THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND AWARENESS AND EXPERIENTIAL QUALITY: TAKING MANUFACTURER BRANDS AND PRIVATE LABELS AS EXAMPLES

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Abstract

This study investigates whether brand awareness and experiential quality generate different brand attitudes for consumers, and whether such difference affects their purchase intention. Experimental research was employed using an everyday commodity as test products, in order to measure how test subjects respond, based on brand awareness and perceived quality in different scenarios. Four experiment groups were designed to examine the subjects' purchase intentions after the experiment. Questionnaires on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand attitude and purchase intention were distributed to undergraduate students at National Formosa University in Taiwan. A total of 200 valid questionnaires were returned. Analysis included one-way ANOVA, and LISREL Analysis. Results show that: 1. Consumers' brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality; 2. Perceived quality has a positive influence on consumers' brand attitude; 3. Brand awareness has no positive influence on purchase intention; 4. Perceived quality has no positive influence on purchase intention; 5. Consumer's brand attitude has a positive influence on purchase intention. This study finds that manufacturer brands clearly possess better brand awareness than private labels do. On the other hand, private labels need to overcome their disadvantages by improving product quality.

Keyword: *brand awareness, perceived quality, brand attitude, purchase intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

For many consumers, brand awareness is often the foremost factor that comes into play when they need to choose among different products; this has implications for perceived product quality, which affects consumers' buying decision. Richardson, Dick and Jain (1994) find that consumers tend to rely on extrinsic cues of products rather than intrinsic characteristics as they assess the quality of products. In other words, consumers may use extrinsic attributes, such as cheap product packaging and design, to infer inferior product quality. As the retail industry in Taiwan continues to grow, consumers now have more diverse channels to do their shopping. Retailers are increasingly investing in private label products in order to create segmentation from other stores. With reasonable prices and quality to satisfy consumers' needs, they hope to establish and strengthen customer loyalty for their retail stores. This results in competition between private labels and manufacturer brands, and creates a tense supply chain.

However, reasonable price does not guarantee good quality. On the contrary, private labels often give the impression of being cheap. According to a 2010 Nielsen study on the quality and price of private labels, 52% of the survey respondents in Taiwan agreed that the packaging of private labels looked rather cheap; in addition, 40% of the survey respondents believed that product quality was important, and did not think private labels were a substitution option. That study indicated that Taiwan's consumers place a high demand on product packaging and quality, and that private labels are generally not well received. Terri Kang, associate director at Nielsen Taiwan, pointed out that retailers need to strengthen promotion in highlighting the uniqueness and quality of their products in order to be perceived as offering high-quality goods at reasonable prices. An-Sheng,Jen-Shiang and Ying-Hung (2006) also stresses that private labels should focus on quality instead of low price in marketing strategy, so as to generate better brand image and brand equity. Therefore, many retailers in Taiwan have recently re-designed their product packaging or used celebrity branding to promote the image of product quality, hoping to eliminate the perceptual gap between their private labels and well-known manufacturer brands.

In Taiwan's consumer market, consumers tend to choose familiar brands, mainly because these brands possess higher brand awareness and in turn affect consumers' attitudes. Manzur, Olavarrieta and Hidalgo (2011) compared consumers' attitudes towards manufacturer brands and private labels and found that for both manufacturer brands and private labels, the degree of influence on consumers' attitude varies according to marketing strategies and prices. In the past, researchers adopted blind tests to see how consumers choose between product quality and brand. While there were still discernible differences in quality between private labels and manufacturer brands, the research results have shown that consumers are willing to adopt positive attitude towards private labels (Olsen, Menichelli, Meyer and Næs, 2011).

Therefore, this study investigates consumers' varying brand awareness towards private labels and manufacturer brands, and how this relates to the perceived difference in product quality. This study examines whether brand awareness and perceived quality affect consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. Different scenario combinations are used to determine whether brand awareness, experiential product quality and brand attitude affect purchase intention. Structural Equation Modeling is adopted as the main analysis method, in order to understand the interplay among different variables in depth. Findings of the study are summarized to provide suggestions for future branding and marketing strategies for Taiwan's manufacturer brands and retailer brands. As a result, this study aims to investigate and test the following two topics:

1. The influence of difference in brand awareness and experiential quality;

2. Whether brand awareness, perceived quality and brand attitude affect consumers' purchase intention.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Private Label

Private label products bear the brand name of the retailer, are produced by a third party manufacturer, and are only available for sale via the retailer's own channel; it is also known as retailer brand or private brand. McMaster (1987) defines private label products as goods sold using the brand name of the store, instead of being sold by the manufacturer. Qing-Song (1998) denotes private labels as being owned, controlled and sold by the retailers; such products are only available for sale via the retailers' own channel. Paul, Yeong-Yun and Chieh-Ru (2011) further point out that retailers invest in private labels in order to increase profit margins, establish segmentation from other brands and strengthen customer loyalty by selling at lower prices, which is made possible by lower costs. Therefore, we can characterize private labels as owned solely, but not manufactured by, the retailers, with no slotting fees. With growing market shares of private labels and the changing scenario in the retail industry, manufacturer brands now face increasing competition from private labels. However, while new private labels often use low prices to attract consumers, they inevitably have lower brand awareness compared to manufacturer brands. In other words, there is no sure winner in the competition. The key to establishing and strengthening customer loyalty is satisfying their needs.

2.2 How Brand Awareness Affects Perceived Quality

Bonner and Nelson (1985) suggest that brand equity refers to good will derived from a brand. The brand represents the product, and consumers rely on the brand name for recognition and evaluation of the product; it is a pivotal determinant in consumer buying decisions. Keller (1993) points out that brand awareness can be understood through the consumer's past experience and memory of the brand, which consists of brand image and brand association. Brand image is defined as the impression brought to the consumer's mind by the brand association; brand association is generated by the consumer's experience and memory.

Aaker (1996) defines perceived quality as customers' perception of the overall superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose. If customers are satisfied with the overall quality of the product, they will be motivated to purchase products of the same brand. Consumer perceptions vary with different product information and category, thereby affecting perceived quality. Szybillo and Jacoby (1974) separate determinants that affect customers' perceived quality into intrinsic cues and extrinsic cues. Intrinsic cues are physical attributes of a product and involve the physical composition of the product, such as material, color, or smell; extrinsic cues are product-related attributes that are more visible, such as brand name, packaging, or price. Studies in the past found that intrinsic cues are stronger determinants of perceived quality judgments (Olson and Jacoby, 1972).

Perceived quality is usually a subjective judgment of the product, and may vary with product categories and attributes. Higher brand awareness leads to higher overall evaluation of the product and more positive perceived quality (Dodds, Monroe and Grewal, 1991). Extrinsic cues also significantly increase consumers' perceived quality, and thereby enhance use value (Teas and Sanjeev, 2000). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality.

Manufacturer brands typically use marketing and advertising strategies to give consumers the impression that their products are superior. Moreover, consumers generally harbor misgivings regarding private label quality (Richardson, Jain and Dick, 1996). Consequently, when there is distinct difference in brand awareness between manufacturer brands and private labels, consumers tend to choose brands that they are familiar with. In such cases, private labels are more disadvantaged. Consequently, higher brand awareness leads to higher perceived quality; conversely, lower brand awareness results in lower perceived quality. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H1-1: Customers' perceived quality of manufacturer brands increases when they are informed of the brand name.

H1-2: Customers' perceived quality of private labels decreases when they are informed of the brand name.

2.3 How Perceived Quality Affects Brand Attitudes

Wilkie (1986) defines brand attitudes as customers' overall evaluations of a brand. Lankford and Howard (1994) point out that brand attitudes can be understood as the process whereby customers' needs are satisfied by a brand; their evaluation of the brand is based on their knowledge of the brand, thereby generating subjective brand preferences. Keller (1998) argues that once brand attitudes are established, they become the basis upon which customers make decisions, indicating the significance of brand attitudes. Franzen (1999) defines brand attitudes as the overall advantageous or disadvantageous evaluation of the brand under particular brand preferences.

Consumers' favorable or unfavorable attitudes are determined after their subjective and overall evaluation of the product. In addition, perceived quality has a positive and direct influence on brand attitudes (Dodds*et al.*, 1991; Olshavsky, 1985). Therefore, higher degree of consumers' perceived quality leads to higher evaluations of, and positive attitude towards, the brand. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived quality has a positive influence on brand attitudes.

Daugherty (2001) discovered that consumers feel more positively about a brand after actual product experience. In other words, higher perceived quality leads to more favorable brand attitudes. As a result, consumers generate more favorable brand attitudes towards high-quality, high-priced manufacturer brands after experiential quality; on the other hand, they generate more unfavorable brand attitudes towards low-quality, low-priced private labels. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H2-1: Consumers generate more favorable brand attitudes towards manufacturer brands after experiential quality.

H2-2: Consumers generate more unfavorable brand attitudes towards private labels after experiential quality.

2.4 How Brand Awareness Affects Purchase Intention

Zeithaml (1988) points out that purchase intention is influenced by price, perceived quality, perceived value, and product attributes. Dodds*et al*. (1991) define purchase intention as the probability of consumers buying products. Shamdasani (2001) further explains that purchase intention is the probability of consumers making a purchase, or the degree to which they recommend the product. Therefore, we can

define purchase intention as the probability that consumers will buy products. Different situations and factors may affect purchase intention. An increase in purchase intention means an increase in the probability of purchasing (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

Consequently, both consumers' brand knowledge and their affinity to the brand may affect their future buying decisions. As brand awareness is established over time, consumers tend to have higher purchase intention towards familiar brands, compared to unfamiliar ones. Keller (1993) also points out that the degree of consumers' familiarity with a brand is positively associated with their purchase intention. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Brand awareness has a positive influence on purchase intention.

Researchers have conducted studies on private labels, and discovered that consumers tend to have doubts about product quality of low-priced private label products, and thus have lower purchase intention (Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer, 1993). Since customers are more familiar with manufacturer brands than private labels, they tend to have stronger purchase intentions for the former. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3-1: Consumers demonstrate stronger purchase intentions for manufacturer brands than for private labels.

2.5 How Perceived Quality Affects Purchase Intention

Dodds*et al*. (1991) discovered that perceived quality has a positive influence on perceived value, which in turn has a positive influence on purchase intention, i.e. higher perceived quality and perceived value lead to stronger purchase intention. Studies by Petrick (2004) and Tslotsou (2005) testify to the positive relationship between perceived quality of products and consumers' purchase intention. Perceived quality can then be used to predict consumers' purchase intention. In addition, perceived quality is a significant factor that influences consumer satisfaction, i.e. higher perceived quality leads to stronger purchase intentions (Chaudhuri, 2002). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Perceived quality has a positive influence on purchase intention.

2.6 How Brand Attitudes Affect Purchase Intention

Brand attitudes can be displayed in many forms. Usually, consumers evaluate a product on an overall basis to determine subsequent purchase action. Kamins and Marks (1991) point out that consumer demonstrate more favorable brand attitudes for more familiar brands, and therefore have stronger purchase intention. Shau-Chang (2010) finds that the consumers have stronger purchase intention when they regard a brand positively; conversely, if they have negative attitudes, they tend to make negative evaluations and would not recommend the brand. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Consumers' brand attitude has a positive influence on purchase intention.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study investigates the difference between brand awareness and experiential quality, and examines whether brand awareness, perceived quality and brand attitude affect consumers' purchase intention. The research structure is shown in Fig.1.
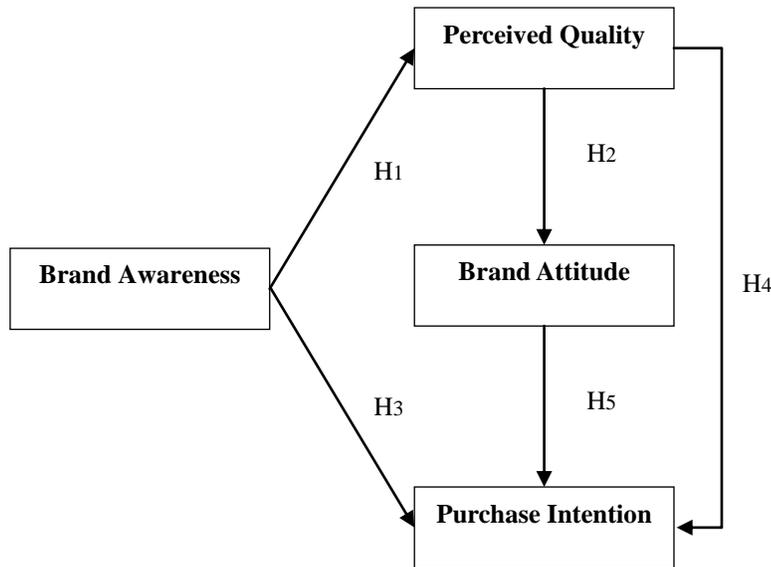

Figure 1: Research Structure

The two variables chosen for the experiment are experiential quality and brand (manufacturer brand and private label), in order to examine respondents' perception of the difference in product quality, and how brand awareness, perceived quality and brand attitudes influence their purchase intention. For the purpose of the study, tissue paper is chosen as the test product, since most private labels are daily necessity products. This study chooses SUJAY for the manufacturer brand and COSMED for the private label. The four experiment scenarios are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Scenarios

Group	Description
1	Product experience → Questionnaire
2	Product experience → Inform brand → Questionnaire
3	Inform brand → Product experience → Questionnaire
4	Inform brand → Questionnaire

Collected data are analyzed using Statistica 8.0 and LISREL, based on the research objectives and hypotheses. Analysis methods include (1) descriptive statistics (2) reliability analysis (3) one-way ANOVA (4) Bonferroni testand (5) LISREL analysis.

4. RESULT ANALYSIS

4.1 Sample Descriptive Statistics

This study investigates whether consumers' brand knowledge affects their experiential quality, and whether it generates different brand attitudes, thereby affecting their purchase intention. Therefore, two questionnaires were distributed to participants on a manufacturer brand and private label, respectively. Since students have comparatively lower disposable income, they are often economical shoppers. As a result, undergraduate students at National Formosa University were chosen as research participants using convenience sampling. Four scenarios were designed in the experiment, with a total of 212 participants. Of the returned questionnaires, 12 were invalid and 200 were valid. Data from the 200 valid questionnaires were then analyzed. Demographic information obtained from the questionnaires included: gender, age, disposable income and place of residence.

In terms of gender, male participants made up 27.5% of total participants, and female participants made up the majority, 72.5%. In terms of age, the participants were mostly undergraduate students, with 14.5% of them under 20 and 85.5% of them, the majority, over 20. In terms of disposable income, the largest group was 3,000 to 6,000 NT dollars, followed by 6,001 to 9,000 NT dollars (28.0%); this was because most participants were students. In terms of place of residence, the distribution is as follows: Northern Taiwan (23.5%), Central Taiwan (49.5%), Southern Taiwan (20.0%),Eastern Taiwan (6.0%), other (1.0%). The majority of participants were from central region.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Cuieford (1965) contends that the Chronbach's α value 0.7 or higher indicates high reliability, and that the α value should not be less than 0.5. Chronbach's α values for all variables in the questionnaires all exceed 0.7, indicating that the questionnaires possess high reliability, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability test for all variables in the questionnaires

Variable	Cronbach's α
Brand Awareness	0.849
Perceived Quality	0.936
Brand Attitude	0.917
Purchase Intention	0.919

4.3 LISREL Analysis

This study is to construct data analysis in LISREL model, the first-order of confirmatory factor analysis, the model fit index, GFI is -0.37, AGFI is -2.43, RMSEA is 0.49. Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998) considered GFI and AGFI should be greater than 0.9, RMSEA less than or equal to 0.05 for the good of fit. GFI and AGFI of this model are not more than 0.9 and RMSEA greater than 0.05, on behalf of the goodness of fit of the model is not ideal.

However, the goodness of fit of the model is poor, the reason for this study speculated that only 200 valid samples and SEM is a large sample analysis, although scholars believe that a minimum of 200 samples (Kelloway, 1998), but Boomsma (1983) considers the number of samples close to 200, the model maybe produce moderate complexity. Since this study the number of samples less than normal, resulting in poor performance of the model fit, so the future is still room for improvement.

Fig. 2 shows the cause-effect relationship of the LISREL overall model. The path coefficient of brand awareness onperceived qualityγwas 0.38 (t= 3.78), indicating that brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality. Thus, hypothesis H1 is supported. The path coefficient of perceived quality on brand attitudesγwas 0.88 (t=12.82), indicating that perceived quality has a positive influence on brand attitude. Thus, hypothesis H2 is supported. The path coefficient of brand awareness on purchase intentionγwas 0.04 (t=0.35), indicating that any positive influence brand awareness has on purchase intention is negligible. Therefore, H3 is unsupported. The path coefficient of perceived quality on purchase intentionγwas 0.13 (t=1.41), indicating that any positive influence perceived quality has on purchase intention is negligible. Therefore, H4 is unsupported. The path coefficient of brand attitudes on purchase intention γwas 0.77 (t=10.84), indicating that brand attitudes have a positive influence on purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis H5 is supported.
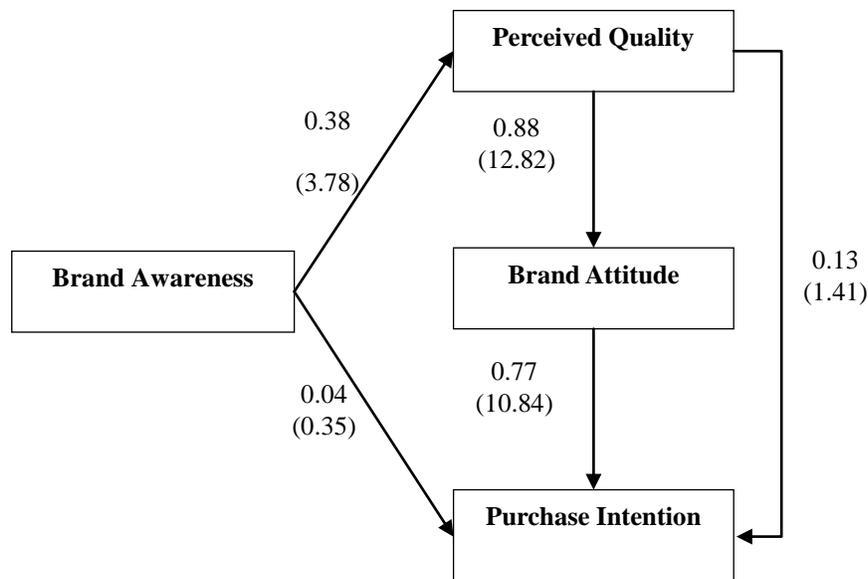

Figure 2: LISREL diagram

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

4.4.1The influence of brand awareness on perceived quality

As shown in Table 3, brand awareness has a significant influence on perceived quality (F=16.33, P=0.00). Therefore, it can be concluded that brand awareness has a significant influence on perceived quality.

Table 3: ANOVA of brand awareness and perceived quality

	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Intercept	3297.431	1	3297.431	11911.63	0.000
Brand Awareness	22.603	5	4.521	16.33	0.000
Error term	81.386	294	0.277		

As shown in Table 4, the Bonferroni test on manufacturer brand A indicates that 1A (mean=3.838) yields better results than 2A (mean=3.444), i.e. participants did not have better product experience after being informed of the manufacturer brand. Thus, hypothesis H1-1 is unsupported. In terms of private label B, the result also shows that 1B (mean=3.296) is higher than 2B (mean=3.210); therefore, participants did not have worse product experience after being informed of the private label. Thus, hypothesis H1-2 is unsupported.

Table 4: Bonferroni test on brand awareness and perceived quality

	1A	1B	2A	2B
1A		0.000	0.003	0.000
1B	0.000		1.000	1.000
2A	0.003	1.000		0.404
2B	0.000	1.000	0.404	
Mean	3.838	3.296	3.444	3.210

4.4.2 The influence of perceived quality on consumers' brand attitudes

As shown in Table 5, after experiential quality, consumers' brand attitudes are significantly affected (F=15.56, P=0.00), which indicates that perceived quality has a significant influence on brand attitudes.

Table 5: ANOVA of perceived quality and brand attitudes

	SS	df	MS	F	P
Intercept	5225.844	1	5225.844	11561.13	0.000
Perceived Quality	49.245	7	7.035	15.56	0.000
Error term	177.191	392	0.452		

As shown in Table 6, Bonferroni test on manufacturer brand A indicates that 4A (mean=4.124) yields better results than 3A (mean=3.916), which indicates that the influence of brand awareness is higher than brand attitudes after experiential quality. Thus, hypothesis H2-1 is unsupported. In terms of

private label B, the result was similar, with 4B (mean=3.472) higher than 3B (mean=3.052). Thus, hypothesis H2-2 is unsupported.

Table 6: Bonferroni test on perceived quality and brand attitudes

	3A	3B	4A	4B
3A		0.000	1.000	0.029
3B	0.000		0.000	0.054
4A	1.000	0.000		0.000
4B	0.029	0.054	0.000	
Mean	3.916	3.052	4.124	3.472

4.4.3 The influence of brand awareness on purchase intention

As shown in Table 7, brand awareness has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intention (F=46.364, P=0.00); therefore, it can be concluded that brand awareness has a significant influence on purchase intention.

Table 7: ANOVA of brand awareness and purchase intention

	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Intercept	4415.603	1	4415.603	7086.133	0.000
Brand Attitude	28.891	1	28.891	46.364	0.000
Error term	248.007	398	0.623		

As shown in Table 8, ANOVA of brand awareness on purchase intention demonstrates that purchase intention for manufacturer brand (Mean=3.591) is higher than for private label (Mean=3.054). Thus, hypothesis H3-1 is supported.

Table 8: ANOVA of brand awareness (Manufacturer Brand, Private Label) on purchase intention

	Mean	Std.Err	confidence interval -95%	confidence interval +95%
Manufacturer Brand	3.591	0.056	3.482	3.701
Private Label	3.054	0.056	2.944	3.163

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 The influence of brand awareness on perceived quality

Results of this study suggest that brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality, i.e. consumers evaluate their perceived quality through their knowledge of the brand. Therefore, brand awareness can effectively lower consumers' perceived risk. The implication for both manufacturer brands and private labels is that they should maintain a standardized quality for their products in order to avoid a perception gap. The fact that H1-1 and H1-2 are not supported may be attributed to the choice of an everyday commodity as test product, for which the influence of brand awareness on perceived quality could be limited.

5.2 The influence of perceived quality on brand attitudes

The results of this study suggest that perceived quality has a positive influence on brand attitude, i.e. consumers establish a positive attitude towards a brand through actual experience. This demonstrates that consumers take product quality seriously. Therefore, brands should maintain strict quality control. The fact that H2-1 and H2-2 are not supported may be because consumers need to rely on more product attributes to evaluate product quality, thereby downplaying the influence of actual experience on brand attitudes.

5.3 The influence of brand awareness on purchase intention

The results indicate that brand awareness did not positively influence purchase intentions, suggesting that even though consumers purchased products because they recognize the brand, such conduct only represented that the brand was the first one that the consumers associated with the product. To elevate the consumers' purchase intentions, additional internal information for brand exploration is required.

5.4The influence of perceived quality on purchase intention

The results suggest that perceived quality did not have a positive influence on purchase intention; therefore, despite the product being more recognizable to consumers after have experienced the product quality, the strengthening of their purchase intentions was, however, not immediate. This implies that companies can adopt product trials as a means for consumers to provide feedback regarding their preferences about product quality, which subsequently elevates their attitude toward the brand and promotes their intentions to purchase the product next time.

5.5The influence of brand attitudes on purchase intention

The results of this study suggest that brand attitude has a positive influence on purchase intention. It means that consumers can effectively identify product attributes and expectations after overall evaluation of the product. Consumers' attitudes reflect whether the product meets their needs, which in turn helps brands to modify their marketing strategies. Maintaining consumers' positive brand attitude would effectively increase their purchase intention. The test results of research hypotheses are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Test results of research hypotheses

Research Hypothesis	Test Result
H 1 : Brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality.	Supported
H 1 - 1 : Customers' perceived quality of manufacturer brands increases when informed of the brand name.	Unsupported
H 1 - 2 : Customers' perceived quality of private labels decreases when informed of the brand name.	Unsupported
H 2 : Perceived quality has a positive influence on brand attitudes.	Supported
H 2 - 1 : Consumers generate more a favorable brand attitude towards manufacturer brands after experiential quality.	Unsupported
H 2 - 2 : Consumers generate a more unfavorable brand attitude towards private labels after experiential quality.	Unsupported
H 3 : Brand awareness has a positive influence on purchase intention.	Unsupported
H 3 - 1 : Consumers demonstrate stronger purchase intention for manufacturer brands than for private labels.	Supported
H 4 : Perceived quality has a positive influence on purchase intention.	Unsupported
H 5 : Consumers' brand attitude has a positive influence on purchase intention.	Supported

5.6 Suggestions

This study finds that manufacturer brands clearly possess better brand awareness than private labels do. It is an advantage that can be maintained by advertising strategies, in order to strengthen consumer's positive and favorable attitudes towards their brands and to attract consumers who care more about brand names. On the other hand, private labels need to overcome their disadvantages by improving product quality. In addition, they can use their competitive edge in distribution to adopt experiential marketing strategies. They can interact with consumers directly and receive instant feedback on their perception about a product, in order to improve product quality and attract consumers who care more about quality. In short, brands need to establish and maintain long-term relationships with consumers based on trust and mutual benefit. Pricing strategies are usually promotional. In the long run, brand awareness and stable, reliable quality are the keys to success.

Since this study chose an everyday commodity as its test product, and was limited in experiment scenarios, the number of samples, and research factors that affect purchase intention (limited to brand, quality, and attitudes), the results are inevitably biased to some degree. It is recommended that future studies take other factors into account and increase the number of samples, to avoid sampling bias.

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