future of private label brands, questioning the current and future use of marketing activities in creating future smart private labels, insisting that price promotions be conducted proactively.

### **Advertising for private label brands**

Advertising is associated with informing, influencing, and reminding the customer of the purchase of firms’ products (Aw & Chong, 2019; Cartwright et al., 2016). As a result, Lacoecilhe *et al.* (2020), in their study, affirmed the effectiveness of advertising towards creating purchase intentions towards private label brands. Lopez et al. (2015) accounted for the increase in the demand for private label brands when there is continued investment in their advertisements by retailers, as constantly watching adverts creates a sense of wanting a private label product (Cartwright et al., 2016). In turn, accomplishing the intended objective for retailers; customers respond by intending or purchasing their private labels. Therefore, familiarity with private label brands creates a positive association within customers’ mindsets (Beneke & Carter, 2015). Aw and Chong (2019), in their study, note the retailers’ underinvestment in advertising private label brands by marketing managers. Understandably, they do so intend to minimise costs. However, with evolving motivations for customers’ purchase intentions for private label brands, retailers, more often than not, neglect the effect of factors such as advertising and its power in terms of influencing customers’ purchase of private label products (Sansone et al., 2020). Consequently, this leaves them prone to obtaining more customers from switching manufacturer brands to purchasing private label brands. Sansone *et al.* (2020) note that only now marketing-oriented organisations are putting effort into investing in advertising their private label products. In doing so, they stand a greater chance of expanding private label customers. In support of the aforementioned, Griffith et al. (2018), in their study, found that the most advertised private label products or private label product category had more purchases than those under-advertised. Therefore, this proves the positive effects that advertising has on the consumption of private label brands. However, this may differ across contexts and product categories.

**Table 3:** Detailed description of advertising articles included, country, and their major findings

Author/s and year	Country	Major findings
Aw & Chong (2019)	Malaysia	Advertising was found to have a positive correlation in influencing private labels' attitudes among customers.
Cartwright, McCormick & Warnaby (2016)	UK	Constantly advertised products create demand within customers exposed to the advertised products; in this case, private label products.
Lacoeuilhe, Louis, Lombart & Labbe-Pinlon (2020)	France	It was found that the use of comparative ads, as an advertising strategy for advertising PLBs in contrast to manufacturer brands is effective in winning price conscious customers to purchase PLBs.
Beneke & Carter	South Africa	Familiarity with private label brands was found to emanate from customers' exposure to them on advertising media, among other factors.
Sansone, Musso, Colamatteo & Pagnanneli (2020)	Italy	Advertising does not have any influence on customers' purchase intention for private label brands due to evolved PLBs in Italy. This is due to retailers investing in advertising and including this as part of their policies.
Griffith, Krol & Smith (2018)	UK	The most advertised PLB products generate double sales figures, more than under-advertised products.

## Research and Methodology

This paper undertook a comprehensive systematic review of literature on marketing activities of advertising, pricing, and price promotions from 2015 to 2021 (before July). Snyder (2019) insists on the use of a literature review as a method of conducting business research, as it provides a more rigorous and thorough review and critique of past studies. In the process, one uncovers new gaps and directions for future studies. Moreover, whereas traditional reviews often fall short (Snyder, 2019), this approach will allow the researchers to reproduce and update existing literature. The review was conducted by undertaking the following stages: searching and screening, as well as including and excluding articles. These steps are deemed essential for successfully conducting a systematic review study (Tranfield et al., 2003).

### Searching

The authors searched for previous relevant studies. In the process of searching for relevant studies, articles from peer-reviewed journals and previous review studies were searched. During the search for related studies to include in this review, the authors used key search terms such as "Private label brands", "Pricing of private label brands", "Price promotions", "Price promotions for private label brands", "Advertising private label brands". Furthermore, the authors used other search terms such as "Marketing private label brands", "Marketing activities for private label brands", "Marketing instruments". The articles were searched for from online databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOHost, Science Direct, Elsevier, and other online databases.

### Screening

After searching for the relevant articles, the authors then screened article titles and their abstracts. This was done to check whether the retrieved articles met this study's inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 4 below). To make certain relevance of this systematic review, the authors ensured strictly following the inclusion criteria, ensuring relevance and quality for this study (Tranfield et al., 2003). Articles that met the set criteria were then included in this study (see Tables 1, 2, and 3 above).

**Table 4:** Articles' inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Date of publication</b>	Articles published from 2015 to 2021 (before July)	Articles on price promotions, pricing, and advertising or any other related articles published before 2015
<b>Article type</b>	Original research articles/ empirical articles and reviews	Conference articles
<b>Language</b>	English articles	Other language articles
<b>Articles relevance</b>	Articles including: Price promotions, Pricing, Advertising Or articles including any of the above marketing instruments. In relation/not concerning private label brands	Articles not relevant to the research topic and the marketing instruments (price promotions, pricing, and advertising) in question for this study

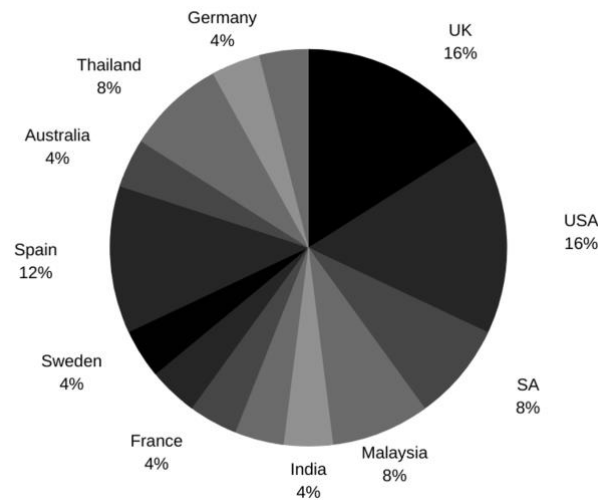
## Descriptive analysis of studies

### *Types of marketing instruments*

Aw and Chong (2019), in their study, highlighted the importance of studying the potential effect of pricing, price promotion, and advertising and their effect on private label brands. Therefore, based on this assertion, nine studies addressed pricing, nine addressed price promotion, seven addressed advertising, and other supplemental literature addressed the combination of the three instruments.

### *Types of research*

Most of the studies sampled in this present study were quantitative studies (21), mostly being survey studies, which employed the use of questionnaires. Qualitative studies (4) tend to follow rigorous qualitative reviews. Moreover, before including and excluding articles for this study, articles were consistently checked against the set inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 4). This process was maintained throughout to ensure eligible articles were included and non-eligible articles were excluded.



**Figure 2:** Percentages of articles included and their countries of origin

Figure 2 shows the percentages of studies that made the inclusion criteria and were selected for this review. The majority of the studies (16.7%) emanate from the UK and USA, followed by Spain (12.5%), South Africa, Malaysia, and Thailand (8.2%), with the rest of the studies (4.2%) originating from countries such as France, India, Sweden, Germany, Turkey, and Australia, to mention a few.

## Discussion and implications

The present study aimed at investigating the role of marketing instruments on the purchase intentions of private label brands, by systematically reviewing current trends within the literature. In the process, this enables an in-depth review and analysis of the marketing instruments (Figure 1) in question for this review.

Firstly, our study shows that, from the reviewed studies on the pricing of private label brands, it is evident that, over the years, retailers have used pricing as a differentiator for their products in juxtaposition with the usually high-priced manufacturer brands. Moreover, this strategy has created a significant influence on PLB's purchase intention (Boon et al., 2018). However, with the current evolvement in consumer behaviours, customers no longer purchase private label brands solely because of being price conscious but also looking for value in their purchase (Cuneo et al., 2019). Interestingly, current studies found manufacturer brands priced higher than private label brands, however, with fewer disparities in terms of their quality (Boyle et al., 2018). This led to probing future studies to investigate the mentioned interesting finding. This can lay a foundation for retailers to review their pricing in the near future. Customers are shifting from the standard heritage mindset that PLBs are low-priced accompanied by low-quality products, to now being true customer centric brands that are valued by customers. Therefore, the following is proposed:

*Proposition 1:* Grocery retailers need to reconsider the pricing of their private label brands to compete with manufacturer brands further aggressively, and in the process gain more sales and value attribute from customers.

Secondly, from the analysis of the included studies, it is worth noting that price promotion has been a widely used strategy by retailers to induce private labels sales volumes, in the short term. As a result, customers respond positively towards price promotions (Bennet et al., 2019; Arce-Urriza et al., 2017). Retailers need to explain the constant offering of price promotions to actively attract customers towards purchasing their price promoted products, private label brands included. Furthermore, from the analysis presented, it also emerged that as economies are continuously facing downturns, this results in retailers constantly introducing price promotions. However, retailers are to exercise caution in this activity. Since price promotion is a short-term marketing technique, it can neglect

the long-term loyalty of customers (Chakraborty, 2018). In contrast, some studies find price promotions have a positive effect in the long run and should improve loyalty through price promotions (Bhakar et al., 2020; Ghezlbash & Khodadadi, 2017) Therefore, the following is proposed:

*Proposition 2:* Price promotions are essential to increase customer purchase intentions for private label brands; however, caution is needed as this, in the long run, might negatively affect the loyalty of customers towards private labels or the store offering PLBs.

Lastly, reviewing the analysis of studies on the advertising of private label brands, this study found the trend of continued under-investment in advertising private label brands. It is visible that in some parts of the globe, retailers are still not utilising the opportunity that comes with investment in advertising their private label brands, regardless of the strategy employed. Prior studies highlight the positive impact that advertising has on customers' purchase intention for private label brands (Sansone et al., 2020). This provides validity to the necessity for retailers to adopt rigorous investments in marketing activities such as advertising, to increase sales volumes and continue their evolution of competing with manufacturer brands. Earlier studies by (Aw & Chong, 2019) support the strength of advertising as one of the marketing activities that shape customers' attitudes towards PLBs, as well as the purchase intention for PLBs.

*Proposition 3:* Retailers across the globe need to acknowledge the need to invest in advertising and include it in their marketing policies.

## Conclusion

In this study, we explored how marketing activities such as pricing, price promotion, and advertising influence customers' purchase intention for private label brands. To this end, it is evident that the three marketing activities have a significant influence on customers purchasing private label brands. However, what is notable, is that retailers have over the years been overly reliant on the low pricing strategy, knowing that customers opt for private labels due to their low pricing. Surprisingly, customers no longer purchase PLBs due to their low prices – they are also looking for value, thereby highlighting the evolvement in consumer behaviour.

With regards to price promotions, PLBs have over decades been famous for these, and as a result, positively boost sales in the short run. However, such stands to erode customers' loyalty towards PLBs in the long run. Hence, retailers should continually strive to enhance their promotional strategies to be value creating rather than enhancing short-term sales (Odongo & Motari, 2020). By doing so, customers will be willing to purchase private label brands at even higher prices; in turn, repeatedly purchasing private label brands and completely switching from manufacturer brands. Lastly, in this paper, we investigated how advertising influences customers' purchase of private label brands. The findings depict a mixture in terms of investment on private label brands by retailers, where some have minimally put the effort into advertising investment and other retailers are seriously incorporating advertising into their marketing policies.

Our findings contribute to marketing retail research by highlighting the impact of the three marketing activities (pricing, price promotion, and advertising) on the purchase of private label brands over the years. Furthermore, we have developed three propositions that can guide retailers in enhancing these marketing activities to provide private label brands that are valuable to customers. Therefore, the discussion from this review is critical for retailers and academics alike. However, it is worth noting, due to the chosen research approach, that the results may lack generalisability. Therefore, future empirical studies on these three marketing activities are encouraged. Secondly, our findings emanate from previously published works, from a distinct period, and therefore generalisability cannot be made to the broad marketing retail research literature. Nevertheless, this review offers considerable insights for retailers, as well as for academics as direction for future research, perhaps, quantitative studies, such as a meta-analysis of these marketing activities.

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