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The Hybrid Label Brand: An investigation into how it can enhance firm performance in an exporting context

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Abstract

This thesis examines a growing phenomenon in which Private Label Brands (PLB) are sold in foreign markets by a retailer other than the brand owner, where the brand-owning retailer has no physical or digital stores and the selling retailer may also offer its own PLBs. We refer to these brands as Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) as they combine characteristics of both National Brands (NBs) and PLBs.

The overall aim of this research is to establish the HLB as a distinct branding construct and explore the consumer-based conditions under which they may support retailer performance and international market development, without the risks associated with foreign direct investment (FDI).

This thesis considers three key research objectives: to establish HLBs as a distinct construct; to identify the key drivers that influence consumers' evaluation and choice of HLBs; and to examine how country-related factors shape HLB evaluation and performance.

The findings contribute to consumer, internationalization and branding knowledge while also helping practitioners understand how to successfully implement this strategy in an effort to increase revenues through exporting their PLBs.

Dedicated to my four women:

Demetra, Ursula, Aelia and Valeria

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Chapter 1. About this Research

1.1 Introduction

Organizations generally treat growth as their main strategic goal which extends beyond being a desirable outcome (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Growth connects to profitability and market expansion, and it represents the fundamental principle for creating enduring shareholder value (Gupta et al., 2013). A growing business enables companies to reach larger scales, which reduces costs while improving efficiency and enables them to build stronger market positions and fund new ventures.

However, within the existing economic environment, sustaining growth appears increasingly difficult for certain sectors, with the grocery retail industry being a notable example (McKinsey & Company, 2025). Growth prospects become more difficult due to long-term and short-term challenges, including supply chain disruptions alongside labor shortages and shifting consumer behaviors (Deloitte, 2023). In addition, the reduced purchasing power of consumers because of inflation leads to changes in market preferences which diminishes the possibilities for organic business expansion.

In light of these pressures, the pursuit of growth requires strategies that are both cost-efficient and resilient over time. Academic literature suggests that sustainability, technological adoption and the effective use of existing organizational resources are likely to play a central role in this process. For example, strengthening private label offerings allows retailers to differentiate themselves while protecting margins (Hyman et al., 2010). Expanding into different markets offers another route, though this often involves considerable risk and adaptation (Lu & Beamish, 2006; Prahalad, 2019). Resource-based perspectives further underline the value of capabilities that competitors cannot easily replicate (Barney, 1991).

The pursuit of growth in grocery retail demands that organizations abandon their conventional business growth approaches. Today, organizations need to innovate and focus on efficiency while developing sustainable solutions to handle current market complexities.

1.2 Research Context

Within the branding literature, there is extensive research on private label brands (PLBs) (also known as store brands, own brand or retailer brands) with a focus on their evolution, consumer perceptions and retail strategies to leverage these brands. Private label branding has traditionally been examined from multiple perspectives, including their role in differentiating retailers from competitors (Gielens et al., 2021; Hoch & Banerji, 1993), the price–quality relationship (Ndlovu, 2024; Choi & Coughlan, 2006), and their impact on consumer loyalty (Joudeh et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 1996). Research studies have shown that PLBs enable retailers to gain market dominance, boost profitability and develop more loyal consumer relationships. For example, Hoch and Banerji (1993) highlighted how PLBs allow retailers to offer lower-priced alternatives to national brands (NBs), while still delivering perceived value, whereas Ailawadi and Harlam (2004) focused on the strategic pricing and positioning of PLBs in the market.

However, despite the extensive research on PLBs, an understudied area is the role of these brands as potential vehicles for business growth when retailers export them to overseas markets. In such cases, PLBs may be exported and sold through the retail network of an independent foreign retailer rather than through the brand owner's own stores. This practice challenges many assumptions within the existing literature, which tends to emphasize the role of PLBs as tools for building brand equity within a retailer's domestic market (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Gielens et al., 2021; Quelch & Harding, 1996). Traditional research assumes that PLBs function as extensions of the retailer's identity and rely on the association with the retailer's brand name to establish consumer trust and loyalty. However, when PLBs are exported and sold through an independent foreign retailer, they are often marketed alongside the foreign retailer's own PLBs, creating an interesting, and to the best of our knowledge unexamined, contradiction to the established models of branding and consumer perception.

We refer to these PLBs as Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) when sold by a different retailer and found outside their domestic market or outside a market where the owner of the brand operates retail outlets or digital stores. For the purposes of this thesis, the term HLB is used to describe PLBs that are sold by a different retailer than the one

that owns the brand, in countries where the retailer brand owner has no physical or digital stores.

Thus, a fundamental difference between PLBs and HLBs is that the owner of the brand and the retailer that sells them to the customer are two different entities, which, according to the existing literature, may accordingly affect the associations and perceptions linked with the PLB. This strategy is already being employed in a number of countries, including Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (a visual representation of this strategy, including the number of product codes available per store, can also be found in Appendix 1). Across these five markets that were examined, more than 3,500 HLB product codes were identified, demonstrating the scale of this strategy across different retailers and different countries. The presence of HLBs across many different countries and by many different retailers suggests that this is not an isolated retail phenomenon but an emerging internationalization strategy. As shown in Appendix 1, several retailers from different countries are selling hundreds of PLB codes in different markets despite the absence of physical or digital stores in the mentioned markets. This allows retailers to generate significant additional revenues from their PLBs while avoiding costs and risks associated with foreign direct investment (FDI) or other retail expansion strategies.

The aim of this study is to establish the HLB as a distinct branding construct and examine how consumers perceive HLBs together with the circumstances that make these brands suitable for retail internationalization. The research makes it possible to explore how these brands operate without the retailer–brand connection that PLB literature usually emphasizes. The goal of this research is to address the gap in the branding and international retailing literature by studying how HLBs serve as an effective tool for business growth and retail expansion into international markets.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The main objective of this research is to establish HLBs as a distinct branding construct and explore the consumer-based conditions under which they may support retailer performance and international market development, without the risks associated with FDI. This study aims to help both academics and practitioners better understand the strategic role that HLBs may play in retail internationalization. Specifically, we propose that the success of HLBs in overseas markets depends on

multiple variables. Retailers who aspire to expand internationally through HLBs strategies need to understand these dynamics because they offer the potential for revenue growth without the financial risks associated with foreign market entry.

By examining the potential to enhance retail internationalization strategies, this study aims to contribute to the broader branding and international marketing literature and offer practical insights for retailers aiming to establish international profit centers through the strategic deployment of HLBs.

More specifically, the following three objectives are stated:

1. to establish HLBs as a distinct construct;
2. to identify the key drivers that influence consumers' evaluation and choice of HLBs; and
3. to examine how country-related factors affect HLB evaluation and performance.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The first part of this chapter explores the theoretical foundations of the decision-making process, focusing first on one of the most established theoretical frameworks, signaling theory. Signaling theory provides valuable insights but also presents certain limitations, which we examine in depth. To address these limitations, we introduce and discuss a less recognized yet powerful theory, cue utilization theory. This theory provides a more robust understanding of decision-making, overcoming the gaps identified in signaling theory. A thorough analysis of cue utilization theory provides essential groundwork for our discussion that follows.

Building on this theoretical framework, we then explore one of the most influential tools companies use to attract customers and build trust: branding. We begin by examining what a brand is and how different academics have conceptualized branding strategies over time. Through a systematic literature review, we provide a comprehensive definition of branding that will serve as the foundation for this research. After defining branding, we discuss the benefits and costs of it, to offer a balanced perspective on the strategy.

With this holistic understanding, we narrow our focus to branding within the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector by presenting the most common approaches retailers use today. More specifically, the analysis focuses on the two major branding strategies: manufacturer brands or NBs, and store brands or PLBs. The discussion then concentrates on PLBs by examining how this strategy has been approached in the literature, its advantages and disadvantages, and identifying gaps that remain unexplored.

Finally, we introduce our primary area of interest, the hybrid label brand (HLB). Within this context, we investigate potential cues, guided by cue utilization theory, that could serve as key indicators for consumers in assessing product quality. These insights will provide retailers with a strategic framework for effectively implementing

HLBs, particularly if they seek to utilize this approach as a means for international expansion.

Consequently, with this literature review the aim is not just to provide a general understanding of branding but also to build the theoretical pathway from brand evaluation to PLBs, international PLBs and ultimately to HLBs as a distinct construct.

2.2 How Do Individuals Make Decisions?

Almost daily, consumers come across a huge variety of products promising to satisfy their needs, at a quality level beyond or at least equal to their expectations. Individuals often make decisions based on information. This information can be either public (and freely available to all) or private and available only to a group of people who have access to this information (Connelly et al., 2011). As a result, information asymmetries arise between those who have the advantage of knowledge of the private information and those who could potentially make better decisions if they had that private information.

Information asymmetries thus characterize consumer decision-making or even corporate strategic decisions. Parties involved in this situation try to decrease asymmetry between different elements (Nyagadza et al., 2021). However, two elements in particular are highly important: quality and intention (Stiglitz, 2000). In terms of the former, information asymmetry is important when one party lacks the characteristics of the second one, and in terms of the latter, it is important when one party is concerned about the other party's intentions.

A rational consumer will try to make the best possible decision and decrease uncertainty using available information and/or specific product attributes such as price, brand name, warranties, advertising, reputation, ingredients and so on (Field et al., 2012). Numerous studies analyze the influence of product attributes in consumer decision-making using two key theories: signaling theory, and cue utilization theory.

2.2.1 Signaling Theory

Signaling theory can help us understand how consumers resolve information asymmetry about unobservable quality of products, organizations, individuals or services (Connelly et al., 2025; Spence, 1973; von Deimling et al., 2022). Spence (1973) first introduced signaling theory in financial economics by utilizing the labor market to model the signaling function of education. Spence (1973) viewed hiring as an investment under uncertainty because the capabilities of an individual are not known at the time of hiring. This lack of information by the employer is what makes the decision one that falls under uncertainty. To reduce uncertainty, employers obtain information from potential employees, such as education, previous work experience, race and gender. In his study, Spence (1973) separated information into two groups: *indices* and *signals*. *Indices* are observable but unchangeable attributes, such as age, while *signals* are characteristics of an individual that can be altered by them, such as education. From the applicants' point of view, since potential employees cannot do much with indices, they invest in alterable characteristics such as education to signal their quality and reduce information asymmetries (von Deimling et al., 2022). Education could be classified as a reliable signal because lower-quality candidates would not be able to fulfill the requirements to successfully complete a higher education degree.

Signaling theory has since become a prominent theme in various disciplines such as *Management*, where scholars like Colombo (2021) studied the effectiveness of signaling to reduce information asymmetries and uncertainty in the context of new venture financing, *Human Resource Management*, where Anderson and Tomlinson (2020), for example, applied signaling theory to identify the dimensions of employers' employability expectations, *Strategy*, where Essman et al. (2021) adopted signaling theory to understand how informational content of pay disparities signals future CEO successor choice, *Economics*, where Stacey (2016) presented a model of a decentralized market with search and information frictions by adopting signaling theory, and, of course, *Marketing*, where Kirmani and Rao (2000), for example, focused on how a firm may signal the unobservable quality of its products through several marketing mix variables.

In signaling theory, there are three key elements or components: the two actors, and the signal itself (Connelly et al., 2025; von Deimling et al., 2022). The two primary actors are the signaler and the receiver. The signaler is the one who, as an insider, obtains information about an organization, individual, product or service that is not available to outsiders (Connelly et al., 2011; Kakaria et al., 2024). This information is private, and it may be negative or positive. No matter its characterization, it provides insiders with an invaluable perspective regarding the underlying quality of the object (organization, individual, product or service) under examination that outsiders would find useful (Connelly et al., 2011). On the other hand, receivers are the outsiders who lack information about the object in question, but they would like to receive information. For signaling to take place, we expect insiders to benefit from signaling certain information in an effort to enhance quality perceptions to the outsiders. With that said, the literature views signaling as an intentionally strategic action by the insiders to communicate (most probably but not necessarily) positive information to the outsiders with the aim to convey positive organizational attributes (Connelly et al., 2011).

Signaling theory in marketing

Signaling theory in marketing examines the transmission of information from one sender (a company or an individual) to a receiver (a consumer). Consumers use signals to resolve the information asymmetry problem that occurs when they don't have the necessary information needed to judge the quality of a product or service (Connelly et al., 2011; Kakaria et al., 2024; Kirmani & Rao, 2000). Companies, on the other hand, transmit quality signals of many forms, such as advertising, branding, warranty, price intending to affect consumer perception and choice (Basuroy et al., 2006; Kirmani & Rao, 2000). Rational consumers are expected to make use of the signal because they believe that the company will honor the commitment expressed by the signal. Not honoring the commitment will most probably result in negative economic results for the company as well as other losses such as negative effects on company image and reputation.

Consequently, signals could be used to explain how decision-makers interpret and respond to situations where information asymmetry exists among parties. In the

past two decades a considerable amount of literature suggests that signaling theory is more useful in “experience products” or “experience categories” where quality cannot be judged before purchase or use for new products rather than search products (Basuroy et al., 2006; Kirmani & Rao, 2000). However, while signaling theory may be used to investigate and explain different strategies as an approach, it is market-focused (instead of consumer-focused) and considers the firm’s incentives (instead of the consumer’s perspective) by focusing mainly on actions that insiders take to communicate their qualities (Basuroy et al., 2006; Connelly et al., 2011; Kirmani & Rao, 2000). Since this research examines a strategy from the consumers’ perspective, we introduced signaling theory to provide a foundational understanding of how quality is communicated through observable signals before turning to a more suitable theory that addresses its limitations and can be effectively applied at consumer level: *cue utilization theory*.

2.2.2 Cue Utilization Theory

Another important theory to explain consumer decision-making is cue utilization theory. C*ue utilization theory* provides a theoretical framework able to assess consumer perceptions of a product’s quality (Kakaria et al., 2024; Richardson et al., 1994).

As there is a rapid increase in products claiming to satisfy specific needs or wants, consumers face a complex problem in choosing the right one (Song & Morton, 2016). It is also postulated that consumers do not have the time, desire, means or knowledge to make a direct judgment of product quality. This argument certainly becomes stronger when considering the complexity characterizing some of the products due to advanced technology.

Past research on consumer product evaluation suggests that consumers view products as an “array of cues”. When evaluating a product, consumers use cues from this array to make evaluating judgments of the product’s quality (Kakaria et al., 2024; Song & Morton, 2016; Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972).

Cox (1967) was the first who tried to develop a cue utilization model. According to his model, consumers tend to evaluate cues based on two dimensions: predictive value (PV) and confidence value (CV) (Cox, 1967; Richardson et al., 1994; Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972). PV reflects the degree to which consumers correlate a specific cue with product quality, whereas CV reflects the confidence consumers feel about themselves to use this cue accurately to judge product quality. Thus, CV can explain why consumers do not always rely on information of high PV. For example, consider a software engineer and an unsophisticated friend trying to judge the quality of a new cell phone. Both believe that the product's software represents a high PV. The software engineer, however, would probably have a higher degree of confidence in judging the software than the unsophisticated friend. Hence, a consumer may be unable to discriminate with confidence between a good and bad software. However, the same consumer might be quite confident in judging other cues such as price and whether the price of a cell phone brand is low, average or high even though they recognize that price level might not be highly predictive of objective quality.

Olson (1972) expanded Cox's model by adding a third variable in the equation, which he identified as cue intrinsicness/extrinsicness. Intrinsic cues include product-related attributes, such as ingredients, taste and texture, and they are part of the physical product (Kakaria et al., 2024). In case of absence or change, they will cause an alteration in the physical properties of the product (Richardson et al., 1994). On the other hand, extrinsic cues are product-related attributes that are not part of the product, for example, price, brand name, color, packaging and store image. Olson believed that when consumers evaluate a product consisting of a large array of cues, they will most probably use a limited number of them. As a result, Olson postulated that it is important to understand what the preferred factors are and an explanation could be attributed to whether consumers demonstrate a preference for intrinsic or extrinsic cues (Olson, 1972; Song & Morton, 2016; Sullivan & Burger, 1987).

Initial research on cue utilization theory suggests that intrinsic cues have greater effect on quality perceptions compared to extrinsic ones (Olson & Jacoby, 1972; Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972, 1974). However, more recent articles support the notion that consumers have the propensity to rely on a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic cues or only on extrinsic cues when assessing product quality (Bao et al., 2011; Kakaria et al., 2024; Langan et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 1994; Veale &

Quester, 2009). This potential turn to relying heavily on extrinsic cues is expected when one considers the variety of products, brands and advertising that confront consumers on a daily basis.

Experimental studies on cue utilization theory confirm its applicability and suggest that both PV and CV are influential across cue settings, both extrinsic and intrinsic, while at the same time as constructs they are independent and distinct. However, there is strong influence on specific attributes only when both PV and CV are at acceptable levels (Sullivan & Burger, 1987). In other words, a cue with high PV and high CV will play a key role in a specific product's quality evaluation. At the same time, Cox (1973, as cited by Woodside, 2012) suggested that a "Low PV – High CV" combination will more likely be utilized for evaluating quality compared to one of "High PV – Low CV", an argument that has been supported by an experimental study by Woodside (2012). In fact, most consumers make decisions through unconscious use of "Low PV – High CV" extrinsic cues such as price or advertising (Richardson et al., 1994; Shiv et al., 2005).

Cue awareness is another concept that is related to the quality evaluation process. Extrinsic and intrinsic cues can influence quality perceptions only if consumers are aware of them. Thus, as a concept, cue awareness works in parallel with extrinsic and intrinsic cues (Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972).

Lastly, cues can be differentiated as those whose valence can change quickly and inexpensively and those that have evolved over time and a change is difficult or requires a significant amount of time and effort to take place (Purohit & Srivastava, 2001). Thus, we separate cues into transient and intransient (Bao et al., 2011; Purohit & Srivastava, 2001). Intransient cues are those that cannot change easily over time and are not directly built into the marketing mix. As a result, cues such as reputation of the retailer, store image and brand name are considered intransient, whereas price, warranty, advertising, and package design are considered transient. Intransient cues tend to be more diagnostic of product quality and, as a result, consumers prefer to use them when evaluating the quality of products or brands (Bao et al., 2011).

2.3 The Brand as a Cue

When consumers are uncertain about the quality of a product or the product's attributes, according to the previous discussion, they tend to use cues to minimize associated risk. Firms use brands and branding to inform potential customers about the positioning of their products while at the same time ensuring them that their claims are credible and trustworthy (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Thus, they use brands as market cues or information sources in an attempt to increase trust and at the same time decrease associated risk and information costs (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

Given that the primary objective of this research is to establish the HLB as a distinct branding construct, we need to first understand what constitutes a brand and what the core dimensions of branding are. By doing so, we will be in a better position to determine whether the HLB should be treated as something that is already approached in the literature as a distinct construct. Thus, in the following discussion we do not attempt to provide a deep understanding of branding theory but to identify which dimensions of branding are relevant for HLBs, including ownership, differentiation, trust, risk reduction and consumer associations. These dimensions provide the necessary conceptual foundation with which we can then develop the HLB as a distinct construct.

2.3.1 What is a Brand? Definitions and Approaches

Academics acknowledge branding as a central theme in the marketing discipline. At the same time, practitioners recognize branding in general and the brand names of their firms, products and/or services, in particular, as one of their most valuable assets (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). There is debate in the literature regarding the definition of what constitutes branding, but several common elements can be discerned within some of the most prevalent sources. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) (1948), a brand is a "name, term, symbol, or design or a combination of them which identifies the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and distinguishes them from those of competitors". Through AMA's

definition, several elements place emphasis on differentiation (usually referred as brand elements). As a result, according to this definition, a brand is created when a manufacturer or a marketer applies a new name, logo, sign, symbol or design on a new product.

While the most prevalent definition approaches branding through its elements as a means to drive sales and provide differentiation, other researchers concentrate on less tangible characteristics such as the concept of trust, arguing that branding operates as a tool to build a relationship of trust between the customer and the company (Kapferer, 2012). Others, such as Gardner and Levy (1955), for example, approach the concept of branding from a consumer psychology perspective, claiming that a brand name is a complex symbol that represents a variety of attributes and ideas. Furthermore, the researchers highlight that a brand can tell a consumer much more than its literal meaning due to the associations that marketers or even the customers attach to a brand over a period of time.

Branding is much more than just adding brand elements to a product. Focusing only on a company's activities and the product itself limits the term as it does not take into consideration the relationship between the customer and the brand as well as the input that customers provide on brands as active recipients of the marketing activity (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Furthermore, academics who define brands as symbolic devices with personalities and values that consumers judge and respond to beyond their functional utility have thoroughly researched associations as well as other intangible aspects of brands (Aaker, 1996, 1997; Kapferer, 2012; Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999; Wang & Tzeng, 2012). International organizations and bodies such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have also confirmed the intangibility aspect of the brand. The ISO 10668:2010 (International Organization for Standardization, 2010) standard defines brand as a "marketing-related intangible asset" able to create "distinctive images and associations in the minds of stakeholders" (p. 2).

Based on previous discussion, branding is a complex phenomenon that researchers and marketing experts have approached from different perspectives, resulting in a plethora of definitions. At the same time, numerous practitioners claim that these definitions aren't actually definitions but descriptions used to describe the

effect of branding on products (Avis & Henderson, 2022). The reason behind this abundance of definitions, for some scholars, lies in the dynamic nature of the concept, while for others it is due to a poor definition of the concept or the ambiguity of the concepts related to branding (Avis & Henderson, 2022). We believe that the wealth of definitions is attributable to both. The dynamic nature of branding can easily be explained by the fact that there is a consensus on the origin of the term brand as an identifier of physical goods; however, as the concept progresses by adding symbolic images and intangible characteristics, practitioners and academics have used it in different settings (such as celebrities, places, countries and firms), making it impossible to apply situational-specific definitions to all themes, entities or objects.

The absence of a definition able to describe the brand concept led to an ongoing debate and discussion among academics who claim that lack of consensus on what a brand actually is may lead to poor or problematic theory development (Avis & Henderson, 2022).

To analyze the different definitions of branding found in literature we introduce the research method of content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique that allows the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952). This methodology is particularly useful for analyzing and identifying trends, themes, concepts and patterns in different types of qualitative data such as academic articles, books and newspapers (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Stemler, 2000; White & Marsh, 2006).

Content analysis has been used extensively in marketing research in areas such as advertising and promotion and for tracking product awareness and image (Wheeler, 1988). However, depending on what the researcher is trying to achieve, three approaches are usually employed: conventional (or inductive) content analysis, directed (or deductive) content analysis, and summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When the existing theory is too limited to explain a phenomenon, researchers rely on a conventional content analysis approach. This entails data analysis with the aim to form key concepts and allow new insights to emerge. When there is existing theory about a phenomenon, but it is incomplete or requires further elaboration, researchers use the second approach (directed content analysis). Thus, the researcher aims to validate or extend the theory. They organize data using the

predetermined codes found in literature. Lastly, summative content analysis begins by quantifying and identifying content or words in texts with the intention to discover underlying meanings of the words or content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). If analysis of the content stops at identifying and quantifying words, then the analysis would be quantitative, and it is called manifest content analysis. On the other hand, if we go beyond counting words to a more qualitative approach to interpret content and discover underlying meanings of the words, then it is called latent content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). There are two classification types for latent content analysis: pattern content, and projective content. Researchers using pattern content analysis believe there is an objective pattern that should be uncovered, whereas projective content analysis leads to subjective interpretations.

To understand the concept of branding and in an attempt to synthesize the different definitions provided in literature, we will use the summative content analysis approach. However, since we aim to discover underlying meanings of the words found in branding definitions and since we are looking at synthesizing the different definitions, we introduce pattern content analysis.

2.3.2 Synthesis of Branding Definitions

In Table 1 we present the collection of definitions and approaches identified through the systematic literature review. While not exhaustive, this collection offers a comprehensive summary of the definitions offered in the past and can be used as a base to conceptualize the concept (or construct) of branding. As observed in the table, the systematic literature review included only peer-reviewed journal articles in order to ensure methodological consistency and comparability. Detailed content analysis methodology, the rationale for excluding books, and other industry sources and results can be found in Appendix 5.

Table 1
Definitions of Brands

	Author	Journal	Definition
1	**Stern, B. B. (2006)**	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Brands can be either entities (such as people, places, things or ideas) or processes to make a product meaningful (such as naming the product, targeting and positioning it, and communicating its benefits). The flexibility of the brand is demonstrated by the expansion of the brand locus as an entity in the world (name or mark associated with a product), mind (denotes a mental representation, an idea or consumer's perception of psychological meaning) or cyberspace (it denotes a repository or information).
2	**Diamond, N. et al. (2009)**	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Brands are the products of multiple sources authoring multiple narrative representations in multiple venues. A brand is the product of dynamic interaction among all those components — a continually evolving, emergent phenomenon.
3	**Jin, X; Weber, K (2013)**	Tourism Management	Branding of either a service, a company, or a destination is a collaborative and value creation process that necessitates contributions of various internal and external interest groups and stakeholders. A brand, on the other hand, is viewed as a differentiator, to distinguish it from the competitors, and as a promise that a firm identifies in its customers to satisfy their functional and symbolic needs.
4	**Schembri, S (2009)**	Journal of Business Research	Branding is an effective differentiation strategy that enables a statement of identification for the product, the firm, and the consumer. Beyond a simple differentiation device, brands can develop a distinct personality and even iconic status with a complex identity aligned with social and political issues.
5	**Hunt, SD (2019)**	Journal of Business Research	A brand can be considered as not just a general asset that adds value to the firm, but a type of asset that is a resource. A brand is a resource when it contributes to the firm's ability to efficiently and/or effectively produce a market offering that has value to some market segment(s).
6	**Celedon, P; Milberg, S; Sinn, F (2013)**	Journal of Business Research	A brand name is a universal signal of quality and risk reduction that is invariant across cultures.
7	**Eckhardt, GM; Houston, MJ (2002)**	Journal of International Marketing	Brands are powerful symbols that reflect not only the image with which marketers hope to imbue them but also the cultural milieu in which they are imbedded.
8	**Klijn, EH; Nederhand, J; Stevens, V (2022)**	Public Management Review	A brand is not the product, policy or service itself but is what gives (additional) meaning and value to the product, defines its identity, and very importantly distinguishes it from other products, policies or services.
9	**de Chernatony, L (2009)**	Marketing Theory	A brand could be defined as a cluster of values that enables a promise to be made about a unique and welcomed experience.
10	**Anker, TB; Kappel, K; Eadie, D; Sandoe, P (2012)**	Marketing Theory	A typical brand is a set of symbolic values, which forms a chain of associations to external ideals in the mind of consumers; and to make a functional, symbolic, or experiential brand promise.
11	**Alsem, KJ; Kostelijk, E (2008)**	European Journal of Marketing	Branding is about creating favorable images with any association, whether tangible or symbolic/emotional or both.
12	**Muzellec, L; Lynn, T; Lambkin, M (2012)**	European Journal of Marketing	A brand is a multidimensional construct, that embodies the firm's functional and emotional values as well as the performance and psychosocial needs of consumers.
13	**Park, HY; Chang, SR (2022)**	European Journal of Marketing	Brands act as relationship partners for consumers, providing a sense of belongingness and helping them construct, express and affirm their desired identities.
14	**Avis, M; Henderson, IL (2022)**	European Journal of Marketing	A brand is a trade name/logo that identifies a product or firm, usage of which may be limited by legal structures and practice.

From the above table and using pattern content analysis, we start looking for patterns or schools of thought among academics approaching the concept of branding. In terms of words, academics use words such as entity, product, process or strategy to describe the concept. At the same time, we observe an extended use of metaphors such as the brand as an asset, company, relationship partner, people, places or ideas. Each metaphor denotes different characteristics for the brand. For example, the brand as an asset denotes the fact that brands are valuable and the brand as a person denotes that it can have values just like individuals (Davies & Chun, 2003). However, there is great consensus on the purpose of branding where differentiation, identification and value creation are common among different academics. Lastly, we observe the use of the word symbol to describe branding, denoting that brands are more than a product with both tangible and rational characteristics as well as intangible, symbolic and emotional ones (Keller, 2013).

Based on the previous discussion, we identify two schools of thought. Firstly, we identify scholars who view branding as a marketing management mechanism that can provide the necessary differentiation needed to compete effectively in a market (product- or firm-oriented definitions). A second group of thought emphasizes the mental associations that consumers connect with brands (consumer-oriented definitions). Thus, we separate approaches into product- (or firm-) oriented and customer-oriented. Therefore, a coherent definition should — at least — include both approaches: the brand as a physical identifier that can provide differentiation, and the intangible brand attributes, such as image, that consumers associate with products when applying branding techniques or programs.

To summarize, brands are entities that have both tangible and intangible characteristics as well as psychological values. As a strategy, firms employ branding to fulfill numerous objectives such as recallability, risk reduction and adding value and for use as a legal instrument. In addition, on many occasions the customer's attachment, interaction and engagement in the brand creation process is so strong and active that ownership of the brand eventually moves from the marketer to the consumer (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999). Lastly, interaction between the brand and the customer helps is shaping the brand (co-creation) and ensures that there is alignment between the values (both functional and emotional) of the brand and consumers' rational and emotional needs.

A sufficient definition must be generic enough, in order to include all dimensions, but at the same time specific enough to set boundaries on what the concept actually should describe. Consequently, we provide the following working definition that will guide the entire discussion from this point on:

Branding is a marketing or business intangible concept that, through features such as name, term, symbol, design or any other entities or a combination of them, can provide benefits (such as identification, trust, quality, risk reduction or differentiation) and value to the product and the customer.

Many researchers, such as Avis and Henderson (2022), de Chernatony and Riley (1998), Gaski (2020), Maurya and Mishra (2012), and Wood (2000), have conducted similar research. de Chernatony and Riley (1998), for example, identified 12 themes that can be used to categorize the range of definitions found in literature: brand as a legal instrument, logo, company, shorthand, risk reducer, identity system, image in consumers' minds, value system, personality, relationship, adding value and branding as an evolving entity.

A review of existing literature on branding definitions demonstrates that branding is not only defined by ownership but also by the ability to create differentiation, trust and consumer associations. These characteristics are necessary for examining later in this research whether HLB functions as a distinct branding construct despite the fact that the owner and the selling retailer are two different entities.

2.3.3 Benefits and Cost of Branding

An obvious question is why brand a product or why brands in general are important. The answer to this question lies, more or less, in the working definition because, simply, a brand is more than a product. Keller (2013) defined a product as "anything we can offer to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a need or want" (p. 3). Given the variety of products that are designed (potentially in the exact same way) to satisfy a particular need, a brand can offer these distinct characteristics that can differentiate the product (Ambler, 1997; Kapferer,

2008; Keller, 2013; Wood, 2000). Thus, whether we talk about tangible or intangible differences, a brand can transform and elevate the product into a unique offering.

While moving from a product to a brand through differentiation may be the obvious reason to brand a product, branding can offer more than that. Continuing the previous discussion, we expect branding to offer benefits to both sides of the equation — the company and the consumer. Thus, in the following paragraphs we separate the benefits of branding to benefits for the customer and benefits for the company (or the product).

Name is usually the first branding technique that a marketer will apply to new products. Through naming, consumers can identify and recognize the product as well as the source of the manufacturer. Thus, the first benefit that consumers enjoy through branding is the ability to assign responsibility to a particular manufacturer (or distributor) (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2013). In addition, recognizing the product can help consumers (because of past experience) to make quick decisions and subsequently simplify the purchase decision-making process. If consumers are aware of a particular brand and have already established knowledge on what it can offer, it is not necessary to gather information to decide whether the product can satisfy their needs. To put it simply, branding raises the chances that consumers will remember the product. Eventually, firms can use branding to reduce associated risk and cost of information search (Ambler, 1997; Kapferer, 2008, p. 20). If repeated purchases of a particular brand result in similar outcomes, then the brand acts as a signal of quality (Horvath & van Birgelen, 2015; Keller, 2013; Moorthy, 2012; Supiyandi et al., 2022). Lastly, there are occasions where brands can serve as symbolic devices and project an individual's self-image and increase self-esteem (Ambler, 1997; Horvath & van Birgelen, 2015; Keller, 2013). This is a widely recognized characteristic in many industries but especially in the luxury market where people often project their social status by purchasing recognizable high-end brands (Horvath & van Birgelen, 2015; Jacob et al., 2020; Jamal & Goode, 2001; Kapferer, 2008, p. 22).

The company also benefits from the brand by primarily offering identification and, as a result, help the customer in tracing and locating the product. Besides differentiation and identification, a brand can also offer a unique competitive advantage since companies attach to the product experiences, associations and even

personalities that are difficult for the competition to copy and reproduce in conjunction with the product's physical attributes and characteristics (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Therefore, brands act as a signal of quality for the company (Ambler, 1997; Keller, 2013). Brand names are not only identifiers but also means of legal protection because they can be registered and protected through patents, trademarks and other types of intellectual property (Keller, 2013). Brands also provide reliability because brand marketers are not interested in one-off transactions but continuous purchase behavior by the same satisfied customer (because simply, research shows, the cost to acquire a new customer is six times higher than the cost to retain an existing one) (Ambler, 1997). Last, but not least, brands are a source of financial returns because they can be part of the financial statements and be bought or sold. Summing up all the benefits, we conclude that strong brands are important to companies because they offer the ability to attract loyal customers and promise future sales. Brand loyalty itself can offer additional benefits to the company such as lower price sensitivity, which will eventually lead to higher margins (due to the company's ability to charge a price premium) as well as lower brand switching possibility (Horvath & van Birgelen, 2015).

On the other hand, building a successful brand is not an easy task. It requires an ongoing investment and a well-designed brand strategy. Taking these steps is not only to create and position the brand in the market but also to manage it over time and perhaps over different geographic boundaries and market segments. A brand's value creation process begins with investment in a marketing program. Therefore, a well-funded and -designed program is a necessary condition for the program's success (Keller, 2013). A marketing program investment can include multiple elements that the company will have to fund, such as product research & development, marketing, public relations, employee training, publicity, advertising, promotion and so on (Keller, 2013, p. 101). However, the expectation is for such costs to contribute to a product's success by providing competitive advantage, higher margins and awareness (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2013). Consequently, given the anticipated benefits versus costs, firms should invest in branding if they want to achieve long and sustainable performance for their products and services.

2.4 Branding in the FMCG Sector

Service providers, places, people, and retailers such as department stores or supermarket chains can create their own brands using brand elements like name, logos, and signs as well as by attaching unique associations and experiences to their offerings (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). According to the working definition, by adding these features, branding transforms the entity to a unique offering or to a symbol that can provide benefits and value to the trading party (no matter if the other party is a customer, a company or even a fan). These benefits (that are not necessarily associated with functional qualities) may guide purchase choice and impact buyers' status and self-esteem. Marketing activities, strategic decisions, the environment and the characteristics of the consumer result in a subjective and perceptual interpretation of the brand. On many occasions, subjective interpretation of the brand is so strong that the perception of the reality is more important than the reality itself, a concept identified in the literature as brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990).

In service-oriented brands, particularly in a retail context, research finds that assortment is critical for creating the retailer's respective brand image. The greater the assortment, the greater the quality and the variety a retailer provides to its customers (Rubio et al., 2017). Consumers appreciate the freedom to choose from a variety of products. This appreciation will add value to the retailer's brand image and will also help in trust enhancement (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

Today, major retailers around the world are selling products that are branded in two ways: manufacturer brands/NBs, and store brands/PLBs.

2.4.1 Manufacturer Brands / NBs

By definition, NBs or manufacturer brands are brands owned by manufacturers (Chimhundu et al., 2010). We can trace the creation of NBs back to the period after the American Civil War due to several industrial and manufacturer forces that provided the necessary characteristics for them to thrive. For example, improvements in transportation (such as railroads) allowed manufacturers to send their products to other states or even abroad, improvements in production processes allowed them to produce large quantities of products of the same high quality, improvements in packaging allowed manufacturers to place their trademark on the product and offer

identification for the customer (instead of selling bulk products), advertising allowed manufacturers to create product awareness and promote their products, and, lastly, increased urbanization created higher standards of living and as a result the need for different products serving potentially the same need (Keller, 2013; Rajaram & Shelly, 2012). All these factors facilitated the creation of a new environment where most consumers moved from buying locally produced bulk containers to mass-produced and heavily advertised brands. By 1915, NBs were dominant in the US and in the following years gained international presence and market share. At the same time, the marketing of NBs became advanced, sophisticated and specialized. Today, sophisticated marketing techniques, packaging, product innovation and effective brand management has resulted in powerful brands that often characterize and lead product categories (Chimhundu et al., 2010; Keller, 2013; Srivastava et al., 2022; Wulf et al., 2005).

2.4.2 Retailer PLBs

Consumer behavior and assortment strategy

Determining what product assortment to offer is one of the most basic strategic decisions a retailer must make in order to balance variety and depth of products while maximizing efficiency in use of physical space (Juhl et al., 2006; Mantrala et al., 2009). Mantrala et al. (2009) proposed a product assortment planning model for retailers to consider when planning their assortment. According to their model, three sets of inputs should influence a retailer's decision: a) consumer perceptions and preferences, b) retailer constraints, and c) environmental factors. When it comes to environmental factors, the authors suggest that changing economic conditions influences both variety and depth.

We have experienced great variations in shopping behavior during a recession or periods of economic uncertainty. For example, private-label market share peaked in the depth of the United States (US) 1981-1982 recession to 17% from the average 14% (Quelch & Harding, 1996). Economic downturns make consumers buy less, spend more time on comparative shopping and look for cheaper products (Ang, 2001). Another example of how environment affects decision-making is consumers' changing

behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to McKinsey & Company research (Fox et al., 2020), 34% of consumers increased their spending on PLBs during the pandemic of Covid-19 and they plan to continue buying these products even after the pandemic has passed.

Prolonged financial insecurity, rise in unemployment, increase in oil prices and decline in GDP reshape how consumers perceive value. Within this context, PLBs have become a core strategic tool for most retailers (especially within the FMCG sector) (Miquel-Romero et al., 2014).

Private label brands (PLBs)

PLBs, also referred to as store brands, distributor brands, own brands or retailer brands, are brands that are owned by the product's reseller rather than by its manufacturer. In rare instances, the reseller may be the manufacturer as well (Nika & Hasan, 2014). Therefore, according to this definition, the key difference between an NB and a PLB lies in the ownership or trademark rights of the brand. PLB trademark rights are held by retailers, whereas the trademark rights for the NB are held by the manufacturers (Olbrich & Grewe, 2009).

Older definitions give importance to the ownership of the brand name and at the same time underline the channel or point of sale, arguing that PLBs are products sold exclusively through the retail organization's outlets, under the retailer's own name (Baltas, 1997; Gendel-Guterman & Levy, 2017; Morris, 1979). In addition, researchers such as Baltas (1997) have distinguished NBs and PLBs by the level of advertising and geographical spread, arguing that PLBs are mostly unadvertised and have local or regional presence. However, recent studies and practices contradict mentioned definitions, as certain PLBs of major grocery retailers have global presence. These brands are often distinguished by academics as international PLBs (Cheng et al., 2007; Ozsomer, 2012). Furthermore, PLBs are on certain occasions advertised heavily and sold either under the retailer's own name or a different one.

Newer definitions approach PLBs from the perspective of who has the control of the product, claiming that PLBs are products controlled and owned by a retailer or a wholesaler and sold exclusively by retailers (Hyman et al., 2010; Sebri & Zaccour,

2017). Beneke and Zimmerman (2014) confirmed the importance of control, arguing that PLBs “are products that are created, controlled and marketed by a specific retail chain” (p. 301).

In terms of product characteristics, PLBs emerged as an alternative to NBs being offered at a lower price due to lower manufacturing costs, inexpensive packaging, and minimal advertising; especially at a national level (de Wulf et al., 2005; Dick et al., 1996b). On the contrary, NBs were offered at a price premium due to strict quality controls, sophisticated-design packaging, and overall higher extrinsic cue effects as well as nationwide or on many occasions worldwide advertising; actions resulted in building strong brand image, recognition, and equity (de Wulf et al., 2005; Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). NB strong brand image, ongoing innovation, and superior extrinsic cue effects act as a signal and/or reassurance of quality. Consequently, PLBs were considered as inferior products compared to manufacturer brands (Richardson et al., 1994).

Despite the differences in perceived quality, PLBs became an attractive and invaluable strategic move for most retailers within the FMCG sector, able to provide uniqueness to the goods and services as well as differentiate them from those of competitors’ (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Increasing presence and market share in all continents confirm the popularity of this strategy. In the first quarter of 2026, market share of PLBs stood at 30% or more in 12 European countries (PLMA International, 2026). In fact, PLB market share in countries such as Switzerland is 52.4%, while in other countries it exceeds 40%. Examples include countries such as Portugal (48.4%), Spain (47.5%), the Netherlands (46.9%), United Kingdom (UK) (44.3%), Hungary (42.7%), Belgium (40.5%) and Germany (40.4%) (PLMA International, 2026).

Benefits and costs of PLBs

PLBs are introduced due to their ability to provide higher percentage margins, negotiating leverage over manufacturers, increased control over shelf space, differentiation and, lastly, the assumption that they enhance loyalty to the retailer (Gielens et al., 2021; Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Semejin et al., 2004). Higher percentage margins are attributable to lower expenditure on research and development (R&D) compared to NB manufacturers, as well as to lower marketing costs (such as advertising, brand image building and packaging design) compared to NB

manufacturers (Baltas, 1997; Hyman et al., 2010). Products that are specially manufactured and distributed within stores provide differentiation and store loyalty. Such products can help build an exclusive store image and positioning. Good examples include IKEA, which built a fashionable brand for price- and value-conscious consumers solely on PLBs. The cost PLB strategy includes risks associated with the retailer/store image and quality variance risks. Drawing from cue utilization theory, extended use of private labels affects the image of the retailer either positively or negatively depending on the quality and image of the PLBs they sell. As a result, low-quality PLBs will negatively influence the retailer's perception and reputation in consumers' minds (Pérez-Santamaría & Martos-Partal, 2021).

2.4.3 PLB Academic Research

Initial research studies, such as that by Richardson et al. (1994), focused mainly on consumer characteristics such as demographic factors (income, age, education, etc.) that led to PLB purchases. As PLBs evolved, studies focused on several different factors that influence PLB sales, such as price consciousness (Burger & Schott, 1972), perceived quality and/or perceived risk (Ballester-Delgado et al., 2014; Hoch & Banerji, 1993), whether their use offers store loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2001) and the role of the store image (Bao et al., 2011; Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003).

Recent studies suggest that the competition between PLBs and NBs has evolved beyond the traditional price–quality paradigm with the introduction of different PLB tiers (low, average and premium) (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Bao et al., 2011; Casteran & Chrysochou, 2026; Martin, 1998). Thus, while PLBs have historically been positioned as lesser alternatives to NBs, most recent studies suggest that many retailers are increasingly competing through the introduction of different tiers, by narrowing the price gap between NBs and PLBs through product innovation, sustainability initiatives and retailer equity (Gielens et al., 2021; Ndlovu, 2024). As a result, on many occasions the distinction between NBs and PLBs has become less clear, and consumers often evaluate PLBs on dimensions that traditionally have been

used to evaluate NBs. This development also creates opportunities for other forms of PLBs that are not adequately captured by existing PLB or NB assumptions.

2.4.4 Retailers' Relationship Marketing & PLBs

Relationship marketing is defined as "all marketing activities directed at establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges in the supplier, lateral, buyer and internal partnerships" (Morgan & Hunt, 1994a, p. 22). Nowadays, retailers develop and implement mutually beneficial relationships with their customers based on trust, commitment, and satisfaction to retain a sustainable clientele and simplify purchasing procedures (Filipe et al., 2017; Miquel-Romero et al., 2014). Thus, the ultimate goal in relationship marketing is to create customer loyalty and repeated purchases. Grocery store retailers have been practicing relationship marketing techniques such as loyalty schemes for years. Through loyalty schemes, retailers can gather large amounts of data for their customers, understand their behavior and needs, and, based on this knowledge, adapt their approach to strengthen their relationship with them (Gielens et al., 2021; Hunt et al., 2006).

Among other relationship marketing techniques, PLBs are considered a key relationship marketing tool able to provide competitive advantage over competition and at the same time provide negotiating leverage over manufacturers (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Miquel-Romero et al., 2014; Sutton-Brady et al., 2017). Each consumer–product transaction encompasses the element of risk. The level of risk that confronts a consumer in a buying situation depends on several factors such as lack of product information, time, budget and so on. Any action to mitigate risk (such as applying branding techniques to the PLB) is expected to increase customer PLB purchase intention (Bao et al., 2011; Palmer, 1996). Based on relationship marketing theory, adequate management of PLB should mitigate risk and generate satisfaction, which eventually leads to the development of trust, commitment and loyalty towards the PLB (Miquel-Romero et al., 2014).

2.4.5 Retailers' Holistic Brand Management

Today, most PLBs are still priced below NBs; however, recent changes in PLBs and store branding have encouraged the creation of different tiers of PLBs, from generics to premium. Premium PLBs are not only priced comparably or on many occasions higher than NBs, but most importantly have equal or better quality (Casteran, 2026; Geyskens et al., 2010). Furthermore, packaging, promotion, and advertising, today, are so advanced that consumers often lack the ability to distinguish them from NBs. The transition from an undifferentiated, low-cost alternative to a comparable or even premium product can be seen as a natural continuation of the relationship marketing techniques that retailers are applying over the last decades. Through relationship marketing tools, such as loyalty cards, and sophisticated software, retailers can collect invaluable data to help them understand customers' purchasing patterns, habits and behaviors, which then allows them to start thinking of ways to cultivate relationships with them, hence evolving PLBs to a strategic resource for the retailer (Gielens et al., 2021).

Today, retailers offer their customers a broad brand assortment, as follows:

- NBs.
- At least four tiers of private-label brands (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Dunne & Narasimhan, 1999; Geyskens et al., 2010):
    - **No name generics**: Low-quality, unbranded products that are usually sold in bulk containers.
    - **Economy PLBs**: Bottom-of-the-market products offered at low prices due to reduced costs by economizing on expensive ingredients. These products target price-sensitive consumers.
    - **Standard PLBs**: Less expensive than NBs that usually imitate the quality of mainstream NBs. These PLBs are usually positioned as medium-quality alternatives and target smart shoppers or value-for-money consumers.
    - **Premium PLBs**: Positioned as premium, top end of the market that deliver equal or higher quality than NBs and sold at a comparable or higher price. Premium PLBs offer higher margins for the retailer and capture specific market segments.

2.5 Opportunities for Retailing Internationalization and the Emergence of the Hybrid Label Brand (HLB)

In light of the development of the PLB, over the last decade, a number of retailers have decided to expand to foreign markets without establishing physical or digital stores there. They implement this internationalization strategy, which can be found with different variations in many countries such as Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan, Malta and the UAE by exporting their PLBs. Examples can be found in Appendix 1, which shows evidence from five countries and four different retailers, along with the number of product codes and a comparison of the price differences between each strategy, suggesting that this is not an isolated retail practice but an emerging internationalization strategy that justifies its examination as a distinct branding construct.

These entities have two important characteristics: international presence (an unusual and understudied characteristic for PLBs), and branding associated with a foreign retailer rather than the retailer through which they are sold. As a result, the PLBs do not compete only with NBs but also with the PLBs of the local retailer where available. We refer to these PLBs as Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs).

Working definition: *Hybrid label brands (hereinafter, HLBs) are retailer-owned brands sold by a retailer other than the brand owner in a market where the brand-owning retailer has no physical or digital retail presence. Accordingly, the brand-owning retailer and the selling retailer are two different entities.*

Thus, the local retailer's brand assortment is being expanded with the addition of the HLB in many different categories where both NBs and PLBs might have a presence.

2.5.1 The HLB

While there is an understanding and a wealth of literature on how PLBs are positioned and perceived compared to NBs and competing retailers' PLBs, to the best of our knowledge there is no clear direction on how HLBs are perceived relative to both NBs and PLBs. This knowledge is particularly important because past research shows that consumers tend to evaluate PLBs against competing retailers' PLBs rather

than NBs. Understanding positioning, perceptions and perceived quality of the new entity is highly important for retailers aspiring to adopt this strategy. For example, if the HLB is perceived as being significantly closer to a PLB then it will most probably affect the performance of the PLB of the local retailer (the importer). By filling this gap, this research is aimed at helping academics better understand the different roles that brand strategies may have from the retailers' perspective in helping them to internationalize. At the same time, it can offer invaluable knowledge to retailers striving to increase their revenues and establish international profit centers, using HLBs, without investment risk.

Furthermore, while international PLBs have been discussed previously in the literature, they are generally referred to as PLBs sold in foreign countries by the retailer that owns the brand through its own network of physical (retail) or digital stores (Cheng et al., 2007). In contrast, HLBs represent a different strategy, where the retailer that owns the brand is absent from the host market and the brand (=the HLB) is sold through a different retailer that may have its own PLBs. Thus, the consumers are exposed to a branding environment in which the brand ownership is different from the point-of-sale ownership, and as a result the two are no longer aligned. This differentiation is important because existing literature assumes that consumers evaluate PLBs through their associations with the retailer that both owns and sells them; however, in the case of the HLB, this relationship does not exist and as a result raises the question regarding the cues that consumers use to evaluate these brands.

Table 2 Conceptual Comparison of PLBs, International PLBs and HLBs

Characteristic	PLB	International PLB	HLB
Brand Ownership	Retailer operating in the market	Retailer operating in the host market	Foreign retailer absent from the host market
Selling Retailer	Brand-owning retailer	Brand-owning retailer	Different retailer
Physical/Digital Presence of Brand Owner	Yes	Yes	No
Point of Sale	Owned retail network	Owned retail network in foreign market	Independent retailer's network
Relationship Between Brand and Retailer	Direct and unified	Direct and unified	Separated

Store Image Effects	Based on the image of the same retailer	Based on the image of the same retailer	Based on the store image of the selling retailer (different from the brand owner)
FDI Requirement	Not applicable	Usually required	Not required
Conceptual Development in Literature	Well established	Limited but recognized	Underexplored
Proposed Status in this Thesis	Existing construct	Existing construct	Distinct branding construct

Thus, on the basis of this research, we propose that HLBs should be conceptualized as a distinct branding construct rather than simply an international variation of traditional PLBs. We also propose that because ownership, retail environment and point of sales are separated in the HLB context, consumers evaluate these brands under different conditions than those assumed in the literature.

We argue that HLBs' success depends on a number of different variables, but we place particular emphasis on supplementary branding influences related to COO, such as COO image and country affiliation, that are not particularly relevant or particularly influential in the home market.

Over the following sections, drawing on cue utilization theory, we examine potential cues (drawn from pertinent literature) that consumers could use as qualitative indicators or mechanisms to evaluate an HLB, form brand perceptions and, as a result, affect their performance.

2.5.2 Applying Cue Utilization Theory to HLB Evaluation

The HLB context presents a completely different environment that differs from both NBs and PLBs. That is because, in the traditional PLB setting, consumers rely on familiarity and experience with the retailer that owns and sells the product to evaluate its quality. However, in the case of the HLB, the parent retailer is absent in the host market and the product is sold under another, different retailer. As a result, familiarity with the parent retailer may have limited or zero effect on the HLB.

The separation between brand ownership and point of sale increases information asymmetry and uncertainty because consumers are less able to make use of the associations that are linked to the brand owner. As a result, according to cue utilization theory, consumers will rely on available cues to make evaluation judgments of the product's quality and reduce uncertainty and perceived risk. For this reason, cue utilization theory provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining the HLB as it helps to explain how available informational cues could be used by consumers in the absence of the cues used traditionally to evaluate PLBs.

In the following section, we consider a number of cues as potential variables affecting HLB acceptance and performance. Cue utilization theory suggests that the influence of each cue depends on the extent to which consumers find it capable of explaining its quality (PV = Predictive Value) and how confident a consumer feels when using it (CV = Confidence Value). Consistent with this logic, this research presents potential evaluation cues by employing PV and CV as theoretical principles for explaining inclusion rather than as constructs requiring direct measurement.

2.6 Constituent Components of PLBs as Potential Quality Cues of HLBs

Since HLBs have not been studied directly as a theme, we consider the following variables affecting PLB and NB performance in local and international markets. Following cue utilization theory, we approach them as potential drivers for HLB performance.

This study adopts the guidelines for investigating performance outcomes suggested by Katsikeas et al. (2016). As this is a consumer-level study, we concentrate on customer-based performance measures and more specifically measures relating to customer mindset and customer behavior. The rationale for this selection and analysis of the chosen indicators is presented in Chapter 5.2.

2.6.1 Company Image

Returning to branding theory, retailers are building their brands based on tangible and intangible characteristics. One of the most prominent characteristics of retailer brand equity is store image. Scholars acknowledge store image as a key

determinant of PLB success (Bao et al., 2011; Burt & Jose, 2000; Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). Ballester et al. (2014) stressed the ability of store image to influence risk perceptions, while Grewal et al. (1998) stated that store image has a direct and positive relationship with purchase intention. Indeed, the way store image influences PLB perception can be easily understood by comparing PLBs from Harrods, widely considered by consumers as premium, with Tesco or Sainsbury's PLBs, which, despite the different quality tiers that have been introduced, are considered as inferior PLB products compared to Harrods'.

Numerous definitions abound in the literature for store image. For example, Beristain and Zorrilla (2011) approached the concept of store image through brand equity, arguing that it "is conceived as a set of brand associations of a commercial, social and strategic nature linked to the store" (p. 564), while Levy and Weitz (2004, as cited by Lee & Hyman, 2008) defined it as "the way a store is defined in a shopper's mind" (p. 220). Others view store image as something much more generic, claiming it is nothing more than the consumer's overall impression (both functional and psychological) of a retail store (Bao et al., 2011; Baugh & Davis, 1989). No matter the definition, it is obvious that different retailers' characteristics result in different store perceptions. These perceptions can drive sales and enhance the retailer's brand equity.

A considerable amount of research looks at store image as a theme. Scholars tried to conceptualize this structure across different dimensions. Different researchers proposed different dimensions, however the majority of them can be grouped into the following: *atmosphere* (can also be found as aesthetics), *convenience* (including accessibility and location), *facilities*, *clientele*, *merchandise* (including brand name, price, reputation, value-added service, etc.), *promotion* (including advertising and incentives), *employees* (including salespeople, personnel service, and so on), and *service* (after-sales service and support, etc.) (Vahie & Paswan, 2006).

In order to analyze and discover how store image may influence PLBs' overall acceptance and success, the following theories are introduced and discussed: attribution theory, cue utilization theory, congruity theory and brand equity theory.

Attribution theory and store image

The focus of attribution theory is the pursuit of knowing and understanding the world as well as how people make causal explanations and how they answer questions (Kelley, 1973; Mizerski et al., 1979). Attribution theory originates from social psychology, and scholars are using it in attempts to identify how information is used by individuals in making causal inferences.

In general, attribution theory may be divided into three main groups: perceptions dealing with persons, self-perceptions, and objects. Consumers use four criteria to help them form an accurate impression of the properties of an entity: distinctiveness, consistency over time, consistency over modality, and consensus (Mizerski et al., 1979). For example, a consumer purchases a specific brand of detergent and observes that the cleaning results on a white shirt exceed the results of the competition (*distinctiveness*). This observation is confirmed every time the consumer repeats the process with the same brand (*consistency over time*). Furthermore, the detergent works efficiently both in hand and machine washes (*consistency over modality*). Finally, other consumers also have this perception of the brand (*consensus*). In other words, a response to a stimulus is valid if it is correlated distinctively with the stimulus, confirmed by other persons, and consistent over time.

Objects–perception attribution theory asserts that information may arise from either multiple sources or a single source (Kelley, 1973). Few would argue that consumers have the knowledge, time or motivation to make multiple observations. From this perspective, the causal inference arises from a single observation of the effect. According to the discounting principle, “the role of a given cause in producing a given effect is discounted of other plausible causes are also present” (Kelley, 1973, p. 113).

Attribution theory suggests that causal inferences are based on distinctiveness, consensus and consistency of information, and thus high consensus will be attributed to the brand (in our case, the retailer). Since consumers do not have the time or the motivation to make multiple observations, they rely on the retailer’s overall store image to judge the PLB’s quality. From this perspective, store image can act as a signal of quality for the PLB in a proportional manner — the higher the association with the retailer, the higher the attribution. In line with this logic, the effect of store image as a

cue (or other factors related with the retailer such as service or overall retailer brand image) will be stronger in the absence of prior experience with the product. We can also make the argument that the consumer may attribute success in PLB product performance to both the product itself and the retailer's store.

Cue utilization theory and store image

We have already mentioned that initial research on cue utilization theory suggests that intrinsic cues have greater effect on quality perceptions compared to extrinsic ones (Olson & Jacoby, 1972; Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972, 1974). Despite this conclusion, price and store image were considered significant cues affecting quality perception. In fact, awareness of store image influenced quality perception greatly compared to price (Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972). However, more recent articles support the notion that consumers have the propensity to rely on extrinsic cues when assessing product quality (Richardson et al., 1994).

We assert that store image as an intransient cue can signal the quality of the PLB to a greater extent compared to other transient extrinsic characteristics.

Congruity theory and store image

Congruity theory is a social psychological consistency theory dealing with the explanation and prediction of human thinking. According to this theory, individuals tend to prefer elements that have balance or consistency with each other. As a result, when a person has two thoughts that are somehow inconsistent with each other, one or both thoughts will change/move towards the other in order to restore psychological consistency or balance (Baugh & Davis, 1989). Thus, congruity theory's center of interest is what happens when a source associates itself with another source or another entity (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984).

Psychological pressures to restore a state of congruity occur only when the two linked entities (source and object) are not valued equally (valued equal either positively or negatively) (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984). In the case of equal evaluation, no

psychological discomfort is expected. Researchers acknowledge as equal evaluation every positive or negative evaluation of the same magnitude.

Research evidence supports important implications for both retailers and manufacturers of brands. Retailers with low image will most probably improve their image by associating it with more favorably evaluated brand images, while retailers with a more favorable image than NBs will most likely harm their image (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984). On the other hand, NBs with a very positive image will most likely experience a lowering of their image when associated with a retailer that has a less positive image. However, NBs with lower image will not have their image improved when associated with retailers with a more positive image.

Store image can be established at both the retailer level and the category level (Lee & Hyman, 2008). The former is conceived based on consumer beliefs about the capabilities and attributes of a specific retailer. For example, consumers tend to view Harrods or Selfridges as more upscale stores selling premium products at a premium price in a relaxed and attractive environment full of trained personnel ready to fulfill their demands. On the other hand, category characteristics form beliefs about the store image as well. In general, discount stores are considered lower-class stores compared to department stores or exclusive brand stores such as Marks & Spencer.

At the retailer level, stores can be classified as hedonic or functional. Hedonic stores differ from functional in terms of their investment in enhancing characteristics related to the overall customer experience, such as status orientation, extensive services, multisensory design, extravagant environment, music and color, all of which work to eventually transform consumption from needs-based to sensation-fulfilling (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Ballantine et al., 2010; Lee & Hyman, 2008). In contrast, functional stores invest in convenience and will most probably have simple designs and indifferent atmosphere. Examples of hedonic grocery stores include Harrods Fresh Market Hall and Whole Foods Market, while functional stores include Lidl and Aldi. From the perspective of congruity theory, we expect consumers to be more receptive to PLBs from hedonic categories (such as perfumes or cosmetics) when visiting hedonic stores compared to functional stores. In addition, we expect consumers to be more receptive to PLBs from categories where the retailer is considered specialized.

Branding, brand equity and store image

Keller (2013) defined customer-based brand equity as “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of a brand” (p. 41). Based on this definition, brand knowledge is key in creating brand equity. The concept of brand knowledge is drawn from psychology, and it is described as a construct with two components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall, while brand image consists of brand benefits and brand attributes (Keller, 2013).

Research in the field of branding and more specifically in brand extensions suggests that quality perceptions of the new product (=brand extension) are directly related and affected by the perceptions and beliefs that consumers hold about the parent brand from previous experience. Since brand extensions occur when a firm uses an established brand name to introduce a new product, a PLB (i.e. a product carrying the name of a retailer) is considered as a brand extension (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). Consequently, the retailer’s image is the basis of the PLB equity (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

Marketers introduced branding as a means to provide identification and reduce consumer search cost. This can be partially achieved by the necessary recognition and recall provided by the brand. Drawing from brand extension theory, we argue that the store brand, as the parent brand of the PLB, provides the necessary brand knowledge (awareness and image) while also acting as a trust-building mechanism. As a result, part of the parent brand’s equity will be transferred to the extension.

Research evidence suggests a direct and linear relationship between store image and attitudes towards store brands (Burt & Davies, 2010). We argue that this relationship will be stronger in the case of a close brand extension strategy. We define close brand extension strategy as the expansion of the parent brand into relevant categories through brand extensions that are using the same brand elements (such as name, logos and symbols).

Conclusion

The retail market is experiencing fierce competition. Companies operating within this market always strive to find ways to differentiate their offerings. Store image is one of the most important features able to provide differentiation while at the same time enhancing the retailer's brand image. Store image refers to the total impression of the store, as this has been stored in consumers' memory based on current and previous experience with the retailer (Konuk, 2018). In general, merchandise, store ambience, atmosphere, personnel, and other tangible and intangible elements contribute to what consumers view as store image (Burt & Jose, 2000).

Based on the aforementioned theories, consumers make their purchase decisions based on store image rather than a PLB's other tangible characteristics (Beristain & Zorilla, 2011; Burt & Jose, 2000; Richardson et al., 1994; Wu et al., 2011). As a result, store image acts as the medium consumers use to form quality perceptions of a PLB (Richardson et al., 1994). Prior research on the grocery sector supports the direct and positive relationship between a particular retailer's favorable image and purchase intention (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). Consequently, store image in PLB evaluation is beyond any doubt one of the most important elements to consider.

However, when PLBs are sold outside their home market, the store image becomes less influential due to consumers' lack of familiarity with the retail outlets. In these instances, the concept of "company image" becomes more relevant, as consumers shift their evaluation of PLBs from the retail store to the overarching corporate brand that owns or markets the products (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). The same attributes that make store image influential, such as trust, consistency, and reliability, are embedded in the company's broader corporate identity, which shapes consumer expectations of the product abroad (Hsieh et al., 2004). Therefore, this study extends the influence of store image to company image when considering PLBs in international contexts, illustrating how corporate identity, brand trust and brand perceptions affect consumer attitudes abroad. This distinction is particularly relevant for the HLB because the retailer that owns the brand is different from the retailer that sells the brand, and thus, unlike traditional PLBs, consumers cannot rely solely on the store image of the retailer when evaluating the brand. Consequently, company image represents a more appropriate evaluation cue for contexts such as the HLB, to reflect

a multidimensional perception formed through the beliefs about the company's overall reputation, innovativeness and quality of its offerings (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Fombrun, 1996).

2.6.2 Country of Origin (COO)

Researchers conceive products' organization as an array of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes that consumers use to determine their quality (Miyazaki et al., 2005). COO, just like any other extrinsic cue, can influence how consumers evaluatively judge a product through the halo effect, meaning that their overall perception of the country can affect how they see the product's specific qualities (Fong et al., 2014; Josiassen et al., 2011; Pharr, 2005; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). From a consumer's point of view, production standards are not equal in all countries and risks involved vary from country to country (Parsons et al., 2012). From a marketing point of view, companies need to understand consumers' perceptions of foreign products to adopt the optimum strategy (Ahmed & d'Astous, 2008). There are contradictions in the literature about the use of COO. For example, Garrett and Lee (2017) argued that the COO effect is particularly influential when other cues are not available or when the consumer is unfamiliar with the product or the brand, yet others such as Usunier and Cestre (2007) claim that increased familiarity with the product category results in more use of COO cues. Thus, after briefly introducing COO as a concept, we emphasize antecedents of COO evaluation to better understand how these could potentially affect PLB and/or HLB performance.

For decades, many researchers have extensively studied COO as an aspect of product information that consumers use to form preferences and make purchase decisions. Back in 1962, Ernest Dichter, while examining basic cultural similarities and differences of customers from different countries, discussed the tremendous influence of COO by providing the example of Venezuelan smokers who despite political differences preferred US cigarettes because they were considered chic. In fact, the influence of COO was so strong that even when an American brand name was used on local cigarettes, the phrase *Hecho en Venezuela* (Made in Venezuela) would result in at least 50% prestige loss despite the cigarette being almost identical. Three years

later, Schooler (1965) found the following through empirical research: “Significant differences in the evaluation of products, identical in all respects except the name of the country appearing on the label” and that “the attitude toward people of a given country is a factor in existing preconceptions regarding the products of that country” (p. 396).

Since then, there has been an enormous amount of research covering a wide range of COO applications. Despite the large body of research, there is still no consensus on the importance of COO’s effect on product evaluation (Karimov & El-Murad, 2019; Usunier & Cestre, 2007; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999)

Consumer ethnocentrism (CE)

Consumer ethnocentrism (CE) as a construct is an application of ethnocentrism that is described as a “nearly universal syndrome of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors” (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006, p. 926). Ethnocentrism is based on the formation of groups where one’s own group (the in-group) is considered superior compared to out-groups (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Hammond & Axelrod, 2006; Shankarmahesh, 2006). As a result, an individual’s in-group is the center of everything, and all others are rated with reference to it.

As a concept, Shimp and Sharma (1987) first introduced CE as a subset domain of ethnocentrism studying consumer behavior with marketing implications. CE is defined as a “trait-like property of an individual’s personality” and encompasses “the beliefs held by the consumers about appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign products” (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). An ethnocentric consumer will interpret buying foreign products as an immoral and unpatriotic action that will eventually lead to a decrease of local jobs (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

We distinguish CE from consumer animosity and define CE as discrimination against, or moral concern, for all foreign products without making any exceptions for specific countries. On the other hand, consumer animosity is defined as consumer negativity towards products coming from certain countries because of war, economic or political issues (Josiassen et al., 2011; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007).

In reference to CE, just like ethnocentrism, we have two groups: products of home country (in-group) and products from foreign countries (out-groups). Ethnocentric consumers are expected to distinguish between the in-group and the out-group and avoid buying products (even when the quality is lower and the price higher) from the out-group due to nationalistic reasons in the same way as non-ethnocentric consumers make decisions based on price, quality, packaging, etc. (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015).

Through a literature review on academic studies related to CE, Shankarmahesh (2006) summarized the antecedents of CE in four broad categories: socio-psychological, economic, political, and demographic. For example, in the socio-psychological category, we can distinguish antecedents such as “cultural openness” where people have the opportunity to interact with other cultures and “worldmindedness” where people even though they don’t necessarily have the chance to interact with other cultures believe in a “world-view of the problems of humanity”. These characteristics might be negatively related to CE even if some researchers find it rather simplistic to generalize that cultural interactions will mitigate CE (Shankarmahesh, 2006). On the other hand, other characteristics such as patriotism and conservatism may be positively related to CE since traditions or purchases that proved to work over a period of time help to create a tendency for repeating them. In terms of demographic characteristics, results are mixed, but most empirical studies suggest that older (an argument also supported by studies in conservatism) and/or female consumers tend to be more ethnocentric than younger and/or male consumers (Josiassen et al., 2011; Shankarmahesh, 2006; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Finally, ethnocentrism is often enhanced or driven by political, government-led campaigns for buying local products in an effort to protect local jobs and improve trade balances (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Such campaigns increase in number especially in periods of financial crisis or even in the recent Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in December 2020, the Canadian government announced a ‘Buy Local Campaign’ where through television, online and social media commercials, Canadians were encouraged to shop for local products (Government of Canada, 2020).

In a more recent empirical study, researchers revisited the term CE and determined that it is a multidimensional construct comprised of five dimensions: pro-sociality, cognition, insecurity, reflexiveness and habituation (Siamagka & Balabanis,

2015). Furthermore, several researchers studied the effect of CE in relation to other factors such as product category and suggested that consumer preferences for products of the same foreign country vary depending on the product category involved (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004).

The central question in studying CE is whether this theme may lead to purchasing domestic products as opposed to foreign products. Researchers have used different terms when approaching this question, such as “purchase intention”, “willingness to buy domestic products” (Josiassen et al., 2011), “attitudes towards buying foreign products” and “tendency” towards local products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). No matter the approach, researchers have generally found CE to be positively related with preferences for domestic products (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Josiassen et al., 2011; Shankarmahesh, 2006).

The level of CE holds high importance for global positioning and/or market entry decisions, such as those regarding the use of standardization or adaptation needed when expanding to foreign markets (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015).

Country of origin image / national stereotypes / country affiliation

Consumers do not treat different countries in the same way (Parsons et al., 2012). For instance, they generally evaluate products from industrialized countries more favorably compared to products from developing or newly industrialized countries (Ahmed & d’Astous, 2004; Cordell, 1992; Pappu et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2012). COO image is defined as “the overall perception consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country’s production and marketing strengths and weaknesses” (Roth & Romeo, 1992, p. 480). Wang et al. (2012) enhanced the definition by adding to the equation not only the mental representation of the country (including economical or technological development stages) but also the people of the country and “the affective evaluations of its social and political systems or standpoints” (p. 1041). As a result, a general image of a country is not only based on prior experience with products from a certain country, even though these two are related.

Country image's effect on product evaluation is based on intangible assets or liabilities shared by products originating from the same country (Kim & Chung, 1997). For example, in the automobile industry, brands coming from Germany or Japan tend to have similar brand images in terms of quality or specific product features such as durability or precision, but they might differ in terms of intangible elements (Keller, 2013; Kim & Chung, 1997; Usunier & Cestre, 2007; Wang et al., 2012; Yasin et al., 2007). Literature refers to these established general perceptions or beliefs that consumers have regarding a particular country's products as product image (Wang et al., 2012). Thus, a country's image may moderate the associated risk of a foreign brand.

Geographical or cultural closeness, shared history, political ties, or similarities in language and lifestyle are some elements that could influence the way consumers view different countries. Country image interacts with brand popularity to influence market share (Kim & Chung, 1997). Previous studies have also concluded that store brands benefit from being locally sourced and even more so when the store is locally owned (Parsons et al., 2012). Furthermore, if a product is foreign-sourced then it is preferable that it comes from countries recognized as culturally close to the seller country (Parsons et al., 2012).

We expect a positive correlation between HLB performance and COO when there are strong cultural or other influential ties between two countries and a negative correlation when the distance (in terms of history, political and/or other ties) between two countries increases.

2.6.3 Pricing

The phrase "you get what you pay for" is a widely used platitude in many industrialized nations to highlight the relationship between price and quality, denoting that the price of something usually equals its quality. Scitovsky (1944) advanced the theory that price differentials between two identical products result in different product quality perceptions; many experimental studies confirmed this in subsequent years. For example, McConnell (1968) conducted an experiment with 60 adults who classified themselves as beer drinkers and gave them three identical beers (all from

the same batch number and bottled in an unmarked glass) with the only difference being the price shown to the customer. Results showed that the highest priced beer was perceived as being a better-quality product than the other two and the middle-priced beer as being marginally better than the lowest-priced beer. Through this experiment, McConnell suggested that price, in the absence of other cues, is a powerful determinant for product quality evaluation. However, this relationship was found to be non-linear and moderated by methodological deficiencies (McConnell, 1968; Peterson, 1970; Rao & Monroe; 1989).

Someone could suggest that in the absence of other extrinsic or intrinsic cues, participants in an experiment are likely to show a positive correlation between price and quality. Rao and Monroe (1989) examined the relationship between price and perceived product quality in conjunction with other cues such as brand name and store name and concluded that price remains an indicator of product quality without being suppressed by the presence of other cues. However, Dodds et al. (1991) challenged this argument two years later by proposing that when other extrinsic cues are present, price as a cue to evaluate perceived quality is less persuasive. Furthermore, their model suggests that “as price increases from a low priced model to a higher priced model, buyers’ perceptions of value will increase and then decrease” (Dodds et al., 1991, p. 316). Including brand or store name in the equation reduces (but does not eliminate) this negative effect of price on value perceptions. As a result, consumers will rely on more familiar information cues (such as brand name or store name) rather than price for an infrequently purchased product at a high price (Dodds et al., 1991).

Narrowing it down to PLBs, price affects quality perceptions there as well. For example, drawing from attribution theory (which explains how people infer causes for observed behaviors), continuously perceived low prices compared to NBs combined with none or minimal advertising may be attributed to a product’s potential weaknesses. Apart from quality perceptions, price also affects consumers’ willingness to buy. The traditional PLB attracts consumers due to its lower price compared to NBs (de Wulf et al., 2005; Dick et al., 1996b). This strategy affects the PLB category as a whole by influencing the reference price of such products. Eventually, consumers resist paying higher prices for a PLB than the referent price or at a smaller price ratio compared to the average NB in the category (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013).

Researchers expect PLBs to compete more intensely in categories with higher purchase frequency and in categories where they are sold at a price lower than the average NB price (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013; Wu et al., 2021). However, the term “lower price” alone is not capable of explaining this behavior. The level of the price advantage is also important. A price reduction of 40% leads to highest willingness to buy, whereas a 20% price reduction leads to the lowest willingness to buy (Zielke & Dobbelstein, 2007). In fact, an everyday low-price strategy is the optimum strategy for food retailers to maximize PLB sales growth and penetration (Zwanka, 2018). This holds an important implication for the strategic decision retailers take regarding their use of PLBs. If they use a PLB to enhance store loyalty, then investing in a good-quality PLB at a higher price (comparable to NBs) and in less frequently bought categories is the answer. If store traffic is the aim, then the retailer should invest in creating a cheap PLB in commodity-like categories (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013).

Narrowing it further to a concept having similar characteristics with the HLB, a pertinent study by Cheng et al. (2007) discusses how pricing directly affects consumer perception of international PLBs versus local PLBs. They define as international PLBs a PLB found in retail chains that have been moving across national borders. The difference between an HLB and an international PLB lies in the fact that the latter can still only be found in stores owned by the parent retailer. The study concluded that consumers in Taipei perceive international PLBs as superior to local PLBs and they were more willing to pay a price premium for an international PLB than a local PLB. However, the authors did not include COO as a moderating effect, despite the large cultural differences between the countries under investigation (France, Taiwan and the UK). Furthermore, 78.34% of the sample size were young people under 30 years of age who are expected to be less ethnocentric than older people and more easily accept products and retailers coming from a foreign country (Josiassen et al., 2011; Shankarmahesh, 2006; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015).

In conclusion, price is treated in this study strictly as an extrinsic cue that signals quality and influences purchase intention but does not by itself represent the consumer’s overall evaluation of the cost–benefit trade-off. This distinction is important since the broader judgment is captured through the concept of value for money (VfM) that is discussed separately below.

2.6.4 Exclusivity in Sale

A key difference between an NB and a PLB is the channel of sale. In fact, researchers have used the channel or point of sale to distinguish a PLB from a NB, arguing that PLBs are products sold exclusively through the retailer's outlets (Baltas, 1997; Kumar & Steenkamp, 2007; Wu et al., 2021). While this is not a prerequisite for HLBs, one can assume that consumers value differently a product that is not associated only with a specific retail firm.

The concept of exclusivity is not new for certain types of products. For example, PLBs, franchise brands or certain NBs are exclusive in their distribution, which is protected by trademarks or exclusivity contracts. However, exclusivity is a broad term comprising many strategies and tactics. For instance, the French cosmetics company L'Oréal Paris created in 2021 the Summer Belle Makeup Collection in collaboration with Walmart and distributed the collection exclusively at Walmart despite the fact of L'Oréal Paris being a major NB manufacturer. In this situation, the retailer carries a collection that is similar to that of other retailers but differs in certain characteristics or attributes. Exclusivity can be found in literature and marketing practice in different forms but also for a number of different reasons. Reasons may include (but are not limited to) geographical/regional availability, limited supply, store brands and/or contractual obligations (Upshaw et al., 2017).

Exclusivity of products can be both advertised and not. Considering for example the automobile industry, an authorized Mercedes dealer is expected to sell Mercedes vehicles exclusively, and as a result advertising exclusivity may not provide any additional benefits. On the other hand, when exclusivity is associated, for example, with uniqueness, then labeling the product as "exclusive" may add an extra attribute to the product that will ultimately increase interest and positive evaluation (Upshaw et al., 2017). Based on the above examples, there are cases where firms strategically mention or advertise "exclusivity" to strengthen the product and offer additional value to the customer. By doing that, they move competition from direct comparison between two identical products to a much safer competition area where products are less vulnerable to price difference and as expected price premium can be justified more easily (Upshaw et al., 2017). From the consumer's perspective, exclusivity could affect the evaluation process. For instance, if exclusivity is associated with rarity, then the

“reason to believe” is sufficiently provided to support a price increase on behalf of the seller.

Several attempts have been made, especially in the luxury products literature, to conceptualize the concept of exclusivity and define its different types. Exclusivity has been defined as a brand dimension or capacity to differentiate, rather than affiliate oneself with the group (Monkhouse et al., 2012). It can be identified as implicit or explicit. In terms of implicit exclusivity, exclusivity occurs due to trademarks, patent laws or the product’s unique nature. Examples of implicit exclusivity products include PLBs, wholesaler agreements, luxury brands, and disguised exclusivity (where retailers have exclusive versions of a product that are unavailable elsewhere and not advertised as exclusive). On the other hand, explicit exclusivity occurs due to regional exclusivity (because of supply constraints, distribution difficulties, etc.) or timed exclusivity (or exclusive versions of products that are advertised by the seller (Upshaw et al., 2017).

Consumer psychology studies have also discussed exclusivity. The concept of exclusivity becomes more pronounced when consumers are exposed to a self-expressive product. Researchers have approached this concept through naïve theories that are defined as “informal common-sense explanations that people use in their everyday lives to make sense of their environment. Consumers frequently rely on them to make inferences regarding marketing communications, products and services” (Steinhart et al., 2014, p. 473). According to the naïve theory of exclusivity, some products are more desirable when they are exclusive. Thus, increased purchase intentions are related to the level to which a product is capable of raising consumers’ self-perceptions of uniqueness (Steinhart et al., 2014).

Consumers could use exclusivity (whether implicit or explicit) as a cue able to affect product and/or quality evaluation by adding additional attributes to the product. The naïve theory of exclusivity for self-expressive products also supports this argument. Lastly, advertising or mentioning exclusivity is expected to further boost its effect for products that are not expected to be exclusive in their nature.

2.6.5 Product Category

Traditionally, PLBs were offered in low-end categories such as paper products, milk and frozen foods, but today they appear in almost every category, from groceries to cosmetics. For example, the British retailer Sainsbury's offers a PLB portfolio that includes a wide range of products from milk to chocolate and wine glasses to cold & flu capsules. PLB market share and success varies from category to category (Batra & Sinha, 2000; Dhar & Hoch, 1997; Gonzalez-Benito & Martos-Partal, 2012). According to NielsenIQ (2021), food categories comprise 70% of PLBs. However, most products in the top 10 categories are non-food products. Examples include tissue papers, glass and floor cleaners.

Prior studies on PLBs associate perceived risk in the category with consumer PLB proneness and purchase (Batra & Sinha, 2000; Sinha & Batra, 1999). Risks are typically divided into functional, financial and social (DelVecchio, 2001). The consequences of making a purchase mistake influence purchase intention (Batra & Sinha, 2000; Glynn & Chen, 2009; Sinha & Batra, 1999). Not all product categories are associated with increased perceived risk. The consequences of making a mistake when purchasing durable goods are higher compared to a short-life cheap product due to the fact that you are stuck with the poor product for a long time. If the relative risk of purchasing within the category is high, then consumers will most likely choose a NB over a PLB (Batra & Sinha, 2000; Glynn & Chen, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito & Martos-Partal, 2012). As a result, categories such as baby food and personal care should be seen as riskier than groceries or toiletries.

Batra and Sinha (2000) conducted a consumer-level research study across 12 different product categories and suggested that PLB purchase rises when the consequences of making a mistake are reduced, when there is a small degree of quality variation across the product category, and when product categories have more search attributes than experience.

The qualities of a brand are distinguished into search and experience (Nelson, 1974). Experience qualities are those that cannot be determined prior to purchasing the product, and search qualities are those that a consumer can determine prior to purchasing through direct inspection (Nelson, 1970). Hedonic attributes such as taste

are classified as experience qualities, whereas functional attributes such as the caloric content of a soft drink are classified as search qualities. Furthermore, the search/experience classification paradigm is expanded by taking into consideration the extent to which consumers feel they need to experience the product before evaluating its quality (Weathers et al., 2007). The greater the need to experience or sense the product, the more experience qualities the product possesses. Therefore, price, for example, are considered as search characteristics whereas taste and wearability as experience characteristics.

Initial studies on search/experience attributes did not incorporate the effect of the internet and how it could affect the way consumers evaluate a search or experience product. Incomprehensibly, the internet provides a number of mechanisms such as consumer ratings and feedback, evaluating videos, digital samples and experience reviews that provide invaluable information enabling one to “experience” the product before purchase (Huang et al., 2009). Huang et al. (2009) concluded that while the search/experience paradigm remains untouched in the traditional retail environment, it differs in online settings in the sense that consumers perceive an increased ability to judge the product before purchase. In fact, this is more applicable in experience goods than search goods.

A similar stream of research approaches decision-making processes based on the degree of consumer involvement in a product category. Involvement is described as a “causal or motivating variable with a number of consequences on the consumer’s purchase and communication behavior” (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, p. 42). Depending on the level of involvement, consumers will differ greatly in the extensiveness of their decision-making process. Literature on involvement distinguishes involvement in three major areas: enduring and situational involvement, emotional involvement, and personal involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Warrington & Shim, 2000). Enduring involvement concerns a patterned (i.e. on a regular basis) behavior of an individual, whereas situational involvement concerns a behavior occurring because of a specific situation. For example, an individual might be purchasing a low-priced wine to accompany their dinner, but a high-involvement decision will most probably occur when in search for a wine gift for a dinner with the CEO of their company. Emotional involvement concerns categories where there is an interest or emotion. For instance, categories involving pleasure, such as a golf club or a restaurant, will most probably

lead to high involvement, whereas products such as toilet paper to low involvement. Finally, personal involvement (or ego involvement) concerns products that are used by the individual to reflect their own identity. Thus, self-expressive products are perceived as a sign of oneself, and high involvement is expected. For example, a dress, a luxury bag or a perfume may be considered as self-expressive products, and thus high involvement on behalf of the consumer is expected. Involvement is characterized by intensity (from low to high), direction (the object, product or issue that an individual is motivated towards), and persistence (which refers to the duration of the involvement intensity) (Warrington & Shim, 2000).

Consumers tend to purchase PLBs more easily from undifferentiated, commodity-like or low-involvement categories (Gonzalez-Benito & Martos-Partal, 2012). In addition, pertinent research on PLBs supports that PLB purchasing is higher in categories where consumer perceptions of quality variability between an NB and PLB are lower (Glynn & Chen, 2009). Based on the above literature review on how product category affects PLB success, we argue that it can serve as a variable able to influence HLB acceptance and performance.

2.6.6 Value for Money

VfM is a central construct in consumer behavior research, particularly in studies examining how individuals approach transactions, make decisions, and essentially assess the trade-off between costs and benefits received. However, value is a highly personal and subjective construct that appears to be approached differently by different consumers, even in products from the same product category. This is evidenced by studies trying to conceptualize perceived value, with the results providing various definitions such as value is low price, value is whatever a consumer wants in a product, value is the quality someone gets for the price they pay, or value is the tradeoff between one “give” and one “get” component (Zeithaml, 1988). In this view, value is a complex construct that does not necessarily reside in the product itself but is a cognitive evaluation based on both extrinsic and intrinsic cues.

The theoretical foundation of VfM is rooted in the exchange theory, where transactions, involving buying and selling products or services, assume that actors

involved in this process aim for maximizing their satisfaction through this interaction (Bagozzi, 1975). A consumer sacrifices money, time, effort and/or perceived risk to receive a benefit or value that can take the form of functional performance, perceived quality, emotional satisfaction, social approval, knowledge or any other symbolic benefit such as status (Sheth et al., 1991; Zeithaml, 1988). Thus, the critical element in a transaction is the sacrifice provided by the consumer and whether this sacrifice is "fair" compared to the benefits received.

VfM narrows the sacrifice to the price of the product or the money needed for purchasing it, assuming that price and perceived quality alone cannot influence intention to buy. Price and quality will first shape how consumers evaluate the value of the product, and then this perceived value will influence whether the consumer will ultimately buy the product. In other words, a consumer wanting to purchase a product will think: "Given what I pay and what I get, is it worth it?". During this procedure price can have two distinct effects, a positive effect on perceived quality (when acting as a quality cue), and a negative effect on perceived value (when a higher price increases the sacrifice at a level where perceived value is not the expected) (Dodds et al., 1991). Thus, VfM is a subjective judgment based on one's expectations and reference prices as well as other cues that affect procedure.

Narrowing further the discussion into PLBs, VfM is also prominent in this field. PLBs traditionally were positioned as lower-priced alternatives to NBs claiming to offer an acceptable quality for a lower price, or, in other words, a VfM product offered at a favorable price value (Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2012). However, with the evolvement of PLBs and the introduction of different pricing and quality tiers, the relationship between price and value of a PLB changed. Premium PLBs compete not only on price but also on perceived quality, shifting overall evaluation from price only to the overall perceived benefit received from the PLB. This is the point where VfM becomes a theoretical distinct concept from price alone, as it incorporates both the sacrifice and the perceived benefits into a unified evaluation.

For HLBs, this logic extends further because the HLB holds additional cues that are involved in the overall assessment and potentially influence perceived value in relation to the money provided. Thus, these additional benefits need to translate into perceived value and communicate either a price advantage or superior performance

compared to other offerings in the assortment. In conclusion, the VfM construct captures the combined evaluation rather than the price cue in isolation.

2.6.7 Cue Selection and Expected Role in the HLB Context

Cue	Relevance in the HLB Context	Implications of PV and CV
Company Image	Consumers cannot directly interact with the foreign retailer that owns the HLB. As a result, they rely on the perceptions of the company that owns the brand.	Cue utilization theory suggests that cues perceived as diagnostic of quality and trustworthiness are more likely to influence evaluations. Company image may therefore play an influential role in reducing uncertainty.
COO	Consumers may have limited information about the foreign retailer and thus use COO to infer product standards.	The influence of COO depends on the extent to which consumers perceive country associations as informative and feel confident using COO when evaluating a product.
Price	Price is available before purchase and acts as an influential extrinsic cue.	It may serve as a quality cue, especially in the absence of other cues.
VfM	Consumers evaluate whether the benefits they get are worth the sacrifice required.	VfM combines information taken from multiple cues and supports overall product evaluation.
Product Category	Different categories are associated with different levels of perceived risk.	Cue utilization theory suggests that reliance on cues may vary according to the evaluation context and the perceived importance of quality.
Exclusivity	Limited availability could act as a differentiation factor for the HLB.	Exclusivity may function as a differentiation cue and contribute to perceptions of uniqueness and desirability.

2.7 Consumer Decision-Making Style

Understanding consumers' behavior has always been an area of interest for advertisers and marketers because cues cause different reactions for different people. Such knowledge has always been of interest for international marketing practitioners positioning and advertising products and deciding on whether to proceed with standardized marketing programs or adjust elements of the marketing mix to accommodate potential differences in foreign markets (Lysonski et al., 1996).

Companies frequently proceed with market research surveys to better understand their clientele in terms of their decision-making styles. In such surveys, consumers are characterized as quality seekers, novelty fashion seekers, experience seekers, information seekers, brand-loyal customers and so on (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). From the consumer's perspective, the unprecedented plethora of product choices in combination with relentless advertising and storms of information on products increases complexity of decision-making. Thus, it is more relevant and crucial than ever before to understand consumer decision-making processes.

Consumer decision-making styles can be defined as a mental orientation describing how a consumer makes choices (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). This contains both cognitive and affective elements. Past research identified the eight most basic mental characteristics to classify consumers by their decision-making style in an instrument termed Consumer Style Inventory (CSI): 1) perfectionism / high-quality consciousness; 2) brand consciousness; 3) novelty fashion consciousness; 4) recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness; 5) price and VfM shopping consciousness; 6) confusion from over-choice; 7) impulsiveness; and 8) habitual, brand-loyal consumer orientation (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Perfectionism concerns consumers who want exactly what they are looking for and usually buy products with the very best quality. Brand conscious consumers believe that "price equals quality" and they tend to buy expensive, well-known NBs. Novelty fashion conscious consumers usually choose the latest styles and don't hesitate to try new products. Recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness concerns consumers who shop for fun, pleasure and recreation. Price and VfM refers to the tendency of people to buy products that are positioned in terms of price at the lower end or products that provide great VfM. Confusion from over-choice concerns consumers who find an abundance of choices in products and stores as part of the decision-making process that contributes to not being able to make a choice. Impulsive or careless consumers don't usually plan their shopping and they are not concerned about how much they spend. Lastly, habitual and brand-loyal consumers refers to the orientation of customers towards repeatedly buying their favorite brands from their favorite stores and who are reluctant to try new brands or retail chains. However, Sproles and Kendall's (1986) study was limited to Tucson in the US and participants were 501 students. As a result,

the applicability and generalizability of these characteristics overseas or to consumers from different backgrounds and/or ages is controversial.

Lysonski et al. (1996) examined the applicability and generalizability of Sproles and Kendall's (1986) instrument in four countries: Greece, India, New Zealand, and the US. According to the study, the inventory was more applicable in New Zealand and the US than Greece and India, but the factors "brand conscious", "novelty fashion conscious" and "habitual, brand loyalty" were common in all four countries. However, at that time, the retail scene and retail environment in general were strikingly different in India compared to the US and New Zealand. Furthermore, Mitchell and Bates (1998) examined the applicability of the CSI instrument in the UK and confirmed all eight factors of Sproles and Kendall's (1986) instrument as well as two more factors: time-energy conserving, and store loyalty. Time-energy conserving characterizes a shopper who consults magazines and compares advertisements before deciding to save energy/time while shopping. A similar study conducted in Germany in 2001 found a seven-factor model to be applicable. In that model, price consciousness and brand loyalty were replaced with variety seeking. Variety seeking describes consumers who are likely to switch brands even if their current brand satisfies their needs to increase their satisfaction or bring something new into their lives (Walsh et al., 2001). Zhou et al. (2010) conducted a CSI applicability study in coastal and inland China and revealed that all eight factors are appropriate but with some significant differences in the level of each factor when tested on coastal China consumers versus inland consumers. Mehta and Dixit (2016) conducted a cross-country comparison to examine the applicability of CSI in a developed market (Germany) and a developing market (India), arguing that developments and investments occurring in India since Lysonski et al.'s (1996) study might have altered the characteristics of Indian consumers. Their study revealed that perfectionism, brand consciousness, confused by over-choice and price equals quality consciousness were common traits. At the same time, they suggested that consumer decision-making styles are not independent of country or culture; thus, taking into account the specific decision-making style of each country is crucial when trying to enter a new market. Recently, researchers validated the traditional CSI construct for contemporary consumers using samples from the general public in the US. Using a data set with 390 participants, Eom et al. (2020) concluded that CSI dimensions seem to be universal regardless of the time period. Thus, the

instrument remains a relevant tool to capture consumer decision-making styles. However, the authors emphasized the need to reaffirm the tool for other countries since cultural idiosyncrasies may affect the applicability of the CSI.

We consider relevant consumer decision-making styles as consumer-level psychological factors that may influence for HLB performance. We intend to use the CSI instrument as a tool for predicting consumer choice and purchasing behavior for the specific country under investigation. Literature confirms the applicability of the CSI as a general concept, but care must be taken regarding the different characteristics of each country. When it comes to choosing an HLB over an NB or PLB, it is important to define the combination of purchasing styles that are relevant for this decision. Thus, the next step is to investigate each relevant decision-making style separately and examine pertinent literature in order to understand how it may influence HLB performance.

2.7.1 Price Consciousness

PLBs emerged as an alternative to NBs being offered at lower prices. Consequently, PLBs became an attractive alternative for price conscious consumers — i.e. those who look for lower prices in general and are always concerned about getting the best value for their money. Past research provides evidence on the direct effect of price consciousness on consumers' purchase intention (Batra & Sinha, 2000; Sinha & Batra, 1999).

Price consciousness is defined as the consumer's unwillingness to pay a higher price for a product and/or the tendency to pay lower prices in general (Lichtenstein et al., 1993; O'Neill & Lambert; 2001; Sinha & Batra, 1999). It is worth mentioning that unwillingness may also occur if the price difference for certain features (that are not present for a similar product) is considered too large for an individual to pay. These additional features may, for example, include the brand name of an NB versus an unbranded PLB offering the same (or similar) end result or satisfaction to the customer (Sinha & Batra, 1999). For some individuals, price consciousness varies across product categories, while for others it may simply be attitude-like predisposition no matter the product category.

Sinha and Batra (1999) conducted a consumer-level study to identify the antecedents of price consciousness. The study concluded that consumers are less price conscious in categories they perceive as high-risk. As expected, an individual will try to minimize risk by choosing a product potentially at a higher price due to the price–quality schema. According to the price–quality schema, consumers use price to make generalized attributions about a product's quality (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). Likewise, if the category is expected to be less risky, consumers will most likely search for products offered at a lower price in order to achieve greater monetary savings.

According to the literature review, the consequences of consumers' price consciousness are decisive for PLB success. A key consequence in the price consciousness category is the purchase of a PLB. A secondary consequence is the purchase of a lower-priced / second-tier NB (Mendez et al., 2008; Sinha & Batra, 1999). This implication is particularly important for the performance of HLBs. As a result, we expect price conscious consumers to prefer HLBs over PLBs and NBs if the price difference between them is considered a VfM choice. More specifically, in high-risk categories, HLBs could be positioned in consumers' mindset as an effective alternative for price conscious consumers whereas in a low-risk category as a VfM alternative if the price difference is not prohibitive. Prospect theory also supports this argument. According to prospect theory, individuals make decisions based on perceived gains instead of perceived losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Thus, the positioning of an HLB in between the NB and the PLB (or at a price close to the PLB) gives this product a beneficial reference price providing an extra incentive to the price conscious consumer.

2.7.2 Brand Consciousness

Brand consciousness is a style or consumer orientation that interprets price as an indicator of quality (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Consumers with this characteristic will most probably choose expensive, best-selling, well-advertised and well-known NBs to get the best possible perceived quality (Walsh & Mitchell, 2010). Shim and Gehrt (1996) enhanced the definition by presenting brand consciousness as a direction of shopping or tendency to buy well-known NBs.

Previous studies examining brand consciousness and intention to buy PLBs revealed a negative relationship between the two (Helmig et al., 2007; Lee, 2008; Miquel et al., 2017). The preference for buying expensive and well-advertised products works as a barrier to purchasing PLBs, a brand traditionally being under-advertised and offered at a lower price compared to NBs. Furthermore, Lee (2008) confirmed the negative (indirect) influence of brand consciousness on PLB purchase intention and proneness but also highlighted the effect on self-image damage when a brand conscious consumer buys a PLB, an effect that will most probably suppress further purchase intention of a PLB. However, over the past decades there has been an improvement in PLBs' quality as well as an increase in average price compared to NBs (Hokelekli et al., 2017). We noted earlier in this study that PLBs can be found in different tiers from basic to premium and on many occasions at a price comparable to or higher than NBs. Walsh and Mitchell (2010) challenged the negative relationship between brand consciousness and intention to buy PLBs. Using survey data, the authors argued that there is no relationship between brand consciousness and intention to buy PLBs. Thus, being a brand conscious consumer may no longer be contradictory with buying PLBs. This finding could be attributed to the ongoing enhancement of branding related to PLBs, the different PLB quality tiers, the retailers' store and brand images, and the overall improvement of PLB quality. However, the authors also supported that brand awareness may have positive influence on purchase of PLBs in premium categories.

We expect HLBs to win a share of these customers when they are marketed as NBs and offered at a price comparable to NBs. These consumers are not expected to choose a PLB over an HLB. Thus, one can suggest that brand-conscious consumers may positively evaluate an HLB if the retailer's brand image is considered well known compared to the local retailer or the local NB.

2.7.3 Habitual Consumers

The "habitual consumer" as a concept has attracted attention from researchers in the field of consumer psychology. We define as habitual consumers those who have favorite brands and retail stores and are characterized by repeated and persistent purchases of the same brand (Kang et al., 2016; Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Wood &

Neal, 2009). A habitual consumer is brand loyal out of habit or other fidelity reasons, an action resulting in low brand switching. Understanding repeated consumer behavior is important for companies and brand managers both for the development and management of the brand itself and for financial reasons. Obviously, repeated purchases are associated with meaningful marketing outcomes such as increased market share as well as share of wallet.

Habits are developed when people act in the same manner, in a stable context. Habits interface with goals to guide behavior in a three-way framework provided by Wood and Runger (2016). According to this framework, goals influence habit formation by motivating people to repeat actions that lead to goal achievement. When habits are formed, then context cues automatically activate the habit representation in memory and as a result people act in the same manner. External factors may negatively influence or alter the whole process. In addition, the literature notes two important facts about habits. First, habits make relevant behaviors that serve the same goal to be less accessible in memory and, second, consumer repetition is not always habitual (Wood & Neal, 2009; Wood & Runger, 2016). For example, brand relationships or brand loyalty may serve as a mechanism or motive leading to repeated purchase and consumption. However, brand loyalty differs greatly from habit because the former might be expressed through multiple behaviors while the latter might not. For example, a brand of coffee-loyal consumer will most probably express their loyalty through buying the coffee for work and home and may also buy a branded t-shirt or a branded coffee mug. In contrast, a habitual consumer will consume the coffee as a response triggered by a specific cue or as part of their morning routine. Thus, variability in responses is not expected for the habitual consumer while for the brand-loyal consumer it is. Habits are not easily forgotten but they can break when someone blocks the mechanisms that trigger performance or by changing the cues in the performance context. For example, consider a consumer who's working opposite a coffee shop. The coffee shop may work as a cue and result in them buying coffee every morning. If that specific consumer moves to a new job then the absence of a nearby coffee shop may alter their habitual behavior. Despite the fact that habit and brand loyalty differ in their underlying mechanisms, both ultimately result in repeated purchase behavior, and for this reason, in this study the emphasis is placed on the outcome.

We expect consumers who either have past experience with the HLB parent retailer or tried it once and are satisfied with the product to repeat the purchase. If, for some reason, they are stimulated at a level where existing habits are broken to try the HLB, then they are potential candidates for repeating purchases and thus cause an increase in performance. Otherwise, we expect habitual consumers not to change their usual purchasing behavior in favor of another alternative towards achieving their goal. In fact, the last argument becomes stronger in grocery stores where past research revealed that most consumers do not compare products that are available in a category but instead seem to go straight to their usual product (Machin et al., 2020).

2.7.4 Confused by Over-Choice Consumers

This group of consumers is confused by the plethora of choices in both brands and stores. Indeed, grocery stores today offer a vast variety of products and brands to satisfy almost any specific need. “Confusion by over-choice” (CBO) consumers experience information overload due to the different choices available (Sproles & Sproles, 1990). They handle this over-choice with discomfort because instead of improving their decision-making process, it makes it more difficult and complex (Anic et al., 2014; Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Sproles & Sproles, 1990; Yasin, 2009). As a result, CBO consumers often do not make the decision on their own, or they convince themselves that all brands are the same and choose a product based on price. Typical CBO consumers are passive in their learning styles and the more they learn about products the harder it seems for them to choose (Anic et al., 2014; Sproles & Sproles, 1990).

In terms of demographics, previous studies have tried to conceptualize the profile of the CBO consumer. Yasin (2009), using a questionnaire with 280 postgraduate students in Turkey, concluded that women are slightly more CBO consumers than men. This argument is in line with a study by Bakewell and Mitchell (2004) who found men to be less CBO due to the fact that they are usually less involved in shopping compared with women. However, a study by Anic et al. (2014), using data collected by 450 consumers through telephone surveys in Croatia, presented contradictory findings claiming that no significant differences in CBO are found with respect to gender, age and income. On the other hand, the study supports

that CBO consumers are found to be low-educated and highly involved. These contradictory results may be explained due to the differences (cultural or other) between countries. Both Bakewell and Mitchell (2009) and Yasin (2009) used student samples, whereas Anic et al. (2014) used a sample from the general population with different backgrounds and education levels. As expected, students may change shopping style in a later life stage when needs and life status have changed.

HLB presence enhances information overload and choices and thus affects the way these customers feel and act. Thus, when an HLB is offered in many categories it adds complexity and might work as a barrier to its performance. This argument might be more salient in high-involvement categories or in high-involvement consumers in general because these consumers should be more interested in acquiring information regarding a new product and are thus more likely to become a CBO consumer (Anic et al., 2014). On the other hand, if the price of the HLB is competitive, then the CBO consumer may solve their discomfort due to information overload by choosing a product based on price — an action that works in favor of the HLB.

2.7.5 Quality Consciousness

This segment of consumers searches for the very best quality. Most of the time, they are not satisfied with “good enough products” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). They aim to acquire all the available information through systematic, active and analytical learning (Sproles & Sproles, 1990). Thus, shopping becomes careful, rational and detailed (Demirgunes & Ozsacmaci, 2017). Perfectionists place emphasis on technical perfection and extraordinary design and/or packaging (Macik, 2014).

Older studies associate high-quality conscious consumers with lower PLB share (Ailawadi et al., 2001; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Batra & Sinha, 2000; Dobson & Chakraborty, 2015). For most of the period, the traditional PLB was associated with and characterized by its lower price but also low level of technology and quality (Anselmsson et al., 2008). Based on the price–quality schema, consumers are expected to associate PLBs with poorer quality. However, over the last decade, PLB perceived quality has improved significantly. In fact, Daymon’s (2020) market report shows that 86% of consumers believe that PLB quality is just as good if not even better

than that of NB quality. Based on the aforementioned, we expect high-quality HLBs to be evaluated positively by this segment if a “reason-to-believe” (such as sophisticated packaging, design, parent retailer image, parent retailer size, product category, etc.) and appropriate information are provided to consumers.

2.7.6 Novelty Consciousness

Consumers scoring high in this category experience excitement and pleasure when seeking new, often innovative and fashionable things. Thus, variety is important for them because it can ensure fulfillment of their need to have the very latest styles (Lysonski & Durvasula, 2013). Variety seeking also pushes consumers who fall into this category to visit different stores and choose different brands. To attract this segment, retailers must be able to offer the necessary variety as well as new products. Furthermore, novelty consciousness is associated with product involvement. The relationship between novelty consciousness and product involvement in the food sector is both significant and positive (Anic et al., 2014). High-involved consumers are expected to be more interested in new products than low-involved consumers. Based on the aforementioned, we expect HLBs to contribute positively to variety-seeking especially in high-involvement categories, if the product sufficiently provides the necessary perceived quality.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

3.1.1 Introduction

The complexity of the entire research procedure encompasses not only data gathering but also how the researcher is associated with the topic through personal worldviews, perspectives and belief systems. Accordingly, a researcher's worldview profoundly contributes to the selection of research methodologies, data analysis techniques, and the interpretation methods of findings. Several research philosophies, namely interpretivism, positivism, realism, and critical theory are available for a researcher's adoption to investigate the reality and develop knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The current chapter outlines the employed research philosophy with pertinent perspectives and beliefs to guide the present academic study. Simultaneously, the interplay between the researcher and the research topic is examined in terms of the impact on data gathering and analysis approaches (Berger, 2015). Hence, the employed research methodology can be thoroughly delineated and enhance the reliability, validity, and coherence, thereby strengthening the understanding of research as a reflective endeavor.

Understanding the prevalent methodologies in existing research is also essential for placing this study within the larger academic discussion. In the field of marketing, the vast majority of research is predominantly quantitative (Petrescu & Lauer, 2017). Most of this research uses empirical modelling based on observed data, with the analytical approach most often relying on regression techniques and structural equation modelling (SEM) (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Riboldazzi et al., 2021; Tadajewski, 2014). The prevalence is potentially owing to earlier scholarly works, which have been conducted primarily by economists or researchers drawing on economic theories (Wilkie & Moore, 2003). The epistemological stance of positivism could also be another contributing factor to the predominance of quantitative methodologies. Positivism highly emphasizes knowledge creation via measurable and observable phenomena to preserve high degrees of objectivity in the pursuit of universal laws and truths (Hunt, 1991; Petrescu & Lauer, 2017).

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: first, we discuss the key philosophical paradigms relevant to this study; next, we explore the epistemological and ontological assumptions and finally, we examine the implications of these philosophical foundations on the research design and methodology.

3.1.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm influences scientific knowledge development by offering a holistic worldview to conceptualize reality, develop pertinent research questions, and interpret findings. In other words, a research paradigm shapes how researchers formulate research questions and interpret data (Dawadi et al., 2021). Building on this, the idea of a paradigm shift denotes that thorough transformations in the underpinning theoretical models guiding academic research drive non-linear progression of science rather than a simple accumulation of knowledge or facts (Kuhn, 1962; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Relevant scientific enquiries under an overarching paradigm share common propositions or metaphysics to determine and formulate research questions, select the most suitable data gathering approach and data analysis technique, and define the criteria for assessing the validity of data interpretations (Cuba & Lincoln, 1994; Deshpande, 1983; Rod, 2009). Thus, a research paradigm serves as a collective framework, which allows the practice of “normal science”, a term introduced by Thomas Kuhn in 1962, within accepted areas. Meanwhile, anomalies, or unanticipated and inexplicable observations and results within the existing research paradigm, are frequently neglected or rationalized. The action seeks to preserve the continuity of the paradigm until an alternative and substituting version, without being necessarily more advanced or sophisticated, emerges from a substantial synthesis of various anomalies (Gokhale, 2007). Anomalies can contribute to positive and productive outcomes by fostering a significant paradigm shift to improve overall research philosophy (Tadajewski, 2014).

Four primary interrelated dimensions, Ontology, Epistemology, Theoretical Perspective, and Methodology exist in a research paradigm. Specifically, the characteristics of a specific reality and relevant comprehension in guiding the development of valid knowledge within a specific area are defined as *Ontology* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The nature of specific knowledge and the interaction between the researcher and the topic are denoted as *Epistemology*, which shapes the knowledge

acquisition method (Crotty, 1998; Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). A *Theoretical Perspective* emerges from ontological and epistemological suppositions and functions as a philosophical stance in determining a research methodology, research questions, and data interpretation (Crotty, 1998). Subsequently, a *Methodology* encapsulates relevant processes, strategies, and techniques applied to data gathering and analysis based on the adopted theoretical perspective and epistemological stance (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A research paradigm pertinent to branding research of the marketing discipline plays an essential role throughout the research procedure, which encompasses denoting brand characteristics and consumer behavior to determining the optimal data gathering strategy and analysis technique. Positivism has constantly been applied to marketing research owing to the priority on quantitative approaches, numerical data, and finding reliability and validity to ensure high generalizability (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Petrescu & Lauer, 2017). The two most popular paradigms, namely positivism and interpretivism, will be outlined in the following sub-sections (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). The discussion will establish a robust conceptual foundation for adopting the philosophical stance employed in the present study.

3.1.3 Positivism

Positivism - Ontology

Positivism posits an objective, external, and independent, of human perception, reality (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), in which the world is orderly, structured, and governed by universal laws that can be uncovered by conducting systematic investigations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Thyer, 2008). Positivists contend that natural and social events emerge independently from human perceptions, which enables objective observations and measurements to pinpoint the actual characteristics and underlying laws (Cohen et al., 2002; Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021; Park et al., 2020).

Positivism – Epistemology

Positivism underscores that a robust knowledge foundation is derived from empirical evidence and sensory experience (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Knowledge acquisition is performed via continuous observation, experimentation, and reasoning. Specifically, a researcher plays the role of an objective observer to acquire knowledge about the world without the influences of personal biases and subjective interpretations (Creswell, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, positivism advocates measurable and observable data to formulate predictive and generalizable conceptual models to thoroughly explain behavioral patterns discerned in both natural and social events without being impacted by personal beliefs or values (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Positivism – Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of positivism portrays a deterministic philosophy that causes determine eventual outcomes or impact (Park et al., 2020). The primary goal is to conduct systematic investigations to reveal universal laws regulating both natural and social events (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The fundamentals of the positivist theoretical perspective originated from early philosophers and empiricists, including Aristotle, Auguste Comte, and Francis Bacon (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Positivism – Methodology

A positivist methodology prioritizes scientific approaches conventionally employed in natural and social sciences. Particularly, the nomothetic methodology functions to pinpoint general laws governing pertinent occurrences through large-scale, structured, and standardized quantitative data gathering and analysis processes (Dawadi et al., 2021; Hasan, 2016). Hypothesis formulation is one of the integral procedures based on the current literature or theoretical frameworks (Park et al., 2020). Hypothesis testing involves systematic observations, controlled experiments, and other quantitative techniques to uncover and corroborate any causation (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Therefore, the methodology ensures sufficient research rigor, replicability, and objective measurement of the defined variables by minimizing potential bias to generate generalizable results that can predict future outcomes (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Hasan, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013).

3.1.4 Interpretivism

Interpretivism - Ontology

A subjective reality not predetermined but instead co-created via continuous social interactions and shared meanings is the primary postulation of interpretivism (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Ontologically, the postulation contradicts the positivist proposition by acknowledging the presence of multiple realities. Each reality is shaped by specific settings, personal experiences, and social interactions. In addition, the diversity of personal experiences is recognized and grasping the social world necessitates different approaches relative to those of the natural world (Lee, 1991).

Interpretivism – Epistemology

Knowledge subjectivity and variations respective to a particular setting, with multiple interpretations and meanings attributed to personal experiences, are the primary emphasis of interpretivism (Klein & Myers, 1999; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Epistemologically, the paradigm acknowledges how a researcher's background, beliefs, and values can subjectively impact the research process. Knowledge co-development also occurs between the researcher and respondents without knowledge being uncovered as an external truth (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Interpretivism – Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective highlights the intricacy of social reality that cannot be thoroughly grasped via objective observations and measurements. Particularly, subjective experiences and meanings attributed by individuals or groups are vital to understanding social events (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivism prioritizes understanding the specific and unique settings of social phenomena rather than discovering universal laws through large-scale investigations (Schwandt, 1994).

Interpretivism – Methodology

Qualitative techniques, especially case studies, in-depth interviews, and observation, are the primary interpretivist methods to explore the complexities of social events and capture the subjective meanings attributed to personal experiences (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The paradigm concentrates on the idiographic approach and recognizes the significance and uniqueness of a specific context instead of applying nomothetic techniques to obtain results generalizable to different populations. The methodology can deepen the knowledge about a particular social phenomenon (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

3.1.5 Research Methods

Positivist Research Methods

Quantitative techniques are the primary positivist methodology to examine defined constructs, develop hypotheses, and provide generalizable outcomes. Specifically, marketing research adopting the paradigm has continuously formulated and administered surveys for data collection from a large sample size and quantification of subjective attitudes, values, and behaviors, including customer satisfaction. The data gathered from diverse population segments can be aggregated and quantified to generalize the findings to a wider population. Nonetheless, several academics, including Shelby Hunt, argue that “equating positivism with quantitative methods is ahistorical” and that “a positivist is not committed to any particular research design” (p. 37) (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Hunt, 1991; Weber, 2004).

Interpretivist Research Methods

Utilizing qualitative techniques to investigate social phenomena in particular settings and understanding the subjective meanings and personal experiences is the primary focus of interpretivism (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). The paradigm is integral to determining how customers interpret and attribute subjective meaning to personal interactions with specific brands and products. In-depth interviews and focus group

discussions are prevalent approaches employed to gather enriched and insightful findings. For example, an in-depth interview can assist in understanding customers' perceptions of a luxury brand and associated symbolic meanings (Thompson et al., 1989). Additionally, ethnography can be implemented to observe specific behaviors and interactions in natural contexts, such as product usage in real-life settings (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). Case studies can also allow the detailed evaluation of social events in a specific cultural or market setting to discover the distinctive contributing factors to behavioral patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.1.6 Critique of Positivism and Interpretivism in Marketing

Criticisms against the positivist paradigm primarily revolve around the specific concentration on objective observations and assessments of a specific context. The paradigm presumes that evaluations of any social phenomena, especially in marketing research and social sciences, can be conducted with similar accuracy relative to natural sciences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Pulla & Carter, 2018; Smith, 1983). Specifically, complex social interactions and behaviors are reduced and quantified through large-scale surveys or experiments. The approach potentially dismisses the crucial nuances of underlying emotions, personal experiences, motives, and cultural contexts that influence purchase intentions and behaviors (Bryman, 2006; Deshpande, 1983; Junjie & Yingxin, 2022; Sofaer, 1999). The outcomes may be superficial without in-depth insights into the complexities of human behaviors across diverse settings, despite offering empirical and robust results.

Conversely, interpretivism is criticized for the high concentration on subjectivity without generalizable outcomes despite offering enriched insights into social events by uncovering specific meanings ascribed to personal experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Pulla & Carter, 2018). An interpretivist method in marketing can be highly context-specific without outcomes valid and generalizable to wider populations, although a deeper comprehension of customer behaviors within a specific group can be gained via in-depth interviews or ethnography (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). Thus, the applicability of the findings to different customer segments or markets and wider marketing strategies is restrained. A higher level of the researcher's engagement may inadvertently generate personal bias through personal beliefs and values, especially during data interpretation.

3.1.7 Philosophical Approach of the Study

The current study is informed by a post-positivist orientation, which balances both positivist and interpretivist approaches, and adopts a mixed-methods compatible philosophical stance by using quantitative and qualitative approaches in each stage that is deemed to be more appropriate for approaching the research problem. Thus, rather than, for example, assuming that strict positivism alone can accommodate all phases of the research, we propose that sequential exploratory design can help first understand the research problem and how consumers feel about the HLB and then, based on this information, inform and refine the questionnaire for the second, quantitative stage. This approach is more appropriate and coherent for the research problem because the initial exploration stage can help us understand the problem and then the second quantitative stage can help us provide measurable and generalizable findings. Post-positivism does not disapprove of the quantitative scientific method of positivism, but it emphasizes that better understanding of any research can come from multiple methods and dimensions (Panhwar, 2017).

Thus, ontologically, for this study we assume that there is a phenomenon that has an external reality that we need to discover and understand, but at the same time we propose that this reality could be better approached by different multiple forms of evidence and methods rather than just a single method alone. Epistemologically, in this study we acknowledge that the research problem can first be refined through a discussion with a number of consumers and then test it empirically through a structured questionnaire.

Thus, effectively utilizing the advantages of both positivism and interpretivism can offer a more holistic and robust comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, mixed methods, which incorporate both qualitative and quantitative techniques, are adopted (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This is done not only to combine different techniques and methods but because the research problem and the nature of it requires methodological complementarity.

It is worth mentioning here that mixed-methods designs are frequently associated with pragmatism, a paradigm that values both objective and subjective knowledge to meet research objectives (Dawadi et al., 2021; Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). However, mixed methods are not restricted to pragmatism alone; they can also

be justified within a post-positivist framework when the qualitative stage is used to refine the quantitative stage (Clark, 1998; Hammersley, 2019).

The research process begins with a qualitative phase to explore and pinpoint key constructs and develop hypotheses that will later be tested quantitatively. More specifically, we start with a qualitative stage where we are trying to explore and understand how participants feel about the HLB, identify its various dimensions, and then inform and build the questionnaire for the subsequent quantitative/survey stage. A focus group discussion can aid in uncovering perceptions related to PLBs in foreign markets, identifying pertinent constructs, and informing hypothesis formulation and testing in the quantitative stage. Qualitative results can also assist in formulating or improving a conceptual model before being empirically evaluated quantitatively.

The quantitative stage encompasses a large-scale survey for hypothesis testing and variable measurement among a large group of respondents, which ensures that the study outcomes can be generalized to various settings and markets. The second stage of this approach aligns with the post-positivist concern for empirical assessment, evidence of patterns and generalization. When used together, these stages generate different but complementary forms of knowledge — the qualitative stage to explore and understand the problem and the quantitative stage to provide broader generalizable evidence.

Thus, mixed methods offer a robust framework by leveraging the strengths of both positivism and interpretivism, consistent with relevant ontological and epistemological assumptions. The study outcomes are empirically robust and sensitive to the complexities of a specific setting, which can produce actionable insights, both theoretically robust and practically relevant, for retailers seeking to expand their market reach through HLBs (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

3.2 Research Design

The context of our investigation is the FMCG sector in Cyprus, and more specifically the supermarket/grocery chains, from the consumers' perspective. The following reasons defend this choice.

Cyprus is a developed European island country in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea (IMF, 2011). Cyprus was under the UK's administration for 82 years and since its independence, in 1960, the republic has been a member of the Commonwealth.

Today, more than 270,000 Cypriots live in the UK and around 30,000 Britons live in Cyprus (https://cyprusinuk.com/cyprus-uk-relations/). In addition, there are two British-administered areas called Sovereign Base Areas on the island providing services to the British armed forces with a population of approximately 18,195, of whom 7,195 are British citizens (https://commonwealthchamber.com/associated-territories/sovereign-base-areas-of-akrotiri-and-dhekelia-on-cyprus/). On 1 May 2004, Cyprus joined the European Union (EU) and almost 4 years later the Eurozone.

As a small, isolated nation with almost 1 million citizens, much of its supplies are dependent on imports, with the major import partners being Greece and the UK as well as other European countries such as Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and France (World Integrated Trade Solutions, 2020). Thus, countries like Cyprus (with free trade among European countries and close trading relations with countries outside the EU, such as the UK) are easy targets for major foreign supermarket chains aspiring to expand overseas through their PLBs. The previous argument becomes stronger for retailers originating from countries with less cultural and/or geographical distance such as Greece and the UK (due to the reasons described earlier). Cultural and geographical proximity reduces uncertainty and search costs of foreign entry (Gripsrud & Benito, 2005; Hill et al., 1990). In addition, we chose Cyprus for our investigation because some of the biggest local supermarket chains are selling exclusively foreign retailers' PLBs in the Cypriot market. For example, Alphamega, the biggest local grocery retailer, was selling Tesco's PLBs during the first stage of our research (Qualitative Stage) but later replaced them with Casino's PLBs due to Brexit. At present, Alphamega offers the French Casino and Greek AB Vassilopoulos PLBs, while Papantoniou, another major local retailer, sells Britain's Sainsbury's PLBs. Lastly, ties between mentioned countries allow us to examine the augmented branding perspective or perceived branding (in overseas markets) in relation to the COO. Hence, Cyprus characteristics are ideal for the purpose of this research as a reference country to investigate further strategies such as the HLB.

Moving to the research design, as mentioned earlier, a mixed-methods approach seems to be suitable for our investigation. Mixed methods are used when the researcher is integrating qualitative and quantitative data or when combining quantitative and qualitative approaches within research (Creswell & Zhang, 2009). This study will use an adapted form of the Sequential Exploratory Design as proposed

by Creswell and Zhang (2009). Sequential procedures use findings from one method to elaborate or expand on findings of the second method (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Given the lack of literature, insight and empirical studies for the HLB, we adopt this method in order to first gain a better understanding of the research problem and then form the hypotheses and test them in large-scale quantitative research to identify whether the qualitative themes can be generalized to a sample of a population.

Research will begin by examining pertinent literature on the concepts of NB and PLB to understand how consumers form perceptions and identify the drivers or variables that affect attitudes towards buying these brands. Then, a qualitative stage will follow to gain a deep understanding on how these variables might be relevant to the HLB and to what extent, as well as to identify potential variables that were not found in the literature review. Based on these steps, we will form hypotheses and then test them in large-scale quantitative research. The sequential exploratory design was selected not only to identify the cues of HLB evaluation but also to support the conceptualization and the empirical examination of the HLB as a distinct branding construct.

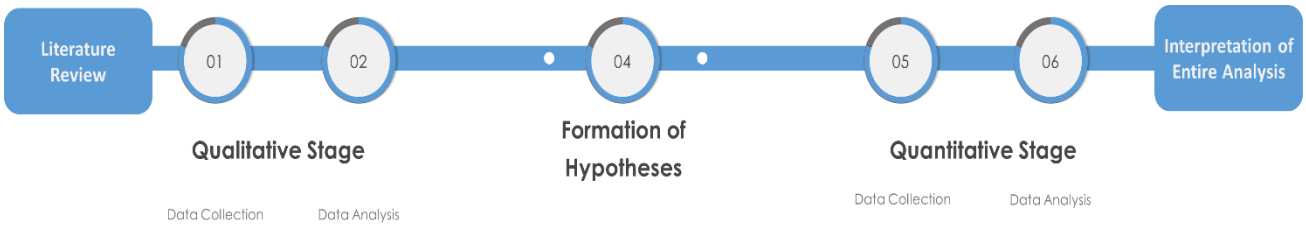


Figure 1 Adapted from Sequential Exploratory Design (Creswell & Zhang, 2009)

3.2.1 Ethics

Before data collection, ethical approval from the University of Strathclyde was received for both the qualitative focus groups and the quantitative questionnaire. The procedures followed for both stages were designed in order for participants to fully understand the purpose of this research, the fact that their participation is voluntary, and that their involvement and information shared were protected through appropriate confidentiality-preserving and data-handling procedures.

More specifically, for the qualitative stage all participants were informed regarding the purpose of the focus groups before the discussion. They were told that

the discussion was around PLBs and the factors that influence their purchasing behavior. Additionally, before recording began, it was made clear to all the confidential nature of the discussion and the way we would process their data. It was noted that their names would not be disclosed in order to prevent identification. Lastly, participants were given time to ask any questions before discussion started and they were asked to confirm they understood the participant information provided to them.

Regarding the quantitative stage, the questionnaire included an introductory section explaining the purpose of this study and it informed them that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop any time. All information is strictly confidential, and we did not ask for their names. Additionally, a consent section was also included in the questionnaire confirming that participants had read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

Additional information and details regarding the ethical procedures followed in this study are presented in the methodology sections of the qualitative and quantitative stages.

Chapter 4. Qualitative Stage

4.1 Design of the Qualitative Stage

The qualitative stage was conducted in the form of focus groups. We choose this qualitative method approach because it allows us to collect data on our topic of interest, through a structured discussion in a small group of people, in a monitored environment. The benefits of this approach lie in the name: group. Discussion and interaction among a group of people with different experiences and characteristics are ideal for investigating, identifying and analyzing complex behaviors and motivations (such as purchase intention and attitudes) and providing insights into the sources of these behaviors, what has been termed as “the group effect” (Morgan, 1996). Thus, the outcome of a focus group discussion will not be the same with the sum of separate interviews with the same participants, because interaction between the participants is what guides the outcome. In addition, the ability to observe this interaction, and more precisely the reasoning behind the interviewees’ agreements, disagreements and in general how views are constructed, helps to more deeply understand the topic of interest (Morgan, 1996; Wibeck et al., 2007). On the other hand, participants might feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in front of a group of people. Moreover, on some occasions a specific participant might guide the discussion towards a specific route. However, since our topic is a general consumer behavior topic, we believe that the advantages surpass the disadvantages of this method.

4.2 Participant Selection Criteria and Data Collection

Within the given frame of reference, we collected data from two focus groups. The number of the focus groups was firstly determined under the principles of the “theoretical saturation” concept as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and secondly on the range of the subgroups that we are interested in. Theoretical saturation is defined as the point where no additional information or data are found for any additional sampling on behalf of the researcher (Guest et al., 2016; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). However, since the actual theoretical saturation point can be found only at the end of the process, many researchers follow the general rule of 2–5 focus groups for a particular audience (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011; Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Since the number of focus groups is associated with cost and time constraints and because funders often require the number of focus groups to be decided pre-study, researchers tried to identify the optimum number of samplings for each qualitative method to balance cost, time and quality of the results (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011).

A thematic analysis of 40 focus groups by Guest et al. (2016) concluded that 2–3 focus groups are likely to capture at least 80% of themes on a topic, while almost double that number are likely to offer only an additional 10% of themes. Another consideration is the number of subgroups we are interested in (Conradson, 2013). For example, if we are examining a new project of transforming a national park for recreational use, we might want to observe the opinion of the park's various users such as walkers and mountain-bikers. Thus, based on the theoretical saturation concept, at least 2–3 focus groups are needed for each subgroup (resulting in a total number of 4–6 focus groups for the given example). In our case, since the whole population universally is purchasing products from the major grocery stores, we conclude that for practical and efficiency reasons two focus groups are sufficient to capture and identify the key themes. The previous argument is strengthened by the fact that the qualitative stage is used as part of a mixed-methods approach to develop or enhance the questionnaire for the quantitative part of the study. When this approach is used, then smaller numbers of focus groups are understandable and sufficient (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011).

Each focus group consisted of eight participants meeting the following eligibility criteria: Mixed gender, with the preference of having more females as the majority is considered to be the decision-makers of grocery shopping in their households (Thrassou et al., 2008), aged 24-61 years old, representing different life stages (single, couple with children, young family, mid-old family), and, lastly, Cypriot national, with all participants being current residents from all Cypriot regions, of A, B, C1 & C2 Socio Economic Class.

Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, and none of them worked in areas related to marketing, branding or the grocery retail sector (Emerson, 2015; Simkus, 2022). More specifically, participants were initially approached through the researcher's own professional and personal network. Additional participants were recruited through referrals from those initially

contacted. Since the main objective of the qualitative phase was to gain insights into consumers' perceptions of the HLB rather than statistical representativeness, this strategy was considered appropriate for this exploratory phase (Simkus, 2022). As with most qualitative studies employing non-probability sampling, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically generalizable to the wider population, and any transferability to similar settings should take into account the detailed description of the research context, participant characteristics and analytical procedures that were followed in this research (Nowell et al., 2017).

Group A consisted of ages 35-61 years, both males and females who are married with children. Group B consisted of single, coupled, or married with or without children, both males and females within the age limit of 29-38. All respondents have high-skill jobs (i.e. teacher, air traffic controller, IT, back-office executive and manager). Most of them are married or cohabitating with a partner and a few are single. The groups were formed so as to enhance interaction and allow sufficient time for all participants to contribute equally. The number of eight participants eliminates the risk of small groups offering limited discussion and at the same time guards against chaotic and difficult management of large groups (Catterall & Maclaren, 2006; Gill et al., 2008). For the in-group formation, we separated participants in a way that ensured homogeneity among the different groups in terms of ages, children and income because participants are more likely to disclose information when they are similar in key demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (Catterall & Maclaren, 2006). Lastly, both groups were made up of complete strangers, based on the premise that greater data are generated among strangers (Catterall & Maclaren, 2006).

Table 3 Summary of the participants in the study

A/A	Group No.	Gender	Age	Kids	Occupation	City
1	A	F	43	Yes	Account manager	Nicosia
2	A	M	61	Yes	Ex Bank of Cyprus Manager	Larnaca
3	A	M	39	Yes	Sales representative	Larnaca
4	A	F	55	Yes	Ex Laiki Bank Staff	Limassol
5	A	F	39	Yes	Administration	Limassol
6	A	F	45	Yes	Teacher	Paphos
7	A	M	37	Yes	IT	Larnaca
8	A	F	35	Yes	Auditor	Nicosia
9	B	F	34	Yes	Small business owner	Larnaca
10	B	F	34	No	Corporate administrator	Larnaca

11	B	M	36	No	Air traffic controller	Paphos
12	B	F	38	Yes	Jewelry technician	Larnaca
13	B	F	30	No	Business development officer	Limassol
14	B	F	29	No	Secretary	Ammochostos
15	B	F	33	No	Auditor	Limassol
16	B	M	32	Yes	Sales administrator	Larnaca

4.3 Focus Group Design

Focus groups ran for between 90 and 120 minutes, and a guide was employed to help the facilitator organize the discussion. The focus group discussion guide consisted of eight parts (Appendix 2).

After providing a short description for the purpose of the discussion, participants were invited to introduce themselves, discuss their personal goals and/or life vision, their daily routine, their favorite habits and, lastly, we asked them to name three brands. These data were not used for further analysis as this part is incorporated as an ice-breaker to make participants feel comfortable and welcomed. Then, the facilitator introduced the topic of PLBs and invited participants to describe in their own words what a PLB is, as well as the reasons for choosing them over NBs. In the following part the facilitator introduced the concept of HLB and, by using some exercises (analogies and correlation), we tried to conceptualize the construct and find reasons for preference over NB and PLB. Over the next parts, the facilitator deepened the discussion further to understand where participants place each product in terms of quality, to understand weaknesses and strengths, and identify whether specific variables, drawn from the literature, such as product category, brand name of the local retailer, COO, price and others could potentially explain overall acceptance and attitude towards these brands. As a result, through this discussion we intended to help participants focus on the topic and discuss how they feel, how they act and what determines their behavior with such brands. Due to the Covid-19 safety protocols that were applied in Cyprus at the time of the data collection, all groups took place online using the Zoom platform.

Each focus group discussion was recorded, after first assuring participants on issues related to confidentiality, data processing and scope of the investigation. Furthermore, all participants confirmed that they understood the provided participant

information sheet and consented to being audio- and video-recorded as part of the process.

4.4 Focus Group Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis and, more specifically, following the analytical principles as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). As already mentioned, both focus groups were video-recorded and audio was transcribed and repeatedly reviewed to ensure familiarity with the data. Analysis was guided by the research objectives, thus being consistent with the sequential exploratory design but at the same time we remained open to identifying and discussing additional concepts or relationships emerging from the participants' discussions that could further enhance our understanding of the topic. Initial codes were generated by identifying patterns across both focus groups, and then we compared them and refined and organized them into broader themes that captured the way consumers perceive and approach the HLB. To formulate a theme, we did not only value its prevalence in the discussion or whether the majority of people support it, but also whether it captured something important in relation to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

PLB & NB: Perception, Credibility and Choice Drivers

Most of the participants were not aware of the exact definitions or under which categorization specific brands fit in. In fact, some respondents confused the term NB with local products as the word "national" was associated with domestic/local production. However, participants had a clearer view of what PLB might stand for (private producer that sells its products in its stores) compared to NB.

Right after the exact definition was provided, the majority specified that the ideal distinction of their purchasing habits between NB and PLB depends on product category (i.e. consumables/food vs disposables). More specifically, respondents prefer NB (for food, drinks or personal hygiene categories); however, they might switch brands (from NB to PLB) for disposables such as foil paper or toilet paper based on the price difference. Furthermore, they are willing to sacrifice quality for mentioned categories to have economic benefit since the usage would have been the same. In terms of the intrinsic characteristics of the products, only a few respondents mentioned

that they would consciously read what ingredients are included in a product to distinguish possible differences between an NB and PLB before they purchase a specific product.

Respondents overall evaluate NBs as being higher-quality products compared to PLBs. However, this distinction does not prevent them from buying PLBs on certain occasions. For example, product category is one driver that leads consumers towards a PLB or NB. All the above are in line with existing literature since the majority prefer NBs over PLBs, with the primary motivation for this choice being extrinsic characteristics such as the brand rather than the ingredients of a product, for example (Rita et al., 2021).

Continuing with the discussion, we asked participants to specify the strengths and weaknesses of each brand. For NBs, the majority argue that the seller is long-standing, sells its products to a broader audience and is specialized in specific categories. Thus, these brands are well established in the market (on some occasions in the international market as well) and as a result they must be doing something right. One male, 34 years old without children, noted: "*I give particular importance to a foreign larger company since it has much more resources in doing research and develop expertise in what goes into their products and (because they are exporting) they give more importance to their labelling.*" In addition, well-known manufacturers can guarantee the quality of the product. One female, 55 years old with children, mentioned: "*I prefer NB because in a way I know the manufacturing origin. For example, I know that Christis Halloumi is strictly produced from its high-standards factories, whereas in the case of Alphamega Halloumi, I don't know who produces it.*" Thus, trust is based on quality and NB manufacturers are recognized as quality-oriented.

During this part of the discussion, we found participants to justify and associate quality with resources. NB manufacturers are believed to possess many more resources as well as R&D capabilities that let them create superior, high-quality products.

Resources and capabilities are central constructs of resource-based theory, a theory used to explain and predict the competitive advantage and performance of a firm (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). Resources can be tangible or intangible (such as brand

equity and customer service). When it comes to foreign NBs, market share is driven by their superior core advantages, such as proven strategies in building brands and leveraging brand assets as well as experiences in areas such as promotions, advertising, customer and product development (Gao et al., 2006).

On the other hand, PLBs are value-for-money products that are found in multiple diverse categories. Participants believe that production is driven by demand since the manufacturer has access to the POS data and generates products that are in high demand. These products are offered at competitive/low prices that almost everyone can afford. Thus, trust is built due to better prices with the recognition of relative lower quality due to lacking uniqueness.

Most respondents agree on the primary drivers for choosing between PLBs and NBs. COO, price, product category, product brand and quality are the most mentioned drivers among participants. However, in terms of product category, what is interesting is that for some respondents the presence of PLBs in different categories (and often irrelevant) is a reason not to choose the product because it signals lower expertise in the category. One male, 39 years old with children, argued: "*With other criteria I buy rice wafers and with other criteria I choose moisturizing cream! I would definitely choose between different brands. I am not convinced that someone who makes good rice wafers or cereals will have correspondingly good face creams. The categories are not related!*"

While category brand extension strategy (i.e. entering a different product category from the one that the brand currently serves) is common in branding, it seems that for PLBs this is considered a weakness. This could be explained by the fact that the brand architecture strategy of certain PLBs (building brand awareness and clarifying brand meaning) might not be as advanced and detailed as that of major NBs. Lack of investment in branding techniques (such as brand associations) and emphasis on price reduction or promotion may decrease brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000). Consequently, the potential of the brand and major strategic moves such as entering a different category might not be well understood by and justifiable to the customers. The secondary drivers for choosing among these two brands are found to be brand competitiveness, advertising, branding strategy, product availability, word-of-mouth, brand specialization and packaging design.

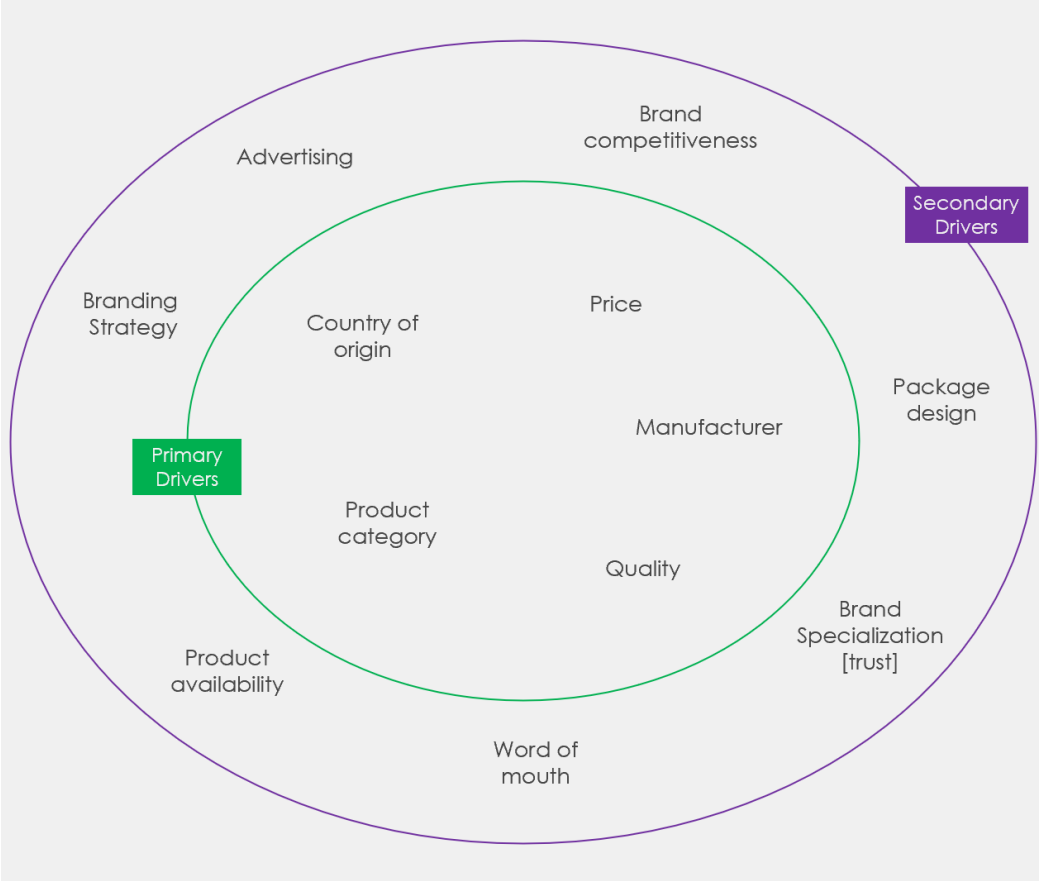


Figure 2 Choice drivers for PLB & NB

HLB: Perception, Credibility and Choice Drivers

We asked participants to guess what an HLB might be and a few respondents from the second group predicted that it is a strategy where "a retailer sells products from another (possibly bigger) retailer." Then, after providing the working definition of an HLB, we invited participants to express their spontaneous feelings about these products. Older-age participants (especially from Group A) seemed more hesitant and reluctant on trying HLBs over PLBs and/or NBs compared to younger-age respondents (from Group B). One male, 61 years old with children, said: "*Having learned from a young age with Pepsi, I wouldn't be tempted by an HLB cola to try. I prefer the original recipe!*" However, there were some exceptions from Group A with respondents who have visited the UK and had tried Tesco products and liked them. The younger group seemed to be less scared to try something new, even if the outcome of their decision might not be ideal. They are willing to move forward from "traditional" providers if they identify some progress or innovation. On the other hand, the older group was uncertain of the unknown and showed unwillingness to change to something new whereas the

younger group was willing to investigate the unknown. Consequently, in general, younger consumers tend to behave innovatively with frequent changes of brands, whereas older consumers tend to remain attached to their known brands (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010).

When it comes to reasons for purchasing, we identify key differences between PLBs and HLBs. Interestingly, during the discussion it was clear that while the HLB is a PLB in the home country (and as a result a value-for-money product), when it becomes an HLB in a foreign country its overall evaluation is higher than for a local PLB. The explanation for this perception deviation is the ability of the HLB manufacturer to break the local barrier, export its products and internationalize. As a result, the majority of respondents trust foreign sellers/brands more than local ones, but not when local ones are NBs. One male, 34 years old, noted: "*I give particular weight to a foreign larger brand since it has much more resources to research and to develop know-how.*"

However, the above argument is altered when it comes to specific product categories such as traditional products. One female, 30 years old without children, said: "*I would rather get fish & chips or Shepperd's pie from Tesco brand than Alphamega since some products are specialized in certain countries. Likewise, if I had to choose between Alphamega halloumi cheese or Tesco halloumi cheese, I would choose Halloumi cheese from Alphamega. The product definitely plays a role depending on the country of origin, especially if it is from a traditional category.*" Many countries have become known for having expertise in specific categories (such as Italy for fashion and Germany for cars). Historically, brands leveraged this reputation by associating their brands with certain countries in order to create strong and unique points-of-difference associations (Keller, 2013). We observe this strategy to be similarly applied for HLB products for country-associated categories and consumers to prefer them over local products (or the opposite) based on the COO.

HLB: Analogies

The last part of the discussion consisted of short exercises that helped participants interact with each other and co-construct knowledge concerning the concept of HLBs. To do that, we used the projective techniques of analogies and metaphors. Projective techniques are powerful tools in focus groups for anchoring new

knowledge and placing the new concept (Wibeck et al., 2007). Metaphors and analogies explain new or complex concepts by using a familiar subject.

We invited participants to associate a car brand and a city with each brand strategy. Most of the participant proposed that an NB would be a Mercedes-Benz and some others mentioned Rolls-Royce. One male, 42 years old with children, said for the NB: "*NB would be a Rolls-Royce, in the sense that it makes a car engine but also an airplane engine! Reliable and expensive.*" The PLB is like a Datsun, Toyota or Mazda and the HLB a Range Rover, Opel, Renault or Vauxhall. By analyzing these analogies, we conclude that the NB is placed higher in consumers' perception and associated as a luxury, European, expensive car. In terms of the PLB, participants associate it with affordable, Japanese car brands, thus it is perceived as a cheap, undifferentiated alternative compared to the NB. The HLB, on the other hand, is associated with both middle-class or expensive European car manufacturers. For example, one female, 39 years old with children, mentioned: "*HLB would be a Range Rover, something nice and solid.*"

Analogies were clearer when asked to associate each brand strategy with a city. The NB is associated with New York and Athens, two major cosmopolitan and multicultural cities that locals would love to visit to have fun and experience new things. It is worth mentioning that Greece (and more specifically Athens) is the top destination for Cypriots, with 17.8% of total travelers from Cyprus visiting Greece (Eurostat, n.d.). The HLB on the other hand is associated with London and Brussels. London has always been considered as the financial capital of Europe (The Global City, 2022) and Brussels is the capital of the EU where numerous European and international organizations have a seat. Lastly, the PLB is associated with smaller cities such as Nicosia, Larnaca and Thessaloniki. One female, 34 years old without children, said: "*NB would be New York because of the huge appeal it has, HLBs would be London and by the same logic I would put PLBs as far as Nicosia. Yes, they are recognizable, but they are not the size of NBs*."

Lastly, we asked participants to place in a triangle each brand starting from the less ideal brand at the very bottom and the most ideal at the very top. Respondents among and between the groups placed for their own reasons PLB in all scales of idealization, but the majority placed them at the very bottom. It was the only brand that

was placed in all scales. Separately, respondents placed HLB as either less ideal or the least ideal, whereas NB was placed by the vast majority as the most ideal and by very few as the least ideal. Throughout the discussions, Group A seemed to be more eager to purchase a PLB over an HLB; however, after the long brainstorming and by the time the discussion reached the idealization part, the group seemingly changed its mind as they placed HLB as more ideal than PLB. The vast majority of Group B agreed that HLBs are more premium than PLBs as foreign producers that come from bigger markets than the Cypriot one, do more research on their products and seemingly have better quality since they sell to a more diverse audience. NB are the brands that do not seem to lose worth or trust in the eyes of consumers. Their long-time establishment and specialization of production placed them as the most ideal brand to buy from.

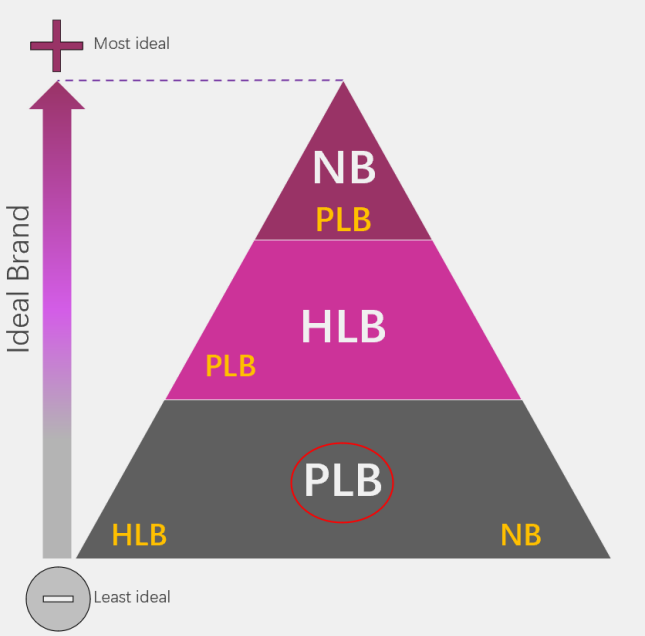


Figure 3 Brand Idealization – Ideal Preference Order

During the discussion we identified that the power of the local element and CE may affect HLBs' overall acceptance and performance. One male, 32 years old with children, said: "*I wouldn't buy HLB for ethical reasons — to support the local market*", while one male, 39 years old with children, mentioned: "*For me, because the local product (PLB & local NB) is the best, I would put it [the local product] as the most ideal.*"

Product standardization or adaptation is one of the most researched issues in exporting literature. While many researchers argue that, due to the integration of the

world economies and the extended use of the internet for almost all ages, there is no need for adaptation in host countries, yet there is a contemporary trend claiming that cultural differences or certain categories justify adaptation at least for certain elements of the product (Grosse et al., 2013; Rao-Nicholson & Khan, 2017). Thus, we identify the lack of local adaptation as a potential weakness of the HLB product.

Another variable potentially affecting performance of HLBs that was identified during the discussion is country affiliation and consumer animosity. We found consumers to be more willing to try products coming from the UK or Greece compared to Turkey, for example. One male, 36 years old without children, said: "*I would never buy a product coming from Turkey, I don't care if it is the best product in the market. Until there is a solution in the Cypriot problem, I am not buying any products from Turkey.*" As a result, if the HLB originates from a country with negative national image or targets high-animosity consumers, then the communication strategy should separate the product from its COO to enhance acceptance and performance (Huang et al., 2010).

4.4.1 Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Findings

Trustworthiness of the qualitative research findings was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as proposed by Ahmed (2024), Anney (2014) and Nowell et al. (2017). Credibility criteria establish whether or not the research findings represent credible information drawn from the participants' own data and are interpreted in a way that projects their original views, and transferability concerns the degree to which the research findings can be used in alternative situations. Dependability concerns the stability of the research findings over time and, lastly, confirmability refers to the degree to which the research findings could be confirmed by other researchers (Ahmed, 2024; Anney, 2014). Credibility was enhanced through the video-recording and transcription of all discussions, the systematic application of thematic analysis and the independent review of the preliminary results by two PhD students. Transferability was enhanced by providing a detailed description of the research setting, the characteristics of the participants (such as age, occupation, gender, parental status and area of residence), recruitment strategy and focus groups procedures, in a way that an external reader could assess

whether the findings are applicable to comparable contexts. Dependability was enhanced through the use of a common structured discussion guide, consistent moderation from the same moderator and a transparent description of the analytical process. Lastly, confirmability was enhanced by ensuring that all themes were based on participants' views and were continuously reviewed against the supporting quotations throughout the process of the analysis, thereby reducing the influence of the researcher's assumptions.

4.5 Summary and Findings

Group A showed more conservatism towards trying something new and expressed notions that resembled a stable purchasing position towards locally produced products and domestic brands. This was not so persistent in Group B. Most respondents chose their products and brands according to the way they've learned as they were younger. This is predominant in the vast majority of Group A, and it is also shared among respondents in Group B.

Product category is crucial for choosing between different strategies. For products that are consumed (i.e. food), people stick to their opinions and preferences as this category is distinct. Individuals know and strictly follow their taste and preference regarding food brands. The same cannot be said for disposable products (i.e. aluminium foil or kitchen paper). For this category, they would prefer something cheaper than an NB. Regarding healthcare products (i.e. body lotion or shampoo), respondents initially were categorical of NBs but further into the discussion became skeptical and said they will reconsider their purchasing rationale.

HLBs are more favored by younger groups than older groups. This was obvious in the focus groups. A potential reason for this is the fact that most respondents in Group B were students in the UK and had a taste of Tesco's products and knew the size of the brand; hence, they trust it as a brand. However, this could also be interpreted as a limitation of the study as their opinion might have been biased.

NBs are the most trusted brands of preference. It was obvious from the groups that NBs have a timeless and dominant worth in participants' minds. HLBs are more appreciated than PLBs but not than NBs. The major reason for this is the management of existing local markets and expanding into foreign ones (internationalization). This is

something that PLBs have not managed yet (a sign of inferiority). HLBs are also seen as being of better quality than Cypriot PLBs because participants believe that they have more regulative control of production. This was consistent among respondents in Group B.

All respondents emphasized that every label brand has quality products, and that specialization of product category matters the most in their opinion when it comes to labeling a producer as ideal. However, specialization also depends on the producer's COO. In this sense, participants would trust fish and chips from Tesco (as both have UK origin) rather than Alphamega, while they would trust halloumi cheese from Alphamega (as both have Cypriot origin) rather than Tesco. At the same time, they would not choose neither product from Lidl (as it is German).

4.5.1 Key Emerged Themes

The analysis of the discussion resulted in four main themes. After obtaining the initial results from the focus groups, the themes were presented to two PhD students. This allowed for a critical evaluation of the themes and conclusions that are presented below.

The first theme that emerged is the role of product category in both HLB and PLB performance. High-involvement categories are expected to turn consumers towards NBs even though HLBs are perceived as being higher-quality products compared to PLBs. However, a sub-theme revealed is product category in relation to the COO. When the product is associated with a specific country, then consumers are expected to choose the brand originating from that country no matter if the brand is an NB or PLB. It is worth noting that although variables such as product category often operate as contextual conditions, we conceptualize it as a direct cue. This is consistent with cue utilization theory, which views product category as a cue that consumers use directly when forming quality perceptions, especially in high-involvement categories.

The second theme that emerged from the analysis is the perception of resources and capabilities perceived to be possessed by the manufacturers of HLBs. Because of the size of the HLB manufacturers, consumers believe that they manufacture their products based on stricter procedures. Furthermore, exporting requires adhering to laws that also contribute to higher quality. A sub-theme that

emerged from this perception is the role of internationalization. This perception can be directly linked to the resource-based view (RBV) theory according to which in order for a firm to achieve a sustained competitive advantage, “it must acquire and control valuable, rare and inimitable, and nonsubstitutable resources and capabilities” (p.350) (Kraaijenbrink, 2010). Although RBV has been developed as a strategic management theory, a number of studies have shown that consumers often use firm-level strengths, such as company size, as cues of reliability or quality to evaluate brands (Woolley, 2023). Thus, consumers believe that the capability of a brand to break local barriers and internationalize is a justifiable reason to choose the HLB over other similar products. This stance could be strengthened when the brand is backed by a strong multinational with extensive resources and capabilities, because these capabilities are able to offer consistent quality. Overall, this notion is consistent with established theories in strategic management, signaling theory, RBV theory, brand equity and international marketing.

The third theme is the role of the COO of the manufacturer. Affiliation or consumer animosity towards the HLB’s home country is expected to work in favor of or against acceptance of the product. Thus, manufacturers should consider adaptation of products or reengineer marketing programs accordingly.

The fourth theme related to performance is decision-making styles and other demographic characteristics. For example, HLBs are more attractive to younger ages since older Cypriots seem to be less eager to try different products. Thus, the host retailer should more deeply investigate its target markets and promote (or not) such products differently to make them attractive.

Table 4 Contribution of the Qualitative Phase to the Development of the Conceptual Framework & Questionnaire

Qualitative Finding	Contribution of the Qualitative Stage	Outcome
Company Image	Confirmed Literature	Included as a direct predictor and operationalized as a measured construct in the questionnaire
Product Category	Confirmed literature	Included as a direct predictor and operationalized as a measured construct in the questionnaire
Country of Origin	Confirmed literature	Included as a direct predictor and operationalized as a measured construct in the questionnaire
Country Affiliation	Emerged from participants' discussions as a contextual influence	Retained as an interpretive concept and not operationalized as a standalone construct in the questionnaire
Price	Confirmed the importance	Included as a direct predictor and operationalized as a measured construct in the questionnaire
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	Emerged from the qualitative stage	Included as a direct predictor and operationalized as a measured construct in the questionnaire

4.6 Conclusions

Based on the analysis and emerged themes, we find significant differences among HLBs, NBs and PLBs. HLBs are considered as being higher-quality products compared to PLBs but lower quality than NBs. They are positioned in between consumers' minds because they share characteristics from each strategy. Thus, retailers can take advantage of this strategy and strengthen their assortment by offering PLBs of major overseas retailers. At the same time, HLB manufacturers could use these products to internationalize and enhance their profits.

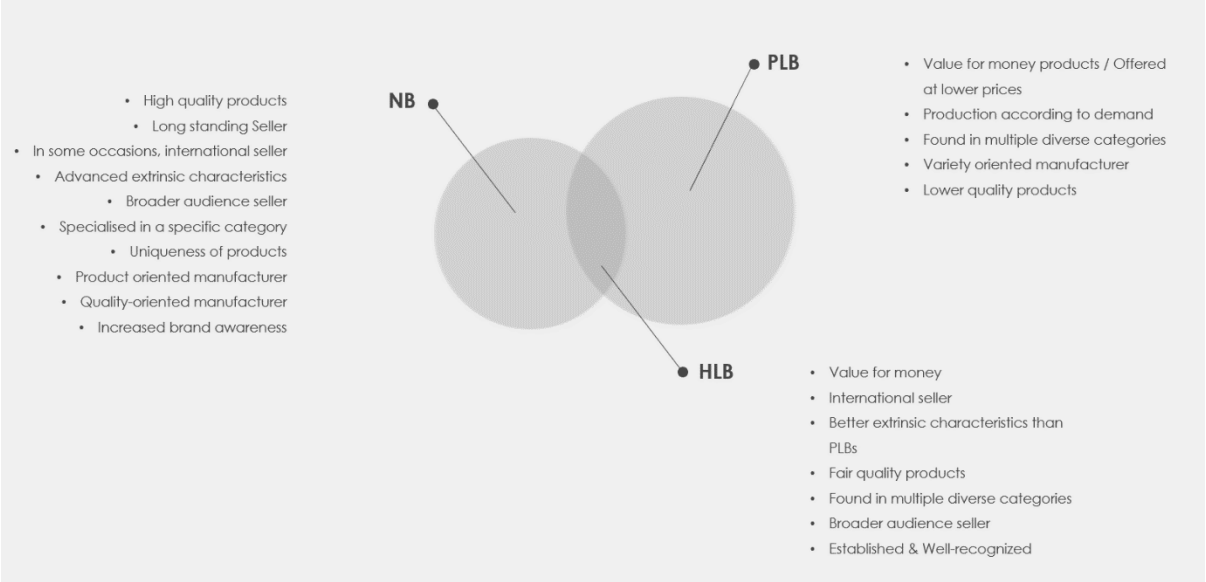


Figure 4 Comparison between NB, PLB & HLB

Consumers are expected to evaluate positively or negatively HLBs based on a number of variables or cues. These cues do not affect all consumers in the same way and not all of them are considered as primary drivers. We group cues such as product category, COO, brand of the manufacturer, brand of local retailer and price as primary. At the same time, decision-making styles, advertising, extrinsic cue effects and word of mouth are expected to affect HLB performance but not as much as the former variables.

Before moving to the next chapter, we note that during the qualitative stage the HLB example available in the AlphaMega supermarket chain was Tesco, while in the quantitative stage, AlphaMega replaced Tesco with Casino due to Brexit. While this is acknowledged in the limitations section as a fact, we believe that it does not undermine the qualitative stage as its purpose was exploratory rather than for measuring responses to one specific HLB.

Chapter 5. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conceptual framework adopted for this study. A conceptual framework is the visual representation of the relationships we expect to see between the different dependent and independent variables that were identified and presented earlier in this research on a literature review of existing studies and on the qualitative research stage (Leshem & Trafford, 2007). Then, following the conceptual framework, the chapter discusses the hypotheses of this study that are expected to formulate the relationships between dependent, independent, and other variables.

5.2 Conceptual Framework

To establish the HLB as a distinct branding construct, the aim of this research is to study and understand the key determinants of HLB performance (dependent variable). Thus, it tries to understand whether and how the different potential cues or drivers (independent variables) that were identified, in previous chapters, affect the dependent variable (HLB performance). We approach independent variables as the expected cause that results in an expected effect to the dependent variable. In addition to the primary drivers or cues, the model incorporates consumer-level and country-specific factors that are expected to influence HLB performance outcomes.

Our conceptual framework (Figure 6) comprises two main sets of independent variables, product-related and retailer-related drivers (or cues), and consumer-level and country-specific factors, all expected to influence HLB performance. The framework is developed to examine whether HLBs are evaluated through a combination of cues and mechanisms that are sufficiently different from those used by consumers to evaluate traditional PLBs, and as a result, support the conceptualization of the HLB as a distinct branding construct.

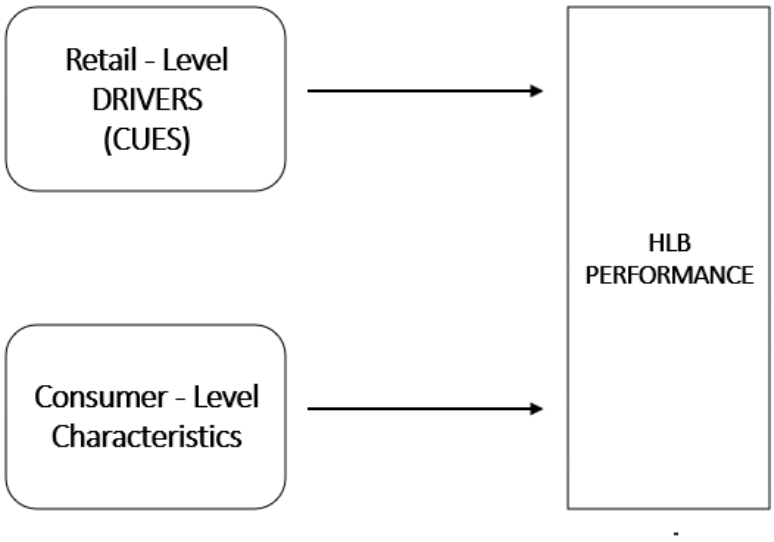


Figure 5 Conceptual Framework

Drivers can be exploited by consumers as cues to help them make sense of the product and the brand as well as help them make evaluating judgments of the product's quality (Chung et al., 2006; Szybillo & Jacoby, 1972). Based on cue utilization theory, consumers are expected to choose cues, consciously and/or unconsciously, based on the predictive (PV) and confidence (CV) value of each cue (Chung et al., 2006). As a result, consumers will not use all cues to help them assess a product's quality, and some cues are expected to be more important than others. Drawn from pertinent literature and the qualitative research we propose the following (Figure 7) to be used as potential quality cues: Company Image, Country of Origin, Price, Exclusivity in Sale, Perception of Resources & Capabilities, Value for Money (VfM) and Product Category.



Figure 6 Retail-Level Drivers (CUES)

The consumer's use of a cue (or a combination of cues) is expected to result in a quality judgment outcome with some level of confidence. Furthermore, the model incorporates consumer-level and country-specific factors that are expected to influence HLB performance.

The *Consumer Personality Factors* are expected to influence consumer evaluations and behavioral outcomes related to the HLB, based on the specific consumer characteristics of the country in investigation. Profiling consumers is very important for marketers because decision-making styles determine the way in which consumers make decisions, and as a result, the way they will utilize each available cue when in a buying situation (Gokcek et al., 2019). Thus, within this set we include the different decision-making styles as described in Chapter 2. Furthermore, we incorporate CE as an individual-level predisposition associated with COO. CE is regularly used by marketing practitioners as well as academics to understand the reasons behind consumers' buying decisions regarding domestic versus imported

products (Fernandez-Ferrin et al., 2015). CE is found to affect both willingness to buy and product judgment (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Fernandez-Ferrin et al., 2015).



Figure 7 Consumer-Level Characteristics

The combined effects of different variables included in the model are going to lead to a performance outcome that both practitioners and academics need to understand and evaluate. We name this performance outcome HLB Performance, and through this model we try to understand the various interrelationships that may lead to optimum performance for those retailers aspiring to increase revenues using this strategy.

However, marketing performance is a complex, multidimensional construct, often described as a chain of different performance outcomes such as customer mindset outcomes, customer behavior outcomes, customer-level performance outcomes, product market performance outcomes, accounting performance outcomes and financial market performance outcomes (Katsikeas et al., 2016). Each aspect of performance is used to assess different outcomes. Thus, presenting performance as a global latent construct may be problematic, misleading or simply incorrect (Katsikeas et al., 2016). In addition, each aspect or performance includes a number of different

measures that are (commonly or rarely) used. For example, within the aspect of accounting performance outcomes, researchers may measure sales revenue, profit, margin or cash flow or a combination of them. Thus, specifying the aspect (or aspects) of performance as well as selecting specific indicators (from within each chosen performance aspect) ensures that results between studies are comparable and allow cumulative knowledge building (Katsikeas et al., 2016).

In view of the foregoing, we have decided to choose Customer Mindset and Customer Behavior as the two aspects of performance. Both aspects of performance are customer-based and as a result fit with the overall framework of this research, as this research aims to conceptualize HLB from the consumers' perspective.

Customer Mindset concerns customer perceptions, feelings and attitudes regarding the firm (and/or the brand) and its value offering (Katsikeas et al., 2016; Shaalan et al., 2023). Typical measures include customer satisfaction, brand equity, perceived quality, likelihood-to-recommend and attitudinal loyalty (Baehre, 2022; Katsikeas et al., 2016). This research aims to measure HLB performance by using the indicator/measure of Perceived Quality. Perceived quality refers to consumer judgments about a brand's excellence (Zarantonello et al., 2020). The reason we have decided to choose this aspect of performance is because it is causally close to marketing actions (such as the HLB) and it is also commonly used to assess marketing performance in practice. At the same time, we have decided to use the mentioned measure because perceived quality is directly associated with actions such as branding as well as market share (Katsikeas et al., 2016; Keller, 2013; Zarantonello et al., 2020). Lastly, using a measure among the most used ones allows building collective knowledge more easily.

Customer behavior, on the other hand, concerns the observation of customer behavior (both before and after purchase) related to the firm and its products (Katsikeas et al., 2016). Typical measures of customer behavior include acquisition, retention and word of mouth. We have decided to use customer acquisition as the customer behavior metric. This construct is operationalized through customer-based behavioral measures, namely HLB purchase intention and willingness to purchase products from the HLB company. HLB is marketed in different countries by different brand managers and, as a result, complexities arise from targeting different groups in

multiple countries (Krautz & Hoffmann, 2017). Thus, identifying what cues affect the first stage of the customer life cycle (=acquisition) is of high importance for marketers seeking to adopt this strategy (Ang & Buttle, 2006). After all, customer retention (a highly ranked subject in recent marketing literature) is important in mature and competitive markets, however for new businesses entering new markets customer acquisition is particularly important (Ang & Buttle, 2006).

5.3 Hypotheses

The framework illustrates potential relationships between identified variables and its primary purpose is to lead to the hypotheses that are subject to testing. Thus, after summarizing key conclusions drawn from the review of existing literature and combining with the results from the qualitative research stage, we propose an expected outcome on every relationship. Thus, a research hypothesis is determining an appropriate expected outcome based on existing theory and experience (Wolverton, 2009).

5.3.1 Company Image

Retailers are building their brands and promoting their products based on tangible and intangible characteristics. One of the most prominent intangible characteristics that retailers often use to enhance loyalty and customer purchase intention is company or retailer image (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Bao et al., 2011). Competent international companies need to create a favorable company image to enhance HLB penetration and performance. However, the formation of a strong and positive company image is a complex practice and requires a wide range of activities on behalf of the brand such as market research, investing in building a strong brand image, positioning, optimum brand assortment, etc. (Bao et al., 2011). Variation in strategies, investment in retailer/company image and other characteristics such as company history result in different company image perceptions. As a result, companies that excel in this characteristic may enjoy a favorable product evaluation on behalf of the consumers. The company image serves as a diagnostic cue that allows consumers to infer the quality of the HLB and as a result help them decide on choosing one brand over another one. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Ha1.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: A firm's/company's positive image has a positive influence on an HLB's perceived quality.*
- *H_0: A firm's/company's positive image does not influence an HLB's perceived quality.*

Ha1.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: A firm's/company's positive image has a significant influence on an HLB's customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: A firm's/company's positive image does not influence an HLB's customer acquisition.*

5.3.2 Country of Origin

Similarly to the concept of company image, COO image serves as an intangible diagnostic cue for product quality evaluation. COO image is based on prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths (or weaknesses) and indirectly influences consumers' buying intentions (Diamantopoulos et al., 2011; Nellikunnel et al., 2017). Specific characteristics such as geographical and/or cultural closeness, shared history, political ties, similarities in language and lifestyle as well as pre-established perceptions based on the country's production strengths contribute to favorable country images. However, not all favorable country images lead to increased purchase intention but only favorable images by countries that are associated with the product category. On the other hand, in the absence of national stereotypes on a specific product category, we expect other characteristics such as cultural closeness or country development status to work in favor of the HLB. Based on the aforementioned, we hypothesize the following:

Ha2.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin (COO) image has a positive influence on the perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin (COO) image does not influence the perceived quality of HLBs.*

Ha2.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin COO image has a positive influence on HLB customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin (COO) image does not influence HLB customer acquisition.*

5.3.3 Price

While the price effect on perceived quality has decreased over the years, it remains an important extrinsic cue for quality judgments, especially in specific categories and countries (Agarwal & Teas, 2002; Myung-Soo & Emine, 2007; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007). However, its role in overall product evaluation is reduced in the presence of other factors such as familiarity with the product. At the same time, perceived variability in quality within a category is expected to increase the role of price in forming quality evaluation judgments (Johnson & Kellaris, 1988). Thus, in this study price is treated as an extrinsic cue and we hypothesize:

Ha3.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has a significant influence on consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has no significant influence on consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Ha3.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has a significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has no significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*

5.3.4 Exclusivity in Sale

Exclusivity, either implicit or explicit, is a brand dimension able to provide differentiation especially when associated with rarity and advertised as additional value (Upshaw et al., 2017). Thus, exclusivity may affect the evaluation process and

often justify price premiums. This argument is enhanced for self-expressive products where the cue of exclusivity affects consumers' evaluation judgments and purchase intentions (Steinhart et al., 2014; Wan et al., 2018). Hence, we hypothesize:

Ha4.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Consumers' perception of exclusivity is positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*
- *H_0: Consumers' perception of exclusivity is not positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*

Ha4.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Consumers' perception of exclusivity is positively related to the customer acquisition of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*
- *H_0: Consumers' perception of exclusivity is not positively related to the customer acquisition of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*

5.3.5 Product Category

Product categories are often associated with increased perceived risk. The level of perceived risk in the category is increased when the consequences of making a mistake are greater. An obvious example would be buying a car compared to buying a bottle of milk. Short-life cheap products or commodity products are seen as less riskier categories. At the same time, the greater the involvement in the category and/or the greater the experience attributes of the products in the category increases the risk in the category.

Based on the aforementioned, we hypothesize the following:

Ha5.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: High involvement in the category is negatively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*
- *H_0: High involvement in the category is not negatively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*

Ha5.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: High involvement in the category is negatively related to customer acquisition of an HLB.*
- *H_0: High involvement in the category is not negatively related to customer acquisition of an HLB.*

5.3.6 Perception of Resources & Capabilities

The size of the retailer and the perceived resources and capabilities are a diagnostic cue when evaluating a product. Consumers tend to believe that products originating from major international retailers possessing greater resources and capabilities have greater quality characteristics. This argument is also supported by the fact that these retailers have successfully exported their products abroad and internationalize. Exporting, for some products, acts as a signal of quality because firms need to comply with stringent and often costly standards (Jayasuriya et al., 2006). As expected, not all firms are able to comply with these standards and internationalize. Thus, we hypothesize:

Ha6.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities is positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*
- *H_0: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities is not positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*

Ha6.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities has a positive influence on customer acquisition of an HLB.*
- *H_0: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities has no positive influence on customer acquisition of an HLB.*

5.3.7 Value for Money (VfM)

VfM represents a more general evaluative judgment in which consumers weigh the benefits they receive compared to the sacrifice that they are required to provide. Compared to price, which acts as a single cue, VfM represents a wider combined

assessment of perceived quality and cost, making it a more holistic indicator of how consumers judge the fairness of a transaction. Thus, we hypothesize:

Ha7.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has a significant influence on their perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has no significant influence on their perceived quality of HLBs.*

Ha7.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has a significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has no significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*

5.3.8 Consumer Personality Factors

Markets become saturated with many international companies offering their products worldwide. Consequently, consumers are faced with an increased variety of products and stores. In addition, promotional activities, ecommerce and loyalty programs make the decision-making process more complex than ever before (Mitchell & Bates, 1998). These complexities force marketers to understand the various decision-making styles because, at the end of the day, these styles are inevitably linked to purchase decision. We expect each decision-making style to influence consumer evaluations and behavioral outcomes, resulting in a difference in consumer behavior and perceived quality. Hence, when it comes to choosing an HLB over an NB or a PLB it is important to define the combination of purchasing styles that become relevant for this decision.

5.3.8.a Price Consciousness

Price conscious consumers have a tendency to pay lower prices in general (Thanasuta, 2015). We expect this tendency to work in favor of the lowest priced product. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hb1.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Price consciousness positively influences consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Price consciousness does not significantly influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Hb1.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Price consciousness positively influences customer acquisition of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Price consciousness does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.*

5.3.8.b Brand Consciousness

Brand conscious consumers are expected to choose expensive, best-selling, well-advertised and well-branded products (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). For these customers, brand name plays an important role in determining product quality. As a result, well-known brands will be considered as higher-quality products compared to less branded or unknown brands. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hb2.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Brand Consciousness negatively influences consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Brand Consciousness does not significantly influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Hb2.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Brand Consciousness negatively influences customer acquisition of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Brand Consciousness does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.*

5.3.8.c Brand Loyalty / Habitual

Brand loyal consumers are expected to repeatedly purchase the same brands and resist switching to alternatives. Within the CSI framework, habitual and brand-loyal orientation capture consumers who exhibit strong attachment to specific brands and demonstrate low switching behavior (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). These customers may be less willing to evaluate HLBs favorably or switch from their preferred brands. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hb3.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Brand Loyalty negatively influences consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Brand Loyalty does not significantly influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Hb3.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Brand Loyalty negatively influences customer acquisition of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Brand Loyalty does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.*

5.3.8.d. Confused by Over-Choice Consumers

These consumers are confused by the plethora of choices found in retail stores because they handle information overload with discomfort. This behavior becomes stronger with consumers with low expertise and involvement in the category (Pappas, 2017). Decision-making becomes complicated and difficult. The presence of the HLB increases confusion for these customers and may lead to less customer acquisition. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hb4.1. Perceived Quality

H_1: Confused by over-choice consumers are less likely to perceive HLBs as high-quality products.

H_0: Confused by over-choice consumers do not significantly differ in their perceived quality evaluations of HLBs.

Hb4.2. Customer Acquisition

H_1: Confused by over-choice consumers are less likely to purchase or show interest in HLBs.

H_0: Confused by over-choice consumers do not significantly differ in their likelihood to purchase or show interest in HLBs.

5.3.8.e. Quality Consciousness.

Only the very best quality is accepted for this segment. In fact, this statement is so strong that “good enough products” are not an option. As a result, most of the times these consumers are likely to turn away from products such as PLBs or products that are not associated with high quality. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hb5.1. Perceived Quality

H_1: Quality-conscious consumers are less likely to perceive Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) as high-quality products compared to established National Brands (NBs).

H_0: Quality-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their perceived quality evaluations of Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) compared to National Brands (NBs).

Hb5.2. Customer Acquisition

H_1: Quality-conscious consumers are less likely to purchase Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) over established National Brands (NBs).

H_0: Quality-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their likelihood to purchase Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) over established National Brands (NBs).

5.3.8.f. Novelty Consciousness

Consumers scoring high in this category enjoy trying new, innovative and fashionable products. Thus, variety enhances this excitement because it provides them with potential products that possibly fulfill the need for experiencing new products. Thus, the argument becomes stronger for products in high-involvement categories. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hb6.1. Perceived Quality

H_1: Novelty-conscious consumers are more likely to perceive HLBs as high-quality products.

H_0: Novelty-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their perceived quality evaluations of HLBs.

Hb6.2. Customer Acquisition

H_1: Novelty-conscious consumers are more likely to purchase or show interest in HLBs.

H_0: Novelty-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their likelihood to purchase or show interest in HLBs.

5.4 Country-Specific Factors

As mentioned earlier, COO just like any other extrinsic cue may influence evaluative judgment of a product as well as purchasing behavior. Country affiliation is conceptually distinguished from COO as COO refers to the national origin of the HLB, while country affiliation refers to the level of familiarity or psychological closeness consumers feel about the country of the HLB. With that said, we note that, although it has been discussed earlier in this research, country affiliation was not used as a standalone construct in the quantitative stage because during the qualitative stage it did not function as an independent evaluation cue comparable to other cues such as company image, price, or perception of resources and capabilities. Most of the participants in the focus groups described country affiliation as a contextual perception reflecting the way consumers feel about a country, thus it was retained as an interpretive concept within the discussion of the findings rather than being positioned as a construct within the quantitative stage.

5.4.1 Consumer Ethnocentrism (CE)

CE is defined as the tendency to shift away from all foreign products in preference for local products (Zhou & Hui, 2003). Thus, exposure to the external stimuli of a foreign product can result in the automatic rejection of the product because buying a foreign product is interpreted as an immoral and unpatriotic action (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Thus, we hypothesize:

Hb7.1. Perceived Quality

H_1: Consumer ethnocentrism has a significant influence on consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.

H_0: Consumer ethnocentrism does not have a significant influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.

Hb7.2. Customer Acquisition

H_1: Consumer ethnocentrism has a negative influence on customer acquisition of HLBs.

H_0: Consumer ethnocentrism does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.

Chapter 6. Quantitative stage

6.1 Design of the Quantitative Stage

In the quantitative phase of this research, a survey method was chosen for data collection. This choice is consistent with the mixed-methods research design, where the qualitative insights obtained from focus groups during the initial stage helped to shape the hypotheses. The qualitative phase offered an in-depth understanding of the research problem and helped identify key variables, which in turn informed the development of the study's hypotheses.

The quantitative phase now aims to confirm these hypotheses on a larger scale. Utilizing a questionnaire allows the systematic collection of data from a larger and more varied population, guaranteeing that the results are generalizable beyond the initial qualitative sample (Bryman, 2006). In addition, questionnaires are particularly effective for collecting large amounts of data in a structured way, making them ideal for statistically testing the relationships between variables. This approach provides results that are measurable and quantifiable, allowing for thorough analysis through statistical methods (Malhotra et al., 2008).

The dependence on self-reported data through questionnaires presents some limitations, such as low response rates and incomplete questionnaires (Coughlan et al., 2009). Furthermore, respondents may not consistently provide accurate information due to social desirability bias, where they respond in ways they believe are more favorable, or recall bias, where they fail to remember their past behaviors accurately (Razavi, 2001). In addition, response bias may arise if the way questions are framed affects the respondents' answers. These limitations should be considered when analyzing the findings to ensure a clear and accurate interpretation of the results.

Despite these limitations, questionnaires are still considered an appropriate method for this research. Surveys have been extensively used in the literature on PLBs to examine market segmentation, consumer profiling, and price perception, which are all critical for the current research objectives (Beneke et al., 2013; Diallo, 2012; Girard et al., 2017; Martenson, 2007; Richardson et al., 1996). By collecting structured and consistent responses, this method improves reliability and allows us to

explore the relationships between the variables identified during the earlier qualitative phase. By conducting this large-scale quantitative research, we aim to provide empirical evidence that either supports or rejects the hypotheses developed from the qualitative stage.

6.2 Design of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to follow a logical sequence, which helped maintain clarity and supported the collection of reliable, valid responses. Emphasis was paid to its length. It needed to cover all relevant areas without becoming too demanding or tiring for respondents. To make the survey easier to follow, questions were grouped into sections that reflected common themes, helping participants navigate the content more easily and reducing the likelihood of confusion. The questionnaire maintained uniformity through consistent use of language as well as response scales and formatting across all sections. The designed method helped respondents understand the questionnaire steps clearly and resulted in more reliable responses.

An introductory section at the beginning explained the purpose of the study while providing background material, which included key definitions, to help participants fully understand the research objectives and the topic in general before continuing. Since the study explored specific branding strategies, a reference table with visual examples from Cyprus stayed visible throughout the online questionnaire. The inclusion of this table served as a useful support tool to reduce question interpretation errors and confirm that participants had the necessary information and knowledge to answer confidently and accurately.

The questionnaire started with screening questions to identify participants who lacked the necessary knowledge or participants who could potentially introduce bias into the research. This process was implemented to guarantee that the collected data maintained both validity and representativeness of the research population. To check that participants remained attentive and followed instructions, a set of validation questions was included toward the end of the questionnaire. These items served as a simple safeguard, helping confirm the quality of each response. Alongside the initial

screening questions, their inclusion contributed to stronger internal validity and added confidence in the overall reliability of the findings.

A 7-point Likert scale was used for most questions because this method provided better sensitivity in measuring attitudes and perception (Joshi et al., 2015). A 7-point scale allows a wider range of responses, which results in a better comprehension of their opinions. However, this method, while widely used, also has limitations. One known issue is central tendency bias, where respondents may avoid selecting extreme options (Alwin, 1997). However, careful attention to wording of questions together with the carefully designed scale helped mitigate this limitation and supported the overall quality of collected data.

Most of the questionnaire items derived from Bruner's Marketing Scales Handbooks and peer-reviewed academic studies to maintain methodological consistency with established research and to ensure the validity and reliability of the measured constructs. The researcher created two new questions to explore particular aspects relevant to the study's focus. Moreover, the questionnaire received feedback from two PhD students before being tested with three individuals to check for clarity and completion time and flow. The participants' input led to small modifications that enhanced the usability of the questionnaire.

The final step in the development of the questionnaire involved its translation into Greek since the research took place in Cyprus where most people are Greek speakers. The questionnaire was initially translated by a professional sworn translator who is a member of the Sworn Translators Register of the Republic of Cyprus (https://www.gov.cy/pio/en/sworn-translator/) and a full regular member of the Pancyprian Union of Graduate Translators and Interpreters. To further ensure accuracy and conceptual equivalence, the translated questionnaire was reviewed by a private translation company in Greece with experience in translating research papers, including questionnaires. This additional review confirmed that the Greek version reflected the meaning of the original English questionnaire while maintaining conceptual consistency across both versions.

Construct	Construct Type	Role in the Conceptual Framework	Measurement Source	Initial No. of Items
Company Image	Retailer / company-related extrinsic cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures consumers' use of company's image as a cue of credibility and expected quality.	Adapted from Walsh & Beatty (2007) and Grewal et al. (1998)	5
Country of Origin (COO)	Country-related extrinsic cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures the extent to which consumers use the HLB country association to infer product standards and expected quality.	Adapted from Dewan (2020), Han (2020) and Koschate-Fischer et al. (2012)	6
Price	Market-based extrinsic cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures the role of price as a cue by which consumers infer value and, in some cases, expected quality.	Adapted from Heinberg et al. (2016)	3
Exclusivity in Sale	Differentiation / availability cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures the role of exclusivity in sale as a cue that makes the HLB appear more distinctive or scarce.	Adapted from Wang & John (2019)	3
Product Category	Product-level evaluation cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures the extent to which the type of product affects perceived risk.	Adapted from Turner & Grant (2011)	3
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	Firm-level capability cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures whether consumers infer quality and international competence from the perceived resources and capabilities of the HLB company.	Developed from the theoretical framework and qualitative phase of the research	2
Value for Money	Evaluative cue	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures consumers' overall assessment of whether the expected benefits of the HLB justify the price paid.	Adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (1993)	4
Brand Loyalty	Consumer decision-making characteristic	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes.	Adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (1990)	3
Brand Consciousness	Consumer decision-making characteristic	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes.	Adapted from Nan & Heo (2007)	3
Quality Consciousness	Consumer decision-making characteristic	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes.	Adapted from Völckner (2008)	3
Price Consciousness	Consumer decision-making characteristic	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes.	Adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (1993)	3
Novelty Consciousness	Consumer decision-making characteristic	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes.	Adapted from Steenkamp and Gielens (2003)	3

Over-Choice Confusion	Consumer decision-making characteristic	Direct predictor of HLB performance outcomes.	Adapted from Shim & Gehrt (1996)	3
Consumer Ethnocentrism	Country-specific consumer characteristic	Predictor of HLB performance outcomes. It captures whether consumers' preference for domestic products affects their evaluation and acceptance of HLBs.	Adapted from Shimp & Sharma (1987)	5
Perceived Quality	Dependent variable		Adapted from Keller & Aaker (1992) and Sprott & Shimp (2004)	1
Willingness to Purchase the Company's Products	Dependent variable		Adapted from Grappi et al. (2015)	2
Purchase Intention	Dependent variable		Adapted from Chandran & Morwitz (2005).	2

Table 5 Summary of the Constructs Included in the Proposed Conceptual Framework

6.3 Sample Design and Data Collection Procedure

In order to determine the appropriate sample size, the population of Cyprus aged 15 and above was taken in account. According to the 2021 census, this group includes 781,180 individuals (Statistical Service of Cyprus, 2021). Using a 95% confidence level of 95% and 5% a margin of error, the required sample size was calculated to be 384 participants (Taherdoost, 2017).

6.3.1 Calculation of Sample Size

To compute the sample size, we applied the Cochran's formula (shown below). Cochran's formula is used to determine the required sample size for large populations when the population size is known, and the confidence level and margin of error are specified.

$$n0 = \frac{Z^2 * p * (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- ***Z:*** The Z-score represents the desired confidence level (1.96 for a 95% confidence level) which refers to how confident we can be that the sample survey has accurately reflected the characteristics of the population (Chaokromthong & Sintao, 2021; Taherdoost, 2017)
- ***p: p*** is the estimated proportion of the population, typically set at 0.5 for maximum variability (Sarmah & Hazarika, 2012)
- ***e: e*** is the margin of error (set at 5%) which represents the level of risk or error the researcher is willing to accept (Chaokromthong & Sintao, 2021; Taherdoost, 2017)

Using these values:

$$n0 = \frac{Z^2 * p * (1 - p)}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = \frac{3.8416 * 0.25}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

This gives an initial sample size of 384.16, which we round up to 385.

Since the total population is finite (781,180), we apply the finite population correction using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{n0}{1 + \frac{(n0 - 1)}{N}}$$

Where:

- ***N*** is the total population (781,180).
- ***n0*** is the initial sample size (385).

$$n = \frac{385}{1 + \frac{(384)}{781180}} = \frac{385}{1.000491} = 384$$

6.3.2 Eligibility Criteria

1. Mixed gender (males and females), fully or partially involved in grocery shopping for their households.
2. Aged between 18 and 70, representing different life stages such as single, couples without children, young families, and mid-old families.
3. Exclusion of individuals working in grocery stores, manufacturers or distributors of private label brands (PLBs), advertising or marketing agencies, or market research companies.

6.3.3 Data Collection

Two methods were used to collect data: online and offline (Supermarket intercept).

An online questionnaire was distributed mainly via Facebook, where 93.6% of the population has an account, targeting individuals living in Cyprus (“Cypriots among top three social media users in Europe”, 2023). A list of personal contacts (friends and

family) who met the criteria was also used, with the questionnaire shared via private messages and emails. No incentives were provided for participation.

Additionally, permission was obtained from two island-wide supermarket chains (in Nicosia & Limassol) that sell HLBs to collect data from customers exiting the supermarkets. Over a two-week period, every third customer exiting the supermarket was asked to complete the questionnaire. No incentives were offered in this case, and the supermarket chains did not request any compensation or favors in return for allowing data collection.

We collected data through Qualtrics, a user-friendly, online platform designed for creating and distributing self-completion questionnaire surveys. Qualtrics supports real-time response monitoring, allows data to be downloaded as Excel and SPSS files and it complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which protects personal information of participants. Furthermore, Qualtrics is offered by the University of Strathclyde at no additional cost, making it a cost-effective solution for data collection.

The data collection for the study started on February 11, 2024, and ended on May 27, 2024. During the research period, 1,455 individuals visited the website, from offline and online methods. Of these, 261 individuals never proceeded to answer the first question, leaving a sample size of 1,194 participants who began the questionnaire.

From the initial sample of 1,194 respondents, several exclusion criteria were applied. First, 123 individuals indicated that they had previously worked at a supermarket chain, leading to their exclusion. From the remaining sample, 43 participants reported having worked for a PLB manufacturer and were subsequently excluded. Following this, 34 respondents who had worked for a marketing company were removed, and another 18 respondents who had worked for a market research company were also excluded. Further screening identified 30 individuals who stated that they were not involved in grocery shopping, and these participants were excluded as well from the study.

To refine the sample further, we excluded respondents who did not purchase from any of the three supermarket chains that sell HLBs (AlphaMega, Metro and Papantoniou), leaving a total sample of 515 participants. From this group, those who did not fully complete the questionnaire were excluded, bringing the sample size down

to 402. Lastly, respondents who answered the validation questions incorrectly were also excluded, resulting in a final eligible sample of 388 responses. Three additional respondents left one or more demographic questions unanswered. As these omissions did not affect the behavioral or attitudinal measures used in the analyses, these respondents were retained in the dataset and were excluded only from the relevant demographic summaries, resulting in a final sample of 391 respondents. This rigorous screening process ensured the validity and relevance of the data collected for the study.

6.4 Analysis

6.4.1 Introduction

A multi-phase quantitative analysis was employed, to address the study's research objectives and explore the complex nature of consumer perceptions and behaviors toward HLBs. The process began by dividing the total sample into two independent and randomly selected subsets. The first subset was used for exploratory factor analysis (EFA), in an effort to uncover the underlying dimensions of the constructs without imposing pre-defined structures. This approach allowed the identification of coherent factors that form the basis of consumer evaluations. The second subset was then used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), in order to evaluate the robustness and generalizability of the factor structure revealed in the EFA. The full sample was used to assess convergent and discriminant validity and generate descriptive insights into how consumers respond to HLBs after the measurement model's validity and reliability were confirmed. An exploratory cluster analysis was then performed to provide a more detailed descriptive profile of the respondents based on their consumer personality styles. The purpose of this analysis is to show the heterogeneity of consumer decision-making styles within the sample, to complement the hypothesis-testing analyses, and not to contribute to theory testing or development of the conceptual framework (Punj & Stewart, 1983). Lastly, the validated constructs were integrated into a structural equation model to examine the hypothesized relationships among consumer perceptions, personality traits and behavioral outcomes.

6.4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The first step in analyzing how people think and behave in relation to HLBs is to understand the demographic profile of the sample. Information such as age, gender, education and income helps to describe the diversity and, also, offer an indication of how representative the sample is. These details may also help to explain differences in responses between groups, which become more relevant as the analysis develops. By presenting this information, the study provides a clear foundation for the analysis and discussion that follows.

The sample in its largest percentage consists of women (60.31%) with a prominent age group that of 30 to 39 years (39.18%) followed by that of 40 to 49 years (21.13%) and that of 50 to 59 years old (17.53%).

The predominant nationality of the sample is Greek Cypriot with a percentage of 93.04% with 23 people (5.93%) declaring Greek nationality. Regarding the province of residence of the participants, the largest percentage is gathered from Nicosia (54.9%), Limassol (22.16%) and Larnaca (16.75%), followed by only 16 people from Paphos and 8 people from Famagusta.

In terms of educational level, the largest percentage of participants stated that they hold a master's or doctoral degree from a higher institution based abroad (22.16%) or within Cyprus (18.81%), while 18.3% stated by high school students. This is followed by College/University graduates based abroad (17%) or inside Cyprus (14.95%).

Regarding the household income to which the participants belong, the majority does not answer (40.21%), while the income groups that gathered the highest percentages are €30,001 to €40,000 (11.86%) and €20,001 to €30,000. (11.08%).

Finally, in terms of marital status, the majority of participants declared themselves married (75.26%) and in terms of the family composition of the household, the predominant composition, based on the ages of the children, is the one without any children or adults, either with one child aged 2 and under (16.49%), or with one child aged 3 to 11 (21.91%), or with two adults over 18 (26.29%).

Table 6 Absolute and relative frequencies of demographics

		N	N %
Gender	Male	153	39,43%
	Female	234	60,31%
	Other/Prefer not to answer	1	0,26%
Age	16–20	1	0,26%
	21–29	45	11,60%
	30–39	152	39,18%
	40–49	82	21,13%
	50–59	68	17,53%
	60–69	28	7,22%
	70+	12	3,09%
Nationality/Ethnicity	Greek Cypriot	361	93,04%
	Greek	23	5,93%
	British	1	0,26%
	French	1	0,26%
	Other	2	0,52%
City/Province	Nicosia	213	54,90%
	Limassol	86	22,16%
	Larnaca	65	16,75%
	Paphos	16	4,12%
	Ammochostos	8	2,06%
Highest level of Education	Did not attend school	2	0,52%
	Graduated from high school	71	18,30%
	University/College Student (Studying in Cyprus)	17	4,38%
	University/College Student (Studying abroad)	15	3,87%
	Graduated from College/University (based in Cyprus)	58	14,95%
	Graduated from College/University (based abroad)	66	17,01%
	Advanced degree (Master's, MBA, PhD or equivalent – based in Cyprus)	73	18,81%
	Advanced degree (Master's, MBA, PhD or equivalent – based abroad)	86	22,16%
What is your total household income?	Under €20.000	28	7,22%
	€20.001 – €30.000	43	11,08%
	€30.001 – €40.000	46	11,86%
	€40.001 – €50.000	34	8,76%
	€50.001 – €60.000	20	5,15%
	€60.001 – € 70.000	21	5,41%
	€70.001 – € 80.000	14	3,61%
	Over €80.001	26	6,70%
	Refused/Did not know	156	40,21%

Table 7 Absolute and relative frequencies for family composition and marital status

		N	N %
Marital Status	Single	85	21,91%
	Married	292	75,26%
	Prefer not to respond	11	2,84%
Family Composition - Children Under 2	0	310	79,90%
	1	64	16,49%
	2	9	2,32%
	3	3	0,77%
	4	1	0,26%
	5	1	0,26%
Family Composition - Children 3-11	0	271	69,85%
	1	85	21,91%
	2	25	6,44%
	3	7	1,80%
	4	0	0,00%
	5	0	0,00%
Family Composition - Children 12-17	0	342	88,14%
	1	30	7,73%
	2	13	3,35%
	3	2	0,52%
	4	0	0,00%
	5	1	0,26%
Family Composition – Adults 18+	0	217	55,93%
	1	25	6,44%
	2	102	26,29%
	3	32	8,25%
	4	8	2,06%
	5	4	1,03%

The demographic profile of the sample shows a high degree of relevance to the target population of grocery shoppers in Cyprus. The predominance of women and individuals aged 30–59 aligns well with the demographic groups most responsible for household grocery purchasing decisions (Giannakopoulou et al., 2022). The overwhelming majority of Greek Cypriot participants accurately reflects the national ethnic composition (CYSTAT, 2021), supporting cultural representativeness.

The high level of education among respondents may enrich the data by providing more considered and informed responses, although it suggests that consumer behaviors related to education-sensitive issues (e.g. health or sustainability)

might be slightly overrepresented compared to the general population. Similarly, while urban areas, particularly Nicosia, are well-represented — consistent with economic and retail concentration patterns (CYSTAT, 2021) — participants from rural or smaller communities are relatively underrepresented.

Although a large proportion of respondents preferred not to disclose income, the range of disclosed incomes covers middle- and upper-middle brackets, which are crucial for studies related to branded grocery products.

Overall, the sample can be considered sufficiently representative for addressing the research objectives. It includes the main consumer groups relevant to the research questions and offers a practical foundation for drawing insights. The few limitations observed (common in most consumer research of this kind) have been clearly reported to encourage a more thoughtful reading of the results.

6.4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for Independent Variables

6.4.3.1 Introduction

We began the analysis of the quantitative data by applying EFA, as the study had an exploratory focus (Fabrigar et al., 1999). EFA was useful at this stage because it allowed the data to guide the identification of possible relationships among the observed variables even though the majority of the measurement items were taken from a previously validated scale found in the *Marketing Scales Handbook* and related literature. The reason the measurement items required renewed validation was because, firstly, the items were not adopted unchanged but were adapted to the HLB context, secondly, they were translated to and used in Greek, thirdly, in some occasions the scales used were not the same as those proposed in the handbook, and, lastly, they were used for a different cultural and consumer population (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Thus, this study did not replicate the exact original scales in all cases but operationalized adapted measurement instruments. As a result, we did not validate existing scales but an adapted measurement instrument.

In this study, principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was used as the extraction method within the EFA framework. Although PCA is technically a data reduction technique rather than a factor model per se, it is commonly employed in EFA for its computational efficiency and its ability to summarize shared variance

among items. Varimax, an orthogonal rotation method, was applied to produce uncorrelated components and to enhance the interpretability of the factor solution by maximizing the variance of squared loadings within each factor (Costello & Osborne, 2005). This ensures that each variable loads highly on one factor while loading minimally on others, thereby simplifying the structure and clarifying construct boundaries.

The resulting factor solution effectively reduced the complexity of the dataset while revealing coherent, interpretable constructs that underpin consumer perceptions of HLBs. These extracted factors provided the empirical basis for the subsequent CFA and structural modelling phases of the study.

6.4.3.2 Interpreting the Rotated Component Matrix

The EFA results are presented in a rotated component matrix which shows the factor loadings (values that indicate how strongly each survey item relates to a particular underlying factor). In this table, we look for items that load strongly on one component and minimally on others. Factor loadings above 0.7 are considered strong and suggest a well-defined structure, while loadings between 0.6 and 0.69 are generally accepted as indicating a meaningful contribution to the interpretation of a factor, especially in exploratory research (Hair et al., 2014).

To obtain simple, clear and interpretable factor structure, Varimax rotation was applied. This orthogonal (meaning that the factors are assumed to be uncorrelated) rotation method maximizes the variance of loadings within each factor which facilitates the distinction between constructs (Corner, 2009). Ideally, each item should load significantly only on one factor while avoiding high cross-loadings. This structure enables both construct clarity and discriminant validity which are essential for the validity of the subsequent confirmatory analysis.

6.4.3.3 EFA Results

Table 8 shows the rotated component matrix obtained from the EFA performed on the independent variables in the first subset (n = 185). The analysis used the principal component extraction method with a Varimax rotation and Kaiser

normalization, ensuring an optimal factor structure. Seven distinct components emerge from the analysis:

The first component, “Value for Money (VfM)”, demonstrates strong loadings from items emphasizing the relationship between price and perceived quality across different brands. This suggests that consumers view price as an important factor when they evaluate quality of a brand.

The second component, “Country of Origin”, demonstrates that consumers view certain countries (such as France) as high-quality producers. This perception affects how they evaluate brands, with country reputation playing a key role. This finding aligns with previous research on country-of-origin effects in consumer decision-making.

The third component, “Company Image”, captures consumers’ perceptions of HLB company as trustworthy, reliable and innovative. This dimension is important, as it suggests that brand equity and corporate credibility directly impact consumer attitudes.

The fourth component, “Perception of Resources & Capabilities”, comprises items related to market size and foreign expansion, reflecting the belief that large international brands are inherently superior in quality. This factor indicates that consumers associate competitive scale with higher quality standards.

The fifth component, “Price”, demonstrates that price attractiveness functions independently as a driver in consumer decision-making. Brand evaluations are significantly influenced by how affordable consumers perceive products and how much value they receive (value-for-money) from their purchases.

The sixth component, “Product Category”, includes items that show how consumers feel about risk when buying products from specific categories (in our case, personal care products). This factor demonstrates how product category influencers consumer choice particularly when dealing with unfamiliar or new brands.

Lastly, the seventh component, “Exclusivity”, represents the social benefits associated with HLBs, such as perceived superiority. The high factor loadings on these items demonstrate that exclusivity functions as an essential driver for brand preference particularly among status-conscious consumers.

During EFA all initially developed independent variable items were entered into the analysis. Items that failed to load significantly on any factor (<0.50) or showed substantial cross-loadings were removed in order to achieve a clear and interpretable factor structure.

The EFA results demonstrate a robust factor structure which explains a significant portion of variance (cumulative variance explained = 74.073%). These findings provide strong support for the theoretical constructs underlying the independent variables and set the foundation for further CFA in the validation subset.

6.4.3.4 CFA Results

A CFA was applied to the second subset (n = 206) of the total sample, which was different from the one used in the EFA. This approach aligns with best practices in scale development and validation, where an independent sample is recommended to avoid capitalizing on chance and to provide a more rigorous test of the factor structure's generalizability (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006).

CFA is being used to test whether the observed items meaningfully represent their underlying theoretical constructs (Hair et al., 2020). This method was preferred over other reliability assessments, as CFA allows a more comprehensive evaluation of measurement quality through multiple model fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Kline, 2023).

The CFA results indicated an acceptable model fit, with $\chi^2/df = 1.89$, CFI = 0.914, TLI = 0.899, SRMR = 0.070, and RMSEA = 0.066. In general, a χ^2/df ratio below 2 or 3 suggests good model fit (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003), and values of CFI and TLI close to or above 0.9 are considered satisfactory, more stringent criteria suggest that values greater than 0.95 provide stronger evidence of model fit (Hooper et al., 2008). Also, SRMR and RMSEA values below 0.08 are considered acceptable indicators of fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Maydeu-Olivares et al., 2018). Although the TLI value was marginally below the conventional 0.90 threshold, this was considered acceptable given the exploratory nature of the study and the inherent complexity of consumer behavior constructs, where slightly relaxed fit criteria are often justified (Hair et al., 2020).

Overall, the collective pattern of fit indices provided strong support for the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement model. These results confirm that the factor structure extracted during EFA is generalizable and stable across consumer subgroups, establishing a robust foundation for subsequent structural modelling.

Table 8 Rotated Component Matrix of Exploratory Factor Analysis for independent variables (training dataset, n=185)

	Components						
Item Description	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
The higher the price of a Hybrid Label Brand, the higher the quality.	0.883						
The higher the price of a Private Label Brand, the higher the quality.	0.849						
The higher the price of a National Brand, the higher the quality.	0.833						
The price of a Hybrid Label Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	0.832						
The price of a National Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	0.787						
The price of a Private Label Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	0.780						
The saying “you get what you pay for” is generally true.	0.734						
One should always pay a little more for better quality.	0.650						
How would you evaluate the prestige of products from France?		0.858					
How would you evaluate the quality of products from France?		0.858					
France, the country of origin of the Hybrid Label Brand, is considered a producer of high-quality products.		0.853					
How would you evaluate the manufacturing quality of products from France?		0.821					
How would you evaluate the attractiveness of the design of French products?		0.809					
The Hybrid Label Brand product appears to be reliable.			0.842				
The Hybrid Label Brand company develops innovative products.			0.821				
The Hybrid Label Brand product appears to be of good quality.			0.820				
A Hybrid Label Brand company is a strong, reliable company.			0.752				
A Hybrid Label Brand company offers high-quality products and services.			0.692				
Brands competing in large markets have higher quality.				0.832			
Expanding in foreign markets is a guarantee of product quality.				0.781			
In my opinion, the size of a retailer is linked to the quality of its products.				0.738			

	Components						
Item Description	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Global retailers can produce high-quality products.				0.659			
A Hybrid Label Brand product has attractive prices.					0.888		
A Hybrid Label Brand product is available at reasonable prices.					0.867		
A Hybrid Label Brand product is a good purchase.					0.766		
I buy personal care products after careful consideration.						0.776	
I perceive a risk in purchasing personal care products from a Hybrid Label Brand.						0.763	
The brand I prefer for personal care products reduces any perceived risk.						0.735	
Hybrid Label Brand products can make someone feel superior to other supermarket customers.							0.938
Hybrid Label Brand products can make someone feel like a better customer compared to others.							0.875
Variance Explained (%)	**18.051**	**13.190**	**12.205**	**9.121**	**8.171**	**6.944**	**6.391**

Notes. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Components labels: 1. Value for Money, 2. Country of origin, 3. Company Image, 4. Resources, 5. Price, 6. Product category, 7. Exclusivity

6.4.4 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for Personality Variables

To investigate how consumer personality influences perceptions and behaviors toward HLBs, the study incorporated a set of personality-related variables into the research framework. Personality traits are a key focus in marketing research, as they are known to shape individual preferences, decision-making processes, and reactions to brand-related stimuli. Following the same analytical approach applied earlier in this chapter, EFA and CFA were conducted to examine the structure, dimensionality, and internal consistency of the personality-related variables. This approach ensures continuity in the analysis and supports the robustness of the measurement model, allowing for a reliable examination of the role these traits may play in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward HLBs.

Table 9 presents the rotated component matrix for the EFA of personality factors conducted on the first subset of respondents (n = 185). The results reveal five distinct components, each contributing meaningfully to the overall variance, suggesting a coherent and well-differentiated underlying structure.

Although Brand Consciousness was initially included as a distinct decision-making factor based on the literature review, these items did not load satisfactorily during EFA. Due to low loadings and/or cross-loadings, the construct was excluded from the final measurement model to ensure conceptual clarity and statistical robustness.

The first component, “Brand Loyalty”, describes habitual purchasing. Consumers scoring high tend to repeat purchases of a particular brand. Strong loadings on this factor suggest that brand familiarity and established consumer habits play a crucial role in shaping long-term purchasing decisions.

The second component, “Quality Consciousness”, describes a pattern of behavior in which consumers place importance on assessing product quality prior to purchase. Consumers scoring high on this factor tend to choose products they perceive as superior and make decisions according to perceived quality rather than, for example, habit.

The third component, “Choice Overload” (over-choice confusion), describes consumer a behavior where a high number of available options results in decision difficulty. Consumers scoring high on this factor experience cognitive strain when navigating multiple brand choices, which can influence their likelihood of engaging in heuristic decision-making.

The fourth component, “Price Sensitivity” (Price Consciousness), describes consumers’ tendency to seek lower prices by shopping at different grocery stores and making extra efforts to find cost-effective products. Consumers scoring high on this factor prioritize affordability over other product attributes and, with price serving as the main driver in their purchasing decisions.

Finally, the fifth component, “Innovativeness” (Novelty Seeking), describes consumers’ tendency to seek out or purchase novel and innovative products. Consumers scoring high on this factor are generally more willing to take risks and tend to purchase new products early.

Overall, the factor solution confirms the presence of key personality characteristics that influence consumer behavior and provides a robust foundation for further CFA.

CFA in the second, validation, subset (n=206) presented a good fit to the proposed factor structure (χ^2/df =1.60, CFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.961, SRMR = 0.064 and RMSEA = 0.054).

Table 9 Rotated Component Matrix of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Personal Factors (training dataset, n=185)

	Components				
Item Description	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Once I choose a brand, I am likely to keep buying it without considering others.	0.912				
I generally buy the same brands I have always bought.	0.869				
Once I get used to a brand, I do not like to switch.	0.837				
It is important for me to know exactly the quality of a product before purchasing it.		0.917			

	Components				
Item Description	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I search for as much information as possible about product quality before choosing.		0.896			
It is important for me to buy high-quality products.		0.846			
There are so many brand choices that I often feel confused.			0.890		
The more I learn about products, the harder it seems to choose the best one.			0.882		
With so many options, I find it difficult to compare competing offers.			0.838		
I shop at more than one supermarket to take advantage of lower prices.				0.917	
I usually look for low-cost supermarkets to buy household products.				0.874	
I am willing to make an extra effort to find lower prices.				0.697	
I like to take risks by buying new products.					0.901
Generally, I am among the first to buy new products when they appear on the market.					0.887
Variance Explained (%)	**17.900**	**17.516**	**17.365**	**15.698**	**12.216**

Final Construct	Original Source Scale(s)	Initial Items	Retained Items	Final No. of Items	Validation
Company Image	Adapted from Grewal et al. (1998) and Walsh & Beatty (2007)	CI1, CI2, CI3, CI4, CI5	CI1, CI2, CI3, CI4, CI5	5	EFA + CFA
Country of Origin (COO)	Adapted from Dewan (2020), Han (2020) and Koschate-Fischer et al. (2012)	COO1, COO2, COO3, COO4, COO5, COO6	COO1, COO2, COO3, COO4, COO6	5	EFA + CFA
Price	Adapted from Heinberg et al. (2016)	P1, P2, P3	P1, P2, P3	3	EFA + CFA
Exclusivity in Sale	Adapted from Wang & John (2019)	E1, E2, E3	E2, E3	2	EFA + CFA
Product Category	Adapted from Turner & Grant (2011)	PC1, PC2, PC3	PC1, PC2, PC3	3	EFA + CFA
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	Developed from the theoretical framework and qualitative phase of the research.	RC1, RC2, RC3, RC4	RC1, RC2, RC3, RC4	4	EFA + CFA
Value for Money	Adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (1993)	VfM1, VfM2, VfM3, VfM4	VfM1, VfM2, VfM3, VfM4	4	EFA + CFA
Brand Loyalty	Adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (1990)	BL1, BL2, BL3	BL1, BL2, BL3	3	EFA + CFA
Brand Consciousness	Adapted from Nan & Heo (2007)	BC1, BC2, BC3	0	0	EFA + CFA
Quality Consciousness	Adapted from Völckner (2008)	QC1, QC2, QC3	QC1, QC2, QC3	3	EFA + CFA
Price Consciousness	Adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (1993)	PC1, PC2, PC3	PC1, PC2, PC3	3	EFA + CFA
Novelty Consciousness	Adapted from Steenkamp and Gielens (2003)	NC1, NC2, NC3	NC1, NC3	2	EFA + CFA
Over-Choice Confusion	Adapted from Shim & Gehrt (1996)	OC1, OC2, OC3	OC1, OC2, OC3	3	EFA + CFA

During the exploratory factor analysis, items with factor loadings below the predefined threshold, substantial cross-loadings, or insufficient conceptual alignment with the emerging factor structure were removed from the final measurement model.

Table 10 Final Operationalization of the Measurement Model Following EFA and CFA

6.5 Convergent Validity, Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

6.5.1 Introduction

In order to ensure the robustness of the measurement model before proceeding to the structural analysis, it is essential to first confirm that the model is valid and reliable. This involves showing evidence of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. Convergent validity evaluates whether two measures (or items) that are theoretically related are also empirically correlated. In other words, it reflects how strongly two measures capture a common construct (Carlson & Andrew, 2012). This is typically confirmed when item loadings are high and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity assesses whether all constructs in the model are distinct and not just empirical reflections of each other, with evidence provided when the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs (Henseler et al., 2015; Voorhees et al., 2016). Reliability examines the internal consistency of items measuring the same construct, with composite reliability (CR) values above 0.70 indicating acceptable levels of consistency (Hair et al., 2020).

To support these assessments, CFA was first conducted on the full sample. Although the initial factor structure was established through EFA and CFA on two independent subsamples, analyzing the full sample allowed for more stable and generalizable estimates across the entire sample. The analysis of the full sample was essential to verify that the factor structure remained consistent across all respondents before testing the psychometric properties of the scales in terms of validity and reliability.

The following section presents the outcomes of the aforementioned assessments. Constructs demonstrating strong model fit through CFA are expected to show high composite reliability and satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity. Constructs with high CR values, low cross-correlations and AVEs exceeding recommended thresholds are anticipated to confirm the strength of the measurement model. In addition, the descriptive statistics provide insights into the central tendencies

and distribution characteristics of the independent, personal, and outcome variables, offering a clearer understanding of consumer evaluations of HLBs. Together, these results establish a necessary foundation for moving on to hypothesis testing and structural model evaluation.

6.5.2 Full-Sample CFA and Validation of Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis in the total sample, n=391, presented a good fit to the proposed factor structure for independent variables (χ^2/df = 2.35, CFI = 0.934, TLI = 0.923, SRMR = 0.059 and RMSEA = 0.059) and for the personality factors (χ^2/df = 2.17, CFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.961, SRMR = 0.054 and RMSEA = 0.055). This highlights the strong convergent validity of the scales. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion in Tables 11 and 12 indicated that the correlation of each construct derived from the factor analyses with other constructs are less than the square root of its AVE, indicating their discriminant validity.

Table 11 Correlation of the independent variables' constructs with other constructs compared to the squared root of its AVE, based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Value for Money	**0.775**						
2.	Country of origin	0.307	**0.824**					
3.	Company Image	0.133	0.356	**0.781**				
4.	Resources	0.350	0.162	0.173	**0.709**			
5.	Price	0.020	0.204	0.524	0.118	**0.777**		
6.	Product category	0.351	0.216	-0.086	0.283	-0.159	**0.707**	
7.	Exclusivity	0.149	-0.090	0.217	0.401	0.059	0.115	**0.932**

Note. Highlighted cells present the squared roots of its AVE.

Table 12 Correlation of the personality factors' constructs with other constructs compared to the squared root of its AVE, based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Loyalty	**0.870**				
2.	Price Consciousness	-0.327	**0.815**			
3.	Over-Choice Confusion	0.406	0.009	**0.837**		
4.	Quality Consciousness	0.213	-0.111	0.118	**0.783**	
5.	Novelty consciousness	-0.189	0.095	-0.023	0.139	**0.899**

Note. Highlighted cells present the squared roots of its AVE.

***Discriminant validity was additionally evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. As shown in Table 13, HTMT ratios ranged

from 0.034 to 0.719. The highest HTMT ratio was observed between Company Image and "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" (HTMT = 0.719), followed by HLB Purchase Intention and "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" (HTMT = 0.705), and Perceived Price Value and "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" (HTMT = 0.694). All values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, providing evidence that the multi-item constructs were empirically distinct.

Table 13 Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratios of Correlations Among the Study Constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Value for Money	—													
2. Country of Origin	.332	—												
3. Company Image	.157	.390	—											
4. Resources	.411	.198	.237	—										
5. Price	.073	.232	.613	.166	—									
6. Product Category	.426	.259	.117	.370	.200	—								
7. Exclusivity	.163	.101	.242	.471	.068	.158	—							
8. Brand Loyalty	.284	.143	.112	.517	.124	.392	.347	—						
9. Quality Consciousness	.325	.214	.065	.327	.087	.439	.070	.249	—					
10. Choice Confusion	.068	.280	.089	.372	.047	.142	.533	.456	.141	—				
11. Price Consciousness	.391	.143	.130	.191	.185	.322	.075	.384	.146	.034	—			
12. Novelty Consciousness	.146	.257	.317	.143	.247	.143	.151	.221	.171	.066	.154	—		
13. Ethnocentrism	.068	.110	.074	.126	.081	.137	.075	.100	.083	.174	.078	.089	—	
14. HLB Purchase Intention	.141	.174	.490	.135	.541	.224	.181	.270	.227	.063	.283	.305	.077	—
15. Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	.077	.269	.719	.162	.694	.236	.128	.197	.089	.072	.270	.294	.077	.705

Note. HTMT = heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations; HLB = Hybrid Label Brand.

Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Table 14). All 54 substantive measurement indicators were entered simultaneously into an unrotated principal components analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure indicated adequate sampling suitability, KMO = 0.840, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (χ^2 (1431) = 14691.54, p<.001). The analysis extracted 13 components with eigenvalues greater than 1. The first component accounted for

15.88% of the total variance, substantially below the commonly applied 50% criterion. Thus, no single factor accounted for the majority of the covariance among the measures, suggesting that common method variance was unlikely to constitute a major threat to the results.

Table 14 Results of Harman's Single-Factor Test for Common Method Bias

Indicator	Result
Number of substantive indicators	54
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure	.840
Bartlett's test (χ^2)	14,691.54
Bartlett's test (df)	1,431
Bartlett's test (p)	< .001
Components with eigenvalues greater than 1	13
First-component eigenvalue	8.575
Variance explained by the first component	15.88%
Cumulative variance explained by retained components	73.50%

Table 15 shows the summary statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability values for all independent, personality, and outcome variables of this study. As shown in the table, all constructs have CR values above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7, except for one, indicating strong internal consistency. The only exception is Quality Consciousness (0.695) which, despite being slightly below the 0.7 threshold, remains within an acceptable range given the exploratory nature of the research and its focus on consumer behavior. These results suggest that the scales used effectively measure the intended constructs.

Across the independent variables, COO has the highest mean (M = 5.18) and relatively low standard deviation (SD = 0.94), indicating that most respondents view the COO as an important factor when they evaluate brands, with little variance in responses. On the other hand, Exclusivity has the lowest mean (M = 2.93) and the highest standard deviation (SD = 1.49), indicating substantial variation in how respondents perceive HLBs as exclusive. The VfM construct shows strong internal reliability (CR = 0.932) and a slightly negative skewness (-0.381), suggesting a mild

tendency for respondents to agree with the notion that higher prices indicate higher quality.

The personality factors reveal different consumer behaviors among respondents. Loyalty (M = 4.32, CR = 0.858) and Price Consciousness (M = 4.19, CR = 0.903) are relatively high, suggesting that many respondents have consistent brand preferences while also being price sensitive. Interestingly, Over-Choice Confusion (M = 3.64, SD = 1.45) is positively skewed (0.193), showing that some consumers experience difficulty in deciding due to market complexity. Novelty Consciousness (M = 3.96) reflects a moderate consumer tendency toward exploring new products, although its CR value (0.755) falls slightly below ideal levels, indicating that further scale refinement might be needed in future research.

Regarding the outcome variables, HLB Perceived Quality is the highest-rated construct (M = 6.73, SD = 1.52), suggesting that consumers generally associate HLBs with high quality. Purchase Intention (M = 5.30) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products (M = 5.00) are also relatively high, reflecting a positive attitude toward buying and trying these brands. Both variables have slight negative skewness, which implies that respondents were more likely to express positive intentions than to remain neutral or disinterested.

The data reveal a well-structured measurement model with reliable constructs, providing insights into key consumer perceptions of HLBs. The findings highlight the influence of price, COO and company image on perceived quality, while personality traits such as loyalty, price consciousness and choice confusion help explain variations in consumer behavior.

Table 15 Summary table with the reliability indices and the descriptive elements of the analysis variables

	CR	Items	Cronbach's α	M	Mdn	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Independent variables										
Value for Money	0.932	8	.918	4.20	4.38	1.14	1.00	6.38	-.381	-.524
Country of Origin	0.936	5	.912	5.18	5.20	.94	1.60	7.00	-.383	.035
Company Image	0.927	5	.886	4.60	4.60	.85	1.00	7.00	-.515	1.353
Resources	0.892	4	.782	4.46	4.50	1.03	1.25	7.00	-.228	.032
Price	0.896	3	.851	4.94	5.00	.92	1.00	7.00	-.871	1.757
Product Category	0.791	3	.736	4.82	5.00	1.19	1.00	7.00	-.324	-.273

Exclusivity	0.899	2	.920	2.93	2.50	1.49	1.00	7.00	.549	-.631
Personality factors										
Brand Loyalty	0.858	3	.903	4.32	4.33	1.39	1.00	7.00	-.169	-.850
Price Consciousness	0.903	3	.845	4.19	4.33	1.40	1.00	7.00	-.169	-.783
Over-Choice Confusion	0.808	3	.875	3.64	3.67	1.45	1.00	7.00	.193	-1.240
Quality Consciousness	0.695	3	.803	5.15	5.00	1.05	1.33	7.00	-.429	-.092
Novelty Consciousness	0.755	2	.807	3.96	4.00	1.32	1.00	7.00	-.052	-.661
Ethnocentrism	0.935	5	.912	3.78	3.80	1.38	1.00	7.00	.142	-.837
Outcome variables										
HLB Perceived Quality	-	1	-	6.73	7.00	1.52	1	10	-.403	.859
HLB Purchase Intention	0.809	2	.818	5.30	5.50	1.17	1.00	7.00	-.630	.237
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	0.817	2	.850	5.00	5.00	1.07	1.00	7.00	-.891	.755

6.6 Correlation Analysis

6.6.1 Introduction

After validating the measurement model through CFA, we moved on to examine how the main variables of this study are related. In order to do this, we used Pearson correlation analysis to explore the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent constructs, personality traits, and outcome measures. Although correlation does not imply causation, the analysis provided an early indication of which factors tend to move together, especially in terms of how perceptions and personality align with consumers' evaluations and behavioral intentions toward HLBs. It also served as a diagnostic step to identify whether any variables are too closely related to

one another, which could interfere with the accuracy and interpretation of the structural model.

To interpret the correlation matrix, attention is given to both the statistical significance of associations (typically at $p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$) as well we the strength of these relationships. Correlation coefficients (r) above ±0.30 are typically regarded as moderate and potentially meaningful, while those exceeding ±0.50 are considered strong, especially within behavioral research contexts (Cohen, 1988). A positive correlation implies that as one variable increases, the other tends to increase as well, whereas a negative correlation suggests an inverse relationship. In this context, stronger positive correlations between independent or personality variables and the outcome measures (such as HLB Perceived Quality, Purchase Intention) and Willingness to Purchase) highlight the constructs that are most likely to influence consumer behavior. These patterns help shape the design and direction of the hypothesized paths in the following SEM phase.

6.6.2 Interpretation of Correlation Results

Table 16 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between the independent variables, personality factors and the outcome variables for the total sample (n = 391). The results show several significant relationships which indicate how different independent variables affect consumer perceptions and behaviors regarding HLBs.

Among the independent variables, Company Image exhibits the strongest positive correlation with HLB Perceived Quality ($r = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$), HLB Purchase Intention ($r = 0.416$, $p < 0.01$), and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products ($r = 0.622$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the significance of company image in forming consumer perceptions and purchase behaviors.

A similar trend appears with Price, which shows moderate strong positive associations with HLB Perceived Quality ($r = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$), HLB Purchase Intention ($r = 0.452$, $p < 0.01$), and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products ($r = 0.589$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that consumers who perceive HLBs as higher in price are also more likely to view them as offering greater quality and are more inclined to consider purchasing them.

COO also shows a modest positive correlation with HLB Perceived Quality ($r = 0.255$, $p < 0.01$) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products ($r = 0.237$, $p < 0.01$). This might reflect the influence of national image and reputation on how consumers judge both the credibility and desirability of HLBs.

In contrast, the VfM construct shows no significant correlation with the three outcome variables, except for a small negative relationship with HLB Purchase Intention ($r = -0.122$, $p < 0.05$). This finding implies that while consumers may conceptually link price and quality, this perception alone does not appear to strongly motivate their intention to purchase HLBs.

When looking at the personality-related variables, Brand Loyalty is negatively associated with HLB Purchase Intention ($r = -0.233$, $p < 0.01$) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products ($r = -0.172$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that individuals with stronger habitual purchasing behaviors may be less willing to try new or unfamiliar brands such as HLBs.

However, this pattern does not apply to Price Consciousness. In contrast to Brand Loyalty, Price Consciousness is positively correlated with both HLB Purchase Intention ($r = 0.229$, $p < 0.01$) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products ($r = 0.223$, $p < 0.01$). These findings could suggest that price-sensitive consumers are more open to HLBs if they view them as cost-effective alternatives.

Interestingly, Quality Consciousness is negatively associated with HLB Purchase Intention ($r = -0.191$, $p < 0.01$), which may reflect a degree of skepticism among quality-focused consumers regarding the standards of HLBs. Lastly, Exclusivity is positively correlated with both HLB Purchase Intention ($r = 0.159$, $p < 0.01$) and HLB Perceived Quality ($r = 0.120$, $p < 0.05$). This could suggest that consumers who value uniqueness or status are more receptive to HLBs they perceive as distinctive of premium.

Table 16 Pearson r correlation coefficients between independent variables, personality factors and outcome variables (n = 391)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.	Value for Money	--														
2.	Country of Origin	.307**	--													
3.	Company Image	.133**	.356**	--												
4.	Resources	.350**	.162**	.173**	--											
5.	Price	0.020	.204**	.524**	.118*	--										
6.	Product Category	.351**	.216**	-0.086	.283**	-.159**	--									
7.	Exclusivity	.149**	-0.090	.217**	.401**	0.059	.115*	--								
8.	Brand Loyalty	.260**	-.128*	-.103*	.440**	-.108*	.318**	.317**	--							
9.	Price Consciousness	-.338**	-.106*	0.079	-.151**	.152**	-.250**	-0.038	-.327**	--						
10.	Over-Choice Confusion	0.046	-.252**	-0.077	.303**	-0.015	0.080	.479**	.406**	0.009	--					
11.	Quality Consciousness	.286**	.188**	0.050	.258**	-0.032	.341**	0.035	.213**	-.111*	.118*	--				
12.	Novelty Consciousness	.121*	.223**	.269**	0.090	.205**	-.100*	.130**	-.189**	0.095	-0.023	.139**	--			
13.	Ethnocentrism	0.052	-0.095	0.001	-0.058	-0.067	0.070	0.053	0.041	0.045	.151**	-0.032	-0.077	--		
14.	HLB Perceived Quality	0.065	.255**	.438**	.154**	.279**	-.137**	.120*	-0.098	.105*	-0.010	0.044	.189**	-0.002	--	
15.	HLB Purchase Intention	-.122*	.150**	.416**	0.091	.452**	-.175**	.159**	-.233**	.229**	-0.032	-.191**	.247**	-0.058	.398**	--
16.	Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	-0.029	.237**	.622**	0.073	.589**	-.189**	.113*	-.172**	.223**	-0.041	-0.076	.244**	0.036	.415**	.588**

**p<.05, ** p<.01*

6.7 Cluster Analysis

6.7.1 Introduction

This section presents a segmentation analysis based on personality factors to illustrate the heterogeneity of consumer decision-making styles within the sample and provide a richer descriptive understanding of the consumer profiles. Using a two-step cluster analysis, the goal was to uncover naturally occurring subgroups within the sample that share similar decision-making tendencies and psychological characteristics. Unlike traditional segmentation approaches that rely on predefined criteria, this data-driven method identifies segments based on patterns emerging directly from the variables previously validated in the measurement model.

In this study, segmentation was based on the five personality traits: Brand Loyalty, Price Consciousness, Quality Consciousness, Novelty Consciousness and Over-Choice Confusion. The two-step cluster analysis was chosen for its ability to accommodate both continuous and categorical variables, which makes it well suited to marketing research where consumer profiles tend to vary. Three, four, and five-cluster solutions were examined. Ultimately, the four-cluster model was selected for offering the most meaningful differentiation while maintaining interpretability.

One-way ANOVA with Duncan's multiple range test was conducted for each of the five personality traits. This approach allowed us to identify which segments had significantly higher or lower mean scores relative to others. Based on their placement in homogeneous subsets across each variable, clusters were classified as "high", "low" or "moderate" on each personality characteristic. These classifications formed the empirical basis for naming the clusters (e.g. "Deal Seekers" or "Quality Innovators") and for crafting detailed behavioral descriptions. For example, a cluster identified as low in brand loyalty but high in novelty consciousness and quality consciousness was labelled "Quality Innovators", reflecting its openness to experimentation and preference for high standards.

The following tables show the mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) for each segment across personality and outcome variables. Statistically significant differences between clusters are indicated using Duncan's groupings, which reveal

where segments diverge meaningfully in their behavioral tendencies. In the next section, these segments are further examined in relation to demographic variables.

6.7.2 Identification and Interpretation of Consumer Segments

This section presents the results of the Two-step Cluster Analysis conducted using the five personality traits. Cluster solutions of three, four and five clusters were analyzed and evaluated in order to determine which one offers the most meaningful differentiation among consumers.

Table 17 presents the results of the cluster analysis and identifies three distinct consumer segments: Quality Loyalists, Innovative Deal Seekers and Cautious Loyalists. It also includes mean scores and standard deviations for each segment, in order to provide insight into how the clusters differ across brand-related traits, personality characteristics and attitudes toward HLBs. The differences between clusters were statistically tested using One-Way ANOVA with Duncan pairwise comparisons.

Quality Loyalists demonstrate the strongest brand loyalty (M = 5.01) and quality consciousness (M = 5.24), reflecting a consistent preference for familiar brands and a strong emphasis on product standards. They also have relatively high scores for Resources and Capabilities (M = 4.66) and COO perceptions (M = 5.20). This could suggest that they place greater value on reputable brands, especially those associated with strong production capabilities and a positive country image. Their perceived quality of HLBs is slightly lower (M = 6.46) compared to other segments, and their purchase intention (M = 4.93) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products (M = 4.71) are the lowest among the three groups.

Innovative Deal Seekers are characterized by the highest price consciousness (M = 4.98) and novelty consciousness (M = 4.28). Based on these results, this cluster appears to be value-driven and open to trying new products. At the same time, they have the lowest brand loyalty (M = 3.04), suggesting a lack of strong attachment to any particular brand. This cluster perceives HLB quality most favorably (M = 6.92) and shows the highest purchase intention (M = 5.70) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products (M = 5.24), indicating that they are the most open to adopting HLBs, particularly when perceived as innovative and offering good value.

Cautious Loyalists are characterized by a high level of brand loyalty (M = 4.92), similar to Quality Loyalists, but also exhibit the highest over-choice confusion (M = 5.07). This may suggest that they struggle with decision-making in a grocery store that offer too many options. This cluster has the highest ethnocentrism (M = 4.07), indicating a preference for domestic brands. Furthermore, this cluster has moderate scores for HLB purchase intention (M = 5.32) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products (M = 5.10), suggesting some openness to HLBs, though less than that of Innovative Deal Seekers.

The three clusters exhibit significant differences in brand loyalty, price consciousness, over-choice confusion, and exclusivity perceptions. Innovative Deal Seekers are the least brand-loyal but report higher interested in trying and purchasing HLBs. In contrast, Quality Loyalists show a stronger preference for familiar brands but show lower enthusiasm toward HLBs. Lastly, Cautious Loyalists demonstrate mixed tendencies, balancing brand loyalty with some openness to new offerings.

Table 17 Consumer Segmentation in Three Clusters Based on Personal Factors

	Clusters (3 segments)					
	Quality Loyalists (n=149)		Innovative Deal Seekers (n=132)		Cautious Loyalists (n=110)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Brand Loyalty	5.01_{a}	.94	3.04_{b}	1.00	4.92_{a}	1.24
Price Consciousness	2.81_{a}	.86	4.98_{b}	.97	5.11_{b}	.82
Choice Confusion	3.73_{a}	1.27	2.36_{b}	.66	5.07_{c}	.85
Quality Consciousness	5.24_{a}	.92	4.77_{b}	1.22	5.47_{a}	.85
Novelty consciousness	3.69_{a}	1.22	4.28_{b}	1.17	$3.94_{a,b}$	1.52
Ethnocentrism	3.64_{a}	1.29	$3.71_{a,b}$	1.37	4.07_{b}	1.49
Value for Money	4.62_{a}	1.00	3.80_{b}	1.20	4.12_{b}	1.06
Country of Origin	$5.20_{a,b}$	.88	5.34_{a}	1.02	4.98_{b}	.90
Company Image	4.45_{a}	.90	4.76_{b}	.84	$4.62_{a,b}$	.76
Resources	4.66_{a}	.95	3.94_{b}	.89	4.82_{a}	1.06
Price	4.73_{a}	.83	5.09_{b}	.95	5.04_{b}	.94
Product Category	5.06_{a}	1.09	4.37_{b}	1.30	5.05_{a}	1.01
Exclusivity	3.03_{a}	1.51	2.18_{b}	1.10	3.69_{c}	1.47

HLB Perceived Quality	6.46_{a}	1.65	6.92_{b}	1.36	$6.85_{a,b}$	1.49
HLB Purchase Intention	4.93_{a}	1.21	5.70_{b}	1.00	5.32_{c}	1.17
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	4.71_{a}	1.14	5.24_{b}	1.00	5.10_{b}	.96

Note. Values in the same row and subtable not sharing the same subscript are significantly different at p< .05 based on the results of One-Way ANOVA and Duncan pairwise comparisons.

Table 18 presents the results of the cluster analysis, dividing individuals this time into four distinct clusters: Brand Enthusiasts, Quality Innovators, Loyal Value Seekers and Deal Seekers. The differences between clusters were once again statistically tested using One-Way ANOVA with Duncan pairwise comparisons.

Brand Enthusiasts (n = 137) represent the most brand-loyal segment (M = 5.05). They are highly conscious of quality (M = 5.27), while showing only moderate concern for price (M = 2.77). This segment places particular importance on both COO (M = 5.21) and company image (M = 4.44), suggesting a preference for well-established brands associated with companies that have a strong reputation. Their HLB perceived quality (M = 6.41) and purchase intention (M = 4.90) are relatively lower, which may reflect a degree of skepticism toward unfamiliar offerings and a stronger preference to familiar, well-known brands.

Quality Innovators (n = 80) emerge as the most quality-conscious segment (M = 5.76) while also displaying the highest novelty-seeking tendencies (M = 4.63). Brand loyalty is relatively low in this segment (M = 3.10) while price sensitivity is comparatively high (M = 4.81), reflecting a tendency to favor options that balance innovation, quality and cost. This segment demonstrates the highest level of perceived quality for HLBs among all groups (M = 7.25). These findings indicate that HLBs are perceived by Quality Innovators as high-quality alternatives. In line with this perception, both purchase intention (M = 5.55) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products (M = 5.28) remain relatively high, highlighting their willingness to try new products.

Loyal Value Seekers (n = 106) show both high brand loyalty (M = 5.01) and strong price consciousness (M = 5.13), reflecting a profile that is attached to their preferred brands but also actively seeks VfM. Their evaluations of HLB are also favorable, with perceived quality rated at 6.86 and purchase intention at 5.34. These

figures suggest a willingness to purchase HLBs if they are perceived as providing quality at a reasonable price.

Lastly, Deal Seekers (n = 68) are primarily driven by price considerations, as shown by their high price consciousness (M = 4.88) and relatively low concern for product quality (M = 3.64). They also exhibit the lowest brand loyalty (M = 3.21) and place little value on exclusivity (M = 2.21). Despite these tendencies, their purchase intention (M = 5.74) is the highest among all segments. This suggests that this group is particularly open to HLBs when they perceive them as offering good value.

The four-cluster solution exhibit significant differences in consumer decision-making patterns. Quality Innovators and Deal Seekers stand out as promising targets for HLBs, given their high purchase intentions and openness to trying new products. On the other hand, Brand Enthusiasts, despite their strong brand loyalty, may be less inclined to consider HLBs without targeted messaging that addresses familiarity and trust. Loyal Value Seekers appear to offer a stable potential, particularly if communication efforts emphasize quality-assurance and competitive pricing.

Table 18 Consumer Segmentation Based on Brand Loyalty, Price Sensitivity, and Quality Perceptions in HLB Adoption

	Clusters (4 segments)							
	Brand Enthusiasts (n=137)		Quality Innovators (n=80)		Loyal Value Seekers (n=106)		Deal Seekers (n=68)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Loyalty	5.05_{a}	.92	3.10_{b}	1.04	5.01_{a}	1.18	3.21_{b}	1.13
Price Consciousness	2.77_{a}	.84	4.81_{b}	1.11	5.13_{b}	.82	4.88_{b}	1.00
Choice Confusion	3.82_{a}	1.27	2.30_{b}	.62	5.08_{c}	.86	2.62_{b}	.88
Quality Consciousness	5.27_{a}	.87	5.76_{b}	.63	$5.48_{a,b}$	.83	3.64_{c}	.64
Novelty consciousness	3.67_{a}	1.20	4.63_{b}	1.09	3.96_{a}	1.52	3.74_{a}	1.17
Ethnocentrism	3.66_{a}	1.29	3.54_{a}	1.45	3.99_{a}	1.47	4.00_{a}	1.31
Value for Money	4.63_{a}	1.00	$4.26_{a,b}$	1.22	4.12_{b}	1.07	3.41_{c}	1.01
Country of Origin	$5.21_{a,b}$	.86	5.56_{a}	.98	4.99_{b}	.90	$4.99_{b,c}$	.99
Company Image	4.44_{a}	.91	4.93_{b}	.76	$4.61_{a,b}$	.78	4.55_{a}	.85
Resources	$4.65_{a,b}$	.96	4.31_{a}	.88	4.88_{b}	1.03	3.61_{c}	.80
Price	4.71_{a}	.83	5.13_{b}	.84	5.06_{b}	.94	$4.99_{a,b}$	1.04

Product Category	5.07_a	1.10	4.65_a	1.36	5.08_a	1.00	4.12_b	1.12
Exclusivity	3.10_a	1.53	2.16_b	1.06	3.75_c	1.44	2.21_b	1.13
HLB Perceived Quality	6.41_a	1.68	7.25_b	1.28	$6.86_{a,b}$	1.50	6.56_a	1.31
HLB Purchase Intention	4.90_a	1.19	5.55_b	.98	5.34_b	1.19	5.74_b	1.08
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	4.68_a	1.16	5.28_b	.91	5.09_b	.96	5.17_b	1.06

Note. Values in the same row and subtable not sharing the same subscript are significantly different at p< .05 based on the results of One-Way ANOVA and Duncan pairwise comparisons.

Table 19 shows the results of the cluster analysis, grouping individuals into five segments: Quality Loyalists, Brand Enthusiasts, Innovative Quality Seekers, Loyal Value Seekers and Deal Seekers. Consistent with the approach used in the previous two analyses, differences across the clusters were examined using One-Way ANOVA with Duncan pairwise comparisons.

Quality Loyalists (n = 45) demonstrate high quality consciousness (M = 5.90) and appear less sensitive to price (M = 2.52), reflecting a tendency to favor high-quality products despite the cost. COO is also influential for this group, with a mean score of 5.76. This may indicate a belief that internationally recognized NBs deliver superior quality. However, their HLB purchase intention (M = 4.14) and Willingness to purchase the HLB company's products (M = 4.38) are the lowest among the clusters, reflecting skepticism towards HLBs.

Brand Enthusiasts (n = 103) score highly on brand loyally (M = 4.92) and they also show a relatively strong preference for exclusivity (M = 3.53). Their level of quality consciousness is moderate (M = 4.99), while price consciousness remains comparatively low (M = 3.03). These traits collectively suggest a tendency to favor established and recognizable brands. Their HLB purchase intention (M = 5.19) is moderate, suggesting some openness to hybrid brands if they align with their brand loyalty preferences.

Innovative Quality Seekers (n = 76) stand out as the most novelty-conscious segment (M = 4.73), with high quality consciousness (M = 5.75) and HLB perceived quality (M = 7.28). Although they score relatively low on brand loyalty (M = 3.04), their purchase intention for HLBs is notably high (M = 5.60), which could reflect a

willingness to explore new products when quality expectations are met. From a practitioner's perspective, this group represents a key target for HLBs positioned as both innovative and high-quality alternatives.

Loyal Value Seekers (n = 101) display a combination of high brand loyalty (M = 5.03) and strong price consciousness (M = 5.18), a profile that points to consumers who prioritize value but remain attached to familiar trusted brands. Their HLB perceived quality (M = 6.83) and purchase intention (M = 5.38) are relatively strong, suggesting they are receptive to HLBs if they perceive them as offering both quality and affordability.

Lastly, Deal Seekers (n = 66) demonstrate a tendency to place more weight on price than on quality. This is evident in their relatively high score on price consciousness (M = 4.89) and lower score on quality consciousness (M = 3.62). They have the lowest perception of VfM (M = 3.37), indicating skepticism about the correlation between higher prices and superior quality. Interestingly, this segment also shows the highest intention to purchase HLBs (M = 5.77), implying that value-oriented branding may be particularly effective in reaching these consumers.

Table 19 A Five-Segment Consumer Classification: Quality, Price Sensitivity and Brand Perceptions in HLB Adoption

	Clusters (5 segments)									
	Quality Loyalists (n=45)		Brand Enthusiasts (n=103)		Innovative Quality Seekers (n=76)		Loyal Value Seekers (n=101)		Deal Seekers (n=66)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Loyalty	5.19_{a}	.71	4.92_{a}	.99	3.04_{b}	1.01	5.03_{a}	1.20	3.19_{b}	1.14
Price Consciousness	2.52_{a}	.82	3.03_{b}	.89	4.85_{c}	1.12	5.18_{c}	.80	4.89_{c}	1.02
Choice Confusion	2.30_{a}	.60	4.49_{b}	.90	2.33_{a}	.62	5.07_{c}	.87	2.58_{a}	.85
Quality Consciousness	5.90_{a}	.57	4.99_{b}	.82	$5.75_{a,c}$	.64	5.51_{c}	.83	3.62_{d}	.64
Novelty Consciousness	2.83_{a}	.73	4.05_{b}	1.15	4.73_{c}	1.02	3.92_{b}	1.56	3.74_{b}	1.18
Ethnocentrism	3.74_{a}	1.17	3.65_{a}	1.31	3.52_{a}	1.47	4.00_{a}	1.49	3.98_{a}	1.32
Value for Money	4.91_{a}	.98	$4.49_{a,b}$	.98	4.25_{b}	1.25	$4.11_{b,c}$	1.06	3.37_{d}	.99

Country of Origin	5.76_{a}	.97	4.97_{b}	.74	5.56_{a}	.93	4.98_{b}	.90	5.01_{b}	.99
Company Image	4.32_{a}	.92	4.50_{a}	.88	4.95_{b}	.76	4.59_{a}	.79	$4.56_{a,b}$	.85
Resources	$4.58_{a,b}$	.92	$4.68_{a,b}$	.96	4.29_{a}	.90	4.88_{b}	1.03	3.59_{c}	.81
Price	4.46_{a}	.84	$4.81_{a,b}$	.81	5.13_{b}	.85	$5.10_{b,c}$	.94	$5.02_{b,d}$	1.03
Product Category	5.85_{a}	1.01	$4.75_{b,c}$	.94	$4.58_{b,d}$	1.34	5.08_{c}	1.02	4.12_{d}	1.14
Exclusivity	2.10_{a}	1.31	3.53_{b}	1.42	2.20_{a}	1.06	3.73_{b}	1.46	2.17_{a}	1.11
HLB Perceived Quality	6.09_{a}	1.36	6.62_{a}	1.74	7.28_{b}	1.29	$6.83_{a,b}$	1.50	6.55_{a}	1.33
HLB Purchase Intention	4.14_{a}	1.09	5.19_{b}	1.06	$5.60_{b,c}$	.96	$5.38_{b,c}$	1.19	5.77_{c}	1.08
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	4.38_{a}	1.09	$4.83_{a,c,d}$	1.14	5.30_{b}	.92	$5.11_{b,c}$	.97	$5.17_{b,d}$	1.06

Note. Values in the same row and subtable not sharing the same subscript are significantly different at $p < .05$ based on the results of One-Way ANOVA and Duncan pairwise comparisons.

6.7.3 Cluster Number Selection

For further analysis, we selected the four-cluster solution because it achieves both differentiation and ease of interpretation, which, as a result, makes it more effective than the three- or five-cluster options.

The three-cluster model, for instance, blurred some important distinctions. Both "Quality Loyalists" and "Cautious Loyalists" showed strong brand commitment and an emphasis on quality, making it difficult to differentiate between them. The third group, "Innovative Deal Seekers", mixed together two quite different tendencies. It grouped together consumers motivated mainly by price with those driven by novelty, overlooking the important differences between these behaviors.

The five-cluster model, on the other hand, introduced additional clusters that were difficult to justify conceptually. Quality-focused consumers were split into "Quality Loyalists" and "Innovative Quality Seekers", though both displayed very similar concerns about product standards. Likewise, two categories emerged, "Brand Enthusiasts" and "Loyal Value Seekers", that overlapped heavily in their brand-loyalty profile, with price sensitivity being the only real divider. This additional complexity did

not appear to add much analytical value and, if anything, made the segmentation harder to apply.

Compared to the above, the four-cluster model provided greater interpretability. It offered a balanced segmentation structure that retained interpretability while still capturing key differences in consumer motivations. As shown in Figure 8 and Table 20, the four clusters were interpreted as:

- Quality Innovators: Consumers who prioritize high product quality and innovation, representing an ideal target for premium and performance-driven marketing strategies.
- Deal Seekers: Consumers who are highly price-sensitive and respond actively to discounts and promotions, making them a natural target for competitive pricing tactics.
- Loyal Value Seekers: Consumers who stick with their preferred brands yet remain conscious of affordability, suggesting the need for a mix of reassurance and value messaging.
- Brand Enthusiasts: Consumers who display strong brand loyalty and relatively low sensitivity to price, best addressed through exclusive branding, premium positioning and long-term relationship-building.

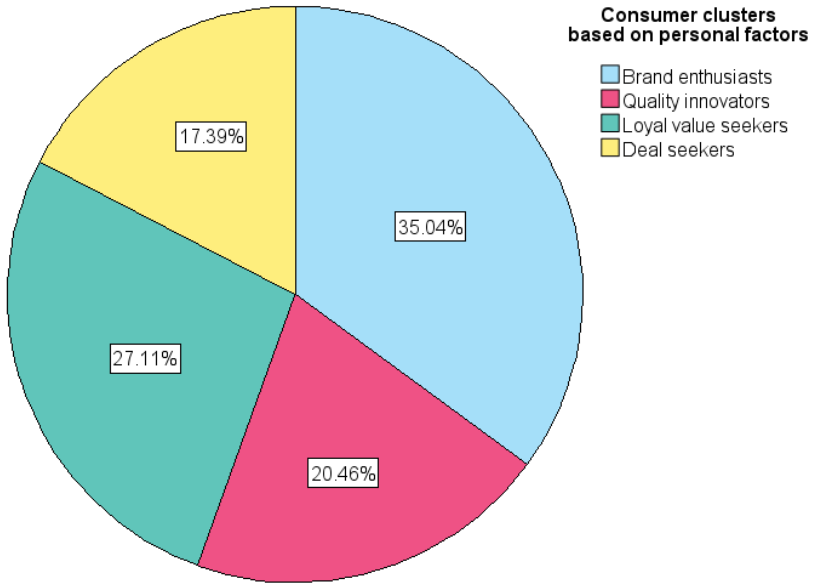


Figure 8 Distribution of Consumers in Four Segments Based on Personal Factors

Table 20 Understanding Consumer Segments: A Four-Cluster Model of Loyalty, Price Sensitivity, and Quality Perceptions

4 Clusters					
NEW NAME	**Brand loyalty**	**Price Conscious**	**Choice Confusion**	**Quality Conscious**	**Novelty conscious**
C1 (Quality Innovators)	LOW		LOW	HIGH	HIGH
C2 (Deal Seekers)	LOW	HIGH		LOW	LOW
C3 (Loyal Value Seekers)	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH		LOW
C4 (Brand Enthusiasts)	HIGH	LOW			LOW

6.8 Cluster Associations with Demographic Variables

Table 21 shows how the four consumer segments relate to key demographic variables such as “Involvement in choosing household item brands”, “Gender”, “Family status” and “Educational level”. The chi-square tests (χ2) were conducted to determine whether significant differences exist across the segments.

The results indicate no significant link between cluster membership and involvement in household brand selection ($\chi^2(3)=4.60$, $p=0.204$). Across all clusters, most participants reported being fully involved in choosing household brands. The differences that do appear are relatively minor. Brand Enthusiasts show the highest involvement (70.1%), while Quality Innovators report the lowest (57.5%). This pattern may suggest that, although some variation exists, decision-making involvement is not a strong factor in distinguishing between consumer clusters.

Gender also appears not to matter much ($\chi^2(3)=.749$, $p=0.862$). Men and women are spread fairly evenly across the four groups. This finding implies that traits such as brand loyalty, price sensitivity, and concern for quality do not systematically differ by gender, at least within this sample.

Family status shows a similar outcome, with no statistically significant association ($\chi^2(3)=5.95$, $p=0.114$). However, it is worth noting that married respondents dominate every cluster. Their presence is highest among Deal Seekers (84.4%) and Quality Innovators (82.5%). This pattern might point to a connection between marital status and more price or quality driven behaviors, perhaps reflecting the added financial responsibilities of managing a household. Still, the absence of statistical significance suggests caution in drawing firm conclusions.

Educational level emerges as the only demographic variable to demonstrate a statistically significant association with cluster membership ($\chi^2(15)=44.82$, $p<.0001$). Segment profiles differ sharply here. Clear contrasts can be observed across the four segments. Brand Enthusiasts appear to be the most highly educated group, with 30.1% holding postgraduate qualifications from abroad and a further 19.1% from Cyprus. In contrast, Quality Innovators present a more mixed educational profile, yet they also contain the largest proportion of respondents with only secondary education (27.5%). Loyal Value Seekers occupy a middle ground, displaying a relatively even distribution across educational levels, though notably 27.9% hold postgraduate degrees obtained in Cyprus. Deal Seekers constitute the least formally educated segment, with only 10.3% reporting postgraduate qualifications and nearly one-third (29.4%) possessing solely secondary education.

The results appear to indicate that education plays a role in shaping consumer orientations. Those with higher levels of education tend to show greater brand enthusiasm and a stronger sensitivity to quality, whereas individuals with less formal education are more often linked to price-conscious and deal-seeking behavior. One possible reading is that consumers holding advanced degrees may give added weight to brand reputation or a sense of exclusivity, while those with lower educational attainment are likely to emphasize affordability and everyday practicality. It should be noted, however, that such associations are not deterministic and may be influenced by other factors such as income or household responsibilities.

Table 21 Associations between the Four-Cluster Model and Demographic Variables

		Clusters (4 segments)								χ^2
		Brand enthusiasts		Quality innovators		Loyal value seekers		Deal seekers		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Involved in choosing household item brands	Fully Involved	96	70.1%	46	57.5%	63	59.4%	44	64.7%	$\chi^2(3)=4.60$, p = .204
	Partially Involved	41	29.9%	34	42.5%	43	40.6%	24	35.3%	
Gender	Male	57	41.9%	31	38.8%	38	36.5%	27	40.3%	$\chi^2(3)=.749$,
	Female	79	58.1%	49	61.3%	66	63.5%	40	59.7%	p = .862
Family status	Single	31	23.5%	14	17.5%	30	29.7%	10	15.6%	$\chi^2(3)=5.95$,
	Married	101	76.5%	66	82.5%	71	70.3%	54	84.4%	p = .114
Educational level	Secondary education	16	11.8%	22	27.5%	15	14.4%	20	29.4%	$\chi^2(15)=44.82$, p <.001
	University/College students	10	7.4%	4	5.0%	12	11.5%	6	8.8%	
	University/College degree (Cyprus)	19	14.0%	15	18.8%	6	5.8%	18	26.5%	
	University/College degree (abroad)	24	17.6%	14	17.5%	18	17.3%	10	14.7%	
	Postgraduate degree (Cyprus)	26	19.1%	11	13.8%	29	27.9%	7	10.3%	
	Postgraduate degree (abroad)	41	30.1%	14	17.5%	24	23.1%	7	10.3%	

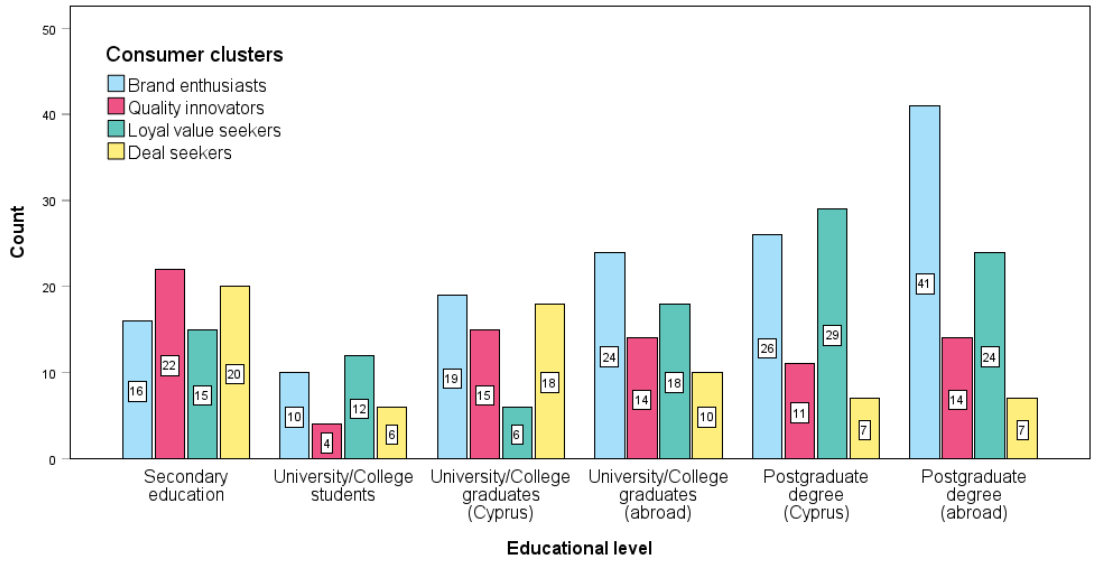


Figure 9 Demographic Influences on Consumer Segments: The Role of Education in Brand Loyalty, Quality Perception, and Price Sensitivity

6.9 Structural Model

6.9.1 Introduction

This section presents the results of the structural model analysis. The model examines the role of a set of independent variables in shaping three outcomes: “HLB Perceived Quality”, “HLB Purchase Intention”, and “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”. The statistical output includes unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors (S.E.), critical ratios (C.R.), standardized regression weights (β), and significance values (p). These indicators provide the basis for assessing both the strength and the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships.

SEM with path coefficients was chosen over simpler techniques such as multiple regression or correlation analysis. The rationale for this choice lies in SEM’s capacity to estimate several relationships at once, within a framework that is explicitly theory-driven. Unlike regression, SEM takes account of measurement error, provides indices of model fit, and permits comparisons across latent constructs. These features make it particularly appropriate when dealing with complex, multi-path models of consumer behavior. This approach is also appropriate given the earlier validation of

the measurement model through CFA, ensuring that the constructs entering the structural model are both reliable and valid.

6.9.2 Predictor Screening and Development of the Structural Model

To identify the most important predictors of HLB evaluation and adoption, a series of backward multiple regression analyses was conducted. The initial models included brand-related variables, personality consumer characteristics and CE. Predictors were sequentially removed when their probability of *F*-to-remove was equal to or greater than 0.10. Because backward elimination is a data-driven procedure, the analyses were used primarily for predictor screening and structural model development rather than as definitive confirmatory tests of the proposed theoretical relationships.

Three related outcomes were examined: “HLB Perceived Quality”, “Willingness to purchase the HLB company’s products”, and “HLB Purchase Intention”. For the final purchase intention analysis, “HLB Perceived Quality” and “Willingness to purchase the HLB company’s products“ were also included as proximal predictors, allowing the analysis to distinguish between direct brand-related effects and effects potentially transmitted through consumers’ evaluations and trial intentions.

Table 22 ***Summary of the Final Backward Regression Models Predicting HLB Outcomes***

Outcome	*R*	R^2	Adjusted R^2	*F*	df	*p*
HLB Perceived Quality	.483	.233	.225	29.318	4, 386	< .001
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products	.723	.523	.517	84.407	5, 385	< .001
HLB Purchase Intention	.666	.444	.434	43.683	7, 383	< .001

Note. The Purchase Intention model included HLB Perceived Quality and Willingness to purchase the HLB company’s products as proximal predictors.

6.9.3 Predictors of HLB Perceived Quality

The final regression model predicting HLB Perceived Quality was statistically significant, $F(4, 386) = 29.32$, $p < 0.001$, and explained 23.3% of its variance, adjusted $R^2 = 0.225$.

Table 23 Final Regression Model Predicting HLB Perceived Quality

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*
Company Image	.626	.088	.350	7.107	< .001
Product Category	−.221	.062	−.172	−3.557	< .001
Country of Origin	.240	.080	.148	3.000	.003
Resources and Capabilities	.174	.070	.118	2.490	.013

Company Image was the strongest positive predictor of "HLB Perceived Quality", $\beta = 0.350$, $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that consumers' assessments of the company as reliable, credible, innovative and capable of offering high-quality products constitute the most influential cues in the formation of HLB quality perceptions.

Product Category was negatively associated with "HLB Perceived Quality", $\beta = -0.172$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, respondents who expressed stronger concerns, perceived risk or greater deliberation regarding the purchase of personal care products tended to evaluate the quality of the HLB less favorably.

COO had a positive independent association with perceived quality, $\beta = 0.148$, $p = 0.003$. A favorable evaluation of France as a country associated with quality, prestige, manufacturing capability and attractive product design contributed positively to HLB quality perceptions, even after the other predictors were controlled.

Perception of Resources & Capabilities also had a smaller but statistically significant positive effect, $\beta = 0.118$, $p = 0.013$. This suggests that consumers used retailer size, international expansion, market presence and production capability as additional indicators of product quality.

The remaining variables did not contribute sufficient unique explanatory variance after these four cues were considered. Therefore, the results suggest that

"HLB Perceived Quality" is primarily shaped by corporate credibility, COO cues, organizational capability and Product Category.

6.9.4 Predictors of "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products"

The final model predicting "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" was statistically significant, $F(5, 385) = 84.41$, $p < 0.001$. The model explained 52.3% of the variance in "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", adjusted $R^2 = 0.517$, representing the strongest explanatory performance among the three regression models.

Table 24 ***Final Regression Model Predicting "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products"***

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*
Company Image	.475	.056	.379	8.539	< .001
Price	.383	.049	.329	7.856	< .001
HLB Perceived Quality	.104	.028	.148	3.771	< .001
Price Consciousness	.090	.027	.118	3.295	.001
Quality Consciousness	−.079	.036	−.078	−2.194	.029

"Company Image" was the strongest predictor of "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", $\beta = 0.379$, $p < 0.001$. Consumers were therefore more willing to try an HLB when the company behind the product was perceived as reliable, strong, innovative and capable of producing high-quality offerings.

Price was the second strongest predictor, $\beta = 0.329$, $p < 0.001$. The likelihood of trial increased when respondents perceived the HLB as reasonably priced, attractively priced and representing a good purchase. This result demonstrates that price perceptions play a central role in encouraging initial consumer experimentation with an unfamiliar or hybrid brand.

"HLB Perceived Quality" had an additional positive association with "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", $\beta = 0.148$, $p < 0.001$. Thus,

favorable quality evaluations contributed to consumers' willingness to try the product independently of company image and price value.

"Price Consciousness" was positively related to "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", β = 0.118, p = 0.001. Price-conscious consumers may therefore be particularly receptive to HLB products when these products are perceived to offer an advantageous balance between price and quality.

"Quality Consciousness" had a small negative adjusted association with "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", β = −0.078, p = 0.029. This suggests that, after accounting for "Company Image", "Price", "HLB Perceived Quality" and "Price Consciousness", consumers with a stronger general emphasis on obtaining high-quality products remained somewhat more hesitant to try the HLB. One possible interpretation is that highly quality-conscious consumers require stronger quality assurance before experimenting with a relatively unfamiliar brand format.

However, this negative coefficient should be interpreted cautiously. Its magnitude was small, and the negative effect emerged in the multivariable model after the other correlated predictors were controlled. It may therefore partly represent a conditional or suppression effect rather than a strong unconditional negative relationship.

Overall, the findings indicate that consumers' "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" is predominantly driven by "Company Image" and "Price", with "Perceived Quality" and "Price Consciousness" making additional positive contributions.

6.9.5 Predictors of "HLB Purchase Intention"

The final comprehensive regression model predicting "HLB Purchase Intention" was statistically significant, $F(7, 383) = 43.68$, $p < 0.001$, and explained 44.4% of the variance in purchase intention, adjusted $R^2 = .434$.

Table 25 ***Final Regression Model Predicting "HLB Purchase Intention"***

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*
Willingness to Purchase the	.406	.056	.369	7.276	< .001

HLB Company's Products					
HLB Perceived Quality	.141	.033	.183	4.325	< .001
Quality Consciousness	−.171	.045	−.154	−3.820	< .001
Price	.195	.061	.152	3.209	.001
Novelty Consciousness	.101	.036	.114	2.813	.005
Value for Money	−.113	.041	−.110	−2.717	.007
Exclusivity	.073	.031	.093	2.380	.018

"Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" was the strongest predictor of "HLB Purchase Intention", β = 0.369, $p < 0.001$. This result indicates that consumers' willingness to experiment with the HLB company's products represents the most immediate antecedent of their intention to purchase it.

"HLB Perceived Quality" remained a significant positive predictor, β = 0.183, $p < 0.001$, even after "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" and the remaining brand and personality characteristics were controlled. "HLB Perceived Quality" therefore appears to affect "HLB Purchase Intention" both directly and potentially indirectly through consumers' "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products".

"Price" also had a positive direct association with "HLB Purchase Intention", β = 0.152, $p = 0.001$. Consequently, favorable price and value perceptions continued to influence purchase decisions even after "HLB Perceived Quality" and "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" had been taken into account.

"Quality Consciousness" was negatively associated with "HLB Purchase Intention", β = −0.154, $p < 0.001$. This finding suggests that highly quality-conscious consumers may remain cautious about purchasing HLB products, potentially because of uncertainty concerning whether an unfamiliar hybrid brand can consistently meet their quality expectations. As with the corresponding effect on "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", this is an adjusted relationship and should be interpreted within the context of the other predictors included in the model.

"Novelty Consciousness" was positively related to "HLB Purchase Intention", β = 0.114, $p = 0.005$. Consumers who were more willing to take risks and adopt new products were therefore more likely to express an intention to purchase the HLB.

“Value for Money” had a negative effect, β = −0.110, p = 0.007. This construct reflects the general belief that higher prices signal higher product quality. The negative coefficient suggests that consumers who strongly rely on a conventional high-price–high-quality heuristic may be less receptive to an HLB value proposition after their evaluation of the specific HLB price is controlled. In other words, favorable perceptions of the HLB’s specific price value encouraged adoption, whereas a general reliance on high prices as a quality cue discouraged it.

Finally, “Exclusivity” had a small positive effect, β = 0.093, p = 0.018. Perceptions that an HLB could offer symbolic, status-related or socially distinctive benefits therefore contributed modestly to purchase intention.

6.9.6 Integrated interpretation and Development of the Path Model

Taken together, the regression findings support a sequential model of HLB evaluation and adoption. First, “HLB Perceived Quality” was primarily shaped by “Company Image”, “COO”, “Perception of Resources & Capabilities”, and “Product Category”. “Company Image” was the dominant positive quality cue, whereas stronger “Product Category” involvement reduced “HLB Perceived Quality”. Second, “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products“ was primarily determined by “Company Image” and “Price”. “HLB Perceived Quality” also contributed positively, indicating that consumers were more willing to experiment with the product when they had already formed a favorable quality assessment. Third, “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products” emerged as the strongest direct predictor of “HLB Purchase Intention”. “HLB Perceived Quality” and “Price” also retained significant direct effects, indicating that the transition from brand evaluation to purchasing was only partly channeled through trial intention.

An important pattern is that “Company Image” was a strong predictor of both “HLB Perceived Quality” and “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”, but it was not retained as a direct predictor of “HLB Purchase Intention” once “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products” and “HLB Perceived Quality” were included. This pattern is consistent with the possibility that the effect of “Company Image” on “HLB Purchase Intention” operates primarily through more proximal consumer responses, particularly “HLB Perceived Quality” and “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”.

Similarly, “COO” and “Perception of Resources & Capabilities” predicted “HLB Perceived Quality” but did not retain independent direct effects on “HLB Purchase Intention”. These variables may therefore operate as distal quality cues, influencing behavioral intentions indirectly through consumers’ evaluations of the HLB.

By contrast, “Price” retained effects on both “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products” and “HLB Purchase Intention”. “Price” therefore appears to function as both an initial incentive encouraging consumers to try the HLB company’s products and a direct determinant of subsequent purchase intention. These findings support a structural model in which brand-related cues first shape perceived quality and intention to try the company’s products, which in turn influence purchase intention.

6.9.7 Results of the Structural Model

Following the preliminary regression analyses, a recursive observed-variable path model was estimated in AMOS using maximum likelihood estimation and the full sample of 391 respondents. Composite scores representing the study constructs were entered as observed variables. Consequently, the analysis is more precisely described as an observed-variable path analysis conducted within a SEM framework.

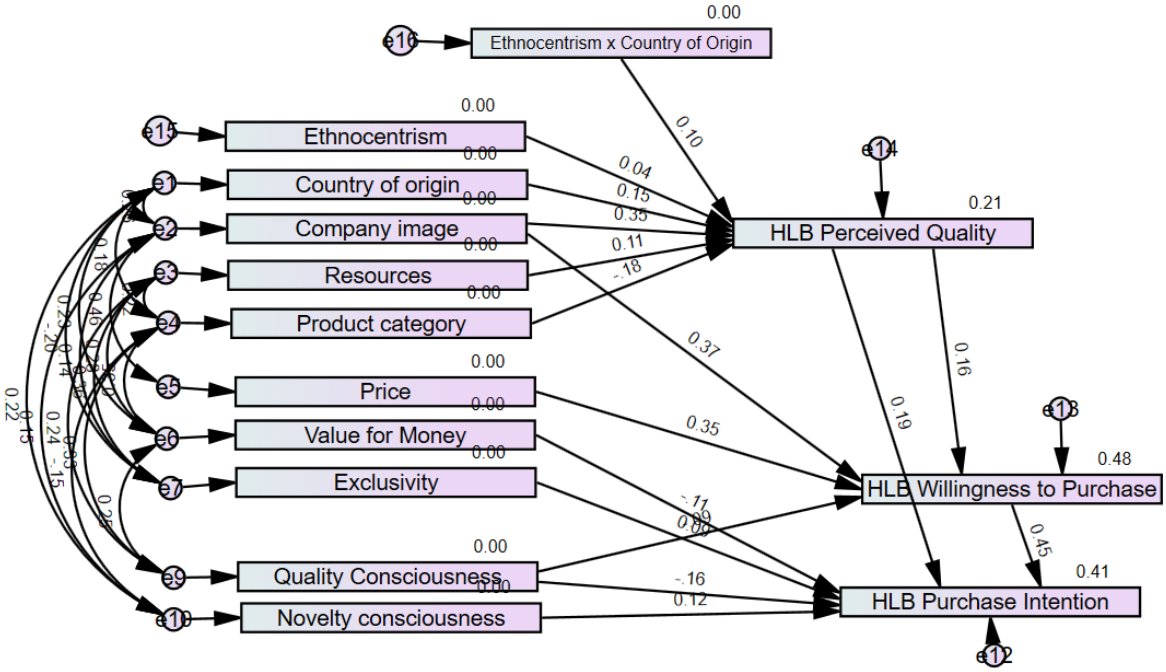


Figure 10 The structural model derived from the preliminary linear regression analyses

***The model represented HLB adoption as a sequential process. Brand- and market-related characteristics were specified as predictors of “HLB Perceived Quality”, while “Company Image”, “Price”, “Quality Consciousness” and “HLB Perceived Quality” were specified as predictors of “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”. “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products“ and “HLB Perceived Quality” were subsequently modelled as proximal predictors of “HLB Purchase Intention”, together with selected personality and product-related characteristics.

“COO” perceptions and “Consumer Ethnocentrism” were mean-centered before constructing their interaction term. Thus, the lower-order effect of “COO” represents its association with “HLB Perceived Quality” at the mean level of “Consumer Ethnocentrism”, while the lower-order effect of ethnocentrism represents its association with “HLB Perceived Quality” at the mean level of COO perceptions.

6.9.8 Fit Indices and Direct Effects

The final structural model produced an acceptable fit to the data, ($\chi^2(59)$ = 172.66), $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.93$, CFI = 0.906, IFI = 0.908, TLI = 0.854, NFI = 0.867,

and RMSEA = 0.070, 90% CI [0.058, 0.083]). The relative chi-square was below 3, while the CFI and IFI exceeded the conventional 0.90 criterion. The RMSEA also fell within the conventionally acceptable range. However, the NFI and TLI remained below 0.90, and the upper confidence limit for the RMSEA slightly exceeded 0.08. The model was therefore considered to provide an adequate or marginally acceptable representation of the observed covariance structure, rather than an unequivocally strong fit (Table 26).

Unstandardized and standardized estimates for the final structural model are presented in Table 27. The final model explained 21.0% of the variance in “HLB Perceived Quality”, 48.3% of the variance in “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products” and 40.7% of the variance in “HLB Purchase Intention”. The model therefore demonstrated its greatest explanatory capacity for consumers’ intention to try the HLB company’s products, while also accounting for a substantial proportion of the variance in purchase intention.

Table 26 ***Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Final Structural Model***

Fit index	**Value**
(χ^2)	172.661
(df)	59
(p)	< .001
(χ^2/df)	2.926
Normed fit index (NFI)	.867
Incremental fit index (IFI)	.908
Tucker–Lewis index (TLI)	.854
Comparative fit index (CFI)	.906
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	.070
90% CI for RMSEA	[.058, .083]
Akaike information criterion (AIC)	292.661
Expected cross-validation index (ECVI)	.750
Hoelter’s critical (N), (p = .05)	177
Hoelter’s critical (N), (p = .01)	197

Note. CI = confidence interval. AIC and ECVI are comparative indices and are primarily interpreted relative to alternative models estimated using the same data.

Table 27 ***Unstandardized and Standardized Estimates for the Final Structural Model***

Outcome and predictor	B	SE	β	p	95% bootstrap CI for B	Bootstrap (p)
HLB Perceived Quality (21%)						
Country of Origin	.242	.075	.154	.001	[.073, .417]	.002
Company Image	.632	.085	.347	< .001	[.415, .844]	.001
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	.168	.068	.114	.013	[.025, .311]	.020
Product Category	−.230	.059	−.182	< .001	[−.362, −.103]	.003
Consumer Ethnocentrism	.043	.048	.040	.370	[−.068, .147]	.452
Country of Origin × Ethnocentrism	.100	.047	.096	.033	[−.010, .196]	.074
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products (48%)						
Company Image	.472	.056	.371	< .001	[.341, .620]	.002
Price	.402	.047	.354	< .001	[.273, .501]	.003
Quality Consciousness	−.092	.036	−.093	.010	[−.170, −.010]	.024
HLB Perceived Quality	.111	.028	.159	< .001	[.057, .164]	.002
HLB Purchase Intention (40%)						
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	.500	.047	.451	< .001	[.397, .607]	.002
HLB Perceived Quality	.145	.033	.188	< .001	[.069, .220]	.002
Quality Consciousness	−.173	.044	−.158	< .001	[−.262, −.076]	.002
Novelty Consciousness	.109	.034	.125	.001	[.025, .179]	.009
Value for Money	−.108	.041	−.105	.009	[−.195, −.025]	.005
Exclusivity	.070	.030	.091	.019	[.010, .132]	.020

Note. B= unstandardized coefficient; SE= standard error; β= standardized coefficient; ML = maximum likelihood; BC = bias-corrected; CI = confidence interval. Bootstrap results are based on 1,000 samples.

"Company Image" was the strongest direct predictor of "HLB Perceived Quality", (β = 0.347), bootstrap (p = 0.001). "Product Category" negatively predicted "HLB Perceived Quality", whereas "COO" and "Perception of Resources & Capabilities" had positive effects. "Consumer Ethnocentrism" did not have a significant independent direct effect on "HLB Perceived Quality". Although the interaction between "COO" and "Consumer Ethnocentrism" was significant under the

conventional maximum-likelihood test, its bias-corrected interval included zero. The moderation effect was therefore not robustly supported by the bootstrap analysis.

"Company Image" and "Price" were the two strongest predictors of "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products". "HLB Perceived Quality" also had a positive direct effect, whereas "Quality Consciousness" had a small negative effect.

"Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products" was the strongest direct predictor of "HLB Purchase Intention", (β = 0.451), followed by "HLB Perceived Quality". "Novelty Consciousness" and "Exclusivity" positively predicted purchase intention, whereas "Quality Consciousness" and "Value for Money" had negative effects.

6.9.9 Indirect and Total Effects

Table 28 ***Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Estimates of Indirect Effects***

Outcome and predictor	Indirect (B)	Standardized Indirect Effect	95% Bootstrap CI for (B)	Bootstrap (p)
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products				
Country of Origin	.027	.024	[.008, .059]	.001
Company Image	.070	.055	[.036, .114]	.001
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	.019	.018	[.004, .043]	.012
Product Category	−.025	−.029	[−.052, −.009]	.002
Consumer Ethnocentrism	.005	.006	[−.006, .019]	.388
Country of Origin × Ethnocentrism	.011	.015	[.000, .027]	.045
HLB Purchase Intention				
Country of Origin	.049	.040	[.014, .098]	.002
Company Image	.363	.257	[.278, .481]	.001
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	.034	.030	[.006, .072]	.014
Product Category	−.046	−.047	[−.081, −.022]	.002
Consumer Ethnocentrism	.009	.010	[−.011, .032]	.411

Country of Origin × Ethnocentrism	.020	.025	[.000, .046]	.047
Price	.201	.160	[.136, .278]	.001
Quality Consciousness	−.046	−.042	[−.094, −.007]	.017
HLB Perceived Quality	.055	.072	[.027, .087]	.002

Note. BC = bias-corrected; CI = confidence interval. The confidence intervals refer to the unstandardized indirect effects. The lower confidence limits for the interaction effects were rounded to .000 by AMOS; these effects should therefore be regarded as marginal.

"HLB Perceived Quality" significantly mediated several effects on "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products". "COO", "Company Image", and "Perception of Resources & Capabilities" had positive indirect effects, whereas "Product Category" had a negative indirect effect. "Company Image" had the largest total indirect effect on "HLB Purchase Intention", (β = 0.257, bootstrap p = 0.001). Its influence was transmitted through "HLB Perceived Quality" and "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products".

"Price" had a significant positive indirect effect on "HLB Purchase Intention" through "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", (β = 0.160, bootstrap p = 0.001). "HLB Perceived Quality" also had a significant indirect effect on "HLB Purchase Intention" through "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", (β = 0.072, bootstrap p = 0.002). "Quality Consciousness" had a negative indirect effect on "HLB Purchase Intention" through "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", (β = -0.042, bootstrap p = 0.017).

Table 29 ***Total Effects on the Endogenous Variables***

Outcome and Predictor	**Total (B)**	**Standardized Total Effect**	**95% Bootstrap CI for (B)**	**Bootstrap (p)**
HLB Perceived Quality				
Country of Origin	.242	.154	[.073, .417]	.002
Company Image	.632	.347	[.415, .844]	.001
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	.168	.114	[.025, .311]	.020

Product Category	−.230	−.182	[−.362, −.103]	.003
Consumer Ethnocentrism	.043	.040	[−.068, .147]	.452
Country of Origin × Ethnocentrism	.100	.096	[−.010, .196]	.074
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products				
Country of Origin	.027	.024	[.008, .059]	.001
Company Image	.542	.426	[.414, .689]	.001
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	.019	.018	[.004, .043]	.012
Product Category	−.025	−.029	[−.052, −.009]	.002
Consumer Ethnocentrism	.005	.006	[−.006, .019]	.388
Country of Origin × Ethnocentrism	.011	.015	[.000, .027]	.045
Price	.402	.354	[.273, .501]	.003
Quality Consciousness	−.092	−.093	[−.170, −.010]	.024
HLB Perceived Quality	.111	.159	[.057, .164]	.002
HLB Purchase Intention				
Country of Origin	.049	.040	[.014, .098]	.002
Company Image	.363	.257	[.278, .481]	.001
Perception of Resources & Capabilities	.034	.030	[.006, .072]	.014
Product Category	−.046	−.047	[−.081, −.022]	.002
Consumer Ethnocentrism	.009	.010	[−.011, .032]	.411
Country of Origin × Ethnocentrism	.020	.025	[.000, .046]	.047
Price	.201	.160	[.136, .278]	.001
Quality Consciousness	−.219	−.200	[−.323, −.118]	.001
HLB Perceived Quality	.201	.260	[.134, .286]	.001
Exclusivity	.070	.091	[.010, .132]	.020
Value for Money	−.108	−.105	[−.195, −.025]	.005
Novelty Consciousness	.109	.125	[.025, .179]	.009
Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products	.500	.451	[.397, .607]	.002

Note. Total effects equal the sum of all direct and indirect effects linking a predictor with an outcome. CI = confidence interval.

"HLB Perceived Quality" had a significant direct effect on "HLB Purchase Intention", (β = 0.188), bootstrap (p = 0.002), a significant indirect effect through "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", (β = 0.072), bootstrap (p = 0.002), and a significant total effect, (β = 0.260), bootstrap (p = 0.001). This pattern is consistent with partial mediation; "HLB Perceived Quality" influenced purchase intention both directly and indirectly by increasing consumers' intention to try the company's HLB products.

HLB Perceived Quality → Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products → HLB Purchase Intention

"Quality Consciousness" had a significant negative direct effect on "HLB Purchase Intention", (β = -0.158), a significant negative indirect effect through "Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products", (β = -0.042) and a significant negative total effect, (β = -0.200). This pattern also supports partial mediation.

Quality Consciousness → Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company's Products → HLB Purchase Intention

6.9.10 Moderating Effect of Consumer Ethnocentrism

"Consumer Ethnocentrism" was examined as a moderator of the relationship between COO evaluations and "HLB Perceived Quality". "COO" and "Consumer Ethnocentrism" were mean-centered before their interaction term was created. The interaction coefficient was positive and statistically significant under conventional maximum-likelihood estimation, (B = 0.100), (SE = 0.047), (β = 0.096), (p = 0.033), suggesting that the positive association between favorable COO perceptions and

“HLB Perceived Quality” became stronger as ethnocentrism increased. The main effect of “Consumer Ethnocentrism” was not significant, (β = 0.040), (p = 0.370), indicating that ethnocentrism did not independently predict perceived quality when COO evaluations were at their mean. However, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the interaction included zero, 95% BC CI ([-0.010,0.196]), with (p = 0.074). Thus, the moderation effect was supported by the conventional test but was not robust under bootstrapping and should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 30 ***Conditional Effects of COO Evaluations on HLB Perceived Quality at Different Levels of Consumer Ethnocentrism***

Consumer Ethnocentrism	Raw value	Centered value	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Low, $M - 1SD$	2.399	−1.385	.103	.106	0.978	.329	[−.104, .311]
Average, M	3.784	0.000	.242	.080	3.008	.003	[.084, .400]
High, $M + 1SD$	5.168	1.385	.381	.103	3.714	< .001	[.179, .582]

Note. B represents the conditional unstandardized effect of COO on HLB Perceived Quality. Company Image, Perception of Resources & Capabilities, and Product Category were statistically controlled. Confidence intervals and significance tests shown here are based on the conventional OLS simple-slopes analysis using the same variables and observations as the corresponding structural equation.

To clarify the interaction between COO evaluations and “Consumer Ethnocentrism”, simple-slopes analyses were conducted at low, average and high levels of ethnocentrism, defined as one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean and one standard deviation above the mean, respectively. At low ethnocentrism, the effect of COO evaluations on “HLB Perceived Quality” was positive but non-significant, B = 0.103, SE = 0.106, p = 0.329, 95% CI [−0.104,0.311]. At the mean level of ethnocentrism, the effect was positive and statistically significant, B = 0.242, SE = 0.080, p = 0.003, 95% CI [0.084, 0.400]. At high ethnocentrism, the positive effect was stronger, B = 0.381, SE = 0.103, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.179, 0.582]. Thus, favorable COO evaluations were more strongly associated with “HLB Perceived Quality” among consumers with average or high ethnocentrism, whereas the association was not significant among consumers with low ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, because the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the overall interaction included zero, the conditional pattern identified by the simple-slopes analysis was interpreted as tentative rather than conclusive evidence of moderation.

6.10 Assessment of the Hypotheses

Prior to the hypothesis testing stage, the measurement model was refined through EFA and CFA procedures. Constructs that did not demonstrate satisfactory factor loadings were excluded from the final structural model. As a result, only hypotheses associated with empirically validated constructs were included. Based on the findings of the quantitative stage, each cue and its associated hypotheses are discussed separately below.

6.10.1 Company Image

Ha1.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: A firm's/company's positive image has a positive influence on HLB's perceived quality.*
- *H_0: A firm's/company's positive image does not influence HLB's perceived quality.*

Ha1.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: A firm's/company's positive image has a significant influence on HLB's customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: A firm's/company's positive image does not influence HLB's customer acquisition.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows a significant and positive relationship between company image and perceived quality of HLBs ($\beta = 0.347$, $p < 0.001$; bootstrap $p = 0.001$), meaning that a positive company image is likely to increase the perceived quality of the HLB. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Regarding HLB customer acquisition, the model results indicate also a statistically significant positive relationship between Company Image and HLB Purchase Intention (standardized total effect = 0.257; bootstrap $p = 0.001$), suggesting that a positive and strong company image increases consumers' likelihood to purchase HLBs. Therefore, the null hypothesis for purchase intention can also be rejected.

6.10.2 Country of Origin

Ha2.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin (COO) image has a positive influence on the perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin (COO) image does not influence the perceived quality of HLBs.*

Ha2.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: A strong and positive HLB COO image has a positive influence on HLB customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: A strong and positive HLB country-of-origin (COO) image does not influence HLB customer acquisition.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows a significant positive relationship between COO and HLB Perceived Quality ($\beta = 0.154$, $p = 0.001$; bootstrap $p = 0.002$), meaning that a favorable COO is likely to increase the perceived quality of the HLB. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Regarding HLB customer acquisition, COO total effect on HLB Purchase Intention is significant and positive, although weak (standardized total effect = 0.040; bootstrap $p = 0.002$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for the overall effect on purchase intention.

6.10.3 Price

Ha3.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has a significant influence on consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has no significant influence on consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Ha3.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has a significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*
- *H_0: Price (as an extrinsic cue) has no significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*

Price is not retained as a direct predictor of HLB Perceived Quality in the final structural model. Therefore, based strictly on the final structural model, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

On the other hand, price shows a significant positive effect on purchase intention for the total sample (standardized total effect = 0.160; bootstrap p = 0.001), operating indirectly through “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”, meaning that consumers are more likely to choose an HLB when the price signals greater credibility and reliability, even if this price does not necessarily translate for them to higher perceived quality. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

6.10.4 Exclusivity in Sale

Ha4.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Consumers’ perception of exclusivity is positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*
- *H_0: Consumers’ perception of exclusivity is not positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*

Ha4.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Consumers’ perception of exclusivity is positively related to the customer acquisition of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*
- *H_0: Consumers’ perception of exclusivity is not positively related to the customer acquisition of an HLB in self-expressive categories.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows that the relationship between exclusivity in sale and perceived quality of the HLB is not statistically significant, meaning that consumers’ sense of exclusivity does not affect how they evaluate the quality of the product. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

On the other hand, exclusivity in sale shows a significant positive effect on purchase intention for the total sample ($\beta = 0.091$, $p = 0.019$; bootstrap $p = 0.020$). The hypothesised positive relationship with purchase intention was therefore supported, although the effect was modest.

6.10.5 Product Category

Ha5.1. Perceived Quality

- *H1: High involvement in the category is negatively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*
- *H0: High involvement in the category is not negatively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*

Ha5.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H1: High involvement in the category is negatively related to customer acquisition of an HLB.*
- *H0: High involvement in the category is not negatively related to customer acquisition of an HLB.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows a statistically significant negative relationship between high involvement in product category (personal care) and HLB Perceived Quality ($\beta = -0.182$, $p < 0.001$; bootstrap $p = 0.003$). This indicates that respondents who perceived greater involvement in the focal personal-care category evaluated the HLB less favorably. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Product category total effect on HLB Purchase Intention is significant and negative (standardized total effect = −0.047; bootstrap $p = 0.002$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected for the overall effect on purchase intention.

6.10.6 Perception of Resources & Capabilities

Ha6.1. Perceived Quality

- *H1: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities is positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*
- *H0: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities is not positively related to the perceived quality of an HLB.*

Ha6.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H1: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities has a positive influence on customer acquisition of an HLB.*
- *H0: Consumers' perception of resources and capabilities has no positive influence on customer acquisition of an HLB.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows a statistically significant positive relationship between perception of resources & capabilities and perceived quality ($\beta =$

0.114, p = 0.013; bootstrap p = 0.020), meaning that consumers who believe that the parent company has strong resources and production capabilities tend to evaluate more favorably the quality of the HLB. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

When it comes to customer acquisition, Perception of resources & capabilities and purchase intention, in the total sample, has a significant positive relationship (standardized total effect = 0.030; bootstrap p = 0.014), showing that the stronger the perception of resources and capabilities for the parent company, the likelihood of purchasing an HLB increases. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected for purchase intention.

6.10.7 Value for Money (VfM)

Ha7.1. Perceived Quality

- *H1: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has a significant influence on their perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H0: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has no significant influence on their perceived quality of HLBs.*

Ha7.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H1: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has a significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*
- *H0: Consumers' Value for Money (VfM) evaluation has no significant influence on HLB customer acquisition.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows that the relationship between VfM and perceived quality of the HLB is not statistically significant. This indicates that consumers' overall evaluation of what they receive relative to what they pay does not shape how they assess the quality of an HLB. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

However, when it comes to customer acquisition, VfM has a significant negative effect on purchase intention (β = −0.105, p = 0.009; bootstrap p = 0.005), suggesting that consumers with stronger VfM considerations are less likely to purchase the HLB. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

6.10.8 Consumer Personality Factors

6.10.8.1 Price Consciousness

Hb1.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Price consciousness positively influences consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_o: Price consciousness does not significantly influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Hb1.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Price consciousness positively influences customer acquisition of HLBs.*
- *H_o: Price consciousness does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows no significant relationship between price consciousness and perceived quality, meaning that sensitivity to price does not affect the way consumers evaluate the quality of the HLB. Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Price consciousness is not retained as a direct predictor of HLB Purchase Intention in the final structural model. Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

6.10.8.2 Brand Loyalty

Hb2.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Brand Loyalty negatively influences consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_o: Brand Loyalty does not significantly influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Hb2.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Brand Loyalty negatively influences customer acquisition of HLBs.*
- *H_o: Brand Loyalty does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows a non-significant relationship between brand loyalty and perceived quality, meaning that brand loyalty does not significantly influence perceived quality of HLBs. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Brand Loyalty is not retained as a direct predictor of HLB Purchase Intention in the final structural model. Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

6.10.8.3 Confusion by Over-choice Consumers

Hb3.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Confused by over-choice consumers are less likely to perceive HLBs as high-quality products.*
- *H_0: Confused by over-choice consumers do not significantly differ in their perceived quality evaluations of HLBs.*

Hb3.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Confused by over-choice consumers are less likely to purchase or show interest in HLBs.*
- *H_0: Confused by over-choice consumers do not significantly differ in their likelihood to purchase or show interest in HLBs.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows a non-significant relationship between confusion by over-choice and perceived quality and purchase intention, meaning that consumers who feel confused by variety do not appear to systematically avoid HLBs. They are most probably likely to rely on other simplifying cues than avoid the category altogether. Therefore, the null hypotheses cannot be rejected.

6.10.8.4 Quality Consciousness

Hb4.1. Perceived Quality

- *H1: Quality-conscious consumers are less likely to perceive Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) as high-quality products compared to established National Brands (NBs).*
- *H_0: Quality-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their perceived quality evaluations of Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) compared to National Brands (NBs).*

Hb4.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Quality-conscious consumers are less likely to purchase Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) over established National Brands (NBs).*
- *H_0: Quality-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their likelihood to purchase Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs) over established National Brands (NBs).*

In the total sample, the structural model shows that the relationship between quality consciousness and perceived quality is not statistically significant, meaning that quality conscious consumers do not perceive HLBs as distinctly higher or lower in quality compared to other brand types (NB or PLB). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

For purchase intention there is a negative and significant relationship ($\beta = -0.158$, $p < 0.001$; bootstrap $p = 0.002$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

6.10.8.5 Novelty Consciousness

Hb5.1. Perceived Quality

- *H1: Novelty-conscious consumers are more likely to perceive HLBs as high-quality products.*
- *H_0: Novelty-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their perceived quality evaluations of HLBs.*

Hb5.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Novelty-conscious consumers are more likely to purchase or show interest in HLBs.*
- *H_0: Novelty-conscious consumers do not significantly differ in their likelihood to purchase or show interest in HLBs.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows that the relationship between novelty consciousness and perceived quality is not statistically significant, meaning that consumers who have a tendency toward new and different products do not necessarily perceive HLBs as higher-quality products. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

However, the relationship between novelty consciousness and purchase intention indicates a positive and significant relationship (β = 0.125, p = 0.001; bootstrap p = 0.009). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

6.10.9 Country-Specific Factors

6.10.9.1 Consumer Ethnocentrism

Hb9.1. Perceived Quality

- *H_1: Consumer ethnocentrism has no significant influence on consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Consumer ethnocentrism has a significant influence consumers' perceived quality of HLBs.*

Hb9.2. Customer Acquisition

- *H_1: Consumer ethnocentrism has a negative influence on customer acquisition of HLBs.*
- *H_0: Consumer ethnocentrism does not significantly influence customer acquisition of HLBs.*

In the total sample, the structural model shows that the relationship with CE has no statistically significant influence on perceived quality, meaning that stronger preference for domestic products does not affect the way consumers shape their perceptions of HLB quality. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

The relationship between CE and purchase intention is statistically non-significant. As a result, ethnocentrism does not meaningfully influence consumers' likelihood of purchasing HLBs. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Chapter 7. Conclusions, Recommendations and Further Research Opportunities

7.1 Introduction

In the early stage of this research, a research question was developed to examine an observation of a recent strategic practice of several grocery retailers. Thereafter, a literature review was commenced in the field of decision-making, branding and private label branding as well as internationalization to better understand how to approach the topic of inquiry. This literature synthesis helped us to better understand how consumers make decisions and what could influence the success and acceptability of this strategy. However, since, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first time someone has approached the concept of HLB directly, a qualitative form of research was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem. This process helped us formulate research hypotheses, identify potential relationships between the various variables and build the questionnaire for the large-scale quantitative stage. The analysis of the quantitative results led to development and testing of a full-sample structural model that explains coherently consumers evaluate and respond to the HLB.

Based on the collective insights acquired throughout the research process, a number of conclusions were drawn and are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, we discuss the managerial implications of this study as well as strategic recommendations based on the findings of this research. Lastly, we present the limitations of this study and suggest potential possibilities for further research.

7.2 Conclusions

In this section, we discuss the conclusions drawn based on the research objectives of this study, which are summarized in Chapter 1.

7.2.1 Objective One

- ***To establish HLBs as a distinct construct***

Literature distinguishes brands into two main categories, NBs and PLBs, and at the same time recognizes some variations such as international PLBs. For this research we argue that HLBs represent a distinct branding construct by demonstrating that this practice cannot be fully captured by existing branding categories. Unlike PLBs, HLBs are not sold by the retailer that owns the brand in its own retail store and environment. Unlike international PLBs, HLBs are sold in foreign countries where the retailer that owns the brand has no physical or digital stores, and thus they are sold in a different retail environment. Lastly, unlike NBs, HLBs remain retailer-owned brands rather than manufacturer brands and, on many occasions, they have the brand name of a different, foreign retailer. Based on the above, the distinctiveness of the HLB from the other branding categories lies in the separation between brand ownership, retail presence and selling retailer.

The qualitative and quantitative findings support the above distinction. In terms of the qualitative findings, participants did not perceive HLBs simply as a PLB or an NB but as an intermediate and unfamiliar branding construct that required additional cues in order to be able to evaluate it and reduce uncertainty. In terms of the quantitative findings, consumers relied on a combination of specific cues such as company image, COO, perception of resources and capabilities, and product category to make evaluation judgments of the product quality. These findings suggest that HLBs create a different evaluative context compared to the PLB because the usual link with the retailer and a store is absent.

In conclusion, objective one has been addressed by showing that HLBs are distinct from existing branding constructs with specific characteristics that cannot be captured or approached by existing theory on PLBs and NBs, since consumers require a different configuration of evaluation cues to make sense of the brand. This different

combination of structural characteristics of the HLB and the different evaluative context provides the conceptual basis for treating HLBs as a separate, distinct construct.

7.2.2 Objective Two

- ***To identify the key drivers that influence consumers' evaluation and choice of HLBs***

The literature identifies a number of cues that explain how consumers evaluate PLBs and what drives their purchase intention. These cues include store image, VfM, COO, price, exclusivity in sale and product category. At the same time, several personality factors were examined as determinants of consumer evaluations and purchase intention.

The qualitative stage, conducted through two focus groups, first aimed to identify potential differences between HLBs, PLBs and NBs and then to investigate the relevance and applicability of the identified cues. This process led to the identification of an additional cue, the perception of resources and capabilities. From the discussion, it was clear that consumers do not view HLBs as fully equivalent to either PLBs or NBs. Instead, HLBs are positioned somewhere in the middle, borrowing attributes and characteristics from both. More specifically, HLBs are perceived as superior in quality and credibility compared to PLBs, mainly due to their internationalization (particularly in categories where COO associations reinforce credibility). At the same time, HLBs are regarded as weaker substitutes for NBs, lacking the heritage, brand equity and specialization associated with them. Lastly, cues such as COO and perception of resources and capabilities function as high-diagnostic cues that compensate for consumers' weaker familiarity with HLBs.

However, in the large-scale quantitative stage, not all cues were found to significantly influence consumers' perceptions of HLB quality. Among the cues examined, the most influential driver is "Company Image". "COO" and "Perception of Resources and Capabilities" had a positive effect while "Product Category" had a negative effect on perceived quality. As a result, from the combined analysis it is clear that consumers choose an HLB only from a small set of cues that work together. More

specifically, and based on the aforementioned cues, consumers, in the absence of direct familiarity with the HLB, will rely on perceptions of the company's credibility and reliability, COO (indicating that consumers will use it as an extrinsic quality cue), and, lastly, on the perception of resources and capabilities to infer the quality of the brand.

"Company Image", in general, came out as the most consistent driver and, in the total sample, it is the strongest predictor of both perceived quality and willingness to buy the HLB company's products. If we combine these results with the outcomes of the focus groups' discussions, we have a clear rationale. Cypriot consumers view a company as reputable when it possesses resources, capabilities and process controls. At the same time, internationalization acts as proof that the company can meet the strict standards needed to enter diverse markets. The HLB, just like any other brand, borrows credibility from these characteristics that provide the necessary reassurance to the consumers that this is not just another low-tier PLB. Leveraging secondary brand associations and transferring knowledge or making a connection from one entity to the brand, to complement or strengthen existing characteristics or perceptions, is a well-researched strategy in the field of brand management. Such entities or secondary sources of brand knowledge can be the parent company, countries, other brands, people, causes, events, brand extensions, alliances, third-party endorsements or channels (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). However, in the case of the HLB, there is no existing knowledge transfer from one entity to another per se but, to the credibility or the positive image, in general, of the company, and this is justified in consumers' minds through the perceived capabilities and resources possessed with the reassurance being the fact that it has managed to internationalize successfully.

Finally, HLB purchase intention is driven mainly by willingness to purchase the HLB company's products and by perceived quality, indicating that choice of HLB is influenced by the overall acceptance of the company behind the HLB and product-specific evaluation.

Choice is also influenced by the different consumer personality styles. Quality consciousness negatively affected willingness to purchase the HLB company's products and purchase intention, while novelty consciousness positively influenced purchase intention. When combining the above observations, we can conclude that HLB adoption is influenced also by consumers' underlying personality traits.

Consumers with stronger novelty consciousness will most likely exhibit higher purchase intention, while those with greater quality consciousness are associated with lower purchase intention.

7.2.3 Objective Three

- ***To examine how country-related factors shape HLB evaluation and performance***

From the data we gathered throughout the research process, it is evident that HLB performance in Cyprus is influenced by country-related factors, but they do not all operate in the same way. COO was measured in the quantitative stage and had a positive effect on HLB perceived quality, meaning that consumers used COO as an extrinsic cue when evaluating the HLB. However, COO did not function as a direct behavioral driver for purchase intention but had mainly an indirect influence operating through perceived quality.

On the other hand, country affiliation played a different role. As already mentioned in previous chapters, country affiliation was not operationalized as a standalone quantitative cue. It emerged as an interpretive country-related concept that appeared in the qualitative stage. Participants in the focus groups seemed to evaluate HLBs partly through the familiarity with, cultural closeness to and overall positive evaluations from the COO of the HLB. Based on that, country affiliation helps explain why COO could be more persuasive in some cases than others without treating this concept as a separate measured predictor in the structural model.

Lastly, CE did not have significant direct effect on perceived quality but had a moderation effect that should be interpreted cautiously. One possible interpretation is that local retail mediation may reduce the salience of foreign ownership, although this explanation was not directly tested and requires further research.

In conclusion, objective three has been addressed by showing that COO influences HLB evaluation mainly as a quality cue, while country affiliation could provide a qualitative context able to help us understand how consumers attach meaning to the country associated with the HLB.

7.3 Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to Existing Theory

7.3.1 Company Image

According to the findings, “Company Image” is the strongest predictor for “Perceived Quality” and one of the strongest predictors for “HLB Purchase Intention”. However, its effect on “HLB Purchase Intention” is mainly indirect, through “HLB Perceived Quality” and “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”.

This finding aligns with existing literature on branding and cue utilization theory, which argues that consumers rely on extrinsic cues such as company image when direct experience with the product is unavailable (Jha et al., 2013). Previous research on PLB also suggests something similar for store image, where consumers are using store image as a cue to make evaluation judgements of the product’s quality, reduce uncertainty and increase confidence in the product (Vahie & Paswan, 2006).

However, what is extended through this research is that company image is expected to play a relatively stronger role for the HLB compared to similar constructs for the PLB. That is because in the case of the PLB, the retailer-owner is closely linked with the product because the consumer purchases the product directly from the retailer that owns the brand. In the case of the HLB, however, it is sold through a third retailer operating in a foreign market than the retailer that owns the brand. Thus, consumers cannot rely on store familiarity or previous shopping experience but instead on the perceptions they have of the retailer behind the brand without necessarily having direct experience with them.

This differentiation represents a unique contribution of this study because in the case of the PLB, the retailer image and the store image largely overlap, but in the case of the HLB, consumers need to evaluate the image of the company that owns the brand independently from the retail environment in which it is being sold. At the same time, unlike NBs, company image remains associated with a retailer rather than a typical NB manufacturer. Thus, in the case of the HLB, this research suggests that company image acts as a substitute for store image and the absence of the experience with the store and becomes a critical quality cue for the HLB.

7.3.2 Country of Origin (COO)

According to the findings, there is a positive relationship between COO and HLB perceived quality, something that aligns with existing literature as many academics acknowledge COO as an important extrinsic cue, especially when there is no direct experience with or knowledge of a product (Teas & Agarwal, 2000). However, what contributes to the existing literature is that, from the findings, COO influences HLB purchase intention only indirectly through HLB perceived quality rather than acting as a direct behavioral driver.

This mechanism differs from PLBs since traditional research on PLB focuses on characteristics such as store image, price and retailer reputation, with COO receiving limited or no attention because retailers are usually part of the domestic retail environment.

However, in the case of the HLB, COO becomes particularly important because the retailer-owner originates from another country. Therefore, and according to the findings and cue utilization theory, COO acts as a credibility cue when there is no existing experience with the brand itself.

7.3.3 Perception of Resources and Capabilities

The contribution of “Perception of Resources and Capabilities” within the evaluation mechanism further illustrates that HLB evaluation extends beyond traditional PLB decision-making. Within the PLB literature, consumers rarely evaluate PLBs based on the resources or the capabilities that the retailer possesses. This is expected since the competence is already demonstrated through direct shopping.

However, in the case of the HLB, consumers cannot view or experience the competences of the retailer and rely on broader characteristics of resources and capabilities of the retailer-owner to infer brand quality, such as international expansion or perceived operational strength.

Thus, and according to the findings, in the case of the HLB consumers are not only evaluating the product itself but also the company behind it, which represents a different trust-building mechanism compared to traditional PLB evaluation. At the same time, the findings suggest that this evaluation should come before evaluating

the product quality, a process that received limited attention in previous PLB studies and represents a differentiation between HLBs and PLBs.

7.3.4 Product Category

The negative influence of Product Category (in the focal personal care category) confirms previous research on PLBs. However, for the HLB the theoretical interpretation is considerably more complex.

The findings suggest respondents who perceived greater risk or involvement in the focal personal care category evaluated the HLB less favorably, despite positive perceptions of company image, COO, and resources and capabilities. Thus, consumers remain reluctant to make positive evaluations for the HLB when found in a high-risk category (personal care).

Thus, in the case of the HLB we have two parallel forms of uncertainty operating at the same time. The first concerns the uncertainty caused by the unfamiliar foreign retailer, and the second occurs from the high-risk product category (personal care). Traditional PLB literature is focused mainly on the product category, and this distinction is crucial because in the case of the HLB, consumers must resolve both uncertainties before favorable quality evaluations can be made.

7.3.5 Price

Price is another example of how HLBs differs from PLBs. Existing literature on PLBs acknowledges price as a key determinant of PLB success and a principal driver of purchase intention. While in the case of HLBs price does affect purchase intention, it does not affect it directly. Instead, favorable price perceptions primarily increase “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products”.

This distinction suggests that price is a sufficient justification for experimenting with the HLB company’s products rather than a sufficient justification for purchase. Thus, rather than directly influencing buying behavior, in the case of the HLB, price reduces the risk of experimenting with the HLB company’s products. This sequential mechanism has received limited attention in the PLB literature and highlights an important distinction between HLBs and PLBs.

7.3.6 Quality Consciousness

The negative effect of “Quality Consciousness” on both “Willingness to Purchase the HLB Company’s Products” and “HLB Purchase Intention” is broadly consistent with existing literature on PLBs. However, what is interesting is the fact that it remained significant even after “Perceived Quality” was included in the structural model.

This finding suggests that quality consciousness provides additional explanatory power in explaining HLB adoption. More specifically, consumers with similar perceptions of HLB quality differed in their willingness to purchase the company’s HLB products and to purchase the HLBs because of their level of quality consciousness.

7.4 Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to theory of branding and private label branding by extending existing knowledge of brand evaluation and internationalization with the inclusion of a new and emerging concept of the HLBs. The findings not only indicate where this branding construct is strategically positioned but also the combination of cues or drivers that influence its acceptance and what shapes its value perceptions.

However, there is something more important than the identification of the drivers behind consumer choice, after all, the majority of them have been already discussed in the PLB and COO literature. What is interesting in this research is that the study demonstrates that these constructs interact differently when consumers evaluate HLBs. Unlike PLBs, HLBs are evaluated without the support from and direct associations with the retailer and the store and, unlike NBs, HLBs do not benefit from the manufacturer brand equity. Thus, consumers, in order to reduce uncertainty, make use of a combination of available, multiple organizational and product-related cues before developing behavioral intentions. In other words, consumers evaluate this distinct branding construct through a sequence of organizational credibility

assessment and product evaluation that cannot be fully captured by existing theories or literature on PLBs or NBs.

These insights advance theory in two directions, as discussed below.

7.4.1 Extending Brand Evaluation Theory to Hybrid Formats

This research builds on existing research on brand evaluation and PLB perception by demonstrating that consumers apply a dual evaluating logic when judging an HLB. While consumers mostly evaluate PLBs through price and store/retailer image and NBs through brand equity and reputation, HLB evaluation blends both using tangible and intangible cues.

The findings show that company image, COO, and perceived resources and capabilities are the strongest cues for evaluating HLB quality, while price remained an important determinant for “Willingness to purchase the HLB company’s products”. As a result, there is a transfer-of-trust mechanism from the manufacturer (or parent company) to the HLB that operates independently from the retailer, a characteristic typically observed in the NBs evaluation mechanism.

Therefore, this study extends brand equity theory by introducing corporate credibility as a cue in HLB evaluation, meaning that when a PLB is exported, trust is anchored not in the seller-retailer but mainly in the manufacturer’s perceived competence and legitimacy.

7.4.2 Positioning HLBs Within the PLB Evolution Framework

This research also extends the literature on branding frameworks by conceptualizing the concept of HLBs as an additional and stand-alone stage in the evolution of PLBs. While the literature on PLBs distinguishes PLBs mainly in tiers such as generic, standard and premium, this study identifies HLBs, as exported PLBs sold by a different retailer when found outside their home country, that leverage the parent retailer brand equity from abroad. Therefore, this study supports the argument that PLBs can internationalize through partnership-based resource sharing. As a result,

this research offers a theoretical foundation for future research into the co-creation of brand equity in hybrid structures.

7.5 Managerial Implications and Strategic Recommendations

The conclusions discussed in the previous section of this study provide several important managerial implications and strategic recommendations for the seller, the manufacturer and the brand managers aiming to enhance the position and performance of the HLB. The following sections outline the most important recommendations for retailers and manufacturers aspiring to adopt this strategy.

7.5.1 Retailers

7.5.1.1 Coherent Value Proposition

The findings of this study reveal that the HLB is a construct that consumers evaluate through a multi-dimensional process involving various cues, in which some serve as behavioral determinants and others as secondary enablers. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of each market is crucial for this strategy to perform successfully.

Retailers adopting this strategy should therefore position HLBs as credible alternatives and not just like their own PLBs or discounted substitutes. At the same time, they should promote these products by communicating the dual benefit of affordability and reliability supported by the HLB's company image, as well as resources, capabilities, expertise and size of the parent company. The HLB's competitive advantage should also be supported by the appropriate pricing strategy. As a result, continuous monitoring of the price difference between HLB–NB and HLB–PLB is also expected from the retailer and corrective measures should be made if needed to ensure alignment with the expectations and needs of the consumers. Lastly, before launching HLBs in a new market, thorough market research should be

conducted to identify what cues are more diagnostic of quality for the consumers in that specific market and amend positioning and communication strategies accordingly.

7.5.1.2 Quality Signals and Credibility Cues

In both the quantitative and qualitative stages, company image emerged as the most influential driver of HLB perceived quality and willingness to buy the HLB company's products. Therefore, both retailers and manufacturers should invest in this cue and co-create the appropriate communication strategy to leverage this cue to the maximum. For example, the retailer should emphasize elements such as COO, expertise or international reach in their advertising campaigns, while the manufacturer could enhance packaging by adding some of these cues visually on the packaging of the brand.

Of equal importance is the perceived resources and capabilities cue. Consumers view exporting and internationalization as an indicator of operational excellence or compliance with strict regulations. As a result, retailers should amplify this by highlighting it throughout their communication and promotion strategy. More specifically, actions could include the redesigning of the packaging to showcase the expertise, resources and capabilities of the foreign retailer as well as its size, international certifications and presence in different markets while at the same time promoting such information in stores through communication strategies and approaches that explain the brand's international presence. Lastly, training the local personnel and brand managers on such information is essential to effectively communicate these credibility cues.

7.5.1.3 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is a critical factor for HLBs, which in combination with product category and perceived expertise can lead to different results when not taken into consideration. Retailers should prioritize HLB entry in product categories where the parent company has a clear competitive advantage and not in too many categories from the very beginning that might dilute the perception of expertise.

7.5.1.4 Portfolio Balance

Retailers should think carefully about what strategic priorities are being accomplished with the inclusion of the HLBs in their portfolio. HLBs should complement and not replace existing NBs or PLBs, because empirical results showed that consumers perceive these brands as something different from both NBs and PLBs. As a result, continuously monitoring how these brands are perceived and understanding the differences in perceptions between HLBs and PLBs or NBs is crucial in order to make informed decisions based on their consumers' priorities and needs.

7.5.2 Exporters and HLB Owners

Study findings suggest that international expansion should not be pursued simply by exporting products and relying on the retailer for them to perform. It is of high strategic importance to successfully communicate and transfer the corporate reputation, credibility, resources and perceived capabilities to the foreign market. Thus, investment in communication activities to effectively communicate the size, expertise, quality assurance based on international exporting standards and innovation could reduce consumers' uncertainty and increase perceived quality of the HLB before trial, and eventually familiarity will develop. This could be done through typical advertising as well as extensive training in the local retailer on what the parent company represents and what resources and innovation competences it holds. Actions should also include 360° brand and communication toolkits, including brand stories, quality credentials, visual assets, brand guidelines and other staff material to ensure consistency in communication. Additionally, regular performance reviews and assessments should be conducted to evaluate the performance of the brand in the new market.

At the same time, selecting local partners that can successfully transfer this knowledge and have strong credibility that could associate with the corporate brand could also enhance HLB acceptance, because it is clear from the findings that the retailer plays a crucial role in positioning the brand in the market and acts as the intermediary between consumers and the foreign HLB owner.

7.5.3 Brand Managers

Brand managers need to understand that HLB adoption follows a sequential evaluation process rather than a simple price-driven decision like the usual PLB. Therefore, building perceived quality should come first, before trying to stimulate purchase intention. At the same time, communication and advertising strategies and campaigns should include elements that are not typically included in PLB campaigns, such as company reputation and image, COO, credibility and VfM messages, rather than just a simple positioning statement. Thus, marketing campaigns should not aim only at sales increase but prioritize, at least in the early stages of entering the market, messages that reinforce company image, expertise and COO.

7.5.4 Policymakers

The findings reveal the importance of company credibility, internationalization and country-related cues when evaluating HLBs. Thus, being able to obtain and promote internationally recognized quality certifications, participating in international trade exhibitions and communicating such information could help retailers promote their HLBs. Thus, government agencies should support firms in obtaining such certificates or other regulatory compliance documents that could be used by exporting firms to enhance their credibility and improve quality cues of the HLB.

7.6 Limitations and Future Research

As with all empirical research, this study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged and reported when interpreting the findings. These limitations do not undermine the value of this study, they actually complement it, by showing the context in which this research has been conducted and in which the conclusions have been made. By doing so, further research can offer a more holistic view and understanding of the concept by incorporating into or studying these limitations in future studies.

7.6.1 Geographic Boundaries

This study was conducted exclusively in Cyprus, a small European country with a highly open economy and a concentrated retail market. The size of the country, the limited resources for local retailers, the purchasing power and cultural context limit the

extent to which the findings can be generalized to bigger countries across Europe or globally. As an import-dependent country (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024), Cyprus has a strong appreciation and dependence on NBs compared to other countries that have matured PLB offerings. As a result, replication of the study in multiple countries is deemed necessary to confirm the external validity of this study. For example, one could assume that the influence of the perception of resources and capabilities cue might be stronger for consumers evaluating a brand being exported from a significantly bigger country to a smaller one because of the size and capabilities of the manufacturer of the HLB compared to local manufacturers of NBs. Country size should not be the only factor when choosing another market for future studies, but also developed and emerging markets, and countries with different levels of PLB maturity.

7.6.2 Product Category

The study was conducted in a specific product category: FMCGs found in grocery stores. The choice of the category was justified because of the observation of the presence of HLBs within supermarket assortments. However, HLBs can be found also in other categories, such as apparel and electronics, and potentially follow different evaluation logic compared to the one we present in this study. Therefore, the relationships observed and analyzed in this research may not be fully applied in other categories with different brand symbolisms, associations or purchasing decision mechanisms. Therefore, it is suggested that future research should be extended also to other product categories, especially high-involvement or symbolic categories, testing whether company image or perception of resources and capabilities operate differently in categories where brand identity plays a more central role in decision-making.

7.6.3 Measurement Constraints

The sample was limited mainly to Greek-speaking consumers living in Cyprus, leaving out non-Greek speakers, expatriates and other consumer groups. Additionally, the way we chose our consumers, mainly through Facebook and outside big supermarket chains, may have resulted in self-selection biases or over-representing consumers who are more familiar with PLBs or foreign retailers. Additionally, the

largest supermarket chain changed its HLBs from Tesco to Casino during our research process. As a result, the qualitative stage was done on a different HLB compared to Casino, resulting in potential variation in results. Therefore, a longitudinal study could track whether perception and purchasing behavior evolve or change during changes in HLBs or with different consumer groups that are not purchasing regularly from the main supermarket chains.

7.6.4 Variables Not Included in the Model

Another limitation relates to the variables chosen in the conceptual framework. These variables were chosen through a literature review in the field of PLB and internationalization. However, purchasing decision-making in retail environments is influenced by a wide range of factors, especially in international contexts. Moreover, other factors such as economic environment, inflationary pressures and competition may also affect the way consumers behave or evaluate brands and products. As a result, future research could incorporate such constructs or other factors such as sustainability orientation and/or online shopping to allow researchers to identify additional cues that potentially influence consumers' behavior and ultimately HLB performance.

7.6.5 Methodological Considerations

All variables were measured using self-reported questionnaires which, despite the fact that these are widely accepted for accessing consumer behavior, potentially introduces biases. For example, respondents often provide socially acceptable responses, cannot recall past experiences or even report intentions that do not necessarily reflect their actual purchasing behavior. Lastly, all constructs were measured using the same questionnaire, and thus the findings may be influenced to some extent by common method variance despite the measures taken to minimize this risk.

7.6.6 Cross-Sectional Design

Data were collected at a specific period of time, and thus they capture the perception of and behavior towards HLBs at a specific time period. As a result, this

study cannot capture how these causal relationships evolve over time and according to changes in the market or changes in consumer experience. This limitation could be minimized through longitudinal study to provide stronger evidence regarding the direction, stability and strength of the various relationships found and described in the model.

7.6.7 Future Research

Beyond addressing the methodological or other limitations mentioned above, future research should also investigate the theoretical questions raised by the findings of this research. More specifically, it should be examined whether this cue configuration changes across product categories or other cultural settings.

Additionally, future research should also examine whether the strength of extrinsic cues, such as company image, perception of resources and capabilities, and COO, varies when consumer familiarity with the HLB increases. This crucial information will help researchers and practitioners determine whether cue reliance exists when consumers gain experience with the HLB.

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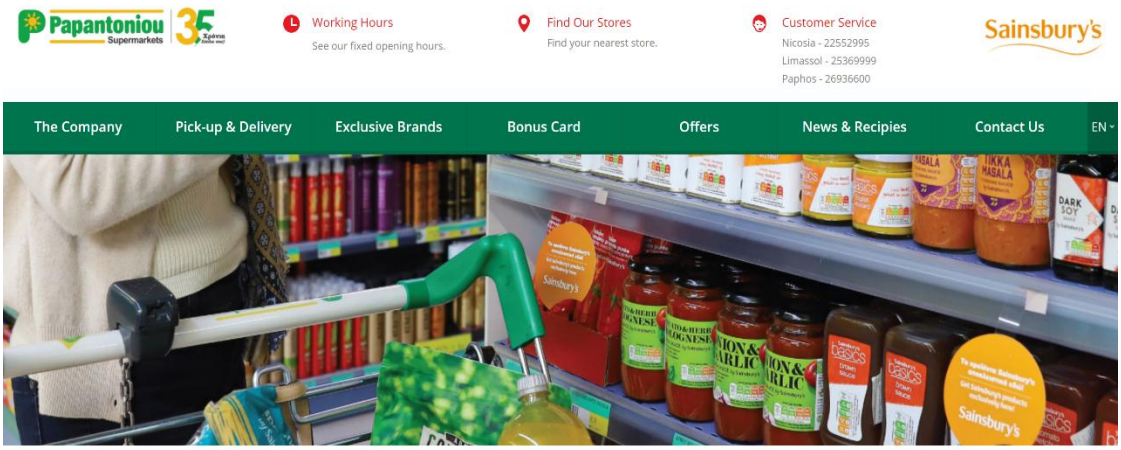
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Appendix 1

1. Cypriot retailers advertising HLBs in the local market:
    a. **Papantoniou Hypermarkets:** A leading supermarket chain in Cyprus with five hypermarkets.





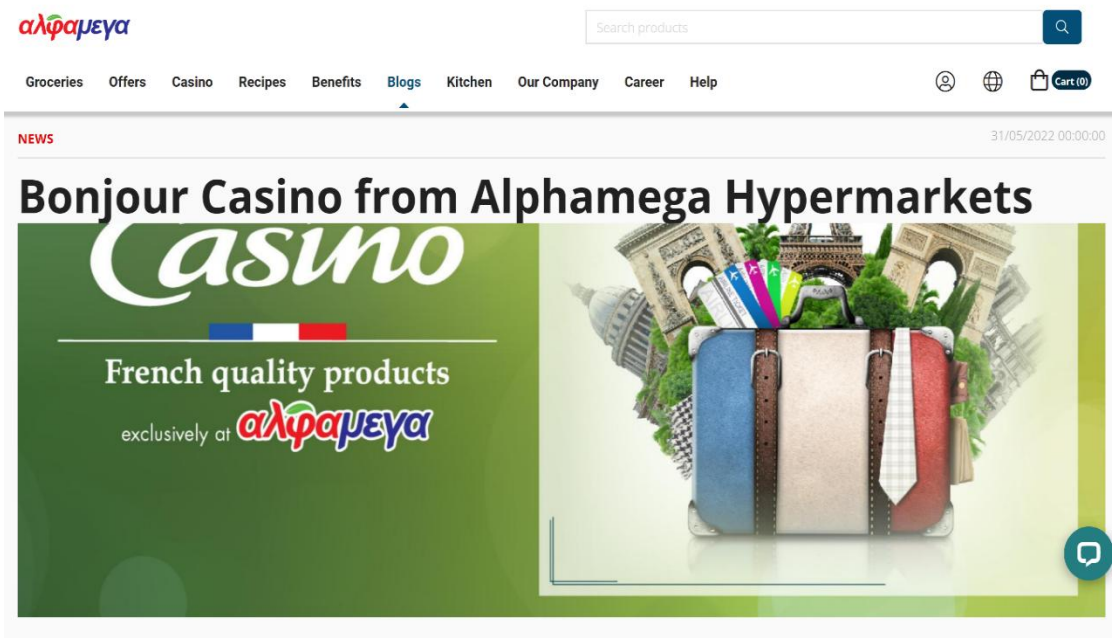
Sainsbury's Live Well, For Less!

Papantoniou Supermarkets proudly welcome Sainsbury's products in Cyprus!

With 150 years of history, your favourite Sainsbury's products are finally here! Find them exclusively at Papantoniou Supermarkets and enjoy them for the first time in Cyprus.

b. **AlphaMega Hypermarkets:** The largest Cypriot hypermarket chain in the country with 18 stores and 2,200 employees.





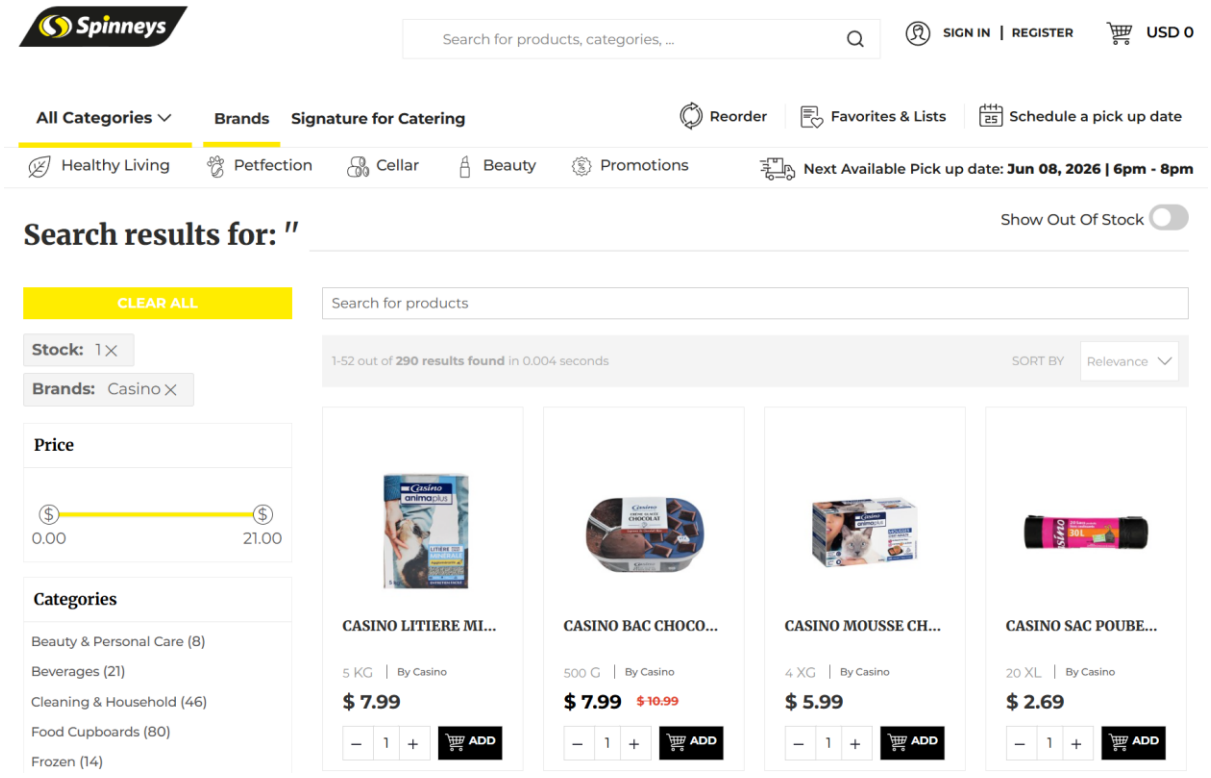
c. Examples of HLBs in the Cypriot Market – The AlphaMega Case

	Product	NB	PLB AlphaMega Brand **480** products/barcodes	HLB Casino Brand **523** products/barcodes
1.	Spaghetti	 €3.20/1kg	 €1.58/1kg	 €1.89/1kg
2.	Microfiber	 €3.99 (4+2 pieces)	 €3.59 (4 pieces)	 €3.59 (4 pieces)
3.	Beef Burgers	 €27.96/1kg	 €18.73/1kg	 €14.98/1kg
4.	Ice Cream Vanilla	 €13.98/1kg	 €3.48/1kg	 €6.78/1kg
5.	Cotton Pads	 €1.69 – 80 pieces	 €1.39 – 80 pieces	 €2.29 – 140 pieces

6.	Dog Food with Beef	 €4.50/1kg		 €2.26/1kg
7.	Baby Diapers No. 3	 €7.45 – 44 pieces		 €6.49 – 38 pieces
8.	Kids Shampoo with Cotton Flower	 €11.80/1ltr		 €7.96/1ltr
9.	Mouthwash Complete / Total Care	 €15.90/1ltr		 €3.98/1ltr
10.	Apple & Strawberry Bio Baby Puree	 €11.50/1kg		 €6.73/1kg

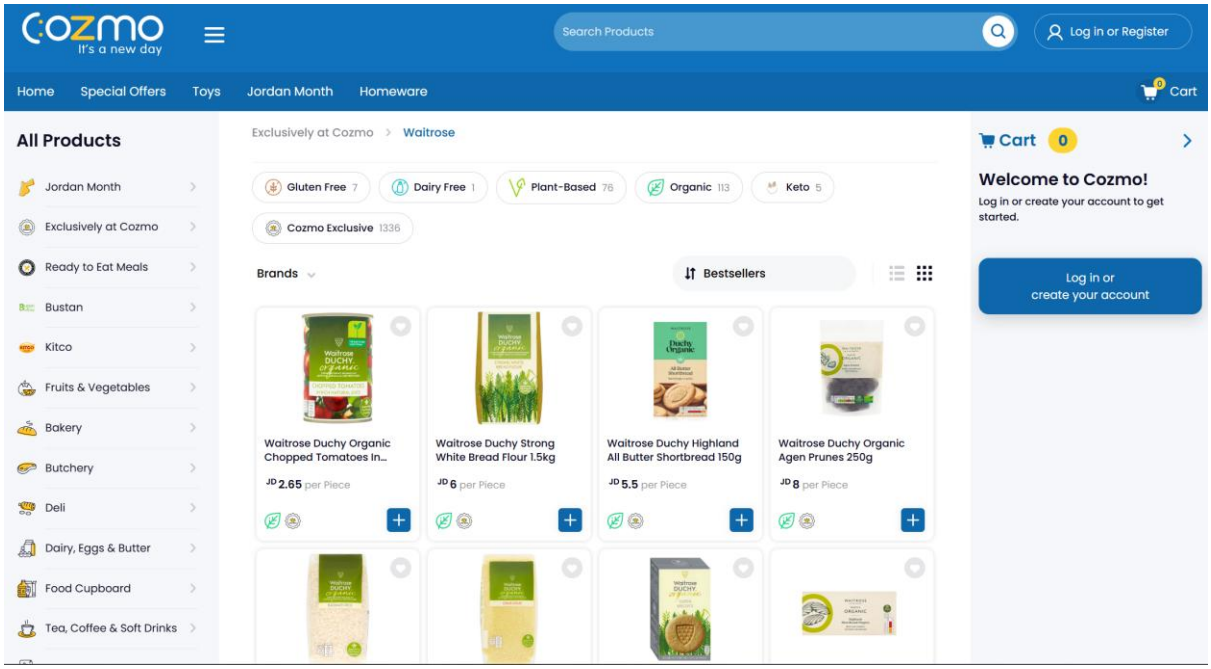
https://www.alphamega.com.cy/ (Accessed December 1, 2025)

2. HLBs in Lebanon (Spinneys / Casino – 291 product codes)



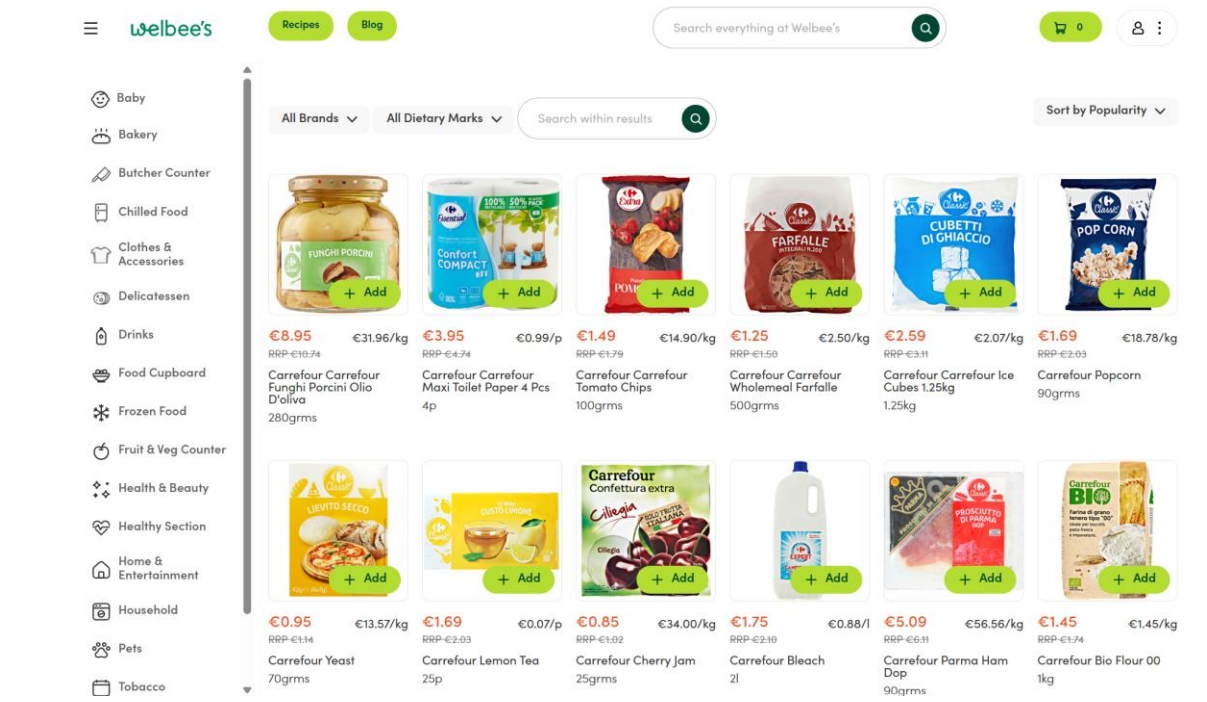
https://www.spinneyslebanon.com/default/catalogsearch/result/?q=casino&mgs_brand=Casino&in_stock=1 (Accessed June 6, 2026)

3. HLBs in Jordan (Cozmo / Waitrose – 800 product codes)



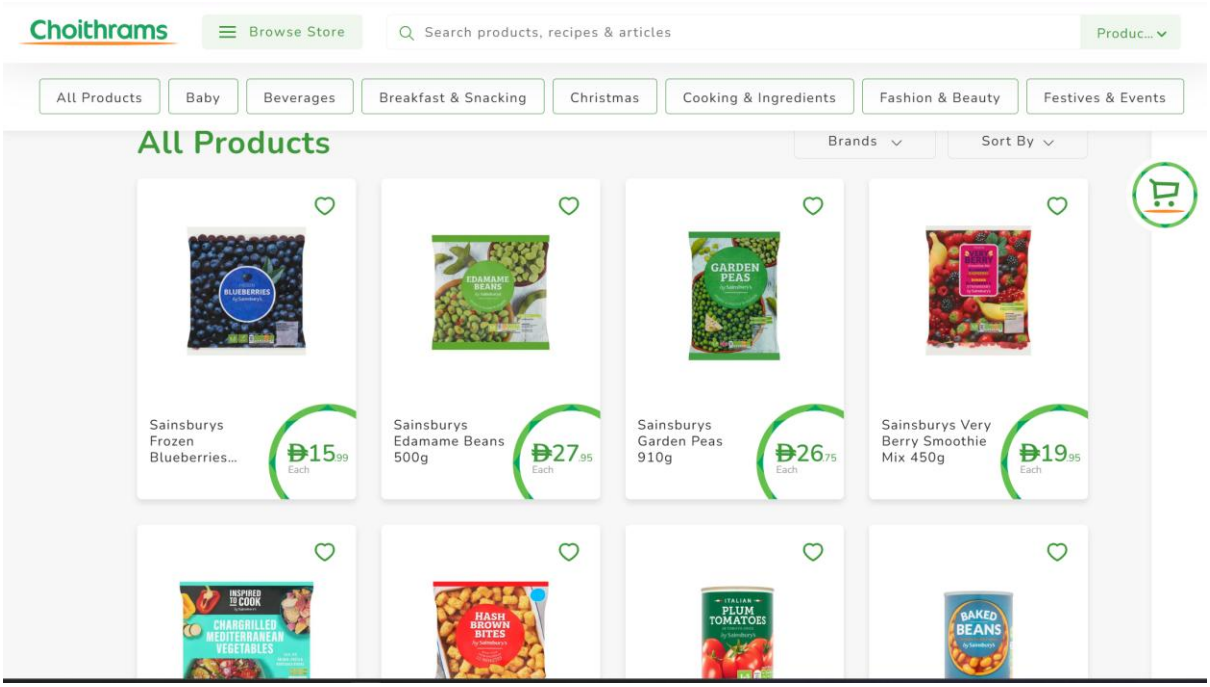
https://cozmo.jo/exclusively-at-cozmo/waitrose?filters= (Accessed June 6, 2026)

4. HLBs in Malta (Welbee's / Carrefour – 1,215 product codes)



https://welbees.mt/shop?s=carrefour (Accessed June 6, 2026)

5. HLBs in UAE (Choithrams / Sainsbury's – 691 product codes)



https://www.choithrams.com/en/catalogue/?selected_facets=brand_exact%3ASAINSBURYS& (Accessed June 6, 2026)

Appendix 2

Discussion Guide (90 minutes)

PART 1: Introduction & Breaking the Ice (5 minutes)

- **Introduction & Short description of the purpose of the discussion, rules, procedure:**
  - Honest opinions and feelings must be heard **(READ & ELABORATE)**
  - One must feel free to express themself. **(READ & ELABORATE)**
  - There are no right or wrong opinions, only different ones. **(READ & ELABORATE)**
  - You do not have to agree with others, but you need to listen to the opinion they are sharing with respect **(READ & ELABORATE)**
  - Mention that the conversation will be recorded **(READ & ELABORATE)**
- **Demographics**: Age, Profession etc. whether the person is a private employee, State of the Business - size-how big is the business, etc, type, family, local, multinational, etc)
- **Dream/Life Vision (Personal goals)**
  - Attempt to describe their dream/ vision in life (their vision for the future - what they want to accomplish in life)
    - Ways to succeed their dreams/visions
- **Lifestyle (Daily routine)**
  - Description of daily routine: home, work, family, entertainment, etc
- **Free time**
  - Free time **inside & outside the house**
    - Favourite habits? / How do you **like spending your time?**
    - **Favourite places/ places you visit** with company for fun?
- Name **3 brands you love** (not necessarily that you use) regardless of the product.
  - Which are they and why?
- **Example of Wording: (READ)**

Good morning, my name is Panagiotis Evangelides and firstly I would like to thank you for your participation in this research. I really appreciate your presence at this discussion.

The purpose of this meeting is to have a short discussion of about 90 minutes long in order to discuss private label brand products, those that are domestic and much further those that are foreign. In particular, we will discuss the factors that, in your opinion, lead to the acceptance of those products instead of other competitive

products, whether these are other products of a private label (domestic or otherwise) or not.

I would like to underline that the contents of this discussion are completely confidential and will be used for purely research purposes. Your names will not be disclosed to anyone and any reference to it will be done by using a pseudonym which will prevent any connection to what you have said. The opinions you will express will be used to strengthen academic research in such a way as to create an in-depth understanding of the way consumers perceive the products of a private label brand under the various business strategies marketed either as brand owners or as resellers.

At the completion of the recording of the discussion, and if this is requested by you, we will be happy to share it with you in order to confirm that an exact documentation of your opinions has been made in relation to what was discussed.

In any case, if you have any queries or need further clarifications with regard to this research, you can contact the responsible supervising Professor Mr. Spyro Gounari.

Before we start, do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

PART 2: Perceptions and Habits in relation to PLB (10 minutes)

- **Let us talk about private label products in general…**
    - Spontaneous comments, reactions, impressions…
        - Description of **emotions, atmosphere created**
        - **When and From Where** do you buy private label brand products?
        - **What do you like** - and **what do you dislike** with private label brand products?
    - **How would you describe your relationship with private label brands in general**
        - **What kind of private label brand products do you mostly purchase**?
        - Motive: for the purchase of private label brand products and what kind

Examples of completed questions (WITHOUT LIMITATION TO THESE SPECIFIC ONES)

Q1: I would like to start the discussion by asking you to describe, in your own words, what is a private label brand product. I am not looking for the exact definition, but how you approach this particular term.

Q2: [Limit this discussion to supermarkets] Based on the above explanation in relation to private label brand products, I would like to discuss a little further the private label brand products you find in supermarkets. [Direct the conversation so as

to receive the general impression of such products without restriction to domestic or foreign, product categories or suppliers]

Q3: [Limit the discussion further to understand purchasing habits] What kind of private label brand products do you usually choose and from which supermarkets?

Q4: Describe the reasons for which you choose private label brands products (PLB) instead of national brand products (NB).

Drivers	Tick if mentioned	Drivers	Tick if mentioned
Country of Origin		Level of Involvement	
Store Image		Branding Strategy	
Pricing		Exclusivity in Sale	
Parent Brand vs. Retail Positioning		Brand Awareness/Familiarity	
Product Category		Consumer Decision-making Style	
Quality		Other …….	
…….		…….	

PART 3: Discussion on Hybrid Label Brands HLB (15 minutes)

- **Now, let us discuss Hybrid Label Brands / foreign private label brands in detail. [READ] We define Hybrid Label Brands as the private label brand products which are sold by a different merchant from the one who created them, when they are outside the local market or outside the**

market in which their inventor maintains a physical presence with shops. Therefore, in this scenario the inventor of the private label brand product is different from the seller.

- What are the **main characteristics of foreign HLB products**?
    - Main General Characteristics of HLB products?
        - What do **you Like** more with HLB products?
        - What do **you Dislike** with HLB products?
        - **Advantages - Main Benefits of HLB products**?
            - Why do you think someone choses HLB products?
            - How do you feel when buying HLB products?
    - Spontaneous comments, reactions, perceptions, etc.
    - Circumstances under which you would choose the HLB products.

- **Characteristics of the HLB Image**
    - **PERSONIFICATION EXERCISE**
        - If I told you to describe the private label brand products, the HLB products and the national brand products as if they were a person, how would you describe them:
            - SEX: Why would you say that?
            - AGE: Why would you say that?
            - PROFESSION: Why would you say that?
            - FAMILY STATUS: Why would you say that?
            - SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS: Why would you say that?
- **Analogies**
    - If PLB, NB & HLB were…
        - … cars, what kind of car would each be? Clarification/Why
        - … capitals, which would each be? Clarification/Why
- **Correlation**
    - Describe who you consider the **"typical consumer"** of an HLB product to be.
        - Who could they be, what are their characteristics, where do they work, what do they like - dislike, when they go out for fun, where do you think they go, etc.
    - Do you, personally, relate in some way as an HLB product consumer? How and in what way - **Why or why not? Why do you prefer HLB products? Why do you reject HLB products?**

Drivers	Tick if mentioned	Drivers	Tick if mentioned
Country of Origin		Level of Involvement	
Store Image		Branding Strategy	
Pricing		Exclusivity in Sale	
Parent Brand vs. Retail Positioning		Brand Awareness/Familiarity	
Product Category		Consumer Decision-making Style	
Quality		Other …….	
…….		…….	

PART 4: Clarification on specific products (15 minutes)

- **Now let us discuss specific products. I will show you a series of products and their relevant producer. Please elaborate, in the context of dialogue, with regard to the questions below:**

- **Characteristics of Image & Habits in relation to HLB products**
  - What sets HLB products apart from the rest of the private label brand products (if there is something that sets them apart)
  - Do you consider HLB products of higher, equal or lower quality from private label brand products?

- **Characteristics of Image & Habits in relation to PLB products**
  - What sets HLB products apart from national brands (if there is something that sets them apart)

    - Do you consider HLB products of higher, equal or lower quality from national brand products

- **Characteristics of Image & Habits in relation to National Brand products**
    - What sets PLB products apart from NB products (if there is something that sets them apart)
    - Do you consider PLB products of higher, equal or lower quality from NB products

    - Which are the **strengths & weaknesses** of each category?
    - How does **each category differ** from the other 2 categories?
    - When deciding to buy a product, **what defines** from which category (PLB, HLB or National Brands) it will be?

PART 5: Purchasing habits HBL (10 minutes)

ONLY FOR HLB PRODUCT CONSUMERS

- **From which supermarket** do you usually buy HLB products?
- **Why do you prefer** this supermarket? If the same HLB product was sold at a different supermarket how would this affect it being chosen?
- Do you always buy the **same brand of HLB** product or does it not matter to you? Why?
- What **categories of HLB products** do you prefer? Why?
- How does preferring or being satisfied by an HLB in one product category influence the preference of the HLB in another category?
- Is the existence of an HLB a factor in choosing a specific supermarket?
- Is the existence of a specific HLB product a factor in choosing a specific supermarket?

PART 6: Evaluation/ Factors of differentiation of HLB (15 minutes)

- [IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED] How much does the **country of origin** of the HLB product affect its performance in relation to NB & the PLB products? What is the reason behind it?
- [IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED] How much does the **category of the HLB product** affect its performance in relation to NB & the PLB products? What is the reason behind it?
- [IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED] How much does the **country of origin AND the category of the HLB product** affect its performance in relation to NB & PLB products? What is the reason behind it?
- [IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED] Do you know the **producer of the HLB product**? If yes, then how does this affect your opinion

on the product in relation to NB & PLB products? What is the reason behind it?

- [IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED] How does the **price of the HLB product** affect its performance in relation to NB & PLB products? What is the reason behind it?
- [IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED] How much does the **exclusivity of the HLB** at a specific supermarket affect its performance in relation to NBs & the PLBs? What is the reason behind it?

PART 7: Comparative brand evaluation (15 minutes)

- ***EXERCISE - IDEALIZATION****: DRAW MANY CONCENTRIC CIRCLES*. We have mentioned/discussed the various types of products for various categories. If I told you that the ideal brand (that may or may not exist) is in the center of these circles, WHERE would you place each brand? Take into consideration that the distance of a brand from the center also reflects its distance from the ideal brand. *[LET THE GROUP PLACE THE VARIOUS BRANDS AND THEN ASK, FOR EACH BRAND]*: Why did you place that specific brand there?
- ***SMALL EXERCISE ON THE BOARD:***
  "Identify which of these products you would place in the corresponding ranking between PLB and HLB on a map divided into 4 squares, where the products will be categorized horizontally in relation to your understanding whether they are HLB (right) or PLB (left), while your intention (up) and/or your reluctance (down) for the purchase of these products in relation to their specific categorization will be placed vertically. *[LET THE GROUP PLACE THE VARIOUS BRANDS AND THEN ASK, FOR EACH BRAND]*: Why did you place that specific brand there?
- ***EXERCISE OF STRONG AND WEAK SUPPORTERS OF 'PLBs'***
  [At this point, the group must be separated into two subgroups. The PRO-HLB (FOR) & the ANTI-HLB (AGAINST). It will be asked from the subgroups to confer with one another for 60-120 seconds and report back to us, the PRO-HLB the reasons for which I must proceed with the purchase of the HLB products and the ANTI-HLB the reasons for which I must not proceed with the purchase of the HLB products.]

  [A DETAILED RECORD OF ALL THE REASONS GIVEN BY EACH GROUP SHOULD BE TAKEN]

PART 8: Summary (5 minutes)

- **What is the most interesting element for you that arose through this discussion?**

- What made an impression on you?
- What will you take away from this discussion?
- Any other comments would you like to make?

Appendix 3

Questionnaire (English)

Dear Sir/Madam,

Academic study into the adoption of Hybrid Label Brands in Cyprus

The following study concerns consumers' understanding of Hybrid Label Brands (hereinafter, **HLB**). The researcher would value your input in the form of completing this questionnaire (approximately 15 minutes). The data will be used to better understand consumer motivations that could help in optimizing retailing practices.

- All responses will remain **strictly confidential**.
- Your participation is entirely **voluntary**.
- You may choose to **opt out at any time**.

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Researcher's name**: Panagiotis-Fanis Evangelides

   E-mail: panagiotis.evangelides@strath.ac.uk

   Supervisor's name: Spiros Gounaris

2. **Purpose of this research project**

This research aims to establish the HLB as a branding construct or tool and identify under what conditions it is capable of increasing retailers' revenue in overseas markets without investment risk.

3. **Background information (definitions):**

3.1. **National Brand (hereinafter, NB):** NBs are brands owned, designed, and produced by manufacturers. These brands are usually marketed by a vendor and distributed nationally.

Typical NB examples include Coca Cola, Ariel, Gillette, Dove, Kelloggs's, Charalambides Christis, Grigoriou, Eureka, Dixan, Kit Kat, etc.

3.2. **Private Label Brands (hereinafter, PLB):** PLBs are brands that are owned by the product's reseller rather than by its manufacturer.

Typical PLB examples include products branded as Alpha Mega, Papantoniou, Metro, MAS, Sklavenitis, Cien (Lidl brand), etc.

3.3. **Hybrid Label Brands (hereinafter, HLBs):** HLBs are retailer brands that are sold by a different retailer when found outside their domestic market or outside a market where the owner of the brand operates retail outlets or digital stores. Under this scenario, the owner of the brand and the retailer are two different entities.

Typical HLB examples in Cyprus include products branded as Casino, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose & Partners, AB Vassilopoulos, MyMarket, etc.

4. **Typical examples of each branding strategy serve as a reference**:

Product Examples	National Brands (NBs)	Private Label Brands (PLBs)	Hybrid Label Brands (HLBs)
Pasta/Spaghetti	 Example 1: Barilla (€3.20/1kg)	 Example 1: Alpha Mega (€1.58/1kg)	 Example 1: Casino (€1.89/1kg)
Ice-Cream Vanilla	 Example 2: Häagen-Dazs (€13.98/1kg)	 Example 2: Alpha Mega (€3.48/1kg)	 Example 2: Casino (€6.78/1kg)
Detergent	 Example 3: Ariel (€4.40/1ltr)	 Example 3: Alpha Mega (€1.25/1ltr)	 Example 3: Casino (€1.99/1ltr)

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Please also read our Privacy Notice for Research Participants

This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde
Graham Hills Building
50 George Street
Glasgow
G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Consent form

Name of the Department: Marketing
Title of the study: Adoption of Hybrid Label Brands in Cyprus

By completing the following questionnaire:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

QS1. Have you or anyone in your family or close friend ever worked – or now works – either full time or part time in ……?

	YES
A grocery/supermarket store	1
A Manufacturer/Distributor of Private Label Brand products	2
An advertising or marketing agency	3
A market research company	4

IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, TERMINATE THE INTERVIEW

QS2. Have you purchased any of the following products from a grocery store in the past 3 months?

	YES	No
Spaghetti	1	1
Feta Cheese	2	2
Cotton Pads	3	3
Kids shampoo	4	4
Ice cream	5	5

IF THREE NO TO THE ABOVE, TERMINATE THE INTERVIEW

QS3. To what extent are you involved in the decision of what brands of Household items to buy?

Fully Involved	1	**CONTINUE**
Partially Involved	2	**CONTINUE**
Not involved at all	3	**TERMINATE**

QS4. From which supermarket(s) do you usually do your shopping? Namely you make most of your purchases.

Alpha Mega	1	**CONTINUE**
Metro	2	**CONTINUE**
Papantoniou	3	**CONTINUE**
Sklavenitis	4	**TERMINATE**
Lidl	5	**TERMINATE**
MAS	6	**TERMINATE**
Other	7	**TERMINATE**

- **MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

SECTION A: VfM & Price

		Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
VfM1	Generally speaking, the higher the price of a National Brand, the higher the quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM1	Generally speaking, the higher the price of a Private Label brand, the higher the quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM1	Generally speaking, the higher the price of a Hybrid Label Brand, the higher the quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM2	The old saying "you get what you pay for" is generally true.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM2	The price of a National Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM2	The price of a Private Label Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM3	The price of a Hybrid Label brand is a good indicator of its quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VfM4	You always have to pay a bit more for the best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P1	Hybrid Label Brand has attractive prices	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P2	Hybrid Label Brand is a good buy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P3	Hybrid Label Brand is available for reasonable prices	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION B: Company Image/Reputation

		Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
CI1	Hybrid Label Brand company offers high quality goods and services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
CI2	Hybrid Label Brand company is a strong, reliable company	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
CI3	Hybrid Label Brand company develops innovative goods.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
CI4	The Hybrid Label Brand appears to be of a good quality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
CI5	The Hybrid Label Brand appears to be reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WT P1	I will purchase products of the Hybrid Label Brand company the next time I need a product.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WT P2	I will definitely try products from the Hybrid Label Brand company	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION C – Exclusivity

	The Hybrid Label Brands:	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
E1	are exclusive	1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Very Much)

E2	Can make someone feel like a better customer compared with other grocery store customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E3	Can make someone feel superior to other grocery store customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION D – Product category, Involvement & Presence in Many Categories

	Product Category: Toiletries	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
PC1	I perceive risk in purchasing Hybrid Label branded toiletries.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC2	My preferred brand of toiletries reduces any risk I may perceive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC3	I put a lot of thought into purchasing my preferred toiletries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
V1	Hybrid Label Brand Variability	1 (Low Variability)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (High Variability)
V2	Hybrid Label Brand quality variation	1 (Small Difference)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Big Difference)

SECTION E – Country of Origin

		Strongly Disagree Evaluate Negative						Strongly Agree Evaluate Positive
COO1	Products produced by firms from France, are generally of high quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
COO2	How would you rate the attractiveness of the design of products from France? Regarding appearance, style, colours, and variety?	1 (Not attractive)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (attractive)
COO3	How would you rate the prestige of products from France? Including their exclusivity status, and brand name reputation	1 (not prestige)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (prestige)
COO4	How would you rate the workmanship of products from France? Which comprises reliability, taste and manufacturing quality?	1 (bad)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (good)
COO5	I believe that the Country of Origin has an impact on my evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
COO6	France, the origin country of Hybrid Label Brand can be considered as a country which produces high quality products	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Have you ever been to France?	YES	NO					

SECTION F – Perception of Resources & Capabilities, Quality & Intention

	Perception of Resources & Capabilities	Strongly Disagree Evaluate Negative					Strongly Agree Evaluate Positive	
RC1	To me, the size of the retailer is associated with product quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

RC2	Brands originating from, and competing in, big markets have higher quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
RC3	Expansion to foreign countries is a reassurance of product quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
RC4	Global retailers can manufacture products of high quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION G – Personal Influences

	Price Consciousness	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
PC1	I am not willing to go to extra effort to find lower prices (r)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC2	I will grocery shop at more than one store to take advantage of low prices	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC3	I typically seek out cheap retail outlets to buy products for the house	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Brand Consciousness	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
BC1	I pay attention to the brand names of the products I buy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BC2	Sometimes I am willing to pay more money for a product because of its brand name.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BC3	I believe the brands I buy are a reflection of who I am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Choice Confusion	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
OC1	There are so many brands to choose from that often I feel confused.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
OC2	The more I learn about products, the harder it seems to choose the best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
OC3	With that many options to choose between, I found it difficult to compare competing offers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Quality Consciousness	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
QC1	I search for as much information as possible on the quality of the products before I choose one.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
QC2	It is important for me to know exactly the quality of a product before I buy it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
QC3	It is important for me to buy high-quality products	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Innovativeness	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
NC1	In general, I am among the first to buy new products when they appear on the market.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NC2	I am very cautious in trying new and different products. (r)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NC3	I enjoy taking chances in buying new products	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Loyalty Proneness (Product)	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
BL1	I generally buy the same brands I have always bought.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BL2	Once I have made a choice on which brand to purchase, I am likely to continue to buy it without considering other brands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BL3	Once I get used to a brand, I hate to switch.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Ethnocentrism	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
E1	Only those products that are unavailable in Cyprus should be imported.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E2	Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Cypriot	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E3	It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Cypriots out of jobs and hurts Cypriot business.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E4	It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Cypriot products.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E5	We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION H – Brand Foreignness

	Regarding the Hybrid Label Brand	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
BF1	I do think consumers in other countries buy this brand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BF2	To me, this brand represents something foreign.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BF3	I do not associate this brand with things that are Cypriot.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BF4	The appeal of this brand is a very good symbol of foreign culture.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION I – Social Desirability

SD1	Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates (T)	True	False
SD2	No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener. (T)	True	False
SD3	At times I have really insisted on having things my way. (F)	True	False

SECTION J – Purchase Intention

Regarding the Hybrid Label Brand	Highly Unlikely Highly Uncertain	Highly likely Highly Certain

PI1	How likely are you to buy the Hybrid Label Brand?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PI2	How certain is it that you will purchase the Hybrid Label Brand?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Regarding the Quality Hybrid Label Brand	Low Quality									High Quality
PC	Quality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

SECTION K – General questions

QH1.	I mostly buy:	National Brands	Private Label Brands	Hybrid Label Brands	I don't know/ I am not sure
QH2.	I have experience in buying and using Hybrid Label Brands products.	YES	NO	I don't know/I am not sure	
QH3.	Coca Cola is a National Brand	YES	NO	I don't know/I am not sure	
QH4.	Hybrid Label Brands can be found in all grocery stores around Cyprus.	YES	NO	I don't know/I am not sure	
QH5.	An example of a Private Label Brand is the Alpha Mega branded kitchen tower.	YES	NO	I don't know/I am not sure	

DEMOGRAPHICS

City		**Age**		**Nationality**	
Nicosia	1	16-20	1	Greek-Cypriot	1
Limassol	2	21-29	2	Greek	2
Larnaca	3	30-39	3	British	3
Paphos	4	40-49	4	Other	4
Ammochostos	5	50-59	5	**Sex**	
		60-69	6	Male	1
		70+	7	Female	2
				Prefer not to respond	3

Family Composition	
Children Under 2	
Children 2-6	
Children 7–11	
Children 12–17	
Adults 18+	
TOTAL	

Marital Status	
Single	1
Married	2
Prefer not to respond	3

Highest level of Education

Did not attend school	1
Graduated from high school	2
University/College Student (Studying in Cyprus)	3
University/College Student (Studying abroad)	4
Graduated from College/University (based in Cyprus)	5

Graduated from College/University (based abroad)	6
Advanced degree (Master's, MBA, PhD or equivalent – based in Cyprus)	7
Advanced degree (Master's, MBA, PhD or equivalent – based abroad)	8

What is your total household income?

Under €20,000	1
€20,001 – €30,000	2
€30,001 – €40,000	3
€40,001 – €50,000	4
€60,001 – €70,000	5
€70,001 – €80,000	6
Over €80,001	7
Refused/Did not know	8

QUESTIONNAIRE (Greek)

Αξιότιμε/η Κύριε/Κυρία,

Ακαδημαϊκή μελέτη για την υιοθέτηση των Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands) στην Κύπρο

Η ακόλουθη μελέτη αφορά την κατανόηση των καταναλωτών για τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands) (εφεξής, **HLB**). Ο ερευνητής θα εκτιμούσε τη συμβολή σας με τη συμπλήρωση αυτού του ερωτηματολογίου (χρειάζονται περίπου 15 λεπτά). Τα δεδομένα θα χρησιμοποιηθούν για την καλύτερη κατανόηση των κινήτρων των καταναλωτών που θα μπορούσαν να βοηθήσουν στη βελτιστοποίηση των πρακτικών λιανικής πώλησης.

- Όλες οι απαντήσεις θα παραμείνουν **αυστηρά εμπιστευτικές**.
- Η συμμετοχή σας είναι εντελώς **εθελοντική**.
- Μπορείτε να επιλέξετε να **αποχωρήσετε ανά πάσα στιγμή**.

Φύλλο πληροφοριών συμμετέχοντα

Όνομα ερευνητή: Παναγιώτης-Φάνης Ευαγγελίδης

E-mail: panagiotis.evangelides@strath.ac.uk

Όνομα επόπτη: Σπύρος Γούναρης

Σκοπός του παρόντος ερευνητικού έργου

Η έρευνα αυτή έχει ως στόχο να καθιερώσει τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (HLB) ως οικοδόμηση Εμπορικού Σήματος ή εργαλείου και να προσδιορίσει υπό ποιες συνθήκες είναι ικανή να αυξήσει τα έσοδα των λιανοπωλητών στις αγορές του εξωτερικού χωρίς επενδυτικό κίνδυνο.

Ιστορικό (ορισμοί):

4.1. **Εθνικό Εμπορικό Σήμα (National Brand) (εφεξής, NB):** Τα Εθνικά Εμπορικά Σήματα (NB) είναι Εμπορικά Σήματα που ανήκουν, σχεδιάζονται και παράγονται από κατασκευαστές. Αυτά τα Εμπορικά Σήματα συνήθως διατίθενται στο εμπόριο από έναν πωλητή και διανέμονται σε εθνικό επίπεδο.

Τυπικά παραδείγματα Εθνικών Εμπορικών Σημάτων (NB) περιλαμβάνουν την Coca Cola, Ariel, Gillette, Dove, Kelloggs, Χαραλαμπίδης Κρίστης, Γρηγορίου, Εύρηκα, Dixan, Kit Kat κ.λπ.

4.2. **Εμπορικά Σήματα Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας (Private Label Brands) (εφεξής, PLB):** Τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας (PLB) είναι Εμπορικά Σήματα που ανήκουν στον μεταπωλητή του προϊόντος και όχι στον κατασκευαστή του.

Τυπικά παραδείγματα Εμπορικών Σημάτων Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας (PLB) περιλαμβάνουν προϊόντα με την επωνυμία Άλφα Μέγα, Παπαντωνίου, Metro, MAS, Σκλαβενίτης, Cien (μάρκα Lidl) κ.λπ.

4.3. Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας **(Hybrid Label Brands) (εφεξής, HLBs):** Τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (HLBs) είναι Εμπορικά

Σήματα λιανοπωλητών που πωλούνται από διαφορετικό λιανοπωλητή όταν βρίσκονται εκτός της εγχώριας αγοράς τους, ή εκτός μιας αγοράς όπου ο ιδιοκτήτης της μάρκας λειτουργεί καταστήματα λιανικής πώλησης ή ψηφιακά καταστήματα. Σύμφωνα με αυτό το σενάριο, ο ιδιοκτήτης του Εμπορικού Σήματος και ο λιανοπωλητής είναι δύο διαφορετικές οντότητες.

Τυπικά παραδείγματα Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (HLB) στην Κύπρο περιλαμβάνουν προϊόντα με την επωνυμία Casino, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose & Partners, AB Vassilopoulos, MyMarket κ.λπ.

5. Τυπικά παραδείγματα κάθε στρατηγικής branding χρησιμεύουν ως αναφορά:

Παραδείγματα προϊόντων	Εθνικά Εμπορικά Σήματα (NB)	Εμπορικά Σήματα Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας (PLB)	Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (HLB)
Ζυμαρικά/Σπαγγέτι	 Παράδειγμα 1: Barilla (3,20 €/kg)	 Παράδειγμα 1: Άλφα Μέγα (1,58 €/kg)	 Παράδειγμα 1: Casino (1,89 €/kg)
Παγωτό βανίλια	 Παράδειγμα 2: Häagen-Dazs (13,98 €/kg)	 Παράδειγμα 2: Άλφα Μέγα (3,48 €/kg)	 Παράδειγμα 2: Casino (6,78 €/kg)

Απορρυπαντικά	 Παράδειγμα 3: Ariel (4,40 €/1ltr)	 Παράδειγμα 3: Άλφα Μέγα (1,25 €/1ltr)	 Παράδειγμα 3: Casino (1,99 €/ltr)

Σας ευχαριστούμε που διαβάσατε τις πληροφορίες αυτές – παρακαλούμε υποβάλετε ερωτήσεις εάν δεν είστε σίγουροι για αυτά που αναφέρονται στο παρόν.

Διαβάστε επίσης την Ειδοποίηση Απορρήτου για τους Συμμετέχοντες στην Έρευνα

Αυτή η έρευνα έλαβε δεοντολογική έγκριση από την Επιτροπή Δεοντολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου του Strathclyde.
Εάν έχετε οποιεσδήποτε ερωτήσεις/ανησυχίες, κατά τη διάρκεια ή μετά την έρευνα, ή εάν επιθυμείτε να επικοινωνήσετε με ένα ανεξάρτητο άτομο στο οποίο μπορεί να απευθύνονται οποιεσδήποτε ερωτήσεις ή να αναζητηθούν περαιτέρω πληροφορίες, επικοινωνήστε με:

Γραμματέας της Επιτροπής Δεοντολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου
Υπηρεσίες Έρευνας & Ανταλλαγής Γνώσεων
Πανεπιστήμιο του Strathclyde
Κτίριο Graham Hills
50 George Street
Γλασκώβη
G1 1QE
Τηλέφωνο: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Έντυπο συγκατάθεσης

Επωνυμία Τμήματος: ΜΑΡΚΕΤΙΝΓΚ
Τίτλος μελέτης: Υιοθέτηση Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands) στην Κύπρο

Συμπληρώνοντας αυτό το ερωτηματολόγιο:

- Επιβεβαιώνω ότι έχω διαβάσει και κατανοήσει το Φύλλο Πληροφοριών Συμμετέχοντα για την παραπάνω έρευνα και ότι ο ερευνητής έχει απαντήσει ικανοποιητικά σε τυχόν ερωτήσεις μου.
- Επιβεβαιώνω ότι έχω διαβάσει και κατανοήσει την Ειδοποίηση Απορρήτου για Συμμετέχοντες σε Ερευνητικά Έργα.
- Κατανοώ ότι η συμμετοχή μου είναι εθελοντική και ότι είμαι ελεύθερος να αποσυρθώ από την έρευνα ανά πάσα στιγμή, μέχρι το σημείο που έφτασα, χωρίς να χρειάζεται να δικαιολογηθώ και χωρίς συνέπειες.
- Κατανοώ ότι τα ανώνυμα δεδομένα (δηλαδή τα δεδομένα που δεν με ταυτοποιούν προσωπικά) δεν μπορούν να αποσυρθούν αφότου συμπεριληφθούν στη μελέτη.
- Συμφωνώ να συμμετάσχω στην έρευνα.

ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ ΔΙΑΛΟΓΗΣ

Ερ.1. Έχετε εργαστεί ποτέ -ή εργάζεστε τώρα- εσείς ή κάποιος από την οικογένειά σας ή στενός φίλος σας είτε με πλήρη είτε με μερική απασχόληση σε ……;

	ΝΑΙ
Παντοπωλείο/σουπερμάρκετ	1
Κατασκευαστή/διανομέα προϊόντων Εμπορικού Σήματος Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας	2
Διαφημιστική εταιρεία ή εταιρεία μάρκετινγκ	3
Εταιρεία έρευνας αγοράς	4

ΕΑΝ ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΑΤΕ ΝΑΙ ΣΕ ΚΑΠΟΙΟ ΑΠΟ ΤΑ ΠΑΡΑΠΑΝΩ, ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ ΤΗ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗ

Ερ. 2. Έχετε αγοράσει κάποιο από τα παρακάτω προϊόντα από παντοπωλείο τους τελευταίους 3 μήνες;

	ΝΑΙ	Όχι
Μακαρόνια	1	1
Τυρί Φέτα	2	2
Βαμβακερά επιθέματα (Βαμβάκι)	3	3
Παιδικό σαμπουάν	4	4
Παγωτό	5	5

ΕΑΝ ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΑΤΕ ΤΡΙΑ ΟΧΙ ΣΤΑ ΠΑΡΑΠΑΝΩ, ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ ΤΗ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗ

Ερ. 3. Σε ποιο βαθμό συμμετέχετε στην απόφαση για το ποιες μάρκες ειδών οικιακής χρήσης θα αγοράσετε;

Εμπλέκομαι πλήρως	1	**ΣΥΝΕΧΙΣΤΕ**
Εμπλέκομαι μερικώς	2	**ΣΥΝΕΧΙΣΤΕ**
Δεν εμπλέκομαι καθόλου	3	**ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ**

Ερ. 4. Από ποια σουπερμάρκετ ψωνίζετε συνήθως; Δηλαδή κάνετε τις περισσότερες αγορές σας.

Άλφα Μέγα	1	**ΣΥΝΕΧΙΣΤΕ**
Metro	2	**ΣΥΝΕΧΙΣΤΕ**
Παπαντωνίου	3	**ΣΥΝΕΧΙΣΤΕ**
Σκλαβενίτης	4	**ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ**
Lidl	5	**ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ**
MAS	6	**ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ**
Άλλο	7	**ΤΕΡΜΑΤΙΣΤΕ**

ΚΥΡΙΩΣ ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ

Παρακαλώ αξιολογήστε το επίπεδο συμφωνίας σας με καθεμία από τις ακόλουθες δηλώσεις:

Ενότητα Α

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα	
1.	Σε γενικές γραμμές, όσο υψηλότερη είναι η τιμή ενός Εθνικού Εμπορικού Σήματος, τόσο υψηλότερη είναι η ποιότητα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	Σε γενικές γραμμές, όσο υψηλότερη είναι η τιμή ενός Εμπορικού Σήματος Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας, τόσο υψηλότερη είναι η ποιότητα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	Σε γενικές γραμμές, όσο υψηλότερη είναι η τιμή ενός Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας, τόσο υψηλότερη είναι η ποιότητα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	Το παλιό ρητό ότι "παίρνεις αυτό που πληρώνεις" είναι γενικά αλήθεια.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	Η τιμή ενός Εθνικού Εμπορικού Σήματος είναι ένας καλός δείκτης της ποιότητάς του.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6.	Η τιμή ενός Εμπορικού Σήματος Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας είναι ένας καλός δείκτης της ποιότητάς του.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	Η τιμή ενός Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας είναι ένας καλός δείκτης της ποιότητάς του.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	Πάντα πρέπει να πληρώνεις λίγο παραπάνω για το καλύτερο.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	Ένα Εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) έχει ελκυστικές τιμές	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	Ένα Εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) είναι μια καλή αγορά	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Ένα Εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) είναι διαθέσιμο σε λογικές τιμές	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Β

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα	
12.	Μια εταιρεία Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) προσφέρει προϊόντα και υπηρεσίες υψηλής ποιότητας	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	Μια εταιρεία Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand company) είναι μια ισχυρή, αξιόπιστη εταιρεία	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	Μια εταιρεία Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand company) αναπτύσσει καινοτόμα προϊόντα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	Το Εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) φαίνεται να είναι καλής ποιότητας	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16	Το Εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label brand) φαίνεται να είναι αξιόπιστο	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	Θα αγοράσω προϊόντα της Εταιρείας Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) την επόμενη φορά που θα χρειαστώ ένα προϊόν.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18	Σίγουρα θα δοκιμάσω προϊόντα από εταιρεία Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Γ

	Τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands) :	Διαφωνώ απόλυτα					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα	
19	είναι αποκλειστικά	1 (Καθόλου)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Πάρα πολύ)
20.	Μπορεί να κάνουν κάποιον να αισθάνεται καλύτερος πελάτης σε σύγκριση με άλλους πελάτες υπεραγορών.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	Μπορεί να κάνουν κάποιον να αισθάνεται ανώτερος από άλλους πελάτες υπεραγορών.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Δ

	Κατηγορία προϊόντος: Προϊόντα περιποίησης (προσωπικής φροντίδας)	Διαφωνώ απόλυτα					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα	
22.	Αντιλαμβάνομαι ότι υπάρχει κίνδυνος αγοράζοντας προϊόντα περιποίησης Εμπορικού Σήματος υβριδικής ετικέτας.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23.	Το προτιμώμενο μου εμπορικό Σήμα προϊόντων περιποίησης μειώνει κάθε κίνδυνο που μπορεί να αντιλαμβάνομαι	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24.	Αγοράζω τα προτιμώμενα προϊόντα περιποίησης μου μετά από πολλή σκέψη	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25.	Ποικιλία Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής ετικέτας	1 (Χαμηλή ποικιλία)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Υψηλή ποικιλια
26.	Διακύμανση ποιότητας Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας	1 (Μικρή διαφορά)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Μεγάλη Διαφορά)

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Ε

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα Αξιολογείτε αρνητικά					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα Αξιολογείτε θετικά	
27.	Τα προϊόντα που παράγονται από επιχειρήσεις από τη Γαλλία, είναι γενικά υψηλής ποιότητας.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	Πώς θα αξιολογούσατε την ελκυστικότητα του σχεδιασμού προϊόντων από τη Γαλλία; Όσον αφορά την εμφάνιση, το στυλ, τα χρώματα και την ποικιλία;	1 (Μη ελκυστικά)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Ελκυστικά)

29.	Πώς θα αξιολογούσατε το κύρος των προϊόντων από τη Γαλλία; Συμπεριλαμβανομένου του καθεστώτος αποκλειστικότητας και της φήμης του Εμπορικού Σήματος	1 (όχι κύρος)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (κύρος)
30.	Πώς θα αξιολογούσατε την ποιότητα κατασκευής των προϊόντων από τη Γαλλία; Που περιλαμβάνει την αξιοπιστία, τη γεύση και την ποιότητα κατασκευής;	1 (κακή)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (καλή)
31.	Πιστεύω ότι η Χώρα Προέλευσης έχει αντίκτυπο στην αξιολόγησή μου	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32.	Η Γαλλία, η χώρα προέλευσης των Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand) μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ως μια χώρα που παράγει προϊόντα υψηλής ποιότητας	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33.	Έχεις πάει ποτέ στη Γαλλία;	ΝΑΙ	ΟΧΙ					

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΣΤ

	Αντίληψη των Πόρων και των Ικανοτήτων	Διαφωνώ απόλυτα Αξιολογείτε αρνητικά					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα Αξιολογείτε θετικά	
34.	Κατά τη γνώμη μου, το μέγεθος του λιανοπωλητή συνδέεται με την ποιότητα των προϊόντων.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35.	Τα Εμπορικά Σήματα που προέρχονται από και ανταγωνίζονται σε μεγάλες αγορές έχουν υψηλότερη ποιότητα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36.	Η επέκταση σε ξένες χώρες είναι μια διαβεβαίωση της ποιότητας του προϊόντος.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37.	Οι παγκόσμιοι λιανοπωλητές μπορούν να κατασκευάσουν προϊόντα υψηλής ποιότητας.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Ζ

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα					Συμφωνώ απόλυτα	
38.	Δεν είμαι διατεθειμένος να καταβάλω επιπλέον προσπάθεια για να βρω χαμηλότερες τιμές (r)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39.	Θα ψωνίσω σε περισσότερα από ένα παντοπωλεία για να επωφεληθώ από τις χαμηλές τιμές	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40.	Συνήθως αναζητώ φθηνά καταστήματα λιανικής πώλησης για να αγοράσω προϊόντα για το σπίτι	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
41.	Δίνω προσοχή στα Εμπορικά Σήματα των προϊόντων που αγοράζω	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42.	Μερικές φορές είμαι πρόθυμος να πληρώσω περισσότερα χρήματα για ένα προϊόν λόγω του ονόματος του Εμπορικού Σήματος του.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43.	Πιστεύω ότι τα Εμπορικά Σήματα που αγοράζω είναι μια αντανάκλαση του ποιος είμαι	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
44.	Υπάρχουν τόσες πολλές επιλογές Εμπορικών Σημάτων που συχνά νιώθω μπερδεμένος/η.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45.	Όσο περισσότερο μαθαίνω για τα προϊόντα, τόσο πιο δύσκολη φαίνεται η επιλογή του καλύτερου.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46.	Με τόσες πολλές επιλογές, δυσκολεύομαι να συγκρίνω ανταγωνιστικές προσφορές.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Συνειδητότητα Ποιότητας		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
47.	Αναζητώ όσο το δυνατόν περισσότερες πληροφορίες σχετικά με την ποιότητα των προϊόντων πριν να τα επιλέξω.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
48.	Είναι σημαντικό για μένα να γνωρίζω ακριβώς την ποιότητα ενός προϊόντος πριν το αγοράσω.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
49.	Είναι σημαντικό για μένα να αγοράζω προϊόντα υψηλής ποιότητας	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
50.	Σε γενικές γραμμές, είμαι από τους πρώτους που αγοράζουν νέα προϊόντα όταν αυτά εμφανίζονται στην αγορά.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
51.	Είμαι πολύ προσεκτικός όταν δοκιμάζω νέα και διαφορετικά προϊόντα. (r)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
52.	Μου αρέσει να ρισκάρω αγοράζοντας νέα προϊόντα	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
53.	Γενικά αγοράζω τα ίδια Εμπορικά Σήματα που αγόραζα πάντα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
54.	Μόλις επιλέξω ποιο εμπορικό Σήματα θα αγοράσω, είναι πιθανό να	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	συνεχίσω να το αγοράζω χωρίς να λαμβάνω υπόψη άλλα Εμπορικά Σήματα							
55.	Μόλις συνηθίσω ένα εμπορικό Σήμα δεν μου αρέσει να αλλάζω.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
56.	Θα πρέπει να εισάγονται μόνο τα προϊόντα που δεν είναι διαθέσιμα στην Κύπρο.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
57.	Η αγορά προϊόντων που κατασκευάζονται στο εξωτερικό είναι αντί-κυπριακή	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
58.	Δεν είναι σωστό να αγοράζουμε ξένα προϊόντα, γιατί κάτι τέτοιο θέτει τους Κύπριους εκτός εργασίας και ζημιώνει τις κυπριακές επιχειρήσεις.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
59.	Μπορεί να μου κοστίσει μακροπρόθεσμα αλλά προτιμώ να στηρίζω τα κυπριακά προϊόντα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
60.	Θα πρέπει να αγοράζουμε από χώρες του εξωτερικού μόνο εκείνα τα προϊόντα που δεν μπορούμε να αποκτήσουμε εντός της χώρας μας.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Η

	Σχετικά με τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (**Hybrid Label Brand**)	Διαφωνώ απόλυτα						Συμφωνώ απόλυτα
61.	Πιστεύω ότι οι καταναλωτές σε άλλες χώρες αγοράζουν αυτό το Εμπορικό Σήμα.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
62.	Για μένα, αυτή η μάρκα αντιπροσωπεύει κάτι ξένο.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
63.	Δεν συνδέω αυτό το Εμπορικό Σήμα με πράγματα που είναι κυπριακά.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
64.	Η ελκυστικότητα αυτού του Εμπορικού Σήματος είναι ένα πολύ καλό σύμβολο ξένης κουλτούρας.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Θ

65.	Πριν από την ψηφοφορία διερευνώ διεξοδικά τα προσόντα όλων των υποψηφίων (Τ)	Σωστό	Λάθος

66.	Σε όποιον κι αν μιλάω, είμαι πάντα καλός ακροατής. (T)	Σωστό	Λάθος
67.	Μερικές φορές επέμενα πραγματικά να γίνουν τα πράγματα με τον δικό μου τρόπο. (F)	Σωστό	Λάθος

ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ Ι

	Σχετικά με τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand)	Πολύ απίθανο Εξαιρετικά Αβέβαιο						Πολύ πιθανό Εξαιρετικά Βέβαιο
68.	Πόσο πιθανό είναι να αγοράσετε ένα εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand);	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
69.	Πόσο βέβαιο είναι ότι θα αγοράσετε το Εμπορικό Σήμα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand);	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Σχετικά με τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand)	Χαμηλή Ποιότητα									Υψηλή Ποιότητα
70.	Βαθμολογήστε την ποιότητα του Εμπορικού Σήματος Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brand)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

ΤΜΗΜΑ Κ

Ερ. 1.	Αγοράζω κυρίως:	Εθνικά Εμπορικά Σήματα	Εμπορικά Σήματα Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας (PLB)	Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands) :	Δε γνωρίζω/ Δεν είμαι σίγουρος/η
Ερ. 2.	Έχω εμπειρία στην αγορά και χρήση προϊόντων Εμπορικών Σημάτων Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands).	ΝΑΙ	ΟΧΙ	Δεν ξέρω/Δεν είμαι σίγουρος/η	
Ερ. 3.	Η Coca Cola είναι ένα Εθνικό Εμπορικό Σήμα	ΝΑΙ	ΟΧΙ	Δεν ξέρω/Δεν είμαι σίγουρος/η	
Ερ. 4.	Τα Εμπορικά Σήματα Υβριδικής Ετικέτας (Hybrid Label Brands) μπορούν να βρεθούν σε όλες τις υπεραγορές στην Κύπρο.	ΝΑΙ	ΟΧΙ	Δεν ξέρω/Δεν είμαι σίγουρος/η	
Ερ. 5.	Ένα παράδειγμα Εμπορικού Σήματος Ιδιωτικής Ετικέτας είναι το χαρτί κουζίνας Άλφα Μέγα.	ΝΑΙ	ΟΧΙ	Δεν ξέρω/Δεν είμαι σίγουρος/η	

ΔΗΜΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΑ ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ

Πόλη		**Ηλικία**		**Εθνικότητα**	
Λευκωσία	1	16–20	1	Ελληνοκυπριακή	1
Λεμεσός	2	21–29	2	Ελληνική	2

Λάρνακα	3	30–39	3	Βρετανική	3
Πάφος	4	40–49	4	Άλλο	4
Αμμόχωστος	5	50–59	5	**Φύλο**	
		60–69	6	Άρρεν	1
		70+	7	Θήλυ	2
				Προτιμώ να μην απαντήσω	3

Οικογενειακή σύνθεση	
Παιδιά κάτω των 2 ετών	
Παιδιά 2–6	
Παιδιά 7–11	
Παιδιά 12 - 17	
Ενήλικες 18+	
ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	

Οικογενειακή κατάσταση	
Άγαμος-η	1
Έγγαμος/η	2
Προτιμώ να μην απαντήσω	3

Ανώτατο επίπεδο εκπαίδευσης	
Δεν πήγα σχολείο	1
Αποφοίτησα από το Λύκειο	2
Φοιτητής/Φοιτήτρια Πανεπιστημίου/Κολλεγίου (Σπουδές στην Κύπρο)	3
Φοιτητής/Φοιτήτρια Πανεπιστημίου/ Κολλεγίου (Σπουδές στο εξωτερικό)	4
Αποφοίτησα από Κολλέγιο/Πανεπιστήμιο (με έδρα την Κύπρο)	5
Αποφοίτησα από Κολλέγιο/Πανεπιστήμιο (με έδρα το εξωτερικό)	6
Προχωρημένο πτυχίο (Μεταπτυχιακό, MBA, διδακτορικό ή ισοδύναμο – με έδρα την Κύπρο)	7
Προχωρημένο πτυχίο (μεταπτυχιακό, MBA, διδακτορικό ή ισοδύναμο – με έδρα στο εξωτερικό)	8

Ποιο είναι το συνολικό εισόδημα του νοικοκυριού σας;	
Κάτω από €20.000	1
€20.001 – €30.000	2
€30.001 – €40.000	3
€40.001 – €50.000	4
€60.001 – €70.000	5

€70.001 – €80.000	6
Άνω των €80.001	7
Αρνήθηκε/δεν γνώριζε	8

Appendix 4

Table 31 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Responses on Price & Quality

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
Generally speaking, the higher the price of a National Brand, the higher the quality.	8	2,05%	65	16,62%	63	16,11%	57	14,58%	112	28,64%	78	19,95%	8	2,05%
Generally speaking, the higher the price of a Private Label brand, the higher the quality.	15	3,84%	76	19,44%	77	19,69%	82	20,97%	90	23,02%	48	12,28%	3	0,77%
Generally speaking, the higher the price of a Hybrid Label Brand, the higher the quality.	14	3,58%	75	19,18%	67	17,14%	84	21,48%	92	23,53%	55	14,07%	4	1,02%
The old saying "you get what you pay for" is generally true.	5	1,28%	36	9,21%	47	12,02%	44	11,25%	124	31,71%	107	27,37%	28	7,16%
The price of a National Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	6	1,53%	46	11,76%	60	15,35%	63	16,11%	110	28,13%	98	25,06%	8	2,05%
The price of a Private Label Brand is a good indicator of its quality.	6	1,53%	57	14,58%	78	19,95%	78	19,95%	116	29,67%	53	13,55%	3	0,77%
The price of a Hybrid Label brand is a good indicator of its quality.	5	1,28%	56	14,32%	66	16,88%	98	25,06%	108	27,62%	53	13,55%	5	1,28%
You always have to pay a bit more for the best.	9	2,30%	43	11,00%	59	15,09%	55	14,07%	115	29,41%	94	24,04%	16	4,09%
Hybrid Label Brand has attractive prices	3	0,77%	8	2,05%	18	4,60%	77	19,69%	133	34,02%	145	37,08%	7	1,79%
Hybrid Label Brand is a good buy	4	1,02%	5	1,28%	20	5,12%	113	28,90%	139	35,55%	107	27,37%	3	0,77%
Hybrid Label Brand is available for reasonable prices	3	0,77%	5	1,28%	19	4,86%	91	23,27%	135	34,53%	130	33,25%	8	2,05%

Table 32 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Company Image

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
Hybrid Label Brand company offers high quality goods and services	2	0,51%	15	3,84%	29	7,42%	146	37,34%	142	36,32%	55	14,07%	2	0,51%
Hybrid Label Brand company is a strong, reliable company	2	0,51%	15	3,84%	23	5,88%	130	33,25%	146	37,34%	72	18,41%	3	0,77%
Hybrid Label Brand company develops innovative goods.	7	1,79%	27	6,91%	28	7,16%	132	33,76%	132	33,76%	61	15,60%	4	1,02%
The Hybrid Label Brand appears to be of a good quality	2	0,51%	9	2,30%	11	2,81%	133	34,02%	155	39,64%	77	19,69%	4	1,02%
The Hybrid Label Brand appears to be reliable	3	0,77%	6	1,53%	14	3,58%	125	31,97%	157	40,15%	83	21,23%	3	0,77%
I will purchase products of the Hybrid Label Brand company the next time I need a product.	1	0,26%	17	4,35%	20	5,12%	107	27,37%	106	27,11%	134	34,27%	6	1,53%
I will definitely try products from the Hybrid Label Brand company	4	1,02%	9	2,30%	15	3,84%	74	18,93%	107	27,37%	161	41,18%	21	5,37%

Table 33 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Exclusivity

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
The Hybrid Label Brands	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
are exclusive	4	1,02%	21	5,37%	15	3,84%	73	18,67%	54	13,81%	192	49,10%	32	8,18%
Can make someone feel like a better customer compared with other grocery store customers.	63	16,11%	132	33,76%	34	8,70%	79	20,20%	48	12,28%	31	7,93%	4	1,02%
Can make someone feel superior to other grocery store customers.	74	18,93%	148	37,85%	39	9,97%	76	19,44%	29	7,42%	19	4,86%	6	1,53%

Table 34 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Product Category

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
I perceive risk in purchasing Hybrid Label branded toiletries.	9	2,30%	51	13,04%	57	14,58%	90	23,02%	70	17,90%	89	22,76%	25	6,39%
My preferred brand of toiletries reduces any risk I may perceive	7	1,79%	22	5,63%	32	8,18%	78	19,95%	84	21,48%	123	31,46%	45	11,51%
I put a lot of thought into purchasing my preferred toiletries	2	0,51%	22	5,63%	26	6,65%	66	16,88%	68	17,39%	152	38,87%	55	14,07%

Table 35 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Category Presence and Quality Variation

		N	N %
Presence of Hybrid Label Brand products in different categories	Very few categories	24	6,14%
	Few categories	42	10,74%
	Somewhat few categories	31	7,93%
	Neither few nor many categories	85	21,74%
	Somewhat many categories	99	25,32%
	Many categories	100	25,58%
	Very many categories	10	2,56%
Quality variation of Hybrid Label Brand products in different categories	Very little variation	14	3,58%
	Little variation	70	17,90%
	Somewhat little variation	109	27,88%
	No variation	46	11,76%
	Somewhat large variation	110	28,13%
	Large variation	39	9,97%
	Very large variation	3	0,77%

Table 36 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Country of Origin (France)

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
Products produced by firms from France, are generally of high quality.	5	1,28%	17	4,35%	17	4,35%	107	27,37%	100	25,58%	124	31,71%	21	5,37%
I believe that the Country of Origin has an impact on my evaluation	5	1,28%	17	4,35%	7	1,79%	44	11,25%	110	28,13%	165	42,20%	43	11,00%
France, the origin country of Hybrid Label Brand can be considered as a country which produces high quality products	4	1,02%	12	3,07%	15	3,84%	73	18,67%	117	29,92%	146	37,34%	24	6,14%

Table 37 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Product Design Attractiveness and Prestige (France)

		N	N %
How would you rate the attractiveness of the design of products from France? Regarding appearance, style, colours, and variety?	*Very unattractive*	2	0,51%
	Unattractive	3	0,77%
	Somewhat unattractive	11	2,81%
	Neutral	91	23,27%
	Somewhat attractive	103	26,34%
	Attractive	155	39,64%
	Very attractive	26	6,65%
How would you rate the prestige of products from France? Including their exclusivity status, and brand name reputation	*Very low prestige*	0	0,00%
	Low prestige	2	0,51%
	Somewhat low prestige	4	1,02%
	Neutral	85	21,74%
	Somewhat high prestige	130	33,25%
	High prestige	148	37,85%
	Very high prestige	22	5,63%
How would you rate the workmanship of products from France? Which comprises reliability, taste and manufacturing quality?	*Very poor*	2	0,51%
	Poor	0	0,00%
	Somewhat poor	3	0,77%
	Neutral	65	16,62%
	Somewhat good	106	27,11%
	Good	154	39,39%
	Very good	61	15,60%

Table 38 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Visits to France

		N	N %
Have you ever been to France?	Yes	247	63,17%
	No	144	36,83%

Table 39 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Perception of Resources and Capabilities

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
To me, the size of the retailer is associated with product quality.	12	3,07%	83	21,23%	48	12,28%	80	20,46%	90	23,02%	63	16,11%	15	3,84%
Brands originating from, and competing in, big markets have higher quality.	5	1,28%	22	5,63%	40	10,23%	113	28,90%	138	35,29%	60	15,35%	13	3,32%
Expansion to foreign countries is a reassurance of product quality.	7	1,79%	36	9,21%	22	5,63%	83	21,23%	140	35,81%	81	20,72%	22	5,63%
Global retailers can manufacture products of high quality.	4	1,02%	14	3,58%	16	4,09%	149	38,11%	112	28,64%	84	21,48%	12	3,07%

Table 40 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Price Consciousness

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %

I am not willing to go to extra effort to find lower prices (r)	30	7,67%	88	22,51%	79	20,20%	55	14,07%	64	16,37%	63	16,11%	12	3,07%
I will grocery shop at more than one store to take advantage of low prices	16	4,09%	75	19,18%	51	13,04%	49	12,53%	98	25,06%	81	20,72%	21	5,37%
I typically seek out cheap retail outlets to buy products for the house	15	3,84%	77	19,69%	53	13,55%	67	17,14%	90	23,02%	73	18,67%	16	4,09%

Table 41 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Brand Consciousness

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
I pay attention to the brand names of the products I buy	1	0,26%	11	2,81%	18	4,60%	73	18,67%	98	25,06%	150	38,36%	40	10,23%
Sometimes I am willing to pay more money for a product because of its brand name.	12	3,07%	29	7,42%	31	7,93%	67	17,14%	102	26,09%	114	29,16%	36	9,21%
I believe the brands I buy are a reflection of who I am	57	14,58%	115	29,41%	39	9,97%	89	22,76%	51	13,04%	30	7,67%	10	2,56%

Table 42 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Confusion by Over-choice

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
There are so many brands to choose from that often I feel confused.	9	2,30%	131	33,50%	47	12,02%	49	12,53%	86	21,99%	56	14,32%	13	3,32%
The more I learn about products, the harder it seems to choose the best.	9	2,30%	131	33,50%	53	13,55%	53	13,55%	78	19,95%	53	13,55%	14	3,58%
With that many options to choose between, I found it difficult to compare competing offers.	11	2,81%	148	37,85%	56	14,32%	56	14,32%	66	16,88%	46	11,76%	8	2,05%

Table 43 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Quality Consciousness

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
I search for as much information as possible on the quality of the products before I choose one.	3	0,77%	15	3,84%	36	9,21%	77	19,69%	106	27,11%	122	31,20%	32	8,18%
It is important for me to know exactly the quality of a product before I buy it.	2	0,51%	11	2,81%	18	4,60%	72	18,41%	116	29,67%	134	34,27%	38	9,72%
It is important for me to buy high-quality products	2	0,51%	5	1,28%	15	3,84%	61	15,60%	111	28,39%	149	38,11%	48	12,28%

Table 44 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Innovativeness / Novelty Consciousness

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
In general, I am among the first to buy new products when they appear on the market.	10	2,56%	71	18,16%	62	15,86%	106	27,11%	83	21,23%	51	13,04%	8	2,05%
I am very cautious in trying new and different products. (r)	1	0,26%	20	5,12%	56	14,32%	83	21,23%	116	29,67%	100	25,58%	15	3,84%
I enjoy taking chances in buying new products	12	3,07%	68	17,39%	62	15,86%	93	23,79%	95	24,30%	53	13,55%	8	2,05%

Table 45 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Loyalty Proneness

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
I generally buy the same brands I have always bought.	4	1,02%	56	14,32%	64	16,37%	55	14,07%	121	30,95%	72	18,41%	19	4,86%
Once I have made a choice on which brand to purchase, I am likely to continue to buy it without considering other brands	8	2,05%	63	16,11%	63	16,11%	58	14,83%	111	28,39%	70	17,90%	18	4,60%
Once I get used to a brand, I hate to switch.	5	1,28%	61	15,60%	57	14,58%	53	13,55%	112	28,64%	78	19,95%	25	6,39%

Table 46 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Ethnocentrism

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
Only those products that are unavailable in Cyprus should be imported.	24	6,14%	100	25,58%	59	15,09%	62	15,86%	76	19,44%	47	12,02%	23	5,88%
Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Cypriot	43	11,00%	125	31,97%	61	15,60%	65	16,62%	71	18,16%	18	4,60%	8	2,05%
It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Cypriots out of jobs and hurts Cypriot business.	32	8,18%	95	24,30%	64	16,37%	59	15,09%	82	20,97%	38	9,72%	21	5,37%
It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Cypriot products.	7	1,79%	61	15,60%	41	10,49%	89	22,76%	109	27,88%	56	14,32%	28	7,16%
We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	16	4,09%	80	20,46%	57	14,58%	81	20,72%	83	21,23%	54	13,81%	20	5,12%

Table 47 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Brand Foreignness

	Strongly Disagree		*Disagree*		*Somewhat Disagree*		*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*		*Somewhat Agree*		*Agree*		*Strongly Agree*	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
I do think consumers in other countries buy this brand.	1	0,26%	7	1,79%	10	2,56%	112	28,64%	68	17,39%	181	46,29%	12	3,07%
To me, this brand represents something foreign.	6	1,53%	85	21,74%	56	14,32%	123	31,46%	56	14,32%	54	13,81%	11	2,81%
I do not associate this brand with things that are Cypriot.	6	1,53%	51	13,04%	40	10,23%	120	30,69%	85	21,74%	79	20,20%	10	2,56%
The appeal of this brand is a very good symbol of foreign culture.	7	1,79%	29	7,42%	29	7,42%	165	42,20%	89	22,76%	67	17,14%	5	1,28%

Table 48 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Social Desirability

	True		False	
	N	N %	N	N %
Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates (T)	313	80,05%	78	19,95%
No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener. (T)	365	93,35%	26	6,65%
At times I have really insisted on having things my way. (F)	277	70,84%	114	29,16%

Table 49 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Purchase Intention

		N	N %
How likely are you to buy the Hybrid Label Brand?	*Completely Unlikely*	10	2,56%
	Unlikely	5	1,28%
	Somewhat Unlikely	21	5,37%
	Neither Likely Nor Unlikely	51	13,04%
	Somewhat Likely	73	18,67%
	Likely	162	41,43%
	Completely Likely	69	17,65%
How certain is it that you will purchase the Hybrid Label Brand?	*Completely Uncertain*	1	0,26%
	Uncertain	8	2,05%
	Somewhat Uncertain	15	3,84%
	Neutral	84	21,48%
	Somewhat Certain	117	29,92%
	Certain	109	27,88%
	Completely Certain	57	14,58%

Table 50 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of General Brand Preferences

		N	N %
I mostly buy	*National Brands*	220	56,27%
	Private Label Brands	58	14,83%
	Hybrid Label Brands	72	18,41%
	Don't know/Not sure	41	10,49%

Table 51 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of General Knowledge

	Yes		No		Not sure / I don't know	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
I have experience in buying and using Hybrid Label Brands.	225	57,54%	123	31,46%	43	11,00%
Coca Cola is a National Brand.	385	98,47%	0	0,00%	6	1,53%
Hybrid Label Brands can be found in all supermarkets across Cyprus.	68	17,39%	226	57,80%	97	24,81%
An example of a Private Label Brand is Alpha Mega kitchen paper.	369	94,37%	0	0,00%	22	5,63%

Appendix 5

Detailed Content Analysis of Branding Definition - Methodology

A number of authors have over the years tried to conceptualize and describe the concept of branding, leading to a plethora of definitions and approaches. This section presents a systematic literature review of academic literature analyzing the different definitions of branding. The major objective of this process is to accumulate large numbers of articles and then through pattern content analysis summarize the findings and create a meaningful synthesis able to effectively describe the concept of branding (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020). For this reason, the process requires a coherent, transparent and complete protocol of journal identification and selection (Page et al., 2021).

Search Strategy

For the search strategy, articles for analysis were gathered through online search using the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS) database. The search covered the following combination of keywords: “branding” OR “brand” AND “definition” as well as “brand is” OR “brand may be defined” OR “define brand” OR “branding is”. We only included papers in English in this analysis and with no restriction on the year of publication and author. Any papers with the above keywords in their title, abstract or keyword list are included in this study with due consideration of the eligibility criteria that are explained in the following section.

Paper Selection

Clear and specific eligibility criteria are a crucial prerequisite for a systematic literature review because inclusion and exclusion criteria help the researcher to define the boundaries of the review (Almestarihi et al., 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The database accessed a total of 3,258 research papers using the above keywords in a search conducted between August 1 and August 3, 2022. To further narrow our research, we included only journal articles listed in the WoS categories of Business,

Management, Economics & Communication. Applying these criteria left 1,165 papers in our database. Afterwards, to maintain the quality of the review we included only top-tier journals with at least three stars, in line with the Academic Journal Guide 2021 of the Chartered Association of Business Schools (2021). By focusing on leading journals, we are confident that we include articles whose definitions are sufficiently explained due to the rigorous review processes of those journals (Bergkvist & Eisend, 2021; Leonidou et al., 2010). Furthermore, the high-impact factor of the major mainstream journals implies that the articles they publish is where major academic contribution is most likely to be made, even though brand-specific journals such as the Journal of Brand Management are excluded (Leonidou et al., 2010). We excluded a total of 783 papers because of their publication ranking, leaving 382 articles in the database. After that, we eliminated articles that do not study brand definition in general but instead concentrate on specific brand-related concepts (such as nation branding, luxury branding, corporate brand, etc.). Through the last step, we retained 14 articles for analysis.

The decision to include only peer-reviewed journal articles, and not books or other industry sources, was made in order to ensure methodological transparency, quality control, comparability and replicability across the reviewed sources (Hiebl, 2023; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Furthermore, the aim of this part of the research is to identify how the concept of branding has been defined and developed across peer-reviewed academic literature and not to provide a holistic historical representation of branding thought. For this reason, we selected only academic journal articles as the core sample because these articles are subject to the peer-review process while books and other practitioner sources differ significantly in terms of purpose, review process and comparability. We clarify that books are important in branding knowledge, especially for establishing foundational concepts, but they mostly organize existing knowledge rather than follow a specific and structured publication format that can be systematically screened and compared in the same way as academic journal articles. The same holds for industry sources that, while extremely valuable for practitioners, most of the time serve as market development tools offering commercial and managerial knowledge and guidance rather than theory building. Thus, including books or other industry sources would reduce comparability, as these sources are developed for different purposes, audiences and methodological standards. Lastly,

exclusion of industry sources and books does not mean that they are irrelevant for this thesis, since we are selectively using them elsewhere in our literature review where they provide valuable knowledge or contextual evidence. Therefore, books and other industry sources are excluded from this systematic literature review but not from the thesis as a whole.

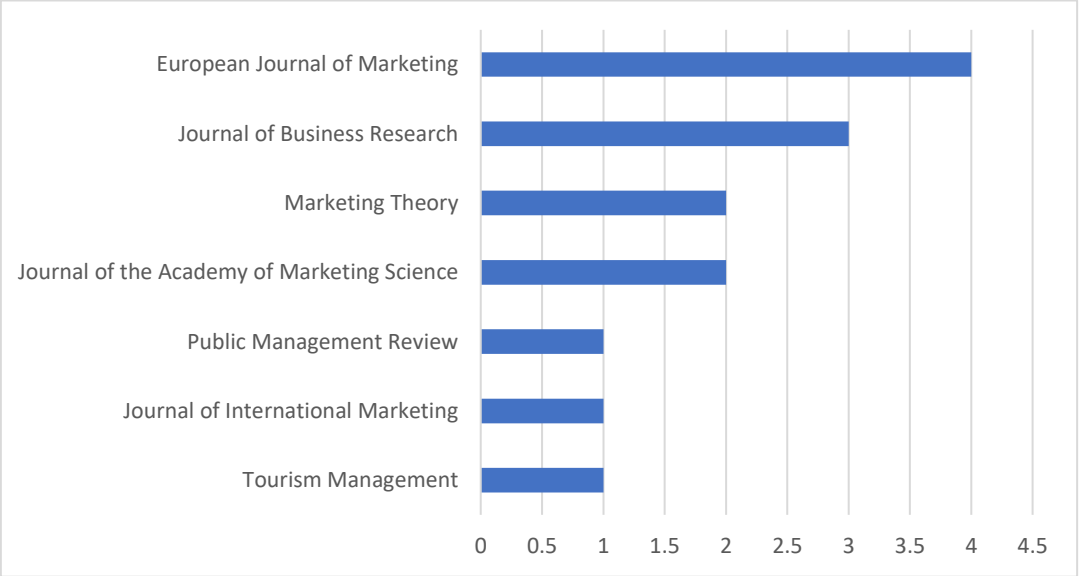


Figure 11 Number of Articles, selected per journal