



Drivers of Consumer Purchase Intention for Private Label Brands: A Study of the Retail Landscape in Kuching, Sarawak

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Abstract

This study investigates the key determinants influencing consumer purchase intention towards private label brand (PLB) products in Kuching, Sarawak. Amid rising living costs and shifting consumer preferences, private label brands (PLBs) have emerged as affordable alternatives to national brands. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected through structured surveys from 407 respondents in Kuching. Five independent variables—price perception, perceived value, perceived quality, brand image, and perceived risk—were examined to assess their impact on purchase intention. The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that brand image, perceived quality, and perceived risk significantly influence purchase intention, while price perception and perceived value showed no significant effect. These findings underscore the importance of brand positioning, product consistency, and consumer risk mitigation in enhancing private label adoption. The study provides practical insights for retailers to refine their marketing, branding, and product strategies, while also contributing to the broader discourse on consumer behavior in emerging retail markets.

Keywords: private label brands; determinants of purchase intention; retailing

1. Introduction

Private label brands (PLBs) refer to the products that are manufactured by third-party supplier but are sold using a retailer's brand name. They are also known as store brands, house brands or retailer brands (Lin et al., 2018; Valaskova et al., 2018; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). PLBs has emerged since the 1970s, as low-cost alternatives to national brands where retailers offered consumers budget-friendly PLBs products during periods of economic uncertainty (Hoch & Banerji, 1993). The 1990s marked a milestone with significant quality improvements and branding efforts by retailers who began investing in product development, packaging, and marketing to promote the image of PLBs (Sethuraman, 1992). Indeed, PLBs started to compete with national brands in innovation and consumer loyalty (Steenkamp & Dekimpe, 1997). Retailers also began adopting multi-tiered PLBs strategies, offering value, standard, and premium product lines to appeal to broader market segments. As such, PLBs evolved from a cost-saving alternative to a strategic branding tool that differentiate and strengthen consumer relationships (Steenkamp & Dekimpe, 1997). Today, PLBs are central to many retailers' strategies. They are now perceived as value-driven and socially conscious brands, often recognized as equivalent, or superior to, national brands (Beneke et al., 2013). Their significance to retail performance spans multiple dimensions, including profit margins (Beneke et al., 2013; Hoch & Banerji, 1993), customer loyalty and brand differentiation (Abdullah et al., 2012; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Semeijn et al., 2004), competitive advantage in pricing and value proposition (Barron's, 2023), supply chain control (Choi & Fredj, 2005) and positioning strategies (Witek-Hajduk, 2018).

In Malaysia, private label brands initially had minimal market presence, primarily limited to basic food and household products. These early store brands, mostly from hypermarkets, were designed to appeal to price-sensitive consumers. Their packaging and quality often reflected their low-cost positioning, and consumer trust was relatively low (Zain & Saidu, 2016). The 2000s marked a turning point when global retailers introduced multi-tiered PLB strategies, offering economy, standard, and premium options under their own labels. Retailers began improving packaging design, product



quality, and shelf visibility, which enhanced consumer perception. These efforts aim to build customer loyalty and differentiate their offerings from competitors (Zain & Saidu, 2016). This period also saw PLBs being launched in non-food categories, including personal care, baby products, and electronics accessories (Loke, 2021). Today, PLBs are strategic assets for Malaysian retailers which are no longer associated with cheap quality. Rather, they compete on innovation, sustainability, and health consciousness. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated consumer interest in PLBs due to economic uncertainty and inflation. NielsenIQ (2023) reports that Malaysian consumers now choose PLBs based on perceived value-for-money, sustainability claims, and local sourcing. Some retailers have taken initiatives in introducing locally themed and halal-certified PLBs, strengthening appeal among Malaysian shoppers.

While urban consumers in Peninsular Malaysia are increasingly exposed to PLBs through large retailers, their penetration in East Malaysia remains limited. In Sarawak, and especially in Kuching, the capital city, the PLB market is still emerging. Looking ahead, the prospect of PLBs in Sarawak is promising, given the continuous evolution of consumer preferences and advancements in retail strategies. Local retailers are now investing in improving their PLBs to enhance their appeal, attracting consumers who seek both affordability and quality. With proper positioning, the local retailers can further strengthen their PLB offerings to compete effectively in the market and build long-term consumer trust. Nevertheless, little is known about what drive the purchase intention towards PLBs in East Malaysian cities like Kuching. Given Kuching's diverse demographic and socio-economic profile, the region presents a unique setting for examining consumer behavior towards PLBs. Hence, this study aims to address this gap by examining the determinants of consumer purchase intentions toward PLBs in Kuching, Sarawak. While prior research has largely concentrated on Peninsular Malaysia, this paper contributes a region-specific perspective, thereby offering timely insights to retailers and policy stakeholders aiming to grow PLB offerings in underserved markets. The findings will provide valuable insights for retailers, marketers, and policymakers in developing effective strategies to enhance consumer trust, brand perception, and overall adoption of PLBs in Kuching's retail landscape.

2. Literature Review

Despite substantial investments by retailers, the purchase intention towards PLBs among Malaysians is relatively low (Maharani, N., et al., 2021), leading to the low overall consumption (Mumin & Phang, 2021; Norfarah et al., 2018). Purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood to buy a product based on various cognitive and emotional evaluations (Ajzen, 1991). Hence, it serves as a critical predictor of actual purchasing behavior. Norfarah et al. (2018) postulated that the purchase intention of PLBs are affected by several factors such as customer's perception on PLBs price, quality, value and store image. While prior literature has established various determinants of purchase intention toward private label brands (PLBs), the findings across studies have been inconclusive and inconsistent. As highlighted by Macias et al. (2023), the factors contributing to PLBs' purchase intention may differ between contexts in terms of type of retailers and countries. Price perception involves how consumers view the price of a product in relation to its value and affordability. It encompasses evaluations of price fairness, affordability, and the relationship between price and quality. A favorable price perception can significantly enhance purchase intention, especially for PLBs (Benhardy et al., 2020; Rubio et al., 2020; Singh & Singhal, 2020; Ramadhan & Muthohar, 2019; Norfarah et al., 2018). Lin et al. (2022) further demonstrated that consumers with higher price sensitivity are more likely to be influenced by price changes, which can affect their purchase intentions toward private label brand.

Perceived value is the consumer's assessment of the product's value, considering the benefits gained as compared with the costs associated. It is the consumer's overall judgement of the value of a product utilized or service hired. A higher perceived value often leads to increased purchase intention. Beneke and Carter (2015) emphasized that perceived value is a critical factor in shaping consumer attitudes toward private label brand. Similarly, more recent studies also indicated that perceived value positively affects purchase decisions (Anwar & Andrean, 2021; Siti-Nabiha et al. (2021). This is further supported by Lin et al. (2023) who found that perceived value components positively influence purchase intentions in the context of food. Perceived quality refers to a consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority. It is a critical determinant of purchase intention, as higher perceived quality can enhance consumer trust and willingness to buy (Wang et al., 2020; Vo & Nguyen, 2015; Mirabi et al., 2015). Beneke et al. (2013) emphasized that perceived quality is a significant predictor of purchase intent for premium private label brands. In support, Bhukya and Singh (2015) suggested that perceived quality exerts significant positive forces on purchase decisions while Mumin and Phang (2021) posit that customers will incur greater intention to purchase PLBs only if the PLB products are able to induce favorable perceived product quality to the customers. Mathur and Gangwani (2021) further reiterate that the stronger the perceived quality on PLBs in customers, the higher the likelihood that the PLBs will be purchased.

Brand image is the set of associations and perceptions held in consumers' minds about a brand, reflecting its identity and reputation. It encompasses the associations and perceptions that consumers hold about a brand. Wu et al. (2011)



demonstrated that the image of the retailer the customers have in their mind is positively associated with the intention to purchase PLBs. Calvo-Porrall and Lang (2015) added that brand image not only significantly influences purchase intention but also customer loyalty. Noor and Abaidah (2020) proposed that the good services rendered, attractive privileges offered, ambience store environment and attentive staff will lure consumers to visit their store and purchase their PLB products. When the trust is fostered in a brand, the customers tend to prefer it over others and are more willing to purchase its products (Benhardy et al., 2020; Dam, 2020). Macias et al. (2023) argued that the consumers' memory with respect to the store brand name is transferred to the PLB products and thus, a positive brand image can lead to higher PBLs purchase intentions. Store image, built over the years, fosters a positive force in purchasing the PLBs (Singh & Singhal, 2020; Boon et al., 2018; Fong et al., 2015).

Perceived risk refers to the consumer's evaluation of the possible negative outcomes associated with purchasing a product or service, such as financial loss, poor performance, or safety concerns. Due to the nature risk averse in human, customers could have form negative attitudes toward PLBs when the perceived risk is high in order to avoid negative consequences. Batra and Sinha (2000) showed that higher perceived risk reduces purchase intention, particularly for unfamiliar or low-involvement product categories. They showed that by reducing perceived risk through guarantees or quality cues, the adoption of PLBs was enhanced. In support, Nguyen et al. (2023) highlighted that higher perceived risk negatively impacts purchase intentions, suggesting that reducing perceived risk could encourage more consumers to opt for private label brand. A systematic review by Wu et al. (2023) also highlighted that perceived risk negatively affects purchase intention (Andarini & Alversia, 2023; Ikrimah et al., 2023; Macias et al., 2023; Manikandan, 2020; Bashir et al., 2015).

3. Research Methodology

The conceptual framework for this study is developed based on existing literature on consumer behaviour and PLBs. The dependent variable (DV) is purchase intention towards PLB products, while the independent variables (IVs) are price perception, perceived value, perceived quality, brand image and perceived risk. The framework hypothesizes that these five independent variables significantly influence consumers' purchase intention towards PLB products.

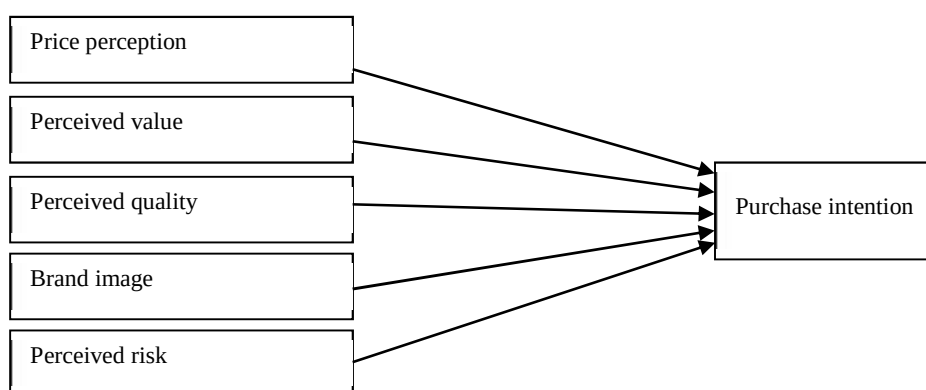


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were tested:

- H1: Price perception exerts a positive force on PLBs purchase intention.
- H2: Perceived value exerts a positive force on PLBs purchase intention.
- H3: Perceived quality exerts a positive force on PLBs purchase intention.
- H4: Brand image exerts a positive force on PLBs purchase intention.
- H5: Perceived risk exerts a negative force on PLBs purchase intention.

The data for this study were solicited through a survey from 407 respondents in Kuching, using the Likert scale (5-point scale) in measuring respondents' perceptions. The survey instruments as in Table 1 were adapted and adopted from past literature (Diallo, 2012; Beneke & Carter, 2015; Andarini & Alversia, 2023). The instruments were checked for internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha, ensuring that the Likert-scale items within each construct are reliable for measuring the intended variable. A small sample of respondents tested the survey to ensure questions were clear, understandable, and not misleading. Inferential statistics were adopted to reveal the strength and direction of relationships among the variables via Pearson correlation analysis. The multiple regression analysis was also performed



to examine whether and how the independent variables (price perception, perceived value, perceived quality, brand image, and perceived risk) exert forces on the dependent variable (purchase intention).

Table 1: Survey Instruments

Purchase Intention	Q1. I intend to buy private label brand products in the near future. Q2. I am likely to choose private label brands over national brands. Q3. I have a strong preference for purchasing private label brands. Q4. I will continue purchasing private label brands if they meet my expectations.
Price Perception	Q5. I believe private label brands are offered at a lower price compared to national brands. Q6. The price of private label products is reasonable given their quality. Q7. I am attracted to private label brands because they are more affordable. Q8. Price plays an important role in my decision to buy private label brand products.
Perceived Quality	Q9. Private label products are of same quality as national brand products. Q10. I find private label brands to be reliable in terms of performance. Q11. The ingredients/materials used in private label brand products are of good quality. Q12. The quality of private label products meets my expectations.
Brand Image	Q13. Private label brands are reputable. Q14. I perceive private label brand as trustworthy. Q15. I associate private label brand with good value for money. Q16. The branding of private label products influences my purchase decision.
Perceived Value	Q17. Private label products offer good value for money. Q18. Purchasing private label brands is a wise choice. Q19. I get good value for what I pay when I buy private label products. Q20. I choose private label brands because they offer the best combination of price and quality.
Perceived Risk	Q21. I am concerned about the quality of private label products. Q22. I worry that private label brands may not meet my expectations. Q23. Buying private label brands involves more risk than purchasing national brands. Q24. I hesitate to buy private label products due to uncertainty about their quality.

4. Results and discussion

The reliability of the measurement instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. As shown in Table 2, all the variables recorded Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding the threshold, indicating good internal consistency of the items used to measure each construct.

Table 2: Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Purchase Intention	0.810
Price Perception	0.775
Perceived Quality	0.862
Brand Image	0.797
Perceived Value	0.810
Perceived Risk	0.873

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the variables. Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients between the variables. Brand Image ($r = 0.611$) and Perceived Quality ($r = 0.571$) have strong positive correlations with Purchase Intention, indicating that consumers' intention to purchase PLB products increases when they perceive the brand image and quality positively. Moderate positive correlations were found between Perceived Value ($r = 0.367$) and Purchase Intention, while weaker yet significant correlations exist between Price Perception ($r = 0.225$) and Perceived Risk ($r = 0.273$) with Purchase Intention. These findings suggest that while all the variables influence purchase intention to varying degrees, brand image and perceived quality play a more dominant role.

Table 3: Correlation Results

Variables	Purchase Intention	Price Perception	Perceived Quality	Brand Image	Perceived Value	Perceived Risk
Purchase Intention	1.0	0.225	0.571	0.611	0.367	0.273
Price Perception	0.225	1.0	0.292	0.458	0.482	0.361
Perceived Quality	0.571	0.292	1.0	0.623	0.415	0.115
Brand Image	0.611	0.458	0.623	1.0	0.516	0.333
Perceived Value	0.367	0.482	0.415	0.516	1.0	0.269
Perceived Risk	0.273	0.361	0.115	0.333	0.269	1.0



To detect multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was employed. As shown in Table 4, all VIF values for the independent variables were below 2.2, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. This implies that the predictors used in the regression model (Price Perception, Perceived Quality, Brand Image, Perceived Value, and Perceived Risk) are sufficiently distinct and contribute unique explanatory power to the model. As multicollinearity is not a threat in this analysis, it can be concluded that the reliability of regression coefficients and improves the interpretability of the model.

Table 4: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Results

Variable	VIF
const	60.552
Price Perception	1.487
Perceived Quality	1.701
Brand Image	2.115
Perceived Value	1.561
Perceived Risk	1.225

Table 5 displays the results of the regression model. Brand Image ($\beta = 0.473$, $p = 0.001$) and Perceived Quality ($\beta = 0.308$, $p = 0.001$) are the most influential predictors of purchase intention. This aligns with prior research that emphasizes the importance of branding and product quality in driving consumer confidence and loyalty. Consumers are more likely to purchase private label products when they associate the brand with positive attributes and trust its quality. A strong brand image not only reduces perceived risk but also signals consistent product performance, which is particularly crucial in private label contexts where brand familiarity is lower compared to national brands. Perceived Risk ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.045$) was also statistically significant. This suggests that when consumers perceive lower risk in terms of financial loss, functional failure, or social embarrassment, they are more inclined to make a purchase. This finding is consistent with the theory that reducing uncertainty increases purchase likelihood. In the context of private labels, risk perceptions often stem from doubts about quality or post-purchase regret. Thus, addressing these perceptions through transparent labelling, return policies, or customer reviews can enhance purchase intention. Interestingly, Price Perception ($\beta = -0.151$, $p = 0.095$) and Perceived Value ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.490$) were not a significant predictor in this study. While they had a moderate correlation with purchase intention, the regression results suggest that its impact is largely mediated through other constructs like quality and brand image.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.90	0.349	-	1.671	0.097
Price Perception	-0.146	0.09	-0.151	-1.68	0.095
Perceived Quality	0.302	0.074	0.308	4.13	0.001*
Brand Image	0.452	0.106	0.473	4.477	0.001*
Perceived Value	0.074	0.087	0.060	0.692	0.490
Perceived Risk	0.209	0.065	0.130	2.019	0.045*

The R-squared value of 0.454 in Table 6 implies that approximately 45.4% of the variance in consumers' purchase intention toward PLB products is explained by the combined influence of the five independent variables: Price Perception, Perceived Quality, Brand Image, Perceived Value, and Perceived Risk. This suggests that the model is reasonably good at predicting purchase intention and that the included variables collectively have a meaningful impact.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	0.673	0.454	0.435	0.561	0.004

5. Conclusions

This study set out to examine the key determinants influencing consumer purchase intentions towards PLB products in Kuching, Sarawak. Based on survey responses from 407 respondents, the findings revealed that brand image, perceived quality, and perceived risk significantly influence purchase intentions. Among these, brand image emerged as the strongest predictor, underscoring the importance of brand trust, familiarity, and positive associations in shaping



consumer preferences. Perceived quality also played a vital role, reflecting consumers' reliance on quality cues when evaluating PLB products. Additionally, perceived risk was found to negatively impact purchase intentions, highlighting the need for retailers to address concerns related to product reliability and safety. In contrast, price perception and perceived value, while moderately correlated with purchase intention, did not exhibit significant effects in the regression model. This suggests that consumers may prioritize brand-related and quality-related considerations over price when evaluating private label options, especially when trust and risk perception are involved. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors driving PLB adoption in a local Sarawakian retail context. The results emphasize that for local retailers to enhance the market performance of their PLB products, strategic efforts should focus on building a strong brand image, maintaining consistent product quality, and reducing perceived risks. These insights not only aid local retailers in refining its marketing strategies but also provide a foundation for future research and policy development aimed at supporting private label growth in Sarawak's competitive retail sector. The expansion of PLBs has also significant economic implications, particularly for Sarawak's retail sector. As retailers develop and promote local PLBs, they contribute to the growth of domestic supply chains, local manufacturers, and small businesses.

Future studies could explore the role of consumer trust, perceived store image, or product involvement as mediating or moderating variables to better understand the indirect effects of the independent variables on purchase intention. Segment-Based Analysis that analyzes consumer behavior by demographics (e.g., age, income, education level) or psychographics (e.g., price sensitivity, brand loyalty) would allow a more granular understanding of which groups are more receptive to private label branding. Apart from that, Cross-Comparative Studies among different PLBs retailers can yield insights into brand positioning strategies and consumer preferences across retail brands. Lastly, incorporating focus groups or in-depth interviews could reveal deeper psychological factors, emotional motivations, or barriers that quantitative surveys may overlook.

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