



Exploring Demographic Determinants of Private Label Brand Purchase Intention: The Case of Kuching, Sarawak

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Abstract

This study examines the demographic determinants of purchase intention toward private label brands. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 357 respondents. Inferential analyses revealed that age and household income significantly influenced purchase intention, with older consumers (55 years and above) and lower-income groups (below RM2,500) demonstrating stronger preferences for private label products. Cross-analysis further showed that lower-income older consumers exhibited the highest levels of loyalty toward private brands. Gender and education were not significant predictors. Multiple linear regression confirmed age and income as key demographic factors affecting purchase intention. The findings suggest that retailers should prioritize segmentation strategies that cater to mature, price-sensitive consumers by emphasizing affordability, trust, and perceived value in private label branding. Future research should incorporate psychological and behavioral variables to deepen the understanding of consumer adoption patterns for private labels.

Keywords: purchase intention; private label brands; demographic determinants

1. Introduction

Private label brands (PLBs), also known as store brands or house brands, are products manufactured by third parties and marketed under a retailer's own brand name (Bai et al., 2023). Traditionally, PLBs are perceived as low-cost and lower-quality alternatives to national brands (sometimes known as manufacturer brands) which are created, owned, and marketed by manufacturers and widely distributed across various retail outlets (Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020). However, over the past two decades, the perception of PLBs has undergone significant evolution into credible, value-driven choices for consumers globally. Indeed, private labels have shifted from cheap, low-quality brands to lower priced than national brand but acceptable quality brands (Gielens et al., 2021). In support, recent studies show that private labels are now recognized for offering competitive quality at better prices, with trust and innovation becoming key determinants of consumer loyalty (Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020; NielsenIQ, 2022).

In Malaysia, private label offerings have expanded significantly, driven by the modernization of the retail sector and shifts in consumer expectations. Research indicates that Malaysian consumers no longer view private labels purely through the lens of affordability but increasingly associate them with quality, exclusivity, and localized identity (Statista, 2024; Euromonitor International, 2023). Hence, major retailers have diversified their private label portfolios to include premium, organic, and sustainable product lines (The Edge Malaysia, 2022). In Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, the local retailers have also expanded their offerings into PLBs since the past few years, motivating by four main reasons, namely lower-priced alternatives, higher profit margins, greater supply chain control and serves as a differentiation tool (Statista, 2024). PLBs represent an important growth area amid intensified retail competition and evolving consumer demands. Supporting the expansion of private labels aligns with Sarawak's Post COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030, which emphasizes local economic strengthening through innovation and domestic consumption. In addition, the Malaysian government's Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021–2025) encourages strengthening



domestic market ecosystems, fostering local brand development, and stimulating resilient retail sectors (Economic Planning Unit, 2021). Therefore, the advancement of private labels supports broader goals of economic sustainability, food security, and inclusive growth.

Nevertheless, despite these positive trends, not all the PLBs initiatives in Kuching are well accepted by the users, in which some PLBs suffered from failure and eventually were phased out from the market. Further, limited academic inquiry has been undertaken to examine how demographic factors such as age, income, gender, and education influence private label purchase intentions in emerging urban economies like Kuching. Given the rapid retail transformation and diverse consumer demographics, understanding these determinants is critical. Although PLBs are gaining traction globally and nationally, research focusing specifically on Malaysia, particularly on semi-urban cities like Kuching, remains sparse. Retailers often generalize marketing strategies without sufficient demographic segmentation, potentially missing opportunities to optimize private label penetration. Furthermore, post-pandemic shifts in consumer behavior make it timely to revisit demographic influences on purchasing intentions (NielsenIQ, 2022). Localized insights are urgently needed to ensure that private label marketing strategies effectively address the needs of diverse consumer groups. Targeting the right demographic segments will be crucial for strengthening customer loyalty, driving sustainable retail growth, and supporting broader economic resilience. Retailers that fail to appreciate these demographic nuances risk ineffective market segmentation, lower brand loyalty, and missed growth opportunities in the increasingly competitive retail landscape. Thus, this study integrates demographic and interactional perspectives to fill gaps in existing Malaysian PLB research, especially in semi-urban centers like Kuching where consumer sophistication is rising but localized data remain scarce. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to examine differences in purchase intention toward private label brands across demographic groups, including gender, age, income, and education, and to identify significant demographic predictors of private label brand purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

Private label brands have undergone a major transformation over the past two decades, moving from price-driven substitutes to quality-assured, value-enhanced offerings (Bai et al., 2023). Gonzalez-Mansilla et al. (2020) found that perceived quality, trust, and perceived value have become the main drivers of loyalty toward private labels. NielsenIQ (2022) emphasized that in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, consumers now expect private labels to deliver innovation, sustainability, and authenticity, not just low prices. In support, recent findings revealed that private label brands (PLBs) have evolved from price-driven substitutes to quality-assured, value-enhanced offerings (Bai et al., 2023; Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020). Research shows that consumers increasingly associate PLBs with trust, innovation, and sustainability, particularly in emerging markets (NielsenIQ, 2022; Deloitte, 2022). According to KPMG (2023), private labels are positioned as strategic assets for retailers seeking differentiation and higher margins. Age is a key demographic factor influencing PLB purchase intention. Studies find that older consumers tend to be more pragmatic and trusting of PLBs compared to younger, brand-conscious consumers (Anic et al., 2021; Erdem et al., 2022). In Southeast Asia, McKinsey (2023) reported that consumers aged 50 and above demonstrate strong loyalty to trusted store brands, particularly in essential goods. Several studies also highlight age as a significant determinant of private label purchase intention. Older consumers tend to demonstrate higher trust and loyalty toward private label brands compared to younger consumers, who are often more experimental and brand-conscious (Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020; Bai et al., 2023). In Malaysia, this pattern is becoming evident, with consumers aged 55 and above showing strong private label preferences, particularly in essential goods (The Edge Malaysia, 2022).

Household income is another major determinant. Lower and middle income consumers are historically more inclined toward private labels due to affordability concerns (Younis & Elmenawy, 2025; Ali & Juhdi, 2023; Chocarro et al., 2021; Lamey et al., 2021). Income level consistently emerges as a critical factor in private label adoption. During times of economic hardship like the pandemic, private-label products tend to become more attractive to consumers (Yadav & Kar, 2024). Research by NielsenIQ (2022) suggests that lower-income groups are more inclined to purchase private labels due to their strong value proposition. They are generally more sensitive to pricing and thus more likely to purchase private label brands (NielsenIQ, 2022; Statista, 2024). However, recent Malaysian findings (Euromonitor, 2023) shows a shift where middle-income groups also increasingly prefer PLBs, recognizing their improved quality and value proposition. A 2024 report by Statista further indicated that the affordability attribute of private labels continues to appeal to middle and low income consumers in Malaysia's urban and suburban regions. The influence of gender on private label purchasing remains mixed. Some studies suggest women, often managing household purchases, show slightly higher trust toward private labels (Geyskens et al., 2020; Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020), while others, including Bai et al. (2023), found no significant gender differences. However, no conclusive evidence has been found specific to the Malaysian context. Education level also introduces complex dynamics. Higher-educated consumers may appreciate the value proposition but remain cautious about unfamiliar brands (Boutsouki et al., 2021). While highly educated consumers appreciate value for money, they may also exhibit skepticism toward unfamiliar brands



(Euromonitor International, 2023; Rahman & Yusof, 2023). Kotler and Keller (2021) argue that as private labels strengthen brand equity, educational differences in purchase behavior diminish. Moreover, psychological variables like perceived risk and brand familiarity increasingly mediate demographic influences (Semeijn et al., 2020). Behavioral studies indicate that trust acts as a critical mediator between demographics and PLB purchase intentions (Santos & Ribeiro, 2021). In Malaysia, diploma holders and undergraduate consumers are emerging as key demographics who balance cost-consciousness with quality expectations.

In Malaysia, PLB growth is catalyzed by retail modernization and government policies under the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (Economic Planning Unit, 2021), emphasizing domestic consumption and SME empowerment. Industry-specific studies (The Edge Malaysia, 2022; Kantar, 2023) reveal that Malaysian consumers now evaluate private labels based on a composite of price, quality, trust, and authenticity. Interaction effects, such as between age and income, are critical for understanding nuanced PLB adoption patterns (Hair et al., 2022). For instance, older middle-income consumers may prioritize stability and value, making them ideal PLB advocates (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2022). However, cross-demographic effects are underexplored, where studies that examined the cross-relationships such as how age×income interact to influence private label purchase behaviors are limited.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the demographic determinants influencing consumers' purchase intention toward private label brands. A cross-sectional design was deemed appropriate as it enables data collection from a large sample at a single point in time, offering a snapshot of consumer behavior and demographic profiles (Sekaran & Bougie, 2022). Quantitative methods were selected to facilitate statistical analysis of relationships between demographic variables and purchase intention, ensuring objectivity and generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The target population comprised consumers residing in Kuching, Sarawak, who engage in grocery shopping activities at supermarkets and hypermarkets. A non-probability stratified random sampling method was utilized to ensure representation across key demographic segments, including gender, age, income, and education levels. Stratified sampling improves subgroup representativeness and enhances the precision of the findings (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Sample size determination followed guidelines by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), indicating a minimum of 384 respondents for a population exceeding 100,000. However, due to resource and time constraints, a sample of 407 respondents was successfully collected, aligning with minimum standards for multiple regression analysis where 10–15 cases per predictor are recommended (Green, 1991).

A structured questionnaire that consisted of two main sections was employed. Section A gathered information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, household income, and educational attainment. These variables were selected based on their relevance to previous studies on private label brand purchasing behavior (Bai et al., 2023; Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020). Section B assessed the respondents' purchase intention toward private label brands. Purchase intention was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). The scale items were adapted from previous validated instruments related to consumer purchase behavior, ensuring content validity and alignment with current research frameworks (Bai et al., 2023). Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 respondents to evaluate its clarity, reliability, and content validity. Minor revisions were made to improve item wording and structure based on the feedback received. Reliability analysis conducted on the pre-test data revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.80 for the purchase intention scale, indicating high internal consistency (Hair et al., 2022). Data were gathered through self-administered online and offline surveys over a four-week period in early 2025. Online surveys were distributed via social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp), while offline surveys were conducted at retail locations in Kuching. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

To enable the use of categorical demographic variables in multiple linear regression analysis, all categorical predictors were converted into dummy variables using reference group coding. This approach ensures the model remains interpretable while avoiding multicollinearity problems such as the dummy variable trap. Gender was treated as a binary variable and Male was selected as the reference group while a dummy variable, *Gender_Female*, was created (Female = 1; Male = 0). Age was categorized into five groups (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, and 55+ years) where 18–24 years served as the reference group while four dummy variables were created: *Age_25_34*, *Age_35_44*, *Age_45_54*, and *Age_55plus*. Household Income was grouped into five ranges (Below RM2,500; RM2,501–RM4,850; RM4,851–RM7,000; RM7,001–RM10,959; Above RM10,960). Below RM2,500 was selected as the reference category while four dummy variables were created: *Income_2501_4850*, *Income_4851_7000*, *Income_7001_10959*, and *Income_Above_10960*. Finally, Education Level was divided into four levels (SPM/STPM, Diploma/Professional Certificate, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree or higher). SPM/STPM served as the reference group and three dummy



variables were created: Edu_Diploma, Edu_Bachelor, and Edu_Postgrad. This dummy coding approach allowed the effects of each demographic category to be interpreted relative to a meaningful baseline group.

To explore the potential moderating effect between demographic variables, interaction terms between age and household income were considered. However, to maintain model parsimony and avoid multicollinearity and overfitting, only interactions that were theoretically meaningful and empirically supported were included. Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 28. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize demographic variables and purchase intention scores. Inferential statistical analyses were applied to test the research hypotheses. First, independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether significant differences in purchase intention existed between male and female respondents. Second, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were employed to investigate differences in purchase intention across different age groups, household income levels, and education categories. In cases where ANOVA results were statistically significant, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc tests were performed to identify specific group differences. Third, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the demographic predictors that significantly influenced purchase intention toward private label brands. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$. Prior to performing regression analysis, the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were checked, following the recommended guidelines outlined by Hair et al. (2022).

4. Results and discussion

The descriptive analysis revealed that the respondents demonstrated a moderate to high level of purchase intention toward private label brands, with a mean score of $M = 3.35$ and standard deviation of $SD = 0.68$. This suggests that private labels are no longer perceived solely as low-quality alternatives, but have attained a respectable position in the minds of consumers in Kuching, Sarawak. The relatively high purchase intention is consistent with regional trends showing the improved reputation and market acceptance of private labels (NielsenIQ, 2022; Statista, 2024).

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Purchase Intention

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Purchase Intention	407	3.35	0.68

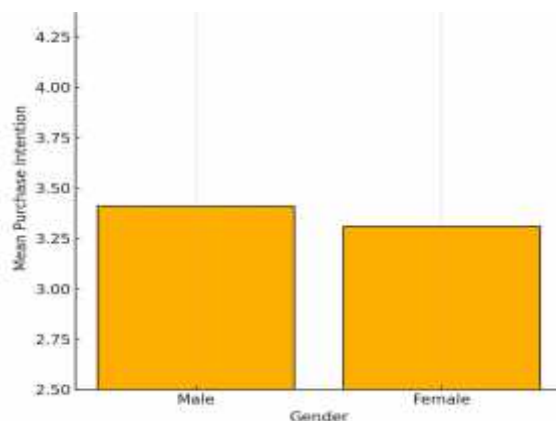


Figure 1: Mean Purchase Intention by Gender

Figure 1 shows that males reported slightly higher mean purchase intention compared to females, although the difference was not statistically significant. An independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference between male and female respondents' purchase intention toward private labels. Although males exhibited slightly higher mean scores than females, the difference was statistically insignificant ($p = .066$). This finding suggests that purchase intention toward private labels is no longer gender-specific. Both male and female consumers value private labels similarly, likely due to broader improvements in quality, packaging, and branding that appeal universally. Retailers may no longer need to tailor gender-specific strategies for private label marketing in urban Malaysian settings.



Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test

Variable	Group 1	Group 2	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Gender	Female	Male	-1.85	405	0.066	0.10

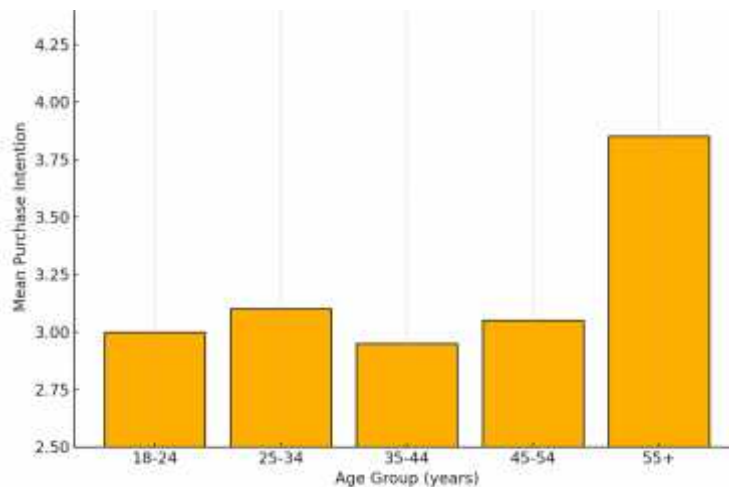


Figure 2: Mean Purchase Intention by Age Group

Figure 2 illustrates that respondents aged 55 and above reported the highest mean purchase intention toward private label brands. A one-way ANOVA revealed that age significantly influenced purchase intention ($p < .001$). Respondents aged 55 years and above demonstrated significantly higher purchase intention compared to younger age groups. Older consumers may be more pragmatic and value-conscious, prioritizing product quality and price over brand prestige (González-Mansilla et al., 2020). They may also have longer shopping experience and greater trust in established private label lines. This trend aligns with the global pattern where older demographics are major supporters of private labels (Bai et al., 2023). Subsequently, retailers should intensify private label marketing efforts among the older consumer segment, emphasizing trust, reliability, and value-for-money messaging.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA for Age Groups

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.12	4	4.53	8.71	0.000
Within Groups	210.05	402	0.52		

Table 4: Post Hoc Test: Tukey HSD (Age)

Comparison	Mean Difference	Sig.
18-24 vs 55+	-0.85	0.001
25-34 vs 55+	-0.65	0.004
35-44 vs 55+	-0.95	0.000
45-54 vs 55+	-0.88	0.002

Figure 3 shows that purchase intention tends to increase with higher education levels. ANOVA results showed no significant differences in purchase intention across education levels. While mean scores increased slightly with higher education, the differences were statistically insignificant. Contradict to Rahman & Yusof (2023), private label acceptance has become mainstream across all educational backgrounds. Consumers of various education levels recognize the improved quality and value of private labels, reducing prior biases associated with lower-educated consumers favoring cheaper options.

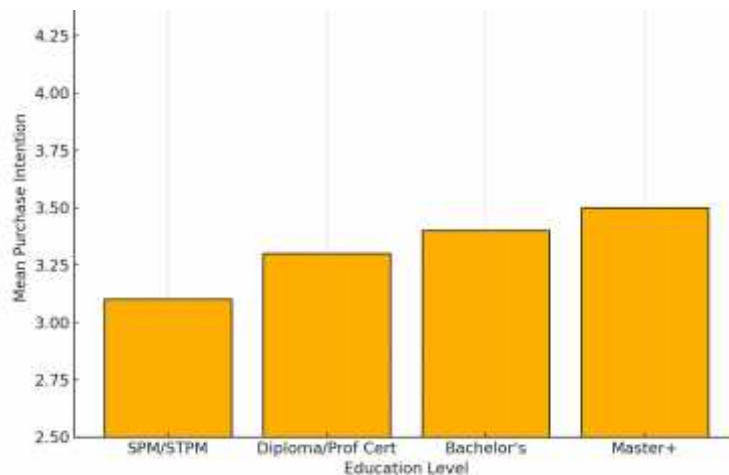


Figure 3: Mean Purchase Intention by Education Level

Figure 4 shows that respondents with household incomes between RM2,501 and RM10,959 had higher mean purchase intentions compared to the lowest income group (< RM2,500). Income level was also found to significantly affect purchase intention ($p < .001$). Respondents earning below RM2,500 exhibited significantly lower purchase intention compared to those earning RM2,501–RM10,959. Surprisingly, those in the lower-middle-income groups (RM2,501–RM10,959) showed higher private label adoption. This may be because Middle-income consumers are strategic shoppers, seeking value without sacrificing perceived quality. Indeed, private labels have upgraded their quality to meet middle-income expectations, including healthier, organic, and premium options (The Edge Malaysia, 2022).

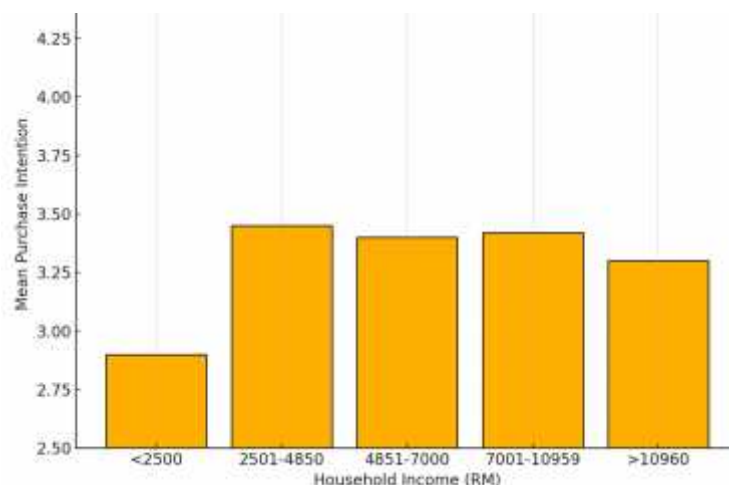


Figure 4: Mean Purchase Intention by Income Group

Lower-income consumers may still perceive private labels as "risky" if price differences with branded products are small or if national brands offer aggressive promotions. Hence, retailers must ensure that private label products are clearly differentiated on quality and value to capture lower-income groups more effectively. Marketing messaging should highlight assurance of quality, affordability, and product authenticity.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA for Income Groups

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15.45	4	3.86	7.34	0.000
Within Groups	212.72	402	0.53		



Table 6: Post Hoc Test: Tukey HSD (Income)

Comparison	Mean Difference	Sig.
Below RM2500 vs RM2501–4850	-0.55	0.002
Below RM2500 vs RM4851–7000	-0.48	0.005
Below RM2500 vs RM7001–10959	-0.50	0.003

The multiple linear regression analysis examined the effects of gender, age, household income, education level, and the interaction between age and income on purchase intention toward private label brands. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(14,392) = 30.12$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately 45% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.450$), indicating a moderately strong model. None of the younger or middle-aged groups showed a statistically significant difference in purchase intention compared to the baseline age group (18–24). Only Age_55plus was significant ($B = 0.95$, $p = .002$). This reveals that respondents aged 55 and above exhibited significantly higher purchase intention toward private label brands compared to those aged 18–24. As such, older consumers are significantly more likely to purchase private labels, confirming that age influences purchase behavior. All higher income groups showed significantly higher purchase intention compared to the lowest income group (below RM2,500). This reveals that consumers with income levels starting from RM2,501 and above were significantly more inclined to purchase private labels. This challenges the traditional view that only lower-income consumers purchase private labels (Younis & Elmenawi, 2025; Ali & Juhdi, 2023). Instead, it reflects that middle-income consumers now actively embrace private labels, valuing them for quality and price balance.

Female respondents showed a slightly lower purchase intention compared to males, but the effect was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). It thus can be concluded that gender does not play a meaningful role in predicting private label purchase intention among Kuching consumers. Besides, none of the education groups were statistically significant. It shows that education level does not substantially affect private label purchase intention in this population and suggests that private label appeal cuts across education levels, supporting the notion of mainstream private label acceptance. Based on preliminary exploratory analysis and post hoc ANOVA findings, the interaction between consumers aged 55 and above and those earning RM2,501–RM4,850 was identified as highly relevant. Accordingly, the interaction term Age55plus \times Income2501_4850 was constructed and included in the final regression model. Including only this significant interaction allowed the model to retain interpretability while adequately capturing the combined effect of age and income on private label purchase intention. Following Hair et al. (2022), non-significant interactions were excluded to enhance model validity and parsimony.

The results reaffirm the independent effects of age and income as strong predictors of private label purchase intention ($B=1.10$, $p = 0.01$). Moreover, the significant interaction term suggests that older consumers (55+) in the lower-middle-income group (RM2,501 - 4,850) are the most supportive of private labels. This subgroup represents value-driven, pragmatic consumers who are highly sensitive to both price and quality signals. Hence, the retailers can strategically position private label products targeting this niche: older, cost-conscious, but quality-sensitive consumers. The communication strategies could highlight trust, safety, and smart choice branding, appealing to their mature consumer logic.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	0.671	0.450	0.435	0.514	0.000



Table 8: Coefficients (Multiple Linear Regression)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.90	0.15	-	19.33	.000
Gender_Female	-0.06	0.07	-0.07	-0.86	.391
Age_25_34	0.10	0.09	0.08	1.11	.269
Age_35_44	-0.08	0.09	-0.07	-0.89	.373
Age_45_54	0.12	0.09	0.10	1.33	.183
Age_55plus	0.95	0.30	0.28	3.17	.002
Income_2501_4850	0.88	0.25	0.21	3.52	.001
Income_4851_7000	0.75	0.26	0.18	2.89	.004
Income_7001_10959	0.68	0.27	0.15	2.52	.012
Income_Above_10960	0.65	0.28	0.13	2.32	.021
Edu_Diploma	0.05	0.09	0.04	0.56	.574
Edu_Bachelor	-0.04	0.09	-0.03	-0.44	.659
Edu_Postgrad	0.03	0.10	0.02	0.30	.766
Age55_Income2501_4850 (Interaction)	1.10	0.32	0.30	3.44	.001

5. Conclusions

This study confirmed that age and income are powerful predictors of private label purchase intention. Older consumers and lower-middle-income groups were more receptive to private labels, aligning with global findings where mature and pragmatic consumers seek value and trust (Bai et al., 2023; Gonzalez-Mansilla et al., 2020). Interestingly, lower-income groups (< RM2,500) were not the strongest supporters of private labels. This suggests that private labels in Malaysia are evolving into mid-market alternatives, no longer appealing solely to price-sensitive, low-income consumers. Furthermore, gender and education showed no significant effects, indicating a broad-based acceptance of private labels across different societal segments, consistent with the mainstreaming of private labels in Southeast Asia (NielsenIQ, 2022; Statista, 2024). The significant age \times income interaction highlights a crucial insight: Older middle-income consumers may represent a high-loyalty, high-value niche for private label strategies, combining purchasing power with strong trust in retailer brands. This study extends private label research by offering localized insights from Kuching, a secondary city in Malaysia, enriching the limited Malaysian-focused literature. It also identifies interaction effects between demographics (age \times income) in private label purchase behaviors, an area previously underexplored in Southeast Asia. The findings show that private labels are no longer a low-income phenomenon, but a smart choice for middle-income, value-seeking consumers. This reflects an evolving consumer perception where private labels are no longer viewed as low-cost alternatives but are increasingly associated with quality, reliability, and value. The results contribute to the growing body of research suggesting that private label brands are becoming mainstream choices for a diverse range of consumers in Malaysia, consistent with global retail trends (Bai et al., 2023; NielsenIQ, 2022). Overall, the study highlights the growing importance of private labels in Malaysia's retail landscape and the need for nuanced marketing strategies that recognize the complex interplay between demographic factors.

The findings of this study offer several important implications for the retail industry and policymakers. Firstly, the strong influence of age and income suggests that private label strategies should prioritize older middle-income consumers as a strategic growth segment. Retailers are encouraged to design targeted marketing campaigns that emphasize trustworthiness, quality assurance, and smart value, characteristics highly valued by this demographic. The strong interaction effect between age and income further highlights the need for nuanced promotions that combine age-specific benefits with financial value messaging. Secondly, the non significance of gender and education effects indicates that broad, inclusive branding strategies are appropriate, as private label brands have achieved acceptance across diverse social segments. Finally, policymakers should recognize the growing role of private labels in enhancing national supply chain resilience, supporting SME participation, and offering consumers accessible quality choices, aligning with broader economic goals such as those outlined in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan.



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