



Buying Motivation Toward Supermarkets' Private Label Products Among Millennials Due to The Covid-19 Crisis in Peru

Ariana Tafur^(✉) and Francisco Arbaiza

Communications and Advertising Program, Faculty of Communications,
Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Lima, Peru
u201620904@upc.edu.pe

Abstract. The presence of private label products on supermarket shelves in Peru is becoming more and more frequent; it is possible to notice a bigger effort by retail companies to position their products through marketing and advertising strategies, trying to leave behind the reputation of low quality that they used to have to compete directly with the leaders of the category. As a result of the pandemic produced by Covid-19 and the impact it had on the economy, purchasing behavior has changed dramatically, consumers have become more selective about the products they buy and the prices they are willing to pay. The opportunity arises in terms of private labels' accessible prices to be able to enter the purchasing possibilities of millennial consumers, since that group is willing to try new brands as long as they are aligned to their needs, such as the economic limits experienced by the pandemic. The objective of this research seeks, through in-depth interviews, to determine how the purchase motivation towards supermarket private label brands has changed according to millennials from the socioeconomic level B due to the Covid-19 crisis. In this way, it was discovered that for millennial consumers brand loyalty is not something present, on the contrary, they look for brands that make their lives practical; In the current context, their motivation towards private labels arises because they offer a price that fits with the consumer's purchase budget, likewise, another important factor was finding that the preference towards these brands is based on a solid marketing strategy that covers the positioning of the supermarket, the accessibility of private label products, exclusive offers, and digital shopping channels.

Keywords: Private label brands · millennials · purchase drivers · economic crisis · supermarkets

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a greater frequency with which private label products, also known as own brands or private label, can be found on supermarket shelves [1]; It is possible to observe that there is a greater effort on the part of retail companies, understood as supermarkets, to position their own-brand products through advertising strategies and thus put them in direct competition with the category leaders [2]. To

achieve this, marketing actions are carried out based on pricing strategies, visual identity development, a promotion at the point of sale, and advertising in traditional and digital media, where the aim is to highlight the quality and price of each product launched that differentiate in category [3].

As a result of the pandemic produced by Covid-19 and the negative impact it had on the economy, consumer behavior has changed brilliantly and the ways of persuading the purchase that was used to employ have become obsolete [4]. Consumers have become more demanding about the products they buy and the prices they are willing to pay [5]; An opportunity arises in terms of white brands to be able to enter within their possibilities [6], as they are supposed to be a good purchase option that ensures the same level of quality offered by the leading brand products that they buy periodically [1].

Given this situation, [6] maintains that white brands face a panorama of opportunities; millennial consumers are willing to try new products outside the brands that they usually always carry in their regular purchases; This is due both to the search for the new, typical of the characteristics of these consumers and to the economic limits they have had to face due to the pandemic, such as salary cuts or layoffs [7]. The challenge born in understanding how to take advantage of this moment to be the ideal option at the time of purchase and, frequently, break down some prejudice already built up about the products of private label supermarkets.

Private label brands beyond gaining popularity during a crisis; the success of these products must be built on a strategic basis that guides the brand to differentiate itself and learn from trends to offer new products as any other in the market would do [8]; An important factor for private label to be a purchase option is to be able to see the supermarket brand as the manufacturer of the indicated product; since the loyalty to the establishment is impacted on the products that bear their signature [9].

Given the above, it is possible to understand that white brands have transformed that today making them compete and be a major opponent against leading brands, either because of their low prices, their product innovations, or seen as an alternative. novel [10].

However, to date, not much research has been done on how the new group of adults, millennials, who begin to live alone or take on roles as parents, face a situation of economic crisis; where they have to provide for and make smart purchases decisions that do not affect the economic stability of their home, opening the possibility that white brands become great allies in such a scenario.

For this reason, this research poses the following question: Q1: Has there been a change in the purchasing motivation towards supermarkets' private label brands according to millennials due to the Covid-19 crisis in Peru?

Given the above, this research seeks to contribute to the field of advertising and marketing by exploring changes in consumer behavior in a crisis; as well as expanding knowledge about white brands, understanding what they are and what their evolution has been to date, to understand how they have been able to establish themselves in the shopping carts of many millennial consumers who consider them an attractive alternative due to the situation that they go through.

This study also seeks to be a useful information tool to understand how the good positioning of a retail brand can be beneficial to promoting its own brands; therefore, advertising or marketing professionals who are planning an advertising strategy or launching

white brands will know the points for improvement and what is making white brands successful in the market.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Strategy Behind the Resurgence of Private Labels

Consumers live surrounded by brands, as a result of this, there is a constant struggle by companies for their brand to become the favorite and establish itself forever in people's minds [11]. Private labels [12] are their products made by supermarkets for the different categories they sell. In the past, white brands were offered as generic products with no attempt at design in the presentation together with cheap packaging, which led them to position themselves negatively, since they were options that offered to be an economical and low-quality alternative, although never as good as the competition [13].

The breaking point that gave rise to the success and resurgence of white brands was putting aside the me-too strategy, which consisted of directly copying and applying what the leading brands did; In this way, retailers realize the need to invest in advertising just like everyone else, above all, the search for a good strategic base to understand what type of image and qualities would allow them to differentiate themselves and position themselves in an already saturated market [14].

2.2 Millennials During Covid-19

The economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic has posed enormous social, structural, and economic challenges throughout the world; being the younger generations the most destabilized; those born between 1985 and 1995 are the only generation of the last century to go through two major recessions while undergoing university education, insertion in the labor market and economic dependence [15]. A great challenge arises for brands in the face of current demographic changes since millennials have come to comprise 24% of the world population; becoming the age group with the highest purchasing power [1].

In relation to consumption in crisis, [14] people who experience drops in their income as a reason for an unstable economic situation, leads them to seek the maximum savings at the time of the purchase of the basic food basket; [16] there is a limitation in purchases, to the extent of being able to obtain the basics, consumption is no longer considered unnecessary.

Millennials are value-conscious, unlike the impulse buys of past generations, they do a lot of research before the purchase; Therefore, if they discover that the store brands are as good as the manufacturer's brands, they will not hesitate to make a change of brand in their shopping cart; especially in a time of crisis such as the one that has been experienced since 2019, with an uncertain panorama regarding health and economic income, they see as added value the fact that they are offered products that promise to be the same but at a lower price [16]. For this reason, retail companies must reorient their strategies to address a consumer who is vulnerable to change and who is waiting for brands that make their life easier [14].

Therefore, with a generation of more responsible, reasonable, and curious consumers; it cannot be assumed that they will be loyal to the same brand forever. It is necessary to develop products and sales strategies that are convenient for them, but above all that offer a wide variety of options that fit their lifestyle and the values, they fight for [1]. One of the factors with the greatest influence on the purchase of private label products is the recommendations and the price they have at the time of purchase; for being an unknown brand, they need to listen to the opinions of family members regarding the brand and its performance; also, advertisement helps to create brand recall and association of characteristics [17].

3 Materials and Methods

When faced with a possible behavior change, a qualitative study was conducted to determine if it is possible to acquire relevant information, which allows us to analyze and validate the complexity and depth of the questioning of the study [18]. The structure of the analysis allows the integration of elements of the life of the interviewee and the world around him, as well as his subjective and rational perspectives [19]. In addition, research is managed from a naturalistic paradigm [20].

The objectives of this study seek to: (i) identify the factors that influence the motivation to buy supermarket white-label products and (ii) inform what is the current perception that consumers have towards supermarket white-label products.

To meet the objectives, the interviewees were recruited through intentional sampling; allowing the selection of cases from a population with certain characteristics according to what is most convenient in the investigation [21]. On the other hand, the purpose of qualitative sampling is to obtain objective answers, since they are received from the analysis of what surrounds the phenomenon and the world of the individual, instead of generalizations as could occur with quantitative research; In addition, they specify that the sampling strategy should focus on the selection of people with substantial data and information according to what is being investigated.

This study seeks to analyze the behavior of millennial consumers; since they are the generation that has begun to have the greatest purchasing power and economic dependence, while they are forming new homes and are in charge of selecting the brands and products that are purchased [1]. It was determined that the interviewees should be consumers of the Tottus supermarket since its extensive portfolio of private labels and its high quota of brand share in the country [22] will help us discover various purchase motivations. It is important to highlight that the brand maintains a continuous expansion since it frequently has new launches of products and lines of its white label, which expands the possibility of reaching various consumer profiles, contrary to the competition that focuses on the development of basic basket products.

Data will be obtained through in-depth interviews with 20 people along with semi-structured questions; This instrument is frequently used in qualitative research and its main objective is for participants to be able to express their perceptions and opinions openly [23]; In this way, a fluid conversation can be established with the selected people so that they comfortably share what they think, without feeling bias or judgment that limits the content of the answers they want to share.

4 Analysis of Results

4.1 Millennials, Facing Adult Life with Economic Adjustments

In this category we will see the way of life in which the interviewed millennials find themselves, focusing on the composition of their homes and how the Covid-19 pandemic pushed them to adapt and change their ways of living and consumption. In this way, the majority agreed on the existence of three major changes in their lifestyle: 1) the search for savings, 2) the search for practicality, and 3) health.

Regarding the first change, it was found that the millennial generation, being in a stage where they seek to become independent or meet goals in a difficult context due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, results in the search for savings in daily expenses, among them One is to stop buying store brand products and replace them with (private label) substitutes that they know will not affect performance in their intended use.

4.2 New Consumers and Their Love Path for Private Label Labels

This category analyzes how consumers express their change in the way they buy and the factors that intervene to choose products at the time of purchase. Broadly speaking, consumers express being curious and analytical, which leads to low brand loyalty, but a great opportunity to discover products that offer to make your life easier and cheaper.

Within the process of evaluating the interviewees on products and brands, the search for cheaper options offers, and replacement products that would not affect their routine or the taste of their meals stood out. When asked about white brands, they stated that they had always been aware of their existence, some since childhood and others since they took on the role of shoppers, however, they all agreed to have a bad perception of this type of product, and at When considering them as a purchase option, the doubt always arose as to whether they were doing the right thing due to the great prejudice of: cheaper, less quality. On the other hand, most of the interviewees mentioned that, in the last year, the presence of these products has intensified in different channels; for example some of the influencers they follow now recommend this type of brand; when they arrive at the point of sale they can see that private label brands are in every aisle, every wall in the supermarkets is cover with banners with an offer of their brands; on television and social networks, the presence of advertising focused on private label brands has increased, as well as in tactics through apps or email marketing.

When deciding to explore private label products, due to the perception of low quality, several interviewees decided to start purchasing these products in the cleaning category: bleach, air fresheners, garbage bags, or fabric softeners; since as they mention, it was not something that made much difference: “finally everything is cleaned the same.” The good performance of these products gave them the confidence to try other options within the portfolio, specifically in the grocery category.

According to what they mention, products such as noodles, beans, flour, or oil do not have a distinctive flavor, it depends more on the touch that is given to them when cooking. After trying these types of products, some people may perceive them as their new favorite products due to their incredible performance. One of the main factors to

achieving this fidelity is in the exhaustive research where they stop to review data on the supplier, the packer, the country of origin, and the price compared to the others; that encourages purchase, product testing, and consequently, in some cases, satisfaction.

4.3 Consumer Awakening: When Functionality is Worth More than Appearance

The objective of any brand is to become indispensable in the life of the consumer, this is built based on the development of incomparable products, good concepts, and memorable experiences for the user. However, we are facing a generation that lived under the fanaticism of their parents regarding the brands that were bought at home, whether for status, performance, or taste.

Despite that indoctrination, when they were the ones who had to pay for the shopping carts, they realized that they could not afford to continue with the unquestionable fanaticism for brands. In this category, the generational break with brand loyalty in certain purchase categories will be analyzed, as well as the reasons why consumers are looking for something more functional for what they need in the stage of life in which they find themselves.

One of the first general results when asking the interviewees about the brands that they could not replace, all agreed that those that have to have contact with their appearance, that is, personal care products such as shampoo, toothpaste, soaps, and creams moisturizers; on the other hand, it was also revealed that products with which they are already familiar due to a more sensory positioning such as flavor are more difficult to replace, among these are: soft drinks, sweets, and snacks. In this way, understanding the context of the interviewees, in a crisis, it will be very difficult for brands that do not provide an economic benefit rather than a social one, especially in a weak quadrant such as groceries, where the interviewees expressed not having a favorite, the election is won by the highest bidder regarding the offer or promotion of the day; likewise, products in this category are seen as a complement but not as an elementary ingredient that will change or determine the final flavor of what is prepared.

The responses of the interviewees reveal a new profile of the consumer, being more selective by having the tools to compare and discriminate the product even before the purchase; As mentioned, the product that suits your needs will be chosen, and private label products are placed in direct competition with white brand products, being discriminated against depending on their functionality. In this way, in times of crisis like the current one, all the interviewees stated that they had left certain brands that did not benefit them on their purchase receipt, opening the way to the purchase of private label products that offered them both offers and promotions as well as the most functionally essential: same performance and results, but in a different package and at a significantly lower price.

Finally, the products that they seek to replace by brands do not have direct importance to them, but with what they will do (recipes), they forgot the white brands, a transit brand with the opportunity to become the favorite; that is to say, consumers say goodbye to the flashy bags and boxes of distributor products, to move on to something that promptly allows them to achieve the objective: to carry out a meal plan to which they are used to.

4.4 Tottus Private Label Brand, More for Less

In this category, the responses focused on the Tottus brand will be analyzed, understanding the factors that make it stand out from other white brands on the market and what role it has obtained in the lives of consumers, and what perspective they have on it today according to what they thought before of this type of product.

According to the answers obtained, one of the most critical factors that helped Tottus Own Brands was to keep the supermarket brand within the final naming of the product; since, in other supermarkets, these names are usually altered; however, what the interviewees expressed is that it gives them more confidence to know first-hand that their favorite supermarket is in charge of the product, producing an instant brand familiarity. The shopping experience, involving the attention of the staff, the cleanliness, or the efficiency in terms of the stock that the store manages, makes the consumer feel safe that the same care has existed at the time of making the products of their brand.

Consumers commented that they do not feel limited in options, they consider that the Tottus Brand has the broadest portfolio in the private label market, developing not only the most popular products but also innovative alternatives. For example, they commented that in the category of groceries, although they find oil, flour, salt, or rice; you can also find brown rice, maras salt, oatmeal, etc. On this, they highlighted that although they do not surpass the products of private label in terms of packaging, they feel that Tottus uses the design of the packaging bags positively, being transparent they let you see the interior of things such as rice or stews.

This conveys confidence to the consumer since he feels that he sees what he buys from the minute he sees it in the aisle. Along the same lines, another of the factors that boosted confidence in the Tottus brand products were the companies that manufactured the content. The interviewees were aware, having found out through social networks as well as through their research, that many of the Tottus brand products were manufactured by companies such as Alicorp, Bimbo, and Nestlé; This made it easier for them to opt for the private label, above all, because the common thought that emerged from all the interviewees is that by choosing to buy private label products they were able to save some money, which allowed them to buy even more things, that is, they bought more for less, without compromising quality.

5 Acknowledgments

The approach of the present investigation was carried out based on previous studies that examined the transformation of white brands and affirmed that together with a good advertising strategy they could be firm brands in the market against the competition [10]. The case chosen to analyze was the purchase motivation of millennials on private label products during the Covid-19 crisis, understanding that in a few years they will be the group with the highest volume in terms of purchase decisions [1].

In this research it was possible to conclude that between economic adjustments, advertising impacts, and information at a click thanks to technological developments, millennial consumers have established themselves as a new consumer profile different from that of any other generation; Unlike their parents or grandparents, their brand loyalty is much lower, being more selective and knowledgeable, they acquire a diligent

position regarding what is or is not entered in their shopping cart. Their curiosity changes the dynamics of purchases, focusing curiosity and analysis on prices, promotions, and product replacements; that is, they search in-depth for the best option before the moment of truth thanks to the rapid access they have to social networks or applications that make it easier for them to find the precise information on the products [16].

Their vulnerability to rebranding depends on the product being functional and matching what they are looking for; In the investigated context of a global economic crisis, consumers were looking for alternatives that work according to the budget for household purchases they had; In this case, it was discovered that if a brand does not have a high position and does not contribute something to the consumer's routine, it will be replaced; since in a crisis, no matter how much preference one has over a product, if it puts at risk being able to obtain the basics, it is discarded [16].

This is the case of products in the grocery category where there are very few brands that millennials are loyal to; In this way, the grocery category has become a weak quadrant in which the majority of products do not present differentiation from the rest of the competition, this has made it easy for consumers to replace them with an option that offered them the same but at a cheaper price: white brands.

The results of the study showed that although at the beginning there are low expectations in private label products due to the price-quality ratio, consumers trust the Tottus brand and the good experience they have had with the supermarket related to attention, cleanliness, and product stock. This leads to a kind of inheritance of product reputation, that is, they feel that if they did well with the supermarket, the same should happen with the products under their signature [23]. The case of Own Brands Tottus is a great example of effective advertising strategy, one of the frequent reasons why they bought the products of the mentioned brand is because both at the point of sale and in virtual spaces the great presence of the products was difficult to ignore, so it finally ended up within their purchasing power in a budget cut scenario [24].

In this way, if the research question is raised again: Has there been a change in the purchasing motivation towards white supermarket brands according to millennials of NSE B due to the Covid-19 crisis? We can conclude by saying that today the perception of brands has totally changed from what has believed of them ten years ago, with a broad portfolio of products that covers all categories, a good performance by being in the hands of manufacturers of recognized products, White brands in the grocery category have taken on the role of allies against all the millennials who were in trouble by having to cut back on their supermarket purchases, mentioning their brand claim: It gives you more for less, this option of products has become the favorite in different homes because it is the option that allows you to maintain the lifestyle to which the consumer was accustomed, and even the possibility of trying things that he had not thought to be able to afford but in more accessible versions [14].

Finally, it is possible to consider that private labels currently play a great role and can compete directly with supermarket brands; while the former position themselves as the alternative that solves a growing problem such as the economic imbalance in millennial households and thus gives them access to many products without putting their economy at risk, making them understand that beyond the package they are the same; many of

the distributor products continue to be commodities that are not differentiated by any outstanding factor or make the consumer feel bad when they stop buying.

It is suggested that future investigations that are centered on the study of private label brands follow the same line of the study presented, it is important to maintain focus on analyzing if the consumption of these products remains similar or increased once the pandemic and the economic crisis are over. Following that path, we would be able to understand if white label products are a temporary substitute in times of crisis or if they really are a loved option by the analyzed generation.

This study is the first step to help brands and marketing teams understand the real impact of white label products in consumers' life, to develop future and strong strategies understanding the key drivers of the product consumption is crucial. In this study we have deep dive to understand the real motivation behind the consumption of private label brands, it is true that our conclusions end by mentioning that supermarket products are no longer in cheap packages and conditions, and the inclusion of branding in the strategy has helped create a new and better image that makes consumers proud of their choice when deciding that option; however, we invite to keep an eye of the evolution of consumption once the conditions of the world change back to what if consider normal again.

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