

## **Age and gender affects on consumers' awareness and source of awareness for food-related private-label brands**

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### **Abstract**

*This article presents the findings of a research regarding consumers' awareness and source of awareness for food-related private-label brands. Results of the field research indicate that the majority of the consumers are aware of private-label brands, with main source being store shopping and the supermarkets' price advertising leaflets. Age and gender affects were tested for awareness, source of awareness and recall of supermarket practising food-related private-label brands. Results revealed that gender affects brand awareness and source of awareness, while age affects recall of the supermarket. Marketing and retailing implications are discussed for a better communication approach and future purchasing of these brands, as regard consumers.*

**Keywords:** Consumer awareness, consumer information source of awareness, private-label brands, retailing, marketing.

### **Introduction**

In order for a brand to have future sales and moreover a respectable market share the managers' first job is to create and enhance brand awareness (Pitts and Katsanis, 1996). Alerk and Settle (1999) in outlining strategies for building strong brand preferences, state that the first strategy is to develop "need association" through developing brand name awareness. Aaker (1991 in Granham et al.,

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1994) and Keller (1993) suggest that brand equity arise from brand awareness, while Farquhar (1994) argues that in order to develop brand power, brand awareness must pre-exist. Lastly, Alba and Chattopadhyay (1986) state that with enhancing brand name awareness substantial competitive consequences result, because it may hinder consumer's memory for competitive brand names. Brand awareness seems to be very important for brand managers. Macdonald and Sharp (1996) determined the level of understanding of brand awareness among marketing practitioners in South Australia. They also investigated the use of brand awareness as measures of their marketing effectiveness. They found that 46% of the managers could provide a reasonable definition, while only 44% measured brand awareness of their brands either during advertising campaigns or during the initial commercialisation of a new product.

Brand awareness is essential for the communication process to occur as it precedes all other steps in the process (Nakanishi, 1971). Establishing brand awareness is the ultimate step for creating brand knowledge (Keller, 1993), brand evaluation (Holden and Lutz, 1992; Nedungadi, 1990) and brand choice (Crowley and Williams, 1991; Nedungadi and Hutchinson, 1985).

In order for a consumer to buy a brand s/he must be aware of it, otherwise brand attitude, preference, nor intention to buy will occur (Rossiter et al. 1991; Rossiter and Percy, 1987; in Macdonald and Sharp, 1996). When a consumer is aware of a brand, s/he imports it in the awareness set, which comprises of all the brands s/he is aware of (Crowley and Williams, 1991). After eliminating some brands, s/he produces a consideration set, which is a subset of the awareness set. The consideration set comprises of brands considered for future purchases (Roberts and Nedungadi, 1995; Alba and Chattapadhyay, 1985; Reilly and Parkinson, 1985). Lastly, after evaluating the brands in the consideration set the consumer forms the evoked set. The evoked set is a subset of the consideration set, and contains the brands considered for the next purchase (Howard and Sheth, 1969; in Reilly and Parkinson, 1985). Thus, a brand that has some level of awareness is more likely to be considered by the consumer, than one that s/he is unaware of.

Hoyer and Brown (1990) as well as Macdonald and Sharp (2000), examined the effect of brand awareness on choice. Both studies were experimental. The second study was a replication of the first using different products as well as aware and non-aware consumers. They found that brand awareness does effect decisions about brands within the consideration set. Lastly, Crowley and Williams (1991), argued that the proportion of brands in the awareness set which are included in the consideration set, i.e. the consideration set/ awareness set ratio is optimal when it identifies a 63:37 mean proportion (consideration set/ awareness set).

Aaker (1991, in Graham et al., 1994) state that there are four types of awareness: Top-of-Mind awareness, brand recall, brand recognition, and unaware of a brand; though in the retailing situation, recognition or recall typically measures brand awareness (Pope, 1998).

With recognition, one only needs to identify a presented stimulus that s/he has seen, heard or felt before (Singh et al., 1988), meaning that recognition gives cues to the subject which can trigger memory to retrieve the desired information (Monroe et al., 1986). Recognition is a relevant brand awareness objective, when consumers' purchase decisions are stimulus-based (MacInnis et al., 1999). Thus,

when the brands are presented, researchers typically take a recognition measure in which they present the brand name and ask respondents whether they know the brand or not (Holden, 1993).

The second measure of brand awareness, recall, as indicated by Chattapadhyay and Alba (1988) is a significant predictor of attitude. Various standard measures of brand awareness, such as aided and unaided (free) brand name recall, rest on the assumption that the ability of the consumer to remember a brand or a product will strongly affect the probability of considering purchasing it (Nedungadi and Hutchinson, 1985). Recall is the mental reproduction of a response or item that has been experienced or learned before (Adams, 1980; in Monroe et al., 1986). With recall, one requires two steps in memory, first search and then recognition (Singh et al., 1988). Holden (1993), states that when the brands are not present, the appropriate measure of brand awareness is recall, measured by presenting a product category (e.g. food) and asking the participants to recall brands from the category.

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

Research on different aspects of awareness, focused mainly on recall and recognition of brands or products, none of which were in the specific context of private label brands, let alone food related ones. In addition, no previous research emphasised on the source of awareness and none investigated consumers' age and gender effects on private label brand awareness.

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

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

To address the above issues, a research approach based on two axons was undertaken as presented in the next section. Then follows the presentation of the research findings. This paper concludes with the discussion, conclusions and implementations for retail managers.

### **Qualitative research**

Following marketing literature on consumer behaviour and in view of the exploratory nature of this study, we opted for qualitative research (Milliken, 2001; Goodman, 1999; Threlfall, 1999; Cahill, 1996; Gregory, 1995). Qualitative research employed discussions in three focus groups with fifteen adults in the central division of greater Thessaloniki (municipalities of Thessaloniki, Agios Pav-

los and Triandria), using the same simple questionnaire for all sessions. Participants were recruited within friends and family, selected to vary in age and gender. Specifically, nine participants were females and six males, while ages varied from 19 to 67 years old, with twelve consumers belonging equally in the following age groups: 18-25; 26-35; 36-45 and 46-55. Also, two participants were 56-65, and one was more than 66 years of age. The main findings of the focus group discussions were the following:

1. Initially, an explanation of the term “ private-label brands” had to be provided to the participants, as they were not familiar with this term. Thereafter, it was found that the majority of the participants were aware of private-label brands.
2. Females were more aware of food-related private-label brands than males, while age did not have any affect on awareness.
3. Regarding information source from where awareness was obtained, younger subjects reported shopping situation; females reported price-advertising leaflets, while older subjects reported mainly friends and relatives.
4. When asked to recall some supermarkets practising food-related private-label brands, older subjects reported neighbourhood supermarkets that they usually purchase from and have access to by foot. These supermarkets are mainly Greek. Younger subjects mentioned first the Hypermarkets, i.e. CONTINENT and secondly other discount retailing chains, such as LIDL or DIA, which are foreign hard discount chains. It was also observed that older subjects (over 55 years old) could not pronounce the foreign retail chains. Such an example was an elderly female who named three “Greek” supermarkets and the “German one” (i.e. LIDL).

### **Research Hypotheses**

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

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

### **Methodology of Field Research**

#### *Questionnaire Development*

For the purpose of verifying the above hypotheses, a structured questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire was developed specifically for this purpose based on the results of qualitative research and on the objectives of this study. It was divided into four parts: private-label awareness and source of awareness,

purchasing behavior, attitudes, and demographic variables. Only the variables pertinent to the present analysis will be discussed.

### **Field Research**

To accomplish the foregoing research objectives, the survey approach was adopted. The questionnaire was pretested with a sample of 54 respondents selected with the mall intercept technique. After making the necessary modifications, field research was undertaken in the same area (municipality of Thessaloniki, Agios Pavlos, and Triandria) over a five-week period in February and March 2000.

The only available sampling frame was the population of each municipality (N.S.S.G.: Census, 1991) and a map with the streets and building blocks. Aiming to make generalisations from the sample to the corresponding population (403,020), the sampling method employed was the multistage random sampling method, as used by Kamenidou (1999: 69-71). Sample unit was one adult per family, where 307 valid questionnaires were collected by personal interviews. Following Stathakopoulos (1997:224-227), the sample size was found efficient for generalisations from the sample to the correspondent population (standard error 6% and confidence level 95%). The sample was also found efficient for the statistical analysis performed, since Lehmann et al. (1998) indicated that the minimum sample size for chi-square tests is 120 respondents.

Statistical analysis of the survey data includes descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics, i.e., cross tabulation, and degree of association (Cramer's V).

### **Results**

#### *Sample Profile*

Gender distribution of the respondents was 40% males and 60% females. Age varied from 18 to 65+, with the largest proportion divided into three age categories: 36-45, 46-55 and 26-35 years old (29.3%, 24.8% and 20.5% respectively). Also, 14.7% were 18-25 years of age, 7.5% were 56-65, and 3.3% were 66+ of age. Most respondents were married (55.4%), had a university degree (35.8%), were salaried employees (44.6%), and a monthly net income varying from 101.000 to 300.000 drachmas (48,2%).

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

Since qualitative research revealed that most respondents were not familiar with the term "private-label brands", and in order to decrease bias in the field study, when respondents answered that they were not aware of food-related private-label brands, they were given a definition of the term. If respondents then answered that they were aware of these brands or could give an example, then they were placed in the "aware" category. If respondents stated once again that they still do not know what private-label brands are, they were placed in the

“not-aware” category. Employing this method, results of this study revealed that from 307 respondents that took part in the survey, 278 (90.6%) were aware of private-label brands’ existence, while 232 (83.2%) respondents were aware of the food-related private-label brands.

In order to investigate source of awareness, recognition measures were used (MacInnis, 1999; Holden, 1993). In this case, four statements/stimulus, which derived from qualitative research, were given to the respondents. Respondents were then asked to recognise the source which produced brand awareness. Results revealed that source of food-related private-label brand awareness were mainly shopping situation and the supermarket price advertising leaflets (Table 1). Friends and relatives, as first source of awareness was very low (7%).

*Second objective: Recall of supermarket practising food related private label brands*

Unaided awareness and specifically free recall measures in an unconstrained task (Hutchinson, 1983) were used to investigate recall of supermarkets practising food-related private-label brands. Specifically, respondents had a few minutes (free recall) to name the first supermarket that comes to their mind practising food-related private-label brands (unconstrained task). With this method, consumers named nine supermarkets, the main ones practising food-related private-label brands in Greater Thessaloniki (Table 2).

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

<i>Source of awareness</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
S/M’s price advertising leaflets	59	25.7
Shopping situation	155	67.3
Friends-relatives	16	7.0
Other sources of awareness	0	0.0
Total	230	100.0

*Third objective: Hypotheses tests.*

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

Awareness of food-related private-label brands did vary significantly over gender groups ( $X^2_1=6.65$ ,  $p=0.010$ , Cramer’s  $V=0.16$ ). Awareness for food-related private-label brands was significantly higher for females (55.4%) than males (44.6%), though Cramer’s  $V$  measure of association is considered low.

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

Source of food-related private-label brand awareness did vary significantly over gender groups ( $X^2_2=17.38$ ,  $p=0.000$ , Cramer’s  $V=0.28$ ). Specifically, significantly more females obtained awareness of food-related private-label brands from the supermarket’s price advertising leaflets (72.9%) as well as from friends

and relatives (81.3%) as opposed to males (27.1% and 18.8% respectively). While the latter, obtained food-related private-label brand awareness primarily during shopping situation (54.2% for males and 45.8% for females). Cramer's V measure of association was medium (Table 3).

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

<i>Supermarket</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentage of sample</i>
Continent	42	18.9
Masoutis	33	14.9
Prisunic Marinopoulos	31	14.0
Katanalotis Konsum- Coop	27	12.2
Veropoulos	24	10.8
Lidl	23	10.4
Galaxias	19	8.6
Dia	18	8.1
Arvanitidis	5	2.1
Total	222	100.0

**Table 3.** Statistical differences between consumers' gender and source of awareness of food-related private - label brands

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Source of awareness of food-related private - label brands</i>		
	<i>S/M leaflets</i>	<i>Shopping situation</i>	<i>Friends and Relatives</i>
<u>Males</u>			
Frequencies	16	84	3
Percentages	27.1	54.2	18.8
<u>Females</u>			
Frequencies	43	71	13
Percentages	72.9	45.8	81.3
<u>Total</u>			
Frequencies	59	155	16
Percentages	100.0	100.0	100.0

$X^2_2=17.38$ ,  $p=0.000$ , Cramer's  $V=0.28$

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

Recall of a supermarket that practices food-related private-label brands did

vary significantly over the age groups ( $X^2_{40}=6.65$ ,  $p=0.006$ , Cramer's  $V=0.24$ ). Specifically, older aged subjects (46-55, 56-65, 66+) named neighbourhood supermarkets, while younger subjects (18-25 and 26-35 years of age) named foreign discount chains and hypermarkets (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Statistical differences between consumers' age and recall of supermarket practising food-related private - label brands

<i>Supermarket first Recalled</i>	<i>Respondents age</i>					
	<i>18-25</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>36-45</i>	<i>46-55</i>	<i>56-65</i>	<i>66+</i>
<u>Arvanitidis</u>						
Frequency	0	1	2	1	1	0
Percentage	0.0	2.0	3.4	1.8	4.8	0.0
<u>Veropoulos</u>						
Frequency	4	2	9	5	3	1
Percentage	15.4	3.9	15.5	8.8	14.3	11.1
<u>Continent</u>						
Frequency	4	7	11	12	5	3
Percentage	15.4	13.7	19.0	21.1	23.8	33.3
<u>Dia</u>						
Frequency	5	6	4	3	0	0
Percentage	19.2	11.8	6.9	5.3	0.0	0.0
<u>Galaksias</u>						
Frequency	1	7	5	5	0	1
Percentage	3.8	13.7	8.6	8.8	0.0	11.1
<u>Katanalotis Konsum –Coop</u>						
Frequency	2	5	7	12	1	0
Percentage	7.7	9.8	12.1	21.1	4.8	0.0
<u>Lidl</u>						
Frequency	8	8	2	4	1	0
Percentage	30.8	15.7	3.4	7.0	4.8	0.0
<u>Prisunic Marinopoulos</u>						
Frequency	0	6	14	8	2	1
Percentage	0.0	11.8	24.1	14.0	9.5	11.1
<u>Masoutis</u>						
Frequency	2	9	4	7	8	3
Percentage	7.7	17.6	6.9	12.3	38.1	33.3
<u>Total</u>						
Frequency	26	51	58	57	21	9
Percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

$X^2_{40}=65.71$ ,  $p=0.006$ , Cramer's  $V=0.24$



## Discussion

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

The first objective of this study was to explore Greek consumers' awareness of food-related private-label brands and source of awareness. Results reveal that awareness does exist for 83% of the respondents. At first sight, this percentage could be considered very high and satisfactory. But on the other hand, 17% of the respondents are not aware that food-related private-label brands are distributed in the market. This percentage (17%) of the sample not being aware of food-related private-label brands cannot be considered small and not worthy to work on, since it may consist of future purchasers. Macdonald and Sharp (1996) state that brand awareness offers a great deal of potential value to the marketing manager and it should be an important goal of the marketing communications efforts of a firm. This means that retail managers, as well as marketing staff practising food-related private-label brands, need to enhance brand awareness of their brands, to all potential consumers. Previous researchers (e.g. Macdonald and Sharp, 1996; Roberts and Nedungadi, 1995; Crowely and Williams, 1991; Hower and Brown, 1990) showed that if brand awareness does not exist, then it is unlikely that a brand will be considered for purchase. Taking this into account, and with the results of this study in the background, retail managers and private-label marketing staff cannot afford to lose this 17% of respondents which are unaware of food-related private-label brands.

This study is the first attempting to identify the source of food-related private-label brand awareness. Results revealed that the main source of food-related private-label brand awareness is consumers' shopping situation and the supermarket's promotion leaflets distributed door-to-door, which is in fact the most common promotional tool, especially for large supermarkets or hypermarkets. In our research, friends and relatives as source of food-related private-label brand awareness is quite limited, while other sources of awareness, such as the Internet or the big tabloids, are not considered at all.

### *Second objective: Recall of supermarket practising food related private label brands*

The second objective of this study was to record which supermarket is first recalled by consumers as the one that practices food-related private-label brands. Since this study, does not deal with a single private label food product category, recall of supermarket was considered as an element which leads consumers to recall of food-related private label brands. Recall of the supermarkets, revealed nine supermarkets, being the dominants in the Thessaloniki's retailing business. Even though the nine supermarkets recalled are the dominant of food-related private label brands in Thessaloniki's area, about half of the respondents (47.8%) recalled only three supermarkets, two of which belong to the French Promodes (Continent and Prisunic Marinopoulos), while the third supermarket is a Greek one. Katanalotis Konsum-Coop, being the first supermarket in Greece (since 1964), was recalled fourth. This underlines that Greek supermarkets have ineffective marketing communication with their customers and the necessity for

them to concentrate in marketing strategies that will develop a strong retailer–costumer bond.

*Third objective: Hypotheses tests.*

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

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

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

Shopping situation is more common source of awareness for males than females, probably because males are less willing to pay higher price premiums for national brands than females (Sethuraman and Cole, 1999). Males probably are “hassle –free bargain hunters”, while females being “informed bargain hunters” do not go searching for lower price brands, unless they are informed (Williams et al., 1997). Discussions of food expenditures and food brands tried among housewives, due to the existence of interpersonal relationships, are also recognised as another source of awareness. Awareness obtained from price shopping leaflets is also higher for females than males, probably because they are more likely to browse through them (especially housewives) when household chores are done.

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

The empirical results strongly suggest that significant differences in recall of supermarkets practising food-related private label brands do exist between age groups. In general, results suggest that older respondents have a higher level of recall for neighbourhood supermarkets. This can be explained by the fact that they purchase mostly from such outlets and they are generally more attached to the neighbourhood spirit (Joyce and Lambert, 1996). Additionally, hard discount chains or hypermarkets are foreign and by having a foreign name, elderly people may not be able to remember or to pronounce it. Thus, it is easier to recall the supermarket from where years now s/he has been shopping, as qualitative research indicated.

### **Implications**

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

Taking into account the fact that prior research in Greece has not been conducted regarding consumers' awareness, perception or buying behaviour

towards food-related private-label brands, these results will help retailers and their marketing staff to concentrate on an effective approach as regards consumers. Specifically, identifying consumer awareness source can be of practical value to the retailers' marketing managers. For marketing managers source of awareness may be an important feature in specifying target markets requiring different marketing strategies. It can be useful in helping the manager to decide how to influence the awareness process, in order to ensure that consumers will perceive the brand positively, and will include the brand among those considered for purchase.

These results will help retailers and their marketing staff to concentrate on an effective way of developing brand awareness. In order to increase their private label brands market share, the small Greek supermarkets should enhance their interpersonal relations and encourage word of mouth (WOM) communication. Literature indicates that WOM communication is one of the most widely accepted concepts in consumer behaviour, having a significant effect in consumers' attitudes and behaviour in the purchasing process of products and services (Bone, 1995; Murray, 1991; Brown and Reingen, 1987). In addition, Brown and Reingen (1987) found that WOM is more effective when social ties exist between those who communicate. Greek supermarkets can achieve this more easily, since they operate in a neighbourhood base, and thus they have an advantage towards the impersonal foreign ones.

On the other hand the foreign chains should concentrate on promotional techniques, such as in store promotions, price advertising leaflets, etc. These chains could use a portion of their promotional and advertising budget for this purpose, something that the small Greek supermarkets or chains are not able to follow, since they have limited financial resources. Lastly, the present study suggests to retail managers and marketing staff the need to segment consumers on the basis of brand awareness and source of awareness for an effective approach and marketing communication.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is important to recognise several limitations of this study, which offer opportunities for further research. Firstly, this study was conducted before the "French giant" hypermarket chain CARREFOUR appeared in Thessaloniki's retailing market. Since the research was conducted, a lot of changes have taken place; not only in the retailing market of Thessaloniki, but in the Greek market in general. Second, this research due to time and resource constraints encompassed only respondents from the central division of Greater Thessaloniki, and for so, results can not be generalised for the whole of the area. Third, this study does not consider a specific food category, mainly because it has an exploratory nature. Lastly, it does not deal with consumers buying behaviour regarding food-related private label brands; it specially focuses on food-related private-label brand awareness.

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