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FACTORS INFLUENCING PURCHASE INTENTION AND LOYALTY TOWARDS PRIVATE LABEL PRODUCTS

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Master of Science in Marketing

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ISCTE Business School

October, 2023



**BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

Department of Marketing, Strategy and Operations

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Rita Simões Raposo

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Rita Simões Raposo

Abstract

Private labels entered the market approximately seven decades, and began to be perceived as cost-effective, trivial, and of lower quality when compared to their national brand counterparts. Nowadays, these labels have established a dominant presence within the global Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector and become strong competitors to national brands. This paradigmatic shift has profoundly reshaped consumers' perceptions and subsequent interactions with these brands. However, it is still unclear in the literature which qualities private labels shall have to be consumers' first choice rather than their secondary option, which is typically the case. This dissertation aims to address this research gap by investigating the factors that influence consumers' purchasing intentions and loyalty towards private labels.

Following an extensive review of the relevant literature, a qualitative methodology was applied to collect and analyze the data. Two focus group discussions were conducted among millennial consumers in Portugal. The research findings have identified four key factors directly impacting consumers' purchase intentions for private labels: reference price discrepancy, perceived value for money, perceived product quality, and store image. Furthermore, this study postulates that in-store private label positioning and packaging design and labelling positively contribute to perceived product quality. It was also revealed that perceived value for money, perceived product quality, and store image have a substantial impact on consumer loyalty towards private labels. Reference price discrepancies were not found as significantly affecting consumer's loyalty towards private labels. It is worth mentioning that in-store national brand promotions were recognized as a predominant barrier that dissuades consumers from choosing private-label products.

These findings offer significant implications in the fields of marketing and retail, providing valuable insights for practitioners and scholars.

Keywords: Purchase intention, loyalty, private label, perceived quality, value for money, store image

Jel: M30, M31

Resumo

As marcas próprias entraram no mercado há aproximadamente sete décadas, e começaram por ser pensadas como produtos baratos, triviais e de qualidade inferior comparativamente às marcas de distribuidor. Atualmente, as marcas próprias estabeleceram uma presença influente no setor global dos produtos de grande consumo e tornaram-se fortes concorrentes às marcas de distribuidor. Esta mudança de paradigma alterou profundamente as perceções e subsequentes interações dos consumidores para com as marcas próprias. No entanto, é ainda limitada a literatura que analisa as características destas marcas, dificultando a sua presença no mercado e a sua imposição como a primeira escolha dos consumidores. A presente dissertação pretende colmatar esta lacuna, investigando os fatores que influenciam as intenções de compra e a lealdade dos consumidores em relação às marcas próprias.

Após a revisão da literatura, foi utilizada uma metodologia qualitativa para a recolha e análise de dados. Realizaram-se dois grupos focais com consumidores portugueses *millennials*. Os resultados da investigação identificaram quatro fatores-chave com impacto direto na intenção de compra das marcas próprias: i) a discrepância do preço de referência, ii) a perceção da relação qualidade/preço, iii) a qualidade percebida do produto e, ainda, iv) a imagem da loja. Este estudo assinala ainda que o posicionamento da marca própria em loja e a embalagem do produto e rótulo contribuem positivamente para a qualidade percebida destas marcas. A fidelidade do consumidor às marcas próprias requer uma positiva perceção da relação qualidade/preço, da qualidade percebida do produto e da imagem da loja. Não se verificou que as discrepâncias dos preços de referência afetassem significativamente a fidelidade dos consumidores às marcas próprias. Por fim, é de salientar que as promoções de marcas de distribuidor foram reconhecidas como uma barreira predominante que dissuade os consumidores de optarem por produtos de marca própria. Estes resultados têm implicações relevantes nos domínios do *marketing* e do retalho, e fornecem informações valiosas tanto para profissionais como para académicos.

Palavras-chave: Intenção de compra, lealdade, marcas próprias, qualidade percebida, perceção da relação qualidade/preço, imagem da loja

Jel: M30, M31

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1. Introduction

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is considered one of the most important sectors in the global economy (Husain, 2021). From a retail perspective, this sector typically operates with low profit margins, high volumes, and generally low profitability (Park, 2015). Companies in this industry predominantly pursue a top-line sales-driven strategy (Grandi & Cardinali, 2022). FMCG products refer to non-durable retail items characterized by short shelf lives, low values, and high consumption rates, including food, beverages, personal care, and household cleaning products (Bocken et al., 2022).

In the current market environment, characterized by dynamic consumption patterns, the rise of a new generation of consumers, rapid technological progress, and the widespread adoption of omni-channel accessibility, manufacturers and retailers face significant concerns. Those include the persistent trend of increasing prices (Gao et al., 2018) and the challenge posed by consumer disloyalty (Mortimer & Weeks, 2019). Consequently, retailers have the ability to differentiate themselves from their competitors, cultivate customer loyalty, and attain a competitive edge in the dynamic retail landscape by developing their own branded products (Chatterjee et al., 2018; Levrini & Jeffman dos Santos, 2021).

Private label brands (PLs), also known as store brands or private brands, encompass products featuring the retailer's chosen brand name and are exclusively owned, operated, and marketed by the retailer (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2007). Unlike national brands (NBs), retailers typically assume full accountability for PLs, including sourcing or manufacturing, pricing, product positioning, product and packaging design, shelf placement, and marketing (Rossi et al., 2015).

PLs have historically represented cost-effective and lower-quality alternatives that compete with national brands (Fitzell, 1982; Goldsmith et al., 2010). The prevailing consensus was that PLs were still the "poor relatives" of national brands (Boyle & Lathrop, 2013). They were deemed acceptable substitutes rather than sought-after brands suitable for special occasions or fine dining. Essentially, PLs lacked the prestige, symbolism, and commercial strength attributed to NBs (Gielens et al., 2021). However, recent studies suggest a shift in consumer perceptions of private labels as they are gaining global recognition and hold strategic importance for retailers worldwide (Beneke & Carter, 2015; Euromonitor International, 2014).

Economic downturns and times of uncertainty, coupled with a growing range of private label options, have accelerated consumer acceptance. Consumers are increasingly becoming value-conscious, seeking products that strike a balance between affordability and quality. A new generation of customers holds high expectations for the products they purchase, contributing to reshaping perceptions (Baumann et al., 2015).

Today, segmentation strategies for private labels are proliferating, targeting various consumer groups. PL lines aim to compete in the economy, standard, and premium segments (Ter Braak et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2021). Retailers have recognized that introducing premium-oriented PLs allows them to penetrate high-end, quality-conscious customer segments and enhance their overall store image (Gielens et al., 2021). As a result, after initially focusing on pricing, private labels have transitioned to a quality-driven positioning and, more recently, a status-oriented positioning (Steenkamp et al., 2010).

Recent research reveals substantial private label penetration rates in various countries. In North America and Europe, private labels currently account for an average of 35% of total retail market share (Pasirayi & Richards, 2023). In Portugal, the private label sector has reached high levels, with a market share of 41.1% in June 2022, largely due to the performance of Mercadona and Intermarché retail brands (Pekic, 2022). In the United Kingdom, nearly half of consumers believe that private labels and national brands are manufactured in the same factories but with different packaging, and 59% consider that national brands are more expensive solely due to advertising costs rather than superior raw materials (Euromonitor International, 2014).

In this context, there is already substantial research about the evolution of private labels from a retail market point of view (Cuneo et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2021). However, there has been limited empirical research focused on identifying consumer purchase patterns for private labels and what may drive these patterns. Consequently, the question of which components most influence customers' decisions, particularly millennial consumers, to purchase private brands in the Portuguese market remains unanswered.

The growing competitiveness in the FMCG market requires companies in this sector to ensure that consumers establish an emotional bond with their brands, remain engaged, and recall them so that they will, naturally, buy and repeat buying such brands (Baumann et al., 2015). This being said, understanding the features that connect consumers to a brand is critical for a company to establish a profitable customer-brand relationship (Lakshmi & Suresh, 2021).

Based on these considerations, the current dissertation seeks to fill the research gap by understanding the influential factors that play a dominant role in explaining consumer purchase behavior and loyalty to PL brands. This study specifically aims to analyze consumers' responses concerning perceptions and behaviors during the purchase process. The purpose of this research is fourfold:

1. Analyze and comprehend the factors that connect consumers to private label brands;
2. Understand and analyze which variables play a more significant role in fostering loyalty towards private labels;
3. Offer a new theoretical framework, test its validity, and present results that are critical for future growth.

The rise of FMCG consumerism, which opens the door to new research in this vast area, is one of the reasons for choosing this topic. The anticipated expansion of the sector is another driving force behind this research. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for the FMCG market is expected to be 6.7% between 2021 and 2026 (ARC, 2021). Therefore, this study significantly contributes to the current literature that interrelates industry and society. This dissertation intends to address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived attributes of private labels that influence consumer purchase behavior and encourage repeat purchases?
2. How do consumers assess private label products across various product categories?
3. Have consumers revised their overall perception of private labels?

This thesis is structured into seven sections, which are described in Figure 1.1. First, the introduction specifies the purpose and objectives, addresses the research questions, and indicates the main motivations. Second, it reviews the existing literature on the fundamental concepts, creating the foundation and framework for the research problem. Following that, the study conducted two rounds of focus group discussions with the millennial age group to gain better insights beyond the empirical research. The third section develops relevant hypotheses and presents a theoretical framework. This is followed by the methodology section, which details the research approach, data collection and sample, and data analysis. The data findings are analyzed in the results section and are then presented and discussed with regard to each hypothesis in the discussion section. Finally, in the last section, conclusions and managerial implications are drawn, and limitations and future research are discussed.



Figure 1.1 Structure of the dissertation

Source: Own elaboration

2. Literature Review

In light of the growing importance of new shopping experiences, several researchers have recently argued that physical stores remain the major selling point and will continue to be important for both customers and businesses (Hänninen et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, physical retail is a vital element of the consumer journey because it is where customers can have a one-of-a-kind experience aside from seeing, feeling, and touching things, which can help to clarify the uncertainty of a product's value (Mosquera et al., 2018). It is well acknowledged, for example, that it is during the pre-purchase period that customers connect with the brand, identify their needs, research it, and make a purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). For the reasons stated, this chapter focuses on the in-store consumer experience and covers the concepts in a comprehensive manner (Roschk & Hosseinpour, 2019).

2.1 Product Packaging Design and Labelling Effect

In today's fiercely competitive market environment, where the battle for consumer attention unfolds primarily on store shelves (Coelho do Vale & Verga Matos, 2015; Roy et al., 2021), product packaging plays a pivotal role as a potential game-changer (Roy et al., 2021). It serves as a channel through which brands strive for uniqueness, aiming to capture attention while providing consumers with information about the product's benefits (Beneke & Zimmerman, 2014). As a result, product packaging is intrinsically linked to how customers perceive the product quality and construct their relationships with brands (Govender, 2015; Mensah et al., 2022). Therefore, product packaging and labeling are integral components of the marketing mix, exerting a direct and substantial influence on consumer purchasing decisions (Ahmad et al., 2012).

Academic literature consistently emphasizes the pivotal role of packaging in shaping customer perceptions of fast-moving consumer goods (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Chiguvi & Sepepe, 2023; Hwang & Kim, 2021). Packaging has evolved significantly in recent years, surpassing its initial purpose of product protection to become a storyteller of the brand's identity, effectively conveying its values and promises (Braak et al., 2014). Key elements such as design, colors, size, and labeling on the packaging play a critical role in shaping customer perceptions, influencing purchasing decisions, and cultivating brand loyalty. As PLBs strive to compete with well-established national brands, the differences in packaging between PLBs and NBs have significantly diminished (Beneke & Zimmerman, 2014).

2.2.1 Consumer Ecological Consciousness and Sustainable Packaging

Consumers are now aligning their purchase choices with their environmental values (Mahmoud et al., 2022; Ketelsen et al., 2020). The preference for products that adhere to principles of health, ethics, and sustainability is on the rise. Plant-based, vegan, and vegetarian diets are becoming more popular due to their health benefits and favorable environmental impact, showcasing a trend towards more conscious choices regarding the environment and health (Rosenfeld et al., 2022; Sanchez-Sabate & Sabaté, 2019).

Euromonitor's Sustainable Living Tracker shows that there was a 14% rise in PL SKUs with dietary attributes in March 2022 compared to the same time last year. This shows that the market is able to adapt to changes in consumer tastes and confirms the flexibility of private label strategies (Robles, 2022).

The evolution of environmental consumer awareness encourages companies to adopt more ecological practices, reaffirming their commitment to sustainability (Czeczotko et al., 2021). Additionally, these brands establish a competitive edge in the market (Lopes et al., 2022). For example, organic packaging and labels serve as differentiating elements in a context where sustainability and conscious consumption are valued, acting as indicators of quality and ethics (Ketelsen et al., 2020).

In this context, packaging assumes a role that is not merely aesthetic but also ethical and environmental, attracting customers who value products that are not only visually appealing but also align with their personal principles and values. Thus, the emerging ecological awareness among consumers is reshaping the packaging landscape, driving innovations, and promoting more sustainable practices in the sector (Nguyen et al., 2020).

2.2 In-store PLs Positioning

Retailers commonly adopt the strategic practice of positioning private labels alongside renowned national brands on store shelves (Grill, 2010). This approach serves a dual purpose: it simplifies the comparison process for consumers and builds trust in PLs. The physical proximity of PLs and NBs is a calculated maneuver that enables consumers to compare products quickly and intuitively, thereby streamlining the consumer decision-making process (Olson, 2012).

This strategic placement is a deliberate move aimed at associating PLs with established and trustworthy NBs in consumers' minds. The proximity and visual alignment with NBs lead consumers to perceive PLs as comparable in quality, putting them on par with NBs and resulting in greater acceptance and trust in PLs. Therefore, private labels experience increased profits (Amrouche & Zaccour, 2007; Valenzuela & Raghuram, 2009).

2.3 In-store Promotions

Retailers employ effective in-store marketing techniques to exert market power against national brand manufacturers (Meza & Sudhir, 2010) and influence consumers' acceptance of private label brands, aiming to cultivate sustainable levels of store loyalty among customers. These in-store marketing activities encompass various strategies, including shelf space allocation, in-store displays, free samples, special events, and in-store promotions. The impact of in-store promotions on retail business performance is substantial (Kiran et al., 2012). Several studies have demonstrated the significant impact of in-store promotions, particularly price promotions and price packages, on the purchase intentions of private labels (Maharani et al., 2020).

On average, PLBs are priced almost 30% lower than NBs (S. Mishra et al., 2021). To mitigate this difference, retain customers, and compete with the growth of PLBs, NB manufacturers often engage in sales promotions and aggressive advertising (Zhou & Wong, 2004). Sales promotions by NBs provide consumers with benefits beyond monetary savings, including a higher self-perception, elevated status, and a greater sense of acquisition utility from buying NBs at affordable prices rather than lower-prestige PLBs (Ailawadi et al., 2001). This has been confirmed by studies in literature (Kiran et al., 2012; (A. Mishra, 2016) which have discovered a significant moderating effect of national brand promotions on the attitude towards purchasing in-store private labels.

2.4 Store Image

Store image is the mental representation that retailers leave in consumers' minds, shaped by a combination of essential attributes or elements (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Giraldi et al., 2003). The literature suggests that retailers can offer both utilitarian and hedonic attributes during the shopping experience (Olsen & Skallerud, 2011). Therefore, the elements contributing to the overall store image encompass merchandise selection, diversity, and quality; product layout; store services; price levels; and, ultimately, the in-store atmosphere, comfort, and environment (Bao et al., 2011; Diallo, 2012). Consistent research findings emphasize that an enhanced store image strengthens store loyalty (Francioni et al., 2018; Vahie & Paswan, 2006). Store loyalty represents a blend of consumer behaviors and attitudes toward a specific store, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Genuine store loyalty is the result of positive attitudes combined with repeated purchase behaviors (Vásquez-Párraga et al., 2014). Consumer loyalty in retail is often driven by their affinity for specific brands available in those establishments, making brand presence a key factor in fostering customer loyalty (Ipek et al., 2016).

Several studies underscore the importance of private labels as a factor in shaping consumer loyalty, emphasizing the need for retailers to diversify their own brand's product portfolio (Ailawadi et al., 2008). By providing a wide range of private label goods that match or surpass the quality of national brand equivalents, retailers can not only attract customers initially drawn to the store by their preferred brands but also retain them as they become captivated by the value inherent in private label offerings (Ipek et al., 2016).

2.5 Price Perception and Reference Price Discrepancy

According to (Zeithaml, 1988), the previous literature defines price as the amount of money customers must spend to complete a specific purchase transaction. This definition has evolved over time, with scholars such as (Beneke et al., 2013; Campo & Yagüe, 2007) highlighting a distinction between actual price and perceived price. This differentiation arises because customers frequently forget or are unaware of a product's precise price. Instead, they attribute subjective value to prices, categorizing them as either cheap or expensive. In this context, the actual price corresponds to the monetary outlay required for purchasing goods, while the perceived price involves consumers' assessment of whether a price is reasonable, appealing, or justifiable, coupled with the emotions it evokes (Marlien et al., 2020).

Previous research, notably conducted by (Diallo, 2012) and (Roth et al., 2017), has demonstrated a substantial correlation between price discrepancies and consumer purchasing behavior. In the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods sector, price discrepancy denotes the difference or variation between the actual price of a product offered by a specific brand, be it a private label or a national brand, and the reference prices of similar or comparable products accessible in the market. This disparity can manifest either positively or negatively. Economic theory substantiates this concept by suggesting that a wider price differential between private labels and national brands within a particular category augments consumers' inclination towards private labels (Steenkamp et al., 2010). These insights emphasize the pivotal role of pricing in shaping consumer preferences and highlight the economic logic behind consumers favoring private label brands when there is a discernible price advantage (Lowe & Alpert, 2007).

To illustrate, if a consumer anticipates the average price of a specific type of cereal to be \$3 based on their past purchasing experiences and they encounter a private label offering the same cereal for \$2.50, this presents a favorable price discrepancy in favor of the private label. Conversely, if a national brand retails the cereal for \$3.50, it results in an unfavorable price discrepancy in favor of the private label. A lesser price discrepancy favoring private labels can potentially attract a larger consumer base, emphasizing their cost-effectiveness, and a reduced-price discrepancy favoring national brands may reinforce perceptions of higher quality or brand loyalty.

Nonetheless, some research has revealed an inverse relationship between price discrepancies and the market share of private labels. A higher price disparity between national brands and private labels in the same category corresponds to a lower market share for private labels (Hoch and Banerji, 1993). Additionally, certain research posits that heavily discounted and frequently promoted products may lead to a decline in consumers' price perception, resulting in decreased purchases (Bambauer-Sachse and Massera, 2015; Blattberg et al., 1995).

In light of these considerations, price has long been scrutinized as a pivotal determinant in consumers' purchasing decisions (Beneke & Zimmerman, 2014). However, recent research conducted by Chatterjee et al. (2018) and Girard et al. (2017) presents a contrasting viewpoint: consumers, instead of consistently prioritizing price, often express a preference for brands with strong reputations. Such brands convey a symbolic value that positively influences consumers' perceptions of value. Therefore, consumers may opt to make the purchase based on considerations of quality and value rather than price.

2.6 Perceived Product Value

The perceived value of a product denotes a comprehensive evaluation by consumers regarding its worth and desirability based on perceived product benefits, features, and quality in relation to the cost or sacrifices incurred. This assessment extends beyond functional or monetary attributes (Girard et al., 2017) and encompasses a process that takes into account factors such as purchase convenience, quality, and emotional aspects (Dibie et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the concept of value for money essentially represents consumers' judgment regarding whether the value offered by a product, in terms of quality or other attributes, justifies the price paid for it (Wu et al., 2021). For example, when comparing products with similar price points, the one offering the most favorable features is typically perceived as delivering the best value for money.

In summary, perceived product value provides a broad perspective on a product's overall worth, encompassing emotional, functional, and psychological aspects. Conversely, value for money offers a more focused assessment of the alignment between cost and benefits. Both of these concepts are pivotal in comprehending consumer behavior and decision-making (Maharani et al., 2020).

Private labels have evolved beyond their initial reputation as economical alternatives and have become sought-after choices on par with well-established national brands. This shift towards higher private label quality has changed consumer perceptions, associating these brands not only with better quality but also with higher prices. This transformation is evident in retailers' marketing strategies, which have shifted from a focus on cost-effectiveness to an emphasis on the superior quality of PLs (Girard et al., 2017). This change has also occurred because factors other than price are gaining

increasing importance. Consumers' purchase intentions for fast-moving consumer goods are significantly shaped by perceived value, perceived quality, and brand recognition (Dibie et al., 2019). Therefore, we can conclude that perceived value serves as a critical indicator for predicting purchase intentions and establishing a competitive advantage (Eggert & Ulaga, 2002).

2.7 Perceived Product Quality

Perceived product quality, as defined by Zeithaml (1988), pertains to how consumers assess a product's overall excellence or superiority. This assessment is subjective in nature and is typically based on consumers' prior experiences and product knowledge rather than solely on manufacturer claims (Garretson et al., 2002).

Consumers primarily perceive the quality of private label products through external cues, including brand name, price, packaging, and store placement (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003; Vahie & Paswan, 2006b). While traditionally private label products came in plain white packaging with black text, often placed separately from national brands, recent times have seen retailers enhance both the quality and packaging of their private label brands (PLBs) to compete with national brands (Chen & Dubinsky, 2003). This significant shift towards improving the external aspects of PLBs aims to reshape consumer perceptions regarding intrinsic qualities, especially the quality of PLB products (Hu et al., 2009).

The positive influence of perceived product quality on perceived product value is well documented, and this relationship holds true within the context of PLBs (Beneke et al., 2013). Consequently, this connection has prompted many retailers to invest in enhancing the quality of their PLBs. To delve deeper, Karaoğlu & Durukan (2022) maintain that there is a strong association between perceived quality and perceived value, where perceived value significantly affects a consumer's inclination to make a purchase. Products perceived as higher in both quality and value enhance consumer confidence in their purchasing decisions.

Incorporating additional intrinsic cues, such as ethical considerations, is a common practice to improve consumer evaluations of product quality. Consumers tend to favor brands that align with their values and beliefs. A strong relationship between consumers and a brand has an impact on various consumer behaviors, including their willingness to pay more and their approval of brand extensions (Wu et al., 2021); (Roggeveen et al., 2021).

For retailers, it's noteworthy that advertising has an indirect effect on the perceived quality of PLB products and is a crucial aspect in developing a robust PLB (Gendel-Guterman & Levy, 2017).

2.8 Loyalty to national brands

Consumer perceptions play a crucial role in today's retail sector, significantly impacting consumer satisfaction and product loyalty. A positive perception of a product strengthens loyalty and, consequently, drives higher profits and retail growth. Conversely, a decline in consumer perception leads to reduced loyalty towards new products (Casteran et al., 2019).

Brand loyalty is a fundamental aspect characterized by a consumer's commitment to consistently purchase a particular brand. It signifies a positive consumer attitude towards the brand, demonstrating a commitment to continue purchasing it in the future. It represents a bond between the consumer and the brand, evident through repeated purchases over time (Goldsmith et al., 2010). Consumers can be categorized into three distinct groups based on their brand loyalty and commitment levels. Some exhibit strong brand loyalty, consistently purchasing the same brands. Others display loyalty to two or three preferred brands within a specific product category. Conversely, some consumers lack brand loyalty and consistently seek novelty, readily switching to new and unfamiliar brands (Lau & Lee, 1999).

Understanding this is crucial, especially as well-established brands present significant entry barriers for new products. Strong brand loyalty encourages customers to pay a premium for the product and deters them from shifting to competitor products. The term "brand switching" refers to consumers who tend to switch brands, driven by their desire for variety (Mortimer & Weeks, 2019). A robust consumer-brand relationship amplifies the desire to maintain that connection, often measured through brand loyalty or a willingness to pay a premium (Iglesias et al., 2011).

Beneke et al. (2013) investigated consumer loyalty to national brands (NBs) as a potential factor influencing the relationship between the perceived value of a private label (PL) product and consumers' willingness to purchase it. Essentially, they explored whether consumers' inclination to buy PL products versus NBs is affected by their valuation of PL products and their loyalty to NBs. This inquiry aimed to shed light on how consumer loyalty to NBs impacts their purchasing choices concerning private label products.

Interestingly, their findings revealed that consumer loyalty to NBs does not moderate the relationship between the perceived value of PL products and consumers' willingness to purchase them. In simpler terms, even if consumers perceive PL products as offering good value, their loyalty to NBs may deter them from seriously considering a switch to PL products due to their strong attachment to prominent market-leading brands (Goldsmith et al., 2010).

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

Drawing upon the existing body of literature, the following hypotheses can now be established.

Consumers are more likely to purchase private label brands when they perceive PL products as having competitive pricing in relation to national products or similar alternatives. The authors (Méndez et al., 2008) assert that there is a correlation between the growing price gap, referred to as reference price discrepancy, between national brands and private labels, and the subsequent rise in market share for private labels. In contrast, it has been posited by Narwal & Nayak (2020) that if the difference between the reference price of the national brand and the private label alternative is above a certain threshold, customers' impression of the quality of the private label diminishes, thereby reducing the probability of purchasing said private label. Based on the prior conclusions, it is possible to formulate the following hypothesis:

H1a: Reference price discrepancy influence PLs purchase intention.

The affordability of private label products is a significant determinant in the consumer's decision-making process, leading to a higher probability of consumers opting for private label brands (Satriawan & Setiawan, 2020). Furthermore, Porral & Levy-Mangin (2016) revealed that the perception of a reasonable or comparatively lower price exerts a favorable impact on consumer loyalty towards private label products. Prior studies have indicated that a significant difference in reference prices between private label products and national brands leads to increased consumer loyalty towards PLs. Therefore, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

H1b: Reference price discrepancy influence PLs loyalty.

Perceived product quality constitutes a fundamental and multifaceted element in the complex landscape of consumer decision-making processes (Konuk, 2018). It encompasses consumers' judgments and evaluations of a product's inherent attributes, features, and overall excellence. In the context of private label brands, perceived product quality takes on particular significance. Prior research, such as the study conducted by (Satriawan & Setiawan, 2020), has emphasized the direct and influential link between consumers' perceptions of product quality and their inclination to purchase private label brands. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged:

H2a: Product perceived quality influence PLs purchase intention.

Based on previous studies (Keller et al., 2022; Olbrich et al., 2016), it has been observed that consumers who perceived private label products as of superior quality will likely exhibit brand loyalty

towards these particular brands. Loyalty is frequently influenced by various factors, including favorable product past experiences and perceived cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, in cases where consumers place trust in a retailer or store that offers private label products, they are more likely to regard these products as being of superior quality and maintain a sense of loyalty towards them. The subsequent hypothesis was formulated:

H2b: Product perceived quality influence PLs loyalty.

Economic costs and benefits are the main factors driving private label use. PL consumers can be characterized as individuals who prioritize quality as well as affordability, seeking products that offer a favorable value for money (Keller et al., 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3a: Perceived value for money influence PLs purchase intention.

Perceived value for money is recognized as a significant predictor of a consumer's purchasing intentions. Furthermore, argued that the behavioral intentions of loyalty towards brands might be influenced by the extent to which these relational exchanges offer a higher perceived value for money to customers (Assarzagdegan et al., 2020).

H3b: Perceived value for money influence PLs loyalty.

In line with existing literature, when national brand promotions are present in-store, the impact of reference price discrepancy on consumers' intentions to purchase private label products is reduced. This implies that consumers are more likely to choose national brand alternatives over private label products when there are promotions available. Based on this, the following hypothesis can be noted:

H4: In-store NBs promotions have a moderating effect on the influence of reference price discrepancy.

The consumer's perception of store image is frequently linked with the quality and value of the products available (Beneke & Zimmerman, 2014). According to (Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2016), if a store is perceived positively due to its appealing ambiance, excellent customer service, strong reputation, and overall experience, consumers are more inclined to trust and buy the private label products offered by that store. Then, the subsequent hypothesis is presented:

H5a: Store image influence PLs purchase intention.

Consumer loyalty refers to the predisposition of consumers to intend or demonstrate a willingness to get involved in future purchases of a specific product or brand (Amine, 2011). Existing literature

(Konuk, 2018; Vale et al., 2016) has found a positive correlation between store image and loyalty towards private label brands. This relationship suggests that when consumers establish a sense of trust in a particular store, it can lead to higher purchase frequency and a sustained preference for private label brands over an extended period of time (Vahie & Paswan, 2006b). Therefore, we propose the subsequent hypothesis:

H5b: Store image influence PLs loyalty.

Informative and visually appealing packaging, along with effective labeling, has the potential to impact consumers' perceptions regarding the quality of PL products. This is supported by prior studies conducted by (Olbrich et al., 2016) and (Steenkamp et al., 2010), which highlight the importance of effective packaging and labeling strategies in enhancing the perceived quality of private label products. Therefore, we conducted the following hypothesis:

H6: Packaging design and labelling influence PLs perceived quality.

When private labels are strategically positioned close to leading national brands, emphasizing product value, promotions, or affordability, consumers might be enticed to perceive these products as having higher quality and greater benefits. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this correlation does not guarantee a subsequent rise in purchases or the development of strong customer loyalty when compared to other influencing factors (Bergès et al., 2009; Olbrich et al., 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis emerged:

H7: In-store positioning influence PLs perceived quality.

In the empirical section of the study, a theoretical framework was constructed to delineate the relationships among the variables under investigation (refer to Figure 2). The independent variables incorporated into the proposed framework are perceived quality, value for money, store image, and reference price discrepancy. These variables were discerned as pivotal factors that influence PLs purchase intention. Moreover, it is posited that both packaging design and labelling, and in-store positioning exert a direct influence on perceived quality. The potential negative impact on purchase intention is attributed to the mediating effect of in-store national brand promotions on the dependent variable, reference price discrepancy. Lastly, the elements that contribute to fostering loyalty towards PLs, namely perceived quality, value for money, and store image, were also considered.

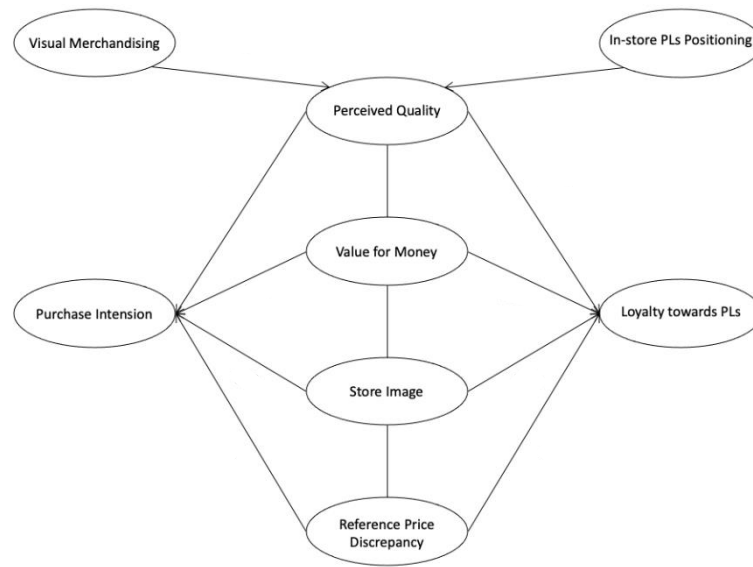


Figure 3.1 Theoretical Framework

Source: Own Elaboration

4. Methodology

The methodology for this study is outlined in this chapter. This section began with a discussion of the overall research approach adopted for the study. Subsequently, it elucidates how qualitative research and focus groups are aligned with the research questions and objectives. Following this, a comprehensive description of the procedure for conducting focus groups is provided, encompassing the organization and facilitation of the sessions.

Additionally, it explains the employed sampling strategy, along with detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria guiding the selection of participants. Moreover, an extensive overview of the data analysis methods is presented, describing the data generation process and the analytical approaches utilized for the collected information.

Examples of questions used to guide group discussion
1. Can you agree on the three factors you value most when making a purchasing decision?
2. What are your thoughts on the quality of private label products versus national brand products?
3. What motivates you to repurchase a product from your own brand? Do they consider themselves loyal to their own brands?
4. Do you believe that the packaging's design and/or branding influences your purchasing decisions (consciously or unconsciously)?

Table 4.1. Sample Focus Group questions

Source: Own Elaboration

4.1 Research Approach

To gather data for this research, a qualitative methodology was employed, which is a crucial approach for providing in-depth explanations of the hypotheses under investigation. As emphasized in the literature, opting for a qualitative technique is essential as it yields a richer and more profound understanding of the phenomena under study (Tracy, 2020). The primary objective of qualitative research is to refine our comprehension of how issues are managed within a social context (Ritchie et al., 2014).

In this dissertation, to fully understand consumers' authentic feeling of private labels, including the attributes they prioritize in their purchasing decisions and what they expect from these brands to ensure repurchase, a qualitative method that encourages discussion and engages participants in critical thinking is imperative. Therefore, a focus group discussion was chosen for this purpose.

A focus group (FG) is delineated in academic literature as a methodically planned yet informal discussion among individuals, strategically organized to acquire valuable insights on particular subjects, under the guidance of a trained (Morgan et al., 1998; Rabiee, 2004).

In-depth thematic exploration is attained by employing open-ended questions meticulously formulated by the moderator following an extensive review of the current literature (Table 4.1). This qualitative approach is notably efficacious as it allows the moderator to maintain control over the discussion and steer participants' responses, thereby optimizing the outcomes (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021).

The participants in the focus group are carefully chosen individuals possessing experience and expertise in the specified subject, enabling them to provide essential insights on the designated topic and thus gather the necessary data.

4.2 Data collection and sample

Two physical rounds of focus group discussions were conducted, both in a meeting room in Lisbon. Each series comprised eight participants and lasted approximately one hour. The discussions were spaced at a one-week interval and were audio-recorded.

Initially, an expectation was set that conducting three to five discussions would yield an adequate volume of data, thereby achieving thematic saturation. However, it became evident during the conclusion of the second focus group discussion that all relevant themes had been comprehensively explored and deliberated upon.

The selection of participants for our focus groups followed a purposive sampling approach, in line with the methodology advocated by scholars such as (Adler et al., 2019) and (Stalmeijer et al., 2014). This approach entails the intentional selection of individuals who meet specific inclusion criteria that align with the study's objectives. The predetermined inclusion criteria were as follows: participants falling within the age range of 27 to 42, representing the targeted demographic we intended to study, the millennial generation, and residing in Portugal, the defined geographical scope of the study. The research population comprised consumers who possess knowledge of private labels in physical stores.

Moreover, deliberate efforts were made to ensure a well-rounded and diverse sample encompassing various genders, ethnicities, income levels, and purchasing behaviors. Detailed information regarding these demographic and behavioral characteristics can be found in the following tables.

The analysis of the Gender variable, as depicted in Figure 4.1, reveals a balanced sample with 8 female participants (50%) and 8 male participants (50%).

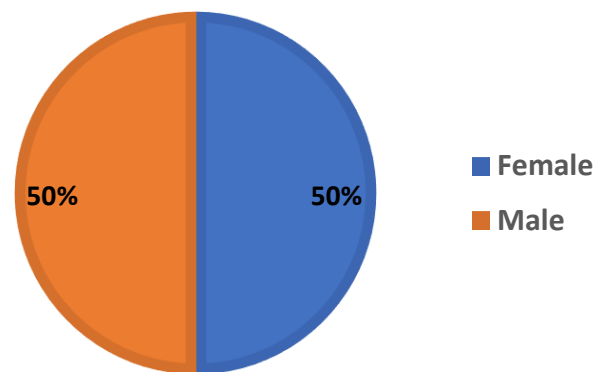


Figure 4.1 Gender distribution chart

Source: Own elaboration

In the context of average disposable income, five distinct ranges were established: less than 700€; 701€ to 1700€; 1701€ to 2700€; 2701€ to 3700€; and more than 3701€. A comprehensive analysis of this variable reveals that the majority of respondents, comprising 6 individuals (37.50%), belong to the income ranges of 701€ to 1700€ and 1701€ to 2700€. The second most prevalent income bracket is observed within the 2701€ to 3700€ category, with 3 respondents (18.75%) falling within this range. Additionally, 1 respondent (6.25%) reports an income exceeding 3701€, while none of the respondents (0%) belong to the less than 700€ income range (Figure 4.2).

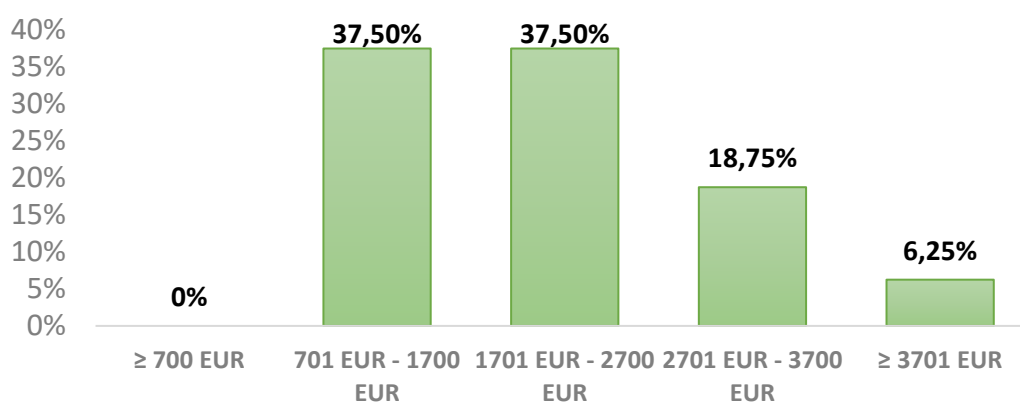


Figure 4.2. Average disposable income

Source: Own elaboration

4.3 Data analysis

Firstly, the audiotape recordings of the focus group discussions were verbatim transcribed by the moderator. The process of taking written notes during the FG allowed for supplementary information regarding observations and behaviors not captured by audio. As illustrated in Appendices 1 and 2, a total of 26 pages were amassed, forming the base material for the data analysis. Hence, the collected data were meticulously examined, coded, and analyzed using methodologies consistent with qualitative research (Krueger, 2002).

Subsequently, and as noted in the literature, the most commonly used techniques for analyzing data obtained through a qualitative method include grounded theory analysis (Barbour, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), thematic analysis (Shaha et al., 2011), and content analysis (Mayring, 2003). In the specific context of this study, content analysis was employed.

According to Gheyle & Jacobs (2017) content analysis (CA) is one of the many methods available to examine and comprehend textual meaning. CA is a valuable data analysis technique used to make sense of the often-unstructured content present in messages, be they texts, images, symbols, or audio data. The communications subject to this analysis can be approached in different ways, allowing flexibility in the method according to the specifics of each research study and context (Câmara, 2013).

In light of the content of the questions posed, a list of themes or categories for exploration was established. As advocated by Mayring (2003) and Onwuegbuzie et al., (2009), responses from the participants underwent systematic categorization into smaller units of data, denoted as sub-categories. In other words, the participant's citations were grouped into similar domains or sub-categories. Throughout the analysis, the main research questions and the study's objectives guided the investigator's focus. Lastly, it is important to mention that, as in any research, methodological rigor was ensured.

The analysis of transcribed data can be conducted either manually or by utilizing analytical software like ATLAS.ti, NVivo, NUD*IST, and MAXQDA. In this study, the data analysis was performed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 software. MAXQDA is a qualitative data analysis software that provides advanced tools for organizing, coding, exploring, and interpreting data from various sources, including interviews, focus groups, and other textual or multimedia materials (Mendes, 2018). Using this software, the collected information was divided into recording units. Each recording unit was linked to predetermined codes and then associated with categories and subcategories. MAXQDA facilitated an organized and systematic analysis of participants' statements, aiding in the identification of recurring patterns, trends, and relationships within the data. The software's selection and filtering functions allowed for the exploration of diverse perspectives and opinions expressed by the

participants. Furthermore, MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 enabled the graphical representation of results, as illustrated below, thereby enhancing the interpretation and communication of the data.

5. Results

During the data analysis process, seven distinct categories were identified: purchase decision factors, perception and stigma of Private Labels, PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality, consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases across product categories, repurchase motivators for PLs, packaging design and branding, and PLs store positioning.

The data analysis tables (Table 5.1 and Table 5.2) illustrate these categories and their respective subcategories. This systematic categorization allowed for efficient organization and synthesis of collected data, identifying prevalent patterns and trends within participants' responses.

5.1 First Focus group results

Codes	Categories	Subcategories
1	<i>Purchase decision factors</i>	- Price - Perceived product quality - Value for money - Influence of in-store NBs promotions - Intrinsic cues - Evaluation of product quantity versus price
2	<i>Perception and stigma of Private Labels</i>	- Quality improvement - Offer and variety of products improvement - Advertisement impact - Economic Context
3	<i>PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality</i>	- PLs perceived quality depends on product category - Specific preferences in certain product categories for NBs - Equivalence perceived quality between PLs and NBs - Specific PL products of perceived lower quality - Specific PL products of perceived good quality - Specific PL products of perceived higher quality
4	<i>Consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases across product categories</i>	- Avoidance of PL purchases for personal care and hygiene category - Avoidance of PL purchases in household cleaning and laundry products - Avoidance of PL purchase in soft drinks category - Perceived lower quality in PL sweets and biscuits - Preference for PLs in packaged food items and dairy category - Preference for PLs in household cleaning and laundry products

		- Consistent brand loyalty and purchasing behavior - Preference for PLs across most categories
5	<i>Repurchase motivators for PLs</i>	- Product perceived quality - Previous positive experience - Value for money - Store image - Influence of family on repurchase - Lack of brand loyalty for PLs
6	<i>Packaging design and branding</i>	- Extrinsic cues influence perceived quality - Influence on first-time purchases - Influenced by child-oriented packaging - Recognition of eco-friendly packaging influence - Subconscious Influence - Lack of extrinsic cues effect on purchase decision
7	<i>PLs store positioning</i>	- Active in-store PLs search - PLs near NBs improves direct comparison - PLs near NBs improves PLs perceived quality - PLs near NBs improves perceived shopping experience - Minimal influence of store positioning on purchase decisions

Table 5.1 Content Analysis table (FG 1)

Source: Own elaboration

Purchase decision factors

Participants were questioned with the prompt, "During your shopping trips to supermarkets or hypermarkets, what factors exert the most significant influence on your purchasing decisions?". The ensuing analysis revealed a multitude of factors that guide consumers purchase decisions. Factors such as previous product experience, product knowledge, in-store promotions, price, perceived product quantity, evaluation of product quantity versus price, value for money, and intrinsic cues were identified. A frequency analysis was executed (Figure 5.1), revealing that price was the most frequently cited factor, with 25% of the responses mentioning it (n = 5; 25%). This highlights the profound influence of price as a pivotal factor in the purchasing decision-making process.

The subsequent recording units further substantiate and corroborate these conclusions:

Participant A: "I think the factor that influences me the most is above all the prices."

Participant B: "In my opinion too, and bearing in mind the current situation, the price ends up being very important."

Participant C: "Initially, the first thing I look at and try to compare are the prices."

Other factors also contribute to shaping consumers' intentions; perceived product quality was mentioned four times during the focus group discussions, representing 20% of the participants (n = 4; 20%).

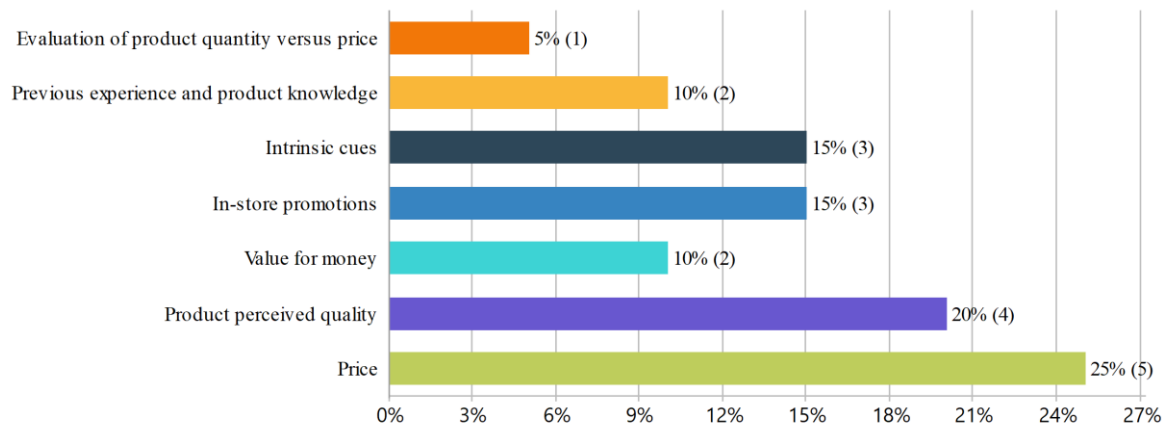


Figure 5.1 Purchase decision factors

Source: MAXQDA

Perception and stigma of Private Labels

To explore the current consumers perceptions regarding private labels, the moderator posed the following question: "Have you ever felt, or do you currently feel, that there is a stigma associated with buying and using private labels? Have your perceptions of private labels changed in recent years (within the last 7 to 10 years)?" Eight participants no longer retain a sense of stigma in association with private labels, their perceptions have evolved over time as reflected in the following quotations:

Participant A: "(...) In the past, I perceived buying the original product as superior to buying what I saw as a replica. Private labels were regarded as imitations."

Participant D: "I recall that five or even ten years ago, we would visit Continente and find only a few "É Continente" brand products, somewhat hidden, making it challenging to locate them. The same applies to Pingo Doce. Moreover, the quality was notably subpar."

Participant E: "The market today is vastly different from what it was a decade ago. The product range has expanded significantly. Private labels offered a limited array of products and categories back then, and the market was dominated by the most recognized manufacturer brands."

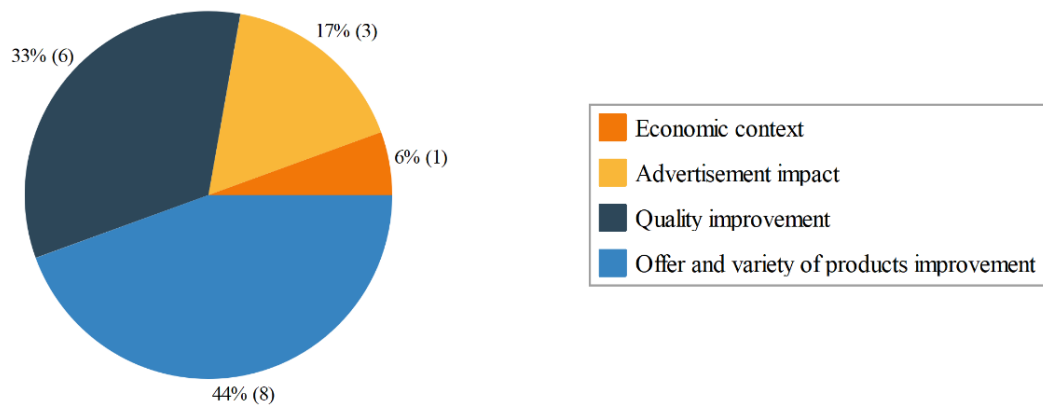


Figure 5.2 Perception and stigma of Private Labels

Source: MAXQDA

These insights underscore a shift in consumer perceptions, revealing a departure from the historical stigmatization associated with these brands. Private labels are gaining acceptance and preference among consumers, primarily due to the evolving market dynamics and increased product range across various categories. Participants have also highlighted the significant impact of advertising on educating and shaping consumers' perceptions of private labels. Also, market competition was referred to as driving an increase in the quality of private label products (Figure 5.2). This ongoing trend further reinforces the idea that consumers are progressively recognizing and placing trust in private-label brands as a viable alternative to traditional manufacturer brands (Pulker, C. E., 2018).

Relevant excerpts from participants contribute additional context to this transformative shift.

Participant B: "Advertising indeed has a significant impact, and when consumers began encountering other products, (...) they began altering their choices (...) and realized that there was equal, if not superior, quality, leaving them satisfied. (...) The truth is, private labels came strongly, offering good products, and hence are, I would say, very successful. The monopoly that the large national brands once held faced significant competition."

Participant D: "Market competition drove an increase in the quality of private label products. In fact, both the variety and quality have improved now."

Participant E: "As soon as the offerings started expanding and advertising (...) grew, the market underwent a complete revolution."

PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality

As delineated in the academic literature (Wu et al., 2021; Roggeveen et al., 2021) and underscored in the analysis perceived product quality emerges as a critical element influencing consumers'

connection towards FMCG brands. The focus groups aim to understand the perceived qualities associated with both PLs and NBs.

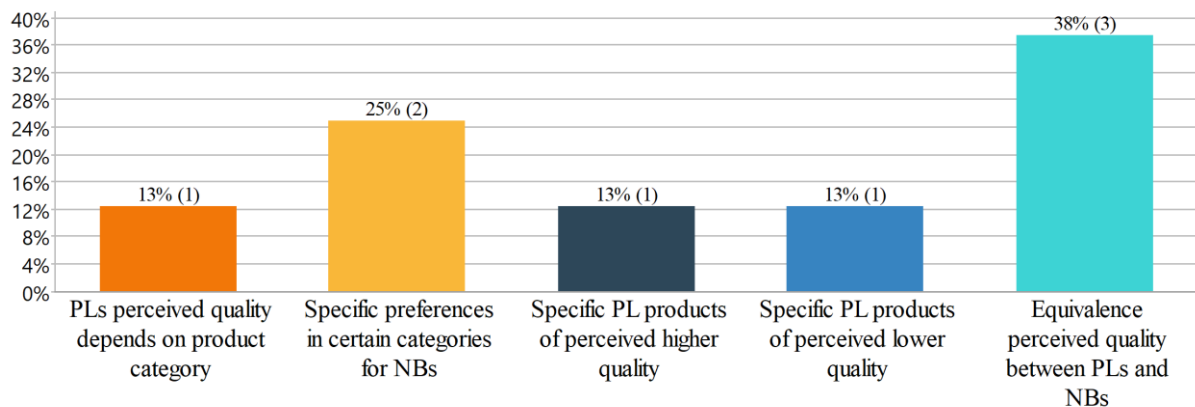


Figure 5.3 PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality

Source: MAXQDA

As shown in Figure 5.3, the most frequently cited subcategory, was “perceived equivalence in quality between PLs and NBs” (n = 3; 38%). Participants affirm that, overall, the quality of private labels is reaching, and in certain instances, even surpassing, distributor brands quality. This is echoed in the quotes below:

Participant A: “I believe that presently the quality of both is converging, increasingly leveling, and becoming more comparable.”

Participant B: “Generally, the quality is aligning, and for some own-brand products, I would say they are superior.”

Additionally, it was mentioned that certain PL products exhibit superior quality compared to specific NBs (n = 1; 13%). While there is consensus regarding the improvement in the quality of private label brands, participants also noted that certain product categories fail to meet consumer expectations. The quality of private-label products varies across categories, with some deemed good quality and others falling short. For example, soft drinks or juices were criticized for their quality:

Participant C: “(...) I refrain from purchasing own-brand soft drinks or juices from supermarkets unless it's freshly made natural orange juice”.

Participant E: “(...) Lidl's Iced Tea is essentially colored water, undrinkable. There are specific products where the quality is lacking, and it does not match up to the distributor's brand.”

Lastly, some participants favor NB products based on habitual inclinations and prior choices:

Participant C: “(...) Also, when I don't buy, it was because of the habit when I was still living at my parents' house of always buying that particular brand of distributor, and I still buy those same products.”

Consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases across product categories

The study reveals consumers' preferences and dissatisfactions concerning private label products (Figure 5.4). A significant portion of participants (n = 5; 33%) favored manufacturer brand products for items like intimate hygiene, hair care, and toothpaste. Participants D and H shared their experiences with PL hygiene products, stating that they rarely buy from their own line:

Participant D: "I've tried several PL hygiene brands, and I don't like them; I can't use them."

Participant H: "I test hygiene products, but it's rare that I buy from my own line; the experiences I've had haven't gone well."

In household cleaning and laundry, differing opinions were evident, with some avoiding PL products and others trusting them. In food and beverage subcategory, some participants expressed reluctance to purchase PL soft drinks due to taste preferences or perceived lower quality. However, private labels were preferred for essential products like pasta, rice, and canned goods.

Overall, consumer preferences highlight the interplay between perceived product quality, brand loyalty, and consumers' previous experiences, shaping their complex decision-making processes.

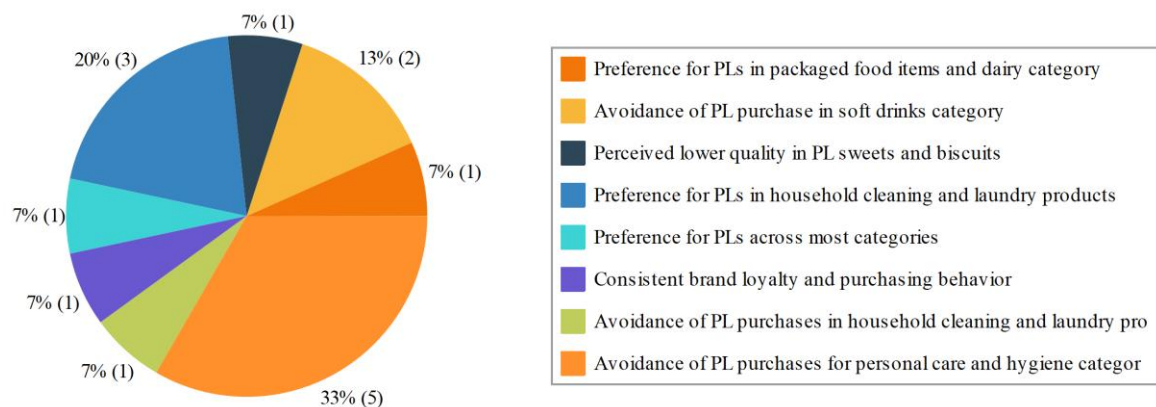


Figure 5.4 Consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases across product categories

Source: MAXQDA

Repurchase Motivators for PLs

During the focus group sessions, participants engaged in a comprehensive discussion regarding the factors influencing their decisions to repurchase private label products (Figure 5.5). Foremost among the motivations identified was the value of money, a factor emphasized by four participants (n = 4; 21%) as being of paramount importance in their consumer decision-making processes. It was elucidated that when consumers perceive that a private-label product offers a level of quality, features,

or benefits commensurate with or exceeding the price paid, it amplifies their perception of value for money and significantly influences their intent to repurchase private-label products.

Three subcategories were equally emphasized as pivotal factors in the repurchasing of private-label products. These subcategories encompass: perceived product quality, previous positive experience, and store image. The statements made by the participants support these findings:

Participants A: "For me, it's about quality; if I try a private label product and it works, I like it; the more I like it, the more I'll stay loyal and the more I'll want to buy it again."

Participant C: "For me, I become loyal based on the quality of the products; if I like them, I'll buy them again."

Participant H: "I try a product; if I like it, I continue to purchase it."

Participant C: "I purchase certain products from private labels due to their lower prices. However, if I notice a distributor brand offering a discount, I will switch to the distributor brand."

Notably, the predisposition to repurchase private-label products is distinctly heightened when consumers perceive these products as being synonymous with, or even superior to, national brand counterparts in terms of quality. This perception instills confidence and trust in their purchase choices, thereby fostering a pattern of repeat purchases.

Additionally, the influence of store image in shaping repurchase decisions emerged as a salient theme. Participants deliberated on the availability of private label products in their preferred retail establishments, underscoring how store promotions and various store-related factors affect their purchase choices. It is essential to acknowledge that certain participants expressed a lack of loyalty toward private-label products, attributed to various factors. For some consumers, private labels may be perceived as interchangeable with similar products available from different retailers, thereby reducing their inclination to establish brand loyalty.

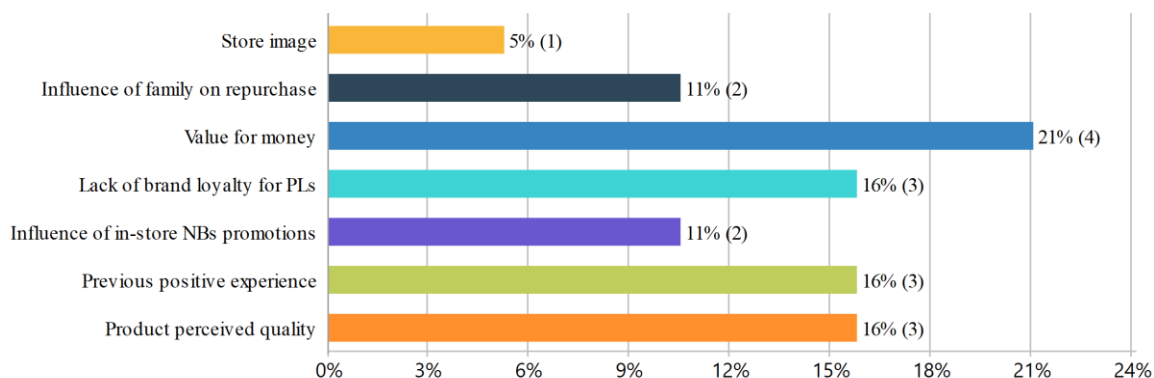


Figure 5.5 Repurchase motivators for PLs

Source: MAXQDA

Packaging design and Branding

The study aimed to understand the impact of packaging design and branding on consumers' purchasing decisions. The majority of participants, 5 out of 8, stated that packaging design holds no significant influence on their purchasing decisions. Instead, they prioritize other factors such as price, perceived product quality, or personal preferences. This perspective is reflected in quotes from participants:

Participant G: "Packaging holds no significance for me. As previously mentioned, my foremost considerations lie in the price and the quality."

Participant E: "I have never placed emphasis on product packaging. While contrasting the PL and NB 'Filipino' products, the packaging does not catch my attention."

A notable insight shared by participants ($n = 2$; 18%) was their conscious effort to resist being influenced by packaging aesthetics. However, they acknowledged that extrinsic cues might subconsciously impact their perception of a product's quality. This observation was echoed by specific participants:

Participant A: "Although I consciously believe that packaging doesn't sway my choices, there have been instances where a product's attractive packaging has caught my attention and influenced my decision."

Participant C: "While I am consciously cautious about the influence of packaging, I admit that on a subconscious level, certain products stand out due to their packaging when I scan the shelf. Despite this, I consider the price, and if it's too high, I quickly return the product to the shelf without making a purchase."

Some participants admitted that certain products stand out due to their packaging when scanning the shelf, but they would still consider the price before making a purchase. The study also highlighted the role of packaging mainly in influencing initial purchases. Participants C and F indicated that the packaging of a product might capture their attention and potentially attract them to make an initial purchase. However, they would subsequently conduct comparisons with other products based on other features and prices. Participant B acknowledged that child-oriented packaging could significantly impact their purchasing decisions, particularly if it brings joy to their children. Participant A highlighted that consumers often opt for products with eco-friendly packaging due to the association with higher quality. This suggests that eco-friendly packaging can significantly influence purchase decisions, especially for consumers who prioritize environmentally conscious products.

PLs store positioning

The following debate centered on the importance of product placement in-store, with a particular emphasis on private labels. Participants expressed a diverse range of perspectives regarding the influence of this strategic positioning on their choices during the purchasing process.

Certain participants highlighted the impact of the in-store placement of private-label products on their shopping behavior. They pointed out that positioning private-label products close to national brands facilitates rapid comparisons between them. Participants underscored how this arrangement eases the process of directly assessing the distinctions and similarities between PL and NB offerings.

Additionally, participants mentioned that the in-store placement of private label products also creates a sense of trust and credibility for these products, as they are positioned alongside well-known national brands. This, in turn, allows consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions based on their preferences and needs.

Furthermore, several participants suggested that organizing PL products alongside NBs enhances their overall shopping experience. They believe that the convenient placement of both options streamlines the shopping process, making it more efficient and user-friendly.

Participant A "I think the position helps to make a quicker comparison between PL and NB products."

Participant E: "Choosing to bring them together is a great advantage for the consumer."

Participant C: "I think it influences the purchase (...) if both the private label and the national brand are in the same aisle."

Participant G expressed that the physical arrangement of products in the store did not exert a substantial impact on their decision-making process.

Participant G: "I don't perceive the positioning of products in the store as a distinguishing factor. From my viewpoint, a situation that might occur is if a consumer is unaware of the private label option for a particular item and it's not conveniently placed alongside the national brand alternatives in the same aisle, they might opt not to make the purchase."

Moreover, when consumers have a clear preference, they exhibit a readiness to explore various sections of the store in pursuit of their preferred products. Participant C illustrated this behavior through personal shopping experiences: "For example, in my case, I am conscious that Pingo Doce Granola is situated in a distinct section, prompting me to head directly there." Additionally, participant E mentioned, "In my situation, when I have a specific product in mind, I proceed directly to the respective aisle, regardless of its location, and navigate the supermarket."

In conclusion, the results suggest that while the positioning of products can certainly influence private label impulse purchases and attract new customers, it may not have as significant an impact

on loyal customers who have established preferences. For instance, consumers who are loyal to a particular brand may actively seek out their preferred products regardless of their location in-store.

5.2 Second Focus group results

Codes	Categories	Subcategories
1	<i>Purchase decision factors</i>	- Price - Perceived product quality - Value for money - In-store NBs promotions - Intrinsic cues - Extrinsic cues: product ethical considerations - Previous experience and product knowledge - Evaluation of product quantity versus price
2	<i>Perception and stigma of Private Labels</i>	- Quality improvement - Offer and variety of products improvement - Economic Context
3	<i>PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality</i>	- PLs perceived quality differs by retailer - PLs perceived quality depends on product category - PLs perceived quality depends on the product line - Occasion-based perceived quality assessment - Equivalence perceived quality between PLs and NBs - Specific preferences in certain product categories for NBs - Specific PL products of perceived lower quality - Specific PL products of perceived good quality - Specific PL products of perceived higher quality
4	<i>Consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases across product categories</i>	- Avoidance of PL purchases for personal care and hygiene category - Avoidance of PL purchase in soft drinks category - Preference for PLs in packaged food items and dairy category - Preference for PLs in household cleaning and laundry products - Consistent brand loyalty and purchasing behavior - Preference for PLs across most categories
5	<i>Repurchase motivators for PLs</i>	- Product perceived quality - Previous positive experience - Value for money - Store image - Influence of in-store NBs promotions - Lack of brand loyalty for PLs

6	<i>Packaging design and branding</i>	- Extrinsic cues influence perceived quality - Influence on first-time purchases - Influenced by child-oriented packaging - Recognition of eco-friendly packaging influence - Subconscious Influence - Lack of extrinsic cues effect on purchase decision
7	<i>PLs store positioning</i>	- PLs near NBs improves direct comparison - PLs near NBs improves PLs perceived quality - PLs near NBs improves perceived shopping experience - Minimal influence of store positioning on purchase decisions

Table 5.2 Content Analysis table (FG 2)

Source: Own elaboration

Purchase Decision Factors

A frequency analysis (Figure 5.6) revealed that among all the subcategories, price was the most frequently mentioned factor influencing purchasing decisions, with 22% of participants mentioning it. Evidently, price holds significant weight for consumers when making purchase decisions. Perceived product quality, perceived value for money, and previous experience and product knowledge were also revealed to be significant factors for the participants in this focus group. Highlighted below are some verbatim responses affirming these findings:

Participant A: "For me, it's a mix of quality and price."

Participant C: "Generally, it's the price. Price always comes first for me."

Participant D: "I prioritize quality for certain categories, but for the rest, price is the deciding factor."

Participant E: "I buy what I already know I like; I buy based on what, for me, has quality, often regardless of the price."

Participant G: "For me, it's more about quality and habit. Yes, I can say that, in general, price takes a back seat."

Lastly, eco-friendly packaging and cruelty-free products were also emphasized as significant factors in purchase decisions, a viewpoint shared by the millennial generation. This is evident in the following quotes:

Participant B: "Eco-friendly packaging or cruelty-free products influence my purchasing decision."

Participant G: "I want to add that younger generations, including millennials, focus on factors beyond just price and quality, such as the values the brand conveys and how the brand interacts with consumers. I think that's also very important, for example, beauty brands being cruelty-free."

The study highlights the importance of considering factors beyond just price and quality in consumer purchasing decisions.

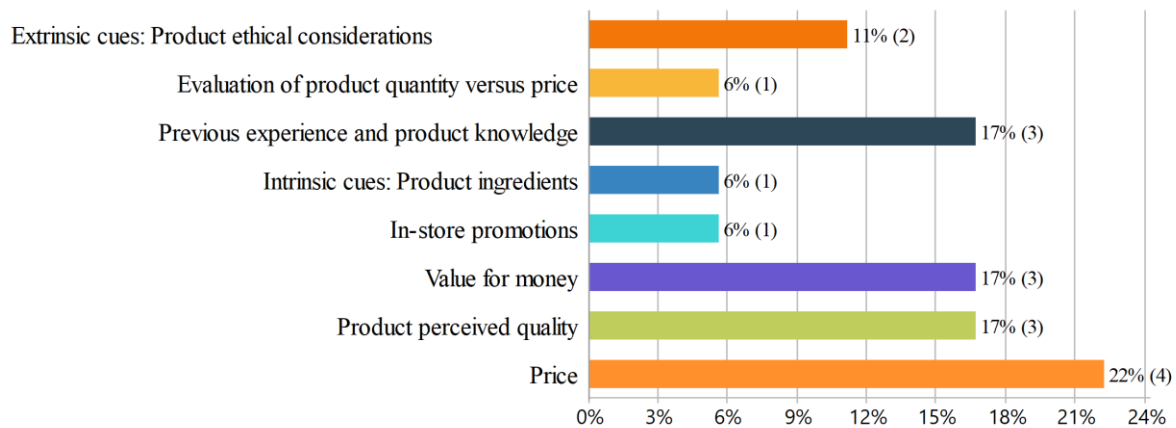


Figure 5.6. Purchase decision factors

Source: MAXQDA

Perception and Stigma of Private Labels

The study reveals a shift in consumer perception towards private labels, attributed to factors such as offer and variety improvement, quality improvement, and economic context (Figure 5.7). Participants expressed a decrease in prejudice towards private labels, as these products often match or surpass national brands in terms of quality. A wider range of options and improved quality perception of private label products shift consumer behavior, leading to informed purchase decisions. Retailers influence also plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of private labels, as their product assortment and quality standards will impact consumers overall PL perceptions. Moreover, Participant G associated the changing perception of private labels, particularly among millennials, with the entry of new retailers like Mercadona, indicating how the market landscape and exposure to new players have influenced consumer mindsets.

Additionally, economic context was also identified as a potential factor in changing consumer perception and reducing the stigma associated with private labels. The study highlights the importance of understanding the changing perceptions and evolving acceptance of private labels. Participant insights:

Participant B: "I think that in recent years, the existing stigma regarding private labels has completely taken a back seat. For me, often there is more quality in private labels than in distributor brands."

Participant A: "Some consumers still have that very old mindset that distributor brands are good. But for me, that happens in older generations. (...) For the generation present in this focus group, Millennials, I think we have all moved beyond that."

Participant G: "I feel that our generation, the Millennials, has largely shed this stigma."

Participant F: "I can add that for me, the end of this stigma may have been driven by the economic situation."

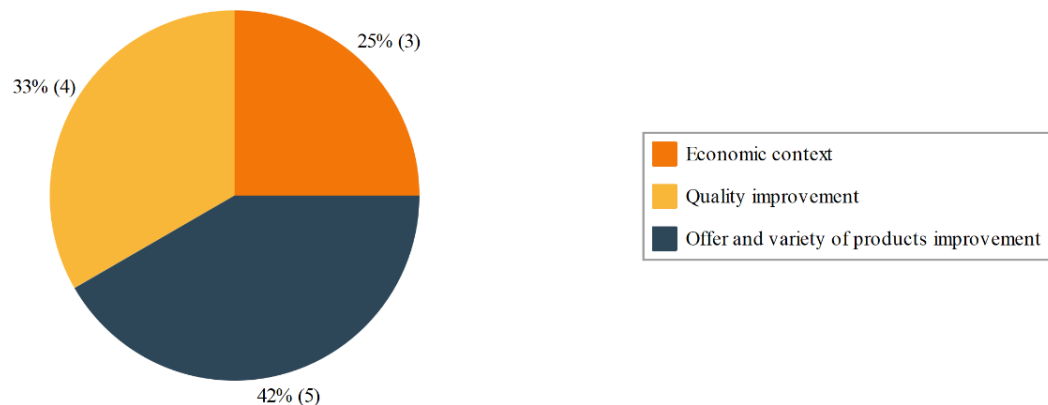


Figure 5.7. Perception and stigma of private labels

Source: MAXQDA

PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality

The results shed light on participants' perceptions of the perceived quality of private label (PL) products compared to national brand (NB) products. They showed that the perceived quality of PL and NB products varies depending on various factors, including product type, retailer, and product category. Participants, constituting 19% of the total mentions, expressed particular preferences for NBs in specific product categories and the equivalence of perceived quality between PLs and NBs. Some participants believed that both brands had quality, while others preferred national brands. Evidential excerpts underscore this standpoint:

Participant A: "For me, it's 50-50. There are categories where the quality of manufacturer products is better; in others, the quality of private label products prevails; and in some, it's equal."

Participant D: "I would also say it's 50-50. There are products where the quality doesn't differ, so it's very easy to buy the private label."

Participant G: "There are products that I don't buy private label because I don't like the quality."

Participant B: "If I'm buying biscuits or chips because I've already tried the own brands and can see the difference in quality, I go for the national brands."

Three out of eight participants emphasized that the perception of quality is not consistently skewed towards either private labels or national brands, implying that the assessment of quality is contingent on a specific product type or varies depending on the retailer. Participants suggested that private labels from certain retailers tend to meet their quality standards more consistently. Also noted is that the quality of private labels varies depending on the product category; for some products, participants always opt for private labels and others do not. Two out of eight participants suggested that the difference in perceived quality between private labels and national brands is strategic, with PLs lower-cost lines prioritizing price over quality. An exemplary quotation:

Participant H: "I think quality also depends a lot on what the brand intends to build. For the products from the economic lines, the focus is not on quality but on price, and the consumer also assimilates that."

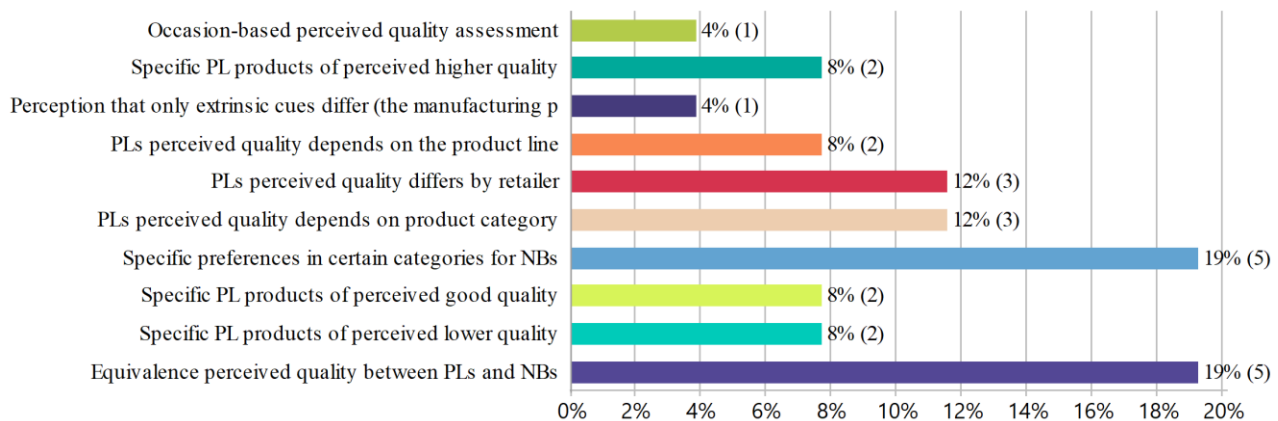


Figure 5.8. PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality

Source: MAXQDA

Consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases across product categories

The outcomes reveal that product category plays a significant role in shaping participants' purchasing decisions, particularly when purchasing private labels. A predominant subcategory emerged, labeled "Avoidance of PL purchases for personal care and hygiene category," with a significant number, 25% of participants, exhibiting reluctance towards private labels. This hesitance could be due to concerns about product quality, perceived differences in effectiveness, or the perceived importance of these items for personal well-being.

On the other hand, participants showed preferences for private labels in specific categories, such as packaged food items and dairy products, and household cleaning and laundry products. These preferences had their roots in confidence in the caliber and value of the products those private labels offered.

19% of participants exhibited a general preference for private labels across a range of product categories, focusing on factors such as familiarity, habit, and cost-effectiveness. A subset of participants demonstrated consistent brand loyalty and purchasing behavior, adhering to specific brands based on personal preferences and habits. These results provide valuable insights into the diverse preferences and considerations that guide individuals when purchasing private labels across different product categories. These inclinations are influenced by price, perceived quality, taste, habits, and brand influence.

Repurchase Motivators for PLs

This question explores the factors that influence consumer's repurchase decisions and brand loyalty for private label products. 25% of participants expressed loyalty towards products from specific retail stores, underscoring the influence of store image on their repurchase decisions. As stated, those participants:

Participant A: "I am loyal to Pingo Doce's brand products. However, if it's another retail store, I don't feel loyal, neither to the distributor's brands nor to the private label products."

Participant H also supported this view: "I usually buy the same brands, mostly private labels. For example, I always buy the cappuccino from a private label of Lidl. If I go to Jumbo, I won't buy theirs."

Value for money was also a critical determinant impacting their loyalty to PLs. Participants were more inclined to opt for PLs when they perceive good quality at a reasonable price. They also noted that meeting their quality expectations would encourage continued purchases. On the other hand, attractive pricing or in-store promotions may prompt consumers to switch to national brands. Moreover, past positive experiences with specific PL products can instill loyalty. Participants noted that a good experience with a particular PL product increases the likelihood of repurchasing. Lastly, some participants do not exhibit strong brand loyalty for private labels and are open to trying different brands, including PLs and NBs, based on factors such as price, promotions, and product perceived quality.

Packaging Design and Branding

This category explores the impact of packaging design and branding on consumers' purchasing decisions, with the subcategory "Extrinsic cues influence perceived quality" being the most prominent theme, counting with 33% of the total. Participants emphasized that packaging can significantly shape

their perception of the product's quality, with some designs often associated with lower-quality products and others more appealing and suggestive of higher quality.

Eco-friendly or sustainable packaging holds a positive influence on purchasing choices, as consumers are willing to support sustainability efforts through their purchase decisions. However, participants acknowledged the subconscious impact of packaging on their choices, even though they believed it shouldn't play a significant role. Aesthetically pleasing packaging could attract them, despite their primary focus on product quality. Child-oriented packaging was identified as having a substantial influence, especially when making purchases for children. This highlights the effectiveness of child-oriented packaging in capturing the attention and interest of the younger audience, indirectly influencing parents in their purchasing choices.

When considering trying a new product, participants often compare the packaging of different brands to make an informed decision. The product design and labelling play a vital role in their initial product selection, showcasing the importance of packaging in grabbing consumers' attention and communicating essential details.

In summary, attractive packaging can subconsciously influence perceived product quality and impact first-time purchases. Child-oriented and eco-friendly packaging are also identified as influencing factors.

PLs Store Positioning

The findings aimed to understand the impact of store positioning on the purchasing decisions of private label products. 36% of participants expressed a strong belief that placing private label products near national brands significantly enhances the perceived quality of these items, shaping the perception of private label products as superior quality. This sentiment is evident in the following participant quotes:

Participant A: "For me, the consumer's perception of a private label product is better when it's near the national brand products. When they are separate or only private labels, it seems like they are trying to push them just because the price is lower."

Participant H: "In my opinion, I think I buy more private labels if they are next to the national brand products. It seems like a more advantageous decision when you're comparing a Milanese pasta with a Pingo Doce pasta, rather than going to the promotion's aisle."

Moreover, positioning private label products near national brands streamlines direct comparisons, making the shopping experience more convenient for consumers. However, one participant noted that the store positioning of a product, whether a private label or a national brand, has minimal impact on their purchasing decision. This participant believed that retail stores follow a preplanned placement, and the location of a product doesn't significantly affect their choice.

In summary, the study found that placing private label products near national brands enhances the perceived quality of private label items and enhances the overall shopping experience. However, some participants found that the location of a product doesn't significantly affect their choice, highlighting the importance of personal preferences and shopping habits in shaping purchasing decisions.

6. Discussion

Our research aimed to explore the factors influencing consumers during the purchasing process, specifically regarding private label products. The study's findings align with nine of the eleven proposed hypotheses, thereby confirming their significant impact on consumer purchasing and repurchase decisions.

H1a: Reference price discrepancy has a positive influence on PLs purchase intention.

As elucidated in the results chapter, price emerged as the most influential factor in determining consumers' purchase intentions. Notably, the participants in the study explained that the influence of price lies in the disparity between the prevailing cost of private labels and national brands. The present study finds a robust and straightforward association, consistent with prior scholarly investigations conducted by Mostafa & Elseidi (2018) and Singh et al. (2018), which have similarly emphasized the pivotal role of price in influencing consumers' intentions towards private label products. Consumers actively participate in the process of comparing prices, particularly when making new purchases. Therefore, it underscores the significance of implementing competitive pricing strategies to entice consumers towards private label brands as well as the pivotal role of price in shaping consumer behavior.

H1b: Reference price discrepancy does not have an influence on PLs loyalty.

This dissertation suggests that while price discrepancies significantly influence initial purchases, they do not have a pronounced effect on brand loyalty. Consumers initially attracted to PLs due to perceived cost advantages do not necessarily develop long-term brand loyalty. Consumers, having established loyalty to a brand, consider a broader spectrum of factors beyond mere price when making subsequent purchasing decisions. They seek a comprehensive brand experience that includes quality, value, and satisfaction. This contradicts previous literature suggesting that cost advantages inherently lead to loyalty. However, other literature (Bergès et al., 2009) supports this perspective, indicating that while price is important for attracting consumers, fostering brand loyalty requires a holistic approach. Consumers now express a desire for quality and a sense of benefit in their usual product purchases, and they are willing to pay slightly higher prices for products they trust to meet their expectations.

H2a: Product perceived quality has a positive influence on PLs purchase intention.

H2b: Product perceived quality has a positive influence on PLs loyalty.

This study emphasizes the importance of preserving and enhancing private label quality to drive purchase intentions and foster consumer loyalty. Perceived quality is a measure of belief in customers'

eyes, affecting their intention to purchase and fostering their loyalty towards a product or brand (Goldsmith et al., 2010). The prominence of perceived quality, as revealed in this dissertation, aligns with existing scholarly literature (Amine, 2011; Bao et al., 2011; Casteran et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that not all private-label products meet the established standards of their national brand counterparts. Consumers continue to weigh quality considerations against price advantages when making informed decisions. Participants in the study distinguished variations in perceived product quality across product categories, expressing preferences for national brands in instances where private label quality is perceived to be comparatively lower. The penetration rate of private-label products within the consumer market fluctuates in accordance with the nature of the goods under consideration. This study posits that a reduced emotional attachment to a product is linked to an amplified inclination to purchase private label products, thereby suggesting an inverse correlation between product result expectations and loyalty to private label brands. Participants exhibited reluctance to purchase private-label hair care, beauty, and hygiene products, which stands in contrast to their loyalty to household cleaning products and staple goods such as milk, pasta, and rice. Consequently, private labels exhibit substantial potential for flourishing within market segments where consumer emotional attachment is less pronounced.

H3a: Perceived value for money has a positive influence on PLs purchase intention.

H3b: Perceived value for money has a positive influence on PLs loyalty.

This study highlights the strong relationship between perceived product value, consumers' purchase intentions and loyalty towards private labels. A higher perceived value is likely to increase the willingness among consumers to purchase private label products, with perceived value for money being the most frequently cited motivator for repurchase within the study focus group discussions. Despite varying conceptualizations of perceived value in the literature, a general consensus exists that underscores the strong link between the value created for consumers and brand loyalty, resulting in increased profits. This is supported by various studies, including those by (Dibie et al., 2019; Konuk, 2018; Liljander et al., 2009; Maharani et al., 2020). Yee & San (2011) research found a direct association between a consumer's perceived value and their purchase decision, indicating that a stronger perceived value significantly increases the likelihood of product purchase. Perceived product value not only shapes how consumers perceive the product but also guides appropriate communication channels and positioning strategies to ensure messages are interpreted as intended.

H4: In-store NBs promotions have a negative moderating effect on the influence of reference price discrepancy.

The research has uncovered a notable moderating effect of in-store national brands promotions on the influence of reference price discrepancies concerning consumers' willingness to purchase private label products. The empirical findings elucidate that when in-store promotions for NBs are prevalent, the less discernible price differences between PL products and their NB counterparts exert a diminished influence on consumer decision-making process. This underscores the role of in-store NB promotions as a mitigating factor, effectively attenuating the impact of price discrepancies in the context of PL product purchase intentions.

According to Gauri et al. (2017) and Palazon & Delgado-Ballester (2009), in-store promotion strategies such as premiums and discounted pricing are prevalent tactics adopted by retailers. These promotions are a common tactic to increase in-store traffic, subsequently catalyzing purchasing decisions. The impact of these promotional incentives on purchase intentions is intrinsically linked to consumers' perceptions of the value derived from such promotions.

These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in consumer decision-making processes and underscore the significance of in-store promotions as a key factor in shaping consumer preferences and purchase intentions.

H5a: Store image has a positive influence on PLs purchase intention.

H5b: Store image has a positive influence on PLs loyalty.

The study reveals the substantial influence of store image on purchase intentions and loyalty towards private label brands. Previous research Bao et al. (2011); Champion et al. (2010) and Vahie & Paswan (2006) has consistently established a direct connection between store image and purchase intentions, primarily driven by consumers' tendency to associate an unfavorable store image with low-quality products. Store image plays a pivotal role in shaping purchase intentions by mitigating risk perception and enhancing perceptions of product quality. Store image significantly affects purchase intentions regarding private label products, often viewed as an extension of the retailer's brand identity. Consumers frequently rely on the overall image and reputation of the retailer when assessing the quality of PLBs. Empirical studies by Beneke & Zimmerman (2014); Fong et al. (2015); Novansa & Ali (2017) and highlight the direct impact of store image on consumer evaluations of PLBs, especially concerning perceived product quality. This positive perception substantially elevates the likelihood of repeat purchases.

These insights underscore the imperative of cultivating a favorable store image to optimize consumer receptiveness to private label offerings and cement long-term loyalty. A positive store image not only attracts consumers to PL products but also fosters repeat purchases and enduring brand loyalty.

H6: Packaging design and labelling has a positive influence on PLs perceived quality.

The data results reveal a significant correlation between visual merchandising, such as product packaging design and labeling, and perceived product quality. Participants in both focus groups discussions acknowledged that attractive packaging can subconsciously influence perceived product quality, particularly in first-time purchases. Child-oriented packaging was noted to affect purchasing choices for families with young children, and eco-friendly packaging may influence environmentally conscious consumers. The findings align with (Chiguvu & Sepepe, 2023; Mensah et al., 2022) study, which emphasizes the importance of packaging and labeling in today's competitive market. Investing in visually appealing and well-designed packaging and clear labeling that accurately highlights key product's features and benefits create a positive first impression, build consumer's trust and can drive sales.

H7: In-store positioning has a positive influence on PLs perceived quality.

This research explores the impact of in-store positioning of private label products on consumers' perceived product quality. The findings support the idea that strategically positioning PL products near well-known national brands instills trust and credibility in consumers, enabling easier direct comparisons and significantly impacting their perception of PL products. This strategic positioning empowers consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions that resonate with their preferences and needs. Additionally, organizing PL products alongside national brands enhances the overall shopping experience by streamlining the process and making it more efficient and user-friendly. This dissertation supports Olson (2012) and Valenzuela & Raghubir (2009) studies, which shows that positioning private labels close to leading national brands helps retailers signal similar quality, shifting demand from national brands and increasing consumer loyalty to private labels. This finding contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of in-store positioning on consumer behavior and product perception, providing valuable guidance for practitioners in the retail industry.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the retail landscape has undergone a notable transformation over the past decade, particularly in the perception and acceptance of private label (PL) products. Retailers have made concerted efforts to dispel the long-standing generic stigma attached to these products through strategies like reformulation, rebranding, and effective marketing campaigns (PL Buyer, 2008). The participants in both FG1 and FG2 echoed this change in perception, highlighting the factors contributing to the shift in perception including improved quality, a broader product range, effective advertising, and the prevailing economic context.

Nevertheless, existing research has identified gaps in the literature regarding the factors affecting purchase intention and loyalty towards PL products. Addressing these gaps, this study provides valuable propositions and contributes to a deeper comprehension of consumer behavior when it comes to private label purchases.

The primary objective of this study was to unravel the factors influencing consumers' intentions to purchase private label products and, subsequently, analyze the elements creating loyalty towards these products. The findings have culminated in a set of insightful propositions. Direct influencers of purchase intention were identified as store image, reference price discrepancy, perceived value for money, and perceived quality. Additionally, the study proposed that PL store positioning, packaging, and labeling positively impact perceived product quality. Moreover, reference price discrepancy, perceived quality, perceived value for money, and store image were found to significantly influence loyalty towards private labels.

While consumers often claim that their food choices are driven by product quality and taste, this study acknowledges the significant influence of extrinsic cues such as ethical considerations, in-store positioning, and placement on consumers' perceptions and purchase decisions, aligning with the propositions proposed by Dotson et al. (2012). Additionally, the role of packaging design and branding, as emphasized by participants, adds another layer of influence on perceived product quality and initial purchases.

Incorporating these insights, the study underscores the strategic importance of private label brands for retailers, in line with the perspectives of Huang & Huddleston (2009) and Wu et al. (2021).

Both industry players and consumers are increasingly recognizing the potential for growth of private label sales, as evidenced by the growing global consumer inclination to increase 21% their purchases of private label products (Euromonitor International, 2014). This reinforces the need to understand and effectively utilize the factors identified in this study to enhance the acceptance and loyalty towards private label offerings.

7.1 Theoretical Contributions

Regarding the theoretical contributions of this research, it is imperative to consider the research questions initially presented. Our first research question is, “What attributes do consumers perceive in private labels that motivate them to buy?”

The findings present compelling evidence that reference price discrepancy, perceived value for money, perceived quality, and store image, positively impact consumers' purchase intentions. Moreover, our study supports the significance of extrinsic cues, such as packaging and labeling, and store positioning, as influential factors shaping consumers' perceived quality of private label brands and, consequently, their willingness to buy PLBs.

These results are consistent with prior literature. A positive store image exerts a favorable influence on private label attitudes, as indicated by Ailawadi et al. (2008) and Bilal & Ali (2013) revealed that three factors significantly influence consumer purchase intentions, namely intrinsic factors, such as perceived value, and extrinsic factors, including store image, packaging design and labelling, and in-store promotions. Konuk (2018) argued that increased purchasing intentions are influenced by product quality and a positive store image. Kakkos et al. (2015) demonstrated that value for money is one of the primary driving factors for consumers' purchase intentions regarding private label products.

On the other hand, in-store promotions of national brands have a negative effect on consumers' purchase intentions. According to literature findings, private labels perform poorly in categories with more frequent and deeper national brand promotions, as PLBs lose their comparative price advantage in such categories (Braak et al., 2014).

Our second research question is, “What make consumers repeat buying and turn them loyal to private labels?” The study underscores the positively effect of value for money, product perceived quality and store image in attracting repeat private labels purchases, and consequently, turn consumers loyal to PLs.

Based on this study's hypothesis, reference price discrepancy, perceived product quality, store image and value for money are predictors of have a positive effect in predicting private label purchase intentions. PLs packaging and labelling and store positioning predict perceived product quality, and, in turn, perceived product quality predicts private label purchase intentions. Furthermore, perceived product quality, store image and value for money are predictors of a positive effect in predicting private label loyalty. Reference price discrepancy cannot be considered in predicting PLs loyalty, while in-store NBs promotions have a negative influence predicting perceived price discrepancy and, in turn, perceived price discrepancy predicts private label purchase intentions.

7.2 Managerial Implications

The current research results offer valuable insights for retailers and marketers.

To begin, this study deepens our understanding of the significant role of reference price discrepancy in shaping consumers' purchase decisions. This comprehension empowers marketers and retailers to strategically position private label products in the market. FMCG businesses can leverage their knowledge by implementing pricing strategies that highlight the cost advantage of private label products. Retailers should adjust their private label pricing with the reference price effect of national products, ensuring that price discrepancies remain within an optimal threshold range to maximize sales.

Beyond price considerations, the study reveals significant variations in consumer attitudes toward private labels across diverse product categories. Understanding consumer preferences for specific product categories can guide retailers in optimizing their private label offerings. Typically, consumer awareness of PLBs is fostered through personal experiences or word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family. Therefore, retailers should prioritize enhancing brand awareness.

Additionally, this research supports the influence of store image as a significant determinant of consumers' purchase intentions and, ultimately, their loyalty to private labels. Retail managers should consider investing in enhancing the store image to retain customers and acquaint them to private labels. Effectively conveying this favorable store image to customers through various communication channels is crucial, which may involve special offers to members of a retailer's loyalty program or in-store trials of private labels across diverse product categories.

Retailers can further enhance consumers' perceptions of private label quality by employing extrinsic cues, such as appealing packaging design and attractive labeling. Also they can optimize product placement by placing PL products near NBs for easy comparison.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Like many other research studies, this investigation is not without its limits, which in turn suggest potential avenues for further research.

The employed methodology may hold intrinsic limitations. Each research methodology possesses its own set of constraints, and in the case of Focus Groups, one such limitation is the potential for bias and manipulation arising from the influence exerted by leading or dominating participants. One additional constraint of this study pertains to the analysis of focus group transcripts and the subsequent identification of themes, categories, and sub-categories. Unlike the recommended approach in the literature, which involves Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) that emphasizes the involvement of multiple judges achieving a balance between the comprehensive and extensive nature

of constructivist qualitative methods and the reliance on hermeneutic consensus in postpositivist approaches (Spencer et al., 2014), the analysis in this study was conducted by a single individual.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the potential influence of the sample size and the representativeness of the participants on the generalizability of the findings. In order to strengthen the external validity of forthcoming investigations, it is recommended to employ larger and more representativeness sample sizes.

Regional and cultural variations in the comprehensive representation perceptions of PLs may not be fully captured. The research data utilized in our study is derived only from focus group conversations conducted inside the Portuguese market. Although there are certain similarities in private label markets across various emerging markets, the inclusion of data from other countries would enhance the applicability of our findings.

The study's results offer a limited perspective on a particular timeframe due to the potential for variations in consumer preferences and market dynamics. Moreover, it would be of interest to undertake research examining changes in purchasing intentions and consumption habits of private label goods prior to and subsequent to an economic recession. This particular research endeavor would provide further elucidation on the influence of economic volatility on consumer decision-making.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Script

Este *focus group* terá como temática as marcas próprias, mais conhecidas como marcas brancas, nos estabelecimentos de comércio alimentar. Partilho agora uma imagem com as categorias das marcas próprias, e alguns exemplos de superfícies de retalho, para terem consciência e noção quais são, enquanto decorre esta conversa. Neste momento existem quatro categorias de marcas próprias ou mais conhecidas, a categoria *premium*, a categoria *standard*, a categoria económica e a categoria saudável. Tudo isso são consideradas marcas próprias e todas as perguntas vão ser relacionadas com este tipo de marcas. As outras marcas são conhecidas como marcas de distribuidor ou de fornecedor e será essa a terminologia que irei usar ao longo deste *focus group*. Como me confirmaram antecipadamente, todos compram marcas próprias correto? E têm conhecimento de quais são estas marcas. Vou agora começar com a primeira pergunta:

Pergunta Nº1	Quando estão nas compras, num supermercado, o que mais influencia a vossa decisão de compra?
Discussão de Grupo	Conseguem chegar a um consenso dos três fatores que mais valorizam quando tomam uma decisão de compra?
Pergunta Nº2	Sentem que existe ou existia estigma em comprar e consumir marcas próprias? Sentem que a vossa perceção das marcas próprias se alterou nos últimos anos (últimos 7 a 10 anos)?
Discussão de Grupo	Essa alteração mudou o vosso consumo de marcas próprias? Em que medidas?
Pergunta Nº3	O pensam sobre a qualidade dos produtos de marca própria versus a qualidade de produtos de marca de fabricante?
Discussão de Grupo	Conseguem chegar a um consenso sobre existir ou não diferenças na qualidade de ambas as marcas.
Pergunta Nº4	A categoria do produto interessa na compra de marcas próprias? Há categorias de produtos que nunca comprem marca própria ou que comprem sempre? E conseguem explicar as razões das vossas escolhas?
Pergunta Nº5	Após a compra de um produto de marca própria, o que vos faz voltar a comprar?
Pergunta Nº6	Sentem que o design e/ou o branding das embalagens afetam a vossa decisão de compra (consciente ou inconscientemente)?
Discussão de Grupo	Assim sendo, sentem que tanto marcas próprias como marcas de fabricante ganham com o “poder” da embalagem na decisão de compra?
Pergunta Nº7	Sentem que a posição em loja dos produtos de marca própria (estarem no mesmo corredor dos produtos de marca de fabricante ou estarem num corredor só de produtos de marca própria) afeta a compra?

Appendix B: 1º Focus Group Transcript

Moderadora: Este *focus group* terá como temática as marcas próprias, mais conhecidas como marcas brancas, nos estabelecimentos de comércio alimentar. Partilho agora uma imagem com as categorias das marcas próprias, e alguns exemplos de superfícies de retalho, para terem consciência e noção quais são, enquanto decorre esta conversa. Neste momento existem quatro categorias de marcas próprias ou mais conhecidas, a categoria *premium*, a categoria *standard*, a categoria económica e a categoria saudável. Tudo isso são consideradas marcas próprias e todas as perguntas vão ser relacionadas com este tipo de marcas. As outras marcas são conhecidas como marcas de distribuidor ou de fornecedor e será essa a terminologia que irei usar ao longo deste *focus group*. Como me confirmaram antecipadamente, todos compram marcas próprias correto? E têm conhecimento de quais são estas marcas. Vou agora começar com a primeira pergunta:

Pergunta Nº1 **Quando estão nas compras, num supermercado, o que mais influencia a vossa decisão de compra?**

Peço que cada um desse uma ou duas razões, e de seguida, chegássemos a um consenso em grupo. Participante A, quer começar? Quando está, numa superfície de retalho alimentar, o que é que mais influencia a sua decisão de compra?

Participante A: Acho que o fator que mais me influencia é sobretudo o preço. Depois desse fator, também o que me influencia são as características do produto em si, qual é o mais processado, qual é o que faz melhor, o que é que faz pior, acho que por aí.

Participante B: Também na minha opinião, e tendo em conta a atualidade, o fator preço acaba por ter muita importância. Mas depois também, na minha opinião, tem a ver com o estilo de vida da pessoa, se procura produtos mais saudáveis e pode procurar dentro das marcas brancas ou próprias produtos com qualidade e com teor saudável. No meu caso, com dois filhos pequenos, tem peso pensar tanto no preço como analisar as características do produto que tem bastante influência. E cada vez mais as pessoas vão sabendo valorizar o produto, ou seja, perceber se é bom para a nossa saúde ou não. Penso eu que isso é cada vez é mais visível e as pessoas estão cada vez mais preocupadas com essa situação.

Participante C: Eu faço as palavras da Participante A e B as minhas, porque inicialmente a primeira coisa para onde eu olho e tento comparar é os preços, e inclusivamente, às vezes, antes de ir ao supermercado, eu frequento mais o Pingo Doce, e muitas vezes antes vejo o catálogo das promoções para ter mais ou menos a noção do que é que posso comprar. Eu faço mais compras semanais e assim vejo o que é que me rende comprar nessa semana ou não. E depois também faço muito, uma comparação das quantidades do próprio produto versus o preço, porque às vezes há produtos que parecem ser mais baratos mas depois vamos comparar preço ao quilo e acaba por ser mais barato o produto que parecia mais caro.

Participante D: Eu também faço essa análise, eu também faço compras semanais, e o orçamento familiar está na ordem do dia. Muitas vezes a compra ou não da marca própria ou da marca de fabricante tem a ver também com as promoções das marcas de fabricante. Se numa semana a marca de distribuidor está a um preço melhor do que a marca própria, e como eu compro em grandes quantidades, compro essa. E às vezes as promoções que há na marca própria, nessa semana, não são de produtos que me interessam. Portanto, faço essa gestão semanal com a minha lista de compras. Quais são as minhas necessidades da semana tendo em conta o meu orçamento disponível.

Participante E: Eu posso também falar, para mim o essencial quando vamos às compras, e tendo em conta a conjuntura atual, é olhar para o preço. E o meu agregado familiar é reduzido, mas mesmo assim é difícil. As

marcas brancas as da categoria saudável, que eu sou uma pessoa que procura muito esse tipo de produtos também ficam caras. E para um agregado familiar grande, evidentemente, que não há poupança. Se houver poupança, temos que estar sempre muito atentos. Como disse o Participante D, tem que se andar sempre a ver as promoções e gerir o que precisamos com o que é apresentado em promoção. Depois, para mim é comparar também a qualidade, se vale a pena ou não gastar tanto e se é um bom produto, ou não.

Participante F: Eu defendo mais a opinião da Participante C, o que influencia mais é a quantidade do produto. Muitas vezes os produtos são mais baratos, mas também trazem menos. Claro que não dispense uma boa promoção, de uma categoria mais premium. Mas, normalmente, é o preço versus quantidade que me influencia.

Participante G: Para mim começo sempre a olhar para o preço, depois se o preço é equivalente, vou para a qualidade. Tendo em conta também produtos que eu já comprei e que sei que são bons, tanto de marcas próprias como de distribuidor. Se sei que a qualidade é parecida opto sempre pela marca própria.

Participante H: Eu baseio-me no conhecimento prévio que tenho do produto, do uso que já dei, e das promoções. Costumo optar pelas promoções do dia.

Discussão de Grupo **Conseguem chegar a um consenso dos três fatores que mais valorizam quando tomam uma decisão de compra?**

Acho que conseguimos chegar aqui a um consenso do que mais valorizam na tomada de decisão de compra: o preço, a qualidade do produto, ou seja, as características nutricionais e os ingredientes, e as promoções. Gerem as vossas escolhas, tendo em conta as promoções que existem na altura da compra. Por último, alguns de vós falaram da relação preço versus quantidade. Penso que concordam que estas serão as quatro principais características. Querem acrescentar alguma coisa?

(Todos os participantes concordaram e não acrescentam mais nenhuma informação)

Pergunta Nº2 **Sentem que existe ou existia estigma em comprar e consumir marcas próprias?**
Sentem que a vossa perceção das marcas próprias se alterou nos últimos anos (últimos 7 a 10 anos)?

Participante A: Eu acho que havia estigma na compra de marcas brancas, sim. Ainda não estavam, propriamente, desenvolvidas e como tal não existiam tantas categorias e tanta oferta. Por isso comprar o produto “original”, era considerado melhor do que a “cópia”, porque a meu ver as marcas próprias eram vistas como cópias. Consigo reconhecer que havia sim estigma, mas pessoalmente sempre comprei o mais me compensava em termos de qualidade e preço.

Participante B: As pessoas ligam muito à publicidade, são muito influenciadas pela televisão e sim a publicidade tem realmente um impacto muito grande e quando os consumidores começaram a ser confrontados com outros produtos, afinal também existe isto no Lidl ou afinal também existe isto no Intermarché, começaram a mudar as suas escolhas, começaram a provar e perceberam que afinal havia igual qualidade, ou até uma qualidade superior e ficaram satisfeitos. Às vezes o preço também é mais baixo, e digo às vezes, porque muitas vezes as campanhas promocionais das marcas de distribuidor, numa determinada semana, são mais vantajosas do que na marca branca. Mas a verdade é que as marcas próprias vieram com força, têm bons produtos e por isso estão a ter, digo eu, muito sucesso. O monopólio que existia das grandes marcas distribuidoras sentiu uma grande concorrência, se calhar na última década, ou até há mais anos.

Participante C: Há 5/7 anos estava a começar a trabalhar e recebia menos do que recebo agora, portanto optava por comprar marcas brancas, por exemplo, refrigerantes. Agora é o oposto, antes comprava Coca-Cola das marcas próprias do Pingo Doce ou do Continente e agora compro a Coca-Cola de marca de distribuidor. Este é só um exemplo, havia várias categorias de produtos que comprava de marca própria. Posso também dizer, da minha experiência pessoal, eu sou vegetariana há 10 anos, e lembro-me que há uns anos não havia tanta variedade deste tipo de produtos nas marcas próprias tinha sempre de optar por marcas de distribuidor. Portanto sinto essa diferença, a forma como vejo as marcas próprias mudou, fiquei mais acostumada a ver uma grande variedade de produtos da marca própria.

Participante D: Lembro-me que, há cinco ou até há dez anos, íamos ao Continente e havia meia dúzia de produtos da marca E, escondidos nem conseguíamos encontrar bem, e no Pingo Doce a mesma coisa, e facto a qualidade era muito baixa. A concorrência do mercado fez com que a qualidade destes produtos aumentasse. E de facto agora aumentou a oferta e aumentou a qualidade, na minha opinião. Agora logo à entrada dos supermercados temos uma grande oferta da marca branca.

Participante E: O mercado de há 10 anos não tem nada a ver com o que é o mercado atual. A oferta é muito, muito maior. Havia poucos produtos e poucas categorias nas marcas próprias e eram as “grandes” marcas de distribuidor que controlavam o mercado. A partir do momento em que a oferta começou a aumentar e a publicidade, que como a participante B disse tem um grande peso, cresceu o mercado revolucionou-se completamente. Não havia estigma, havia era pouca oferta. Havia duas ou três prateleiras no canto do supermercado.

Participante F: Eu não diria que sentia que havia um estigma. Na altura não havia tanta publicidade e o mercado ainda não tinha explorado as marcas próprias. E, portanto, estas marcas eram compradas por pessoas com rendimentos baixos, por necessidade, e não pela qualidade ser melhor ou pior. Nos dias de hoje sinto que o mercado investe muito em marcas próprias e tornou a qualidade dos produtos melhor. Os consumidores, como eu, começaram a perceber isso.

Participante G: Do meu ponto de vista também nunca senti estigma relativamente às marcas brancas. Sempre as vi como uma nova oportunidade para experimentar produtos novos, a preços mais reduzidos, o que ajudava bastante. Concordo que há uns anos não havia tanta publicidade, nem tantos produtos, nem tanta escolha, portanto as pessoas optavam sempre por comprar as marcas distribuidoras. Atualmente este cenário foi ultrapassado. Mas lá está, nunca senti que houvesse um estigma, para mim era uma questão de experimentar e podiam ser boas ou más.

Participante H: Concordo com o que foi dito. Há uns anos não havia grande variedade. Atualmente há e a qualidade dos produtos melhorou muito, mas consumo produtos de marca própria há já muito tempo.

Discussão de Grupo **Essa alteração mudou o vosso consumo de marcas próprias? Em que medidas?**

Moderadora: Penso que houve um consenso nas opiniões: não existia estigma em relação à compra e consumo de marcas brancas, existia era pouca oferta e pouca qualidade. Com o crescente da publicidade, e a importância que alguns mostraram que esta tem, o conhecimento e interesse por marcas próprias aumentou. Passando agora para a próxima pergunta:

Pergunta Nº3 **O pensam sobre a qualidade dos produtos de marca própria versus a qualidade de produtos de marca de fabricante?**

Discussão de Grupo **Conseguem chegar a um consenso sobre existir ou não diferenças na qualidade de ambas as marcas.**

Participante A: Eu acho que atualmente a qualidade de ambas está cada vez mais próxima, cada vez mais ao mesmo nível, cada vez mais iguais.

Participante B: Penso que nos vamos repetir porque sem dúvida que cada marca tem se aperfeiçoado cada vez mais de modo a aproximar-se, e até às vezes a ultrapassar, a marca distribuidora. Também há o contrário, obviamente, há produtos que não chegam lá. Mas penso que, no geral, a qualidade está cada vez mais igual, e em alguns produtos de marca própria eu diria que são melhores. Há produtos que eu utilizo, e que gosto mais da marca branca do que da marca distribuidora.

Participante C: Eu também concordo que regra geral, a qualidade dos produtos de marca própria é boa e está cada vez melhor. E se eu não compro marca própria dos supermercados, é em coisas muito específicas, como disse há pouco, refrigerantes ou sumos, a não ser que seja aquele sumo de laranja natural que se faz na hora. Também quando não compro foi pelo hábito quando ainda vivia em casa dos meus pais de se comprar sempre essa determinada marca de distribuidor, e eu, continuo a comprar esses mesmos produtos. Mas isto acontece apenas com produtos específicos em algumas categorias.

Participante E: Ainda assim há alguns produtos de marca própria que não são de boa qualidade, mas tem havido melhorias. Por exemplo, o *Ice Tea* do Lidl é uma água com cor, não se consegue beber. Há certos produtos que a qualidade ainda não está lá e não se compara com os da marca de distribuidor. Mas há outros que sim, que têm vindo a melhorar.

Participante B: Mas nesses casos a diferença de preço é abismal, um *Ice Tea* da Lipton ou um sumo da Compal e um sumo da marca própria do Lidl, posso comprar 2 ou 3 da marca própria.

Participante E: Exatamente e nesses casos compramos uma vez e nunca mais porque vemos que a qualidade não é boa.

Moderadora: Alguns de vocês já se anteciparam e começaram a responder à próxima pergunta, que é:

Pergunta Nº4 **A categoria do produto interessa na compra de marcas próprias? Há categorias de produtos que nunca compram marca própria ou que compram sempre? E conseguem explicar as razões das vossas escolhas?**

Moderadora: Peço aos que ainda não falaram pensarem não em produtos específicos, mas em categorias de produtos que nunca compram ou compram sempre a marca própria.

Participante B: Eu posso começar, produtos de higiene íntima e produtos para cabelo nunca compro marca própria, mas por exemplo gel de banho, sabonete, pasta dos dentes já uso marca própria. Produtos de limpeza para a casa e para a roupa também não compro marca própria, compro sempre em promoção os de marca de distribuidor. Posso estar no supermercado e pensar em comprar o produto, mas se vir que está no preço normal, espero até que esteja em promoção. A razão é porque sempre comprei daquela marca específica, dou-me bem e nunca pensei em mudar. Mesmo dentro das marcas de distribuidor não mudo, compro sempre os mesmos.

Participante D: Eu posso falar a seguir. No meu caso o que nunca compro de marca branca é o leite, na minha casa bebe-se de uma marca de fornecedor específica e compro sempre esse. Produtos de higiene como a pasta dos dentes já experimentei várias de marca própria e não gosto, não consigo usar, portanto, é também uma marca específica de distribuidor. Mas de resto tudo o que é de uso regular, normalmente, opto pela marca própria.

Participante E: Posso acrescentar mais algumas categorias e preferências que tenho. Produtos de higiene íntima, de uso mais pessoal, não vou para a marca própria, mas tudo o que é para a limpeza da casa, compro marcas próprias. Outra categoria são os doces como as bolachas, sinto diferença na qualidade entre marca própria e de distribuidor. Há bolachas que também são boas de marca própria, mas há outras que não. Para mim é experimentar e ver.

Participante A: Eu concordo com o que o participante B disse, sobretudo produtos de higiene como champôs, amaciadores compro sempre marca do distribuidor, mas por exemplo produtos para a casa não me importo que seja marca própria.

Participante G: Eu posso também dar a minha opinião, a categoria que nunca compro marca própria e que está fora de questão são refrigerantes e gelados também não compro. Produtos como massa, arroz, enlatados, leite compro sempre marca própria.

Participante H: Terminou eu, refrigerantes também não consumo de linha própria, não gosto do sabor não têm qualidade. Produtos de higiene vou testando, mas é raro comprar de linha própria, as experiências que tive não me dei bem. Agora produtos para a casa sim, consumo linha própria e recomendo.

Moderadora: Vamos passar então para a próxima questão:

Pergunta Nº5

Após a compra de um produto de marca própria, o que vos faz voltar a comprar?

Moderadora: Tendo em conta o que falamos até agora. Abordaram a questão de o preço ser geralmente mais baixo nas marcas próprias, mas por outro lado muitos também deram a opinião que quando as marcas de distribuidor estão em promoção o preço é inferior ao de marca própria. Portanto, o que é que vos faz fidelizar a uma marca própria? Que atributos os estes produtos precisam de ter para voltarem a comprar?

Participante A: Para mim tem haver com a qualidade se experimentamos um produto de marca própria e resulta, gostamos, quanto mais gostamos, mais vamos ficar fidelizados e mais vamos ter vontade de voltar a comprar. Mas no caso de já termos uma boa experiência com a marca de distribuidor e vimos que o preço está mais vantajoso, para mim vamos optar por escolher o que tiver o preço mais baixo. Mas o que me faz voltar à marca própria e continuar a comprar, se o preço do produto não fizer grande diferença com a promoção do outro, é ter tido uma boa experiência. Ou seja, sinto que sou 50-50, nem fidelizada a marcas de distribuidor nem a marcas próprias.

Participante B: No meu caso, não posso dizer que sou fiel à marca A, B ou C, seja ela própria ou distribuidora. Vou analisando, semana a semana, tanto o que preciso como o que está em promoção no momento da compra. Por exemplo, hoje vou ao supermercado e a marca de distribuidora CIF, que nunca compro porque tem preços muito mais elevados, está com 50% de desconto, vou comprar tudo o que preciso dessa marca, mas é só hoje. Só voltarei a comprar CIF se daqui a 15 dias, e precisar, estiver novamente em campanha.

Participante C: Para mim fidelizo-me pela qualidade dos produtos, se eu gostar vou voltar a comprar. E também acontece o oposto, se eu comprar e não gostar, provavelmente, nunca mais vou comprar aquele produto porque penso que mais vale investir mais para uma qualidade melhor do que estar a poupar uns centimos e a qualidade não ser assim tão boa. Posso acrescentar que há produtos que compro de marca própria porque são muito mais baratos, mas se vir que uma marca distribuidora está em desconto, vou passar para a marca distribuidora porque, se calhar, eu sei que gosto mais daquele produto, mas não compro com tanta frequência porque é muito mais caro. O que concluo é que, maioritariamente, é a qualidade que me fideliza.

Participante D: No meu caso a vontade, ou desejo, do meu agregado familiar influenciam as minhas compras. Os meus filhos estão uns tempos a adorar uma marca e eu compro sempre essa e depois fartam-se ou veem um produto novo e eu altero as minhas compras.

Participante E: Eu não acho que seja fidelizada nem a marcas próprias nem a marcas de distribuidor. Para mim depende dos nossos gostos, da nossa carteira e também da oferta. E tendo em conta que a oferta no mercado é grande, podemos saltitar entre marcas conforme as nossas prioridades e o que nos satisfaz melhor. Acho que existe sempre um ou dois produtos específicos que somos fidelizados, mas no geral, eu não.

Participante F: Eu sou fidelizada a marcas de distribuidor. A cadeia de retalho é sempre o Continente e depois há produtos de marcas específicas que compro sempre, como por exemplo, a massa é da Barila e o leite da Vigor. Mas lá está não é por ser de qualidade superior em comparação com a marca própria ou com outras marcas de fabricante, mas sim porque foi o hábito que trouxe quando ainda vivia com os meus pais e acabei por me manter nesses produtos. Na verdade, se calhar a massa até é produzida na mesma fábrica e ser igual e o que muda é apenas a embalagem, mas foi um hábito que trouxe.

Participante G: Opto sempre pelas marcas próprias, experimento e se gostar mantenho-me na marca própria. Pontualmente, se houver uma promoção, posso ir para a marca distribuidora, mas sem ser em promoção, para mim, não compensa em termos de qualidade versus preço. Portanto para mim é sempre marca própria a não ser que não goste mesmo dos produtos.

Moderadora: Mais alguém quer acrescentar algum comentário sobre esta questão?

Participante C: Quero acrescentar que como o participante G referiu, eu também mais rapidamente sou fidelizada a marcas distribuidoras do que a marcas próprias. Estava agora a tentar pensar e há alguns produtos que compro sempre a mesma marca de distribuidor. Outro ponto é produtos de cosmética eu compro sempre *cruelty-free*, esse é o meu critério de compra e às vezes as marcas próprias não têm este tipo de produtos.

Participante H: Eu não sou fidelizada nem a marcas de distribuidor nem a marcas próprias. Eu compro pelas campanhas promocionais, por qualidade e pelo preço. Provo, gosto e continuo a comprar.

Pergunta Nº6 Sentem que o design e/ou o branding das embalagens afetam a vossa decisão de compra (consciente ou inconscientemente)?

Discussão de Grupo Assim sendo, sentem que tanto marcas próprias como marcas de fabricante ganham com o “poder” da embalagem na decisão de compra?

Moderadora: Mesmo sendo um processo inconsciente refletindo agora um pouco pensam que são influenciados a comprar certos produtos pela embalagem?

Participante F: Eu posso começar já, quando vivia em casa dos meus pais e tinha maior poder de compra dava-me ao luxo de escolher pela estética do produto. Agora que depende do meu ordenado a estética já não é um fator tão importante na decisão de compra como antes.

Participante E: Eu nunca liguei à embalagem dos produtos. Estou a pensar na diferença do pacote dos filipinos de marca de distribuidor e dos de marca própria e não é a embalagem que me “chama”.

Participante D: A mim não me influencia absolutamente nada.

Participante B: A mim também não influencia, mas eu reconheço que às vezes se souber que os meus filhos vão gostar e ficar contentes porque a embalagem tem bonecos ou é destinada a crianças, posso acabar por levar.

Participante C: Conscientemente, acho que não, mas inconscientemente acho que é possível porque há produtos que quando a pessoa olha para a prateleira captam mais a atenção que outros. Mas depois, olho para o preço e se tiver um valor exorbitante, rapidamente também volto a colocar na prateleira e não compro. Mas depende também do poder de compra de cada pessoa.

Participante D: Eu acho que não é tanto a embalagem, mas a posição dos produtos em loja. Houve um dia, que tive de estar imenso tempo à procura de sal para pôr na máquina de lavar louça. Porque eu sabia qual era o sal que queria, era um saco que traz quase dois quilos de marca própria, mas todos os que estavam à minha frente, traziam muito menos e eram muito caros. E encontrei-o na última prateleira num canto. Eu fui procurar porque sabia que havia, mas se não soubesse, teria de comprar um dos outros de uma marca de distribuidor.

Participante G: Para mim a embalagem não faz diferença. Como disse anteriormente o que me importa é o preço e a qualidade.

Participante H: Na minha opinião também não faz.

Participante A: Eu, conscientemente, concordo que não sou influenciada pelas embalagens, mas, inconscientemente, posso às vezes já ter achado algum produto mais atrativo pela sua embalagem e acabar por o escolher. Mas quando isto acontece continuo a ir comparar nos produtos alternativos as características do produto e o preço. Agora se pensar em embalagens ecológicas penso que há muitas pessoas que os comprem por isso, porque associam à embalagem um produto de qualidade superior, mesmo nem sempre sendo assim.

Pergunta Nº7 **Sentem que a posição em loja dos produtos de marca própria (estarem no mesmo corredor dos produtos de marca de fabricante ou estarem num corredor só de produtos de marca própria) afeta a compra?**

Participante A: Eu acho que a posição ajuda a fazer uma comparação mais rápida entre os produtos de marca própria versus de distribuidor. Mas produtos que já se comprem regularmente e que já sabemos onde estão já se vai em direção a esse sítio, portanto se tiver um produto de marca própria ao lado de um de distribuidor já não influencia tanto.

Participante E: Não sei o que em norma os supermercados fazem, mas se optarem por juntar é uma grande vantagem para o consumidor. No meu caso quando quero um produto vou direito ao seu corredor, seja onde for e percorro o supermercado à procura.

Participante D: A minha opinião é a mesma do participante E. Para mim os produtos estão todos colocados estrategicamente, antigamente havia as promoções semanais e estes produtos estavam na estante logo à entrada. Agora há produtos que estão em promoção misturados com outros que não estão, mas ambos no mesmo corredor. Eu vou diretamente aos corredores que sei que têm as marcas dos produtos que quero comprar.

Participante B: Eu acho que quando estamos nas compras, por exemplo no corredor das massas, estão lá todas as massas tanto das marcas de distribuidor como da marca própria. Às vezes quando querem destacar um produto põem ao meio, num caixote, a indicar que está em campanha ou em promoção, mas a verdade, é que esse produto pode continuar mais caro do que o produto da marca própria, e as pessoas podem ser levadas a comprar aquele porque está em maior destaque. No meu caso eu nunca vou às compras e faço apenas um corredor, se passei no corredor da massa e peguei numa para comprar quando passo no corredor das promoções

daquela semana e verificar que há outra massa que compense mais levar, altero a minha escolha. A verdade é que temos de estar sempre atentos.

Participante C: Eu acho que influência a compra, tal como a participante A disse, se ambas as marcas, a de distribuidor e a própria estiverem no mesmo corredor. Por exemplo no meu caso sei que a granola Pingo Doce está noutro corredor, das restantes granolas de marca de distribuidor, e desloco-me até lá. A não ser que o supermercado decida fazer aquelas reconfigurações, e mude o artigo de sítio, obrigando-me a estar à procura e a passar por outros corredores, e a olhar e comprar novos produtos. Mas digamos que mesmo que o produto de marca própria não esteja no mesmo corredor dos de marca de fabricante, se eu já o compro, e sei onde está, vou me deslocar a outro corredor para o comprar.

Participante G: Eu não vejo a posição em loja como um fator diferenciador. No meu ponto de vista o que pode acontecer é quando a pessoa não conhece a marca própria de um determinado artigo, e esta, não está no mesmo corredor das restantes, não a comprar.

Appendix C: 2º Focus Group Transcript

Moderadora: Este *focus group* terá como temática as marcas próprias, mais conhecidas como marcas brancas, nos estabelecimentos de comércio alimentar. Partilho agora uma imagem com as categorias das marcas próprias, e alguns exemplos de superfícies de retalho, para terem consciência quais são, enquanto decorre esta conversa. Neste momento existem quatro categorias de marcas próprias: a categoria *premium*, a categoria *standard*, a categoria económica e a categoria saudável. As restantes marcas são conhecidas como marcas de distribuidor ou de fornecedor e será essa a terminologia que irei usar ao longo deste *focus group*. Como me confirmaram antecipadamente, todos compram marcas próprias correto? E têm conhecimento de quais são estas marcas. Vou agora começar com a primeira pergunta:

Pergunta Nº1 **Quando estão nas compras, num supermercado, o que mais influencia a vossa decisão de compra?**

Participante A: Para mim é um misto entre qualidade e preço, se estivermos a falar de um produto que eu acho melhor e que a diferença são 30 ou 40 cêntimos em 2,5 euros, eu vou comprar pelo que tem mais qualidade. Agora, mesmo que tenha mais qualidade, mas é o dobro do preço, vou optar por outro que tenha menos qualidade, mas é metade do preço.

Participante C: De uma forma geral é o preço. O preço está sempre em primeiro lugar para mim, mas se o mesmo produto me oferece, a mesma qualidade, os mesmos benefícios, vou para aquilo que estou habituada.

Participante D: Para mim depende da categoria, higiene íntima, produtos para o cabelo, compro pela qualidade. Apesar de haver produtos mais baratos eu escolho pelo que já uso e gosto, os que me dou bem. As categorias que valorizo compro pela qualidade e as restantes vou mais pelo preço.

Participante E: Eu compro aquilo que já sei que gosto, compro pelo que para mim tem qualidade, muitas vezes independente do preço.

Participante F: Bem prático pensar entre preço ou qualidade. O meu propósito, é esse. Se eu quero um produto para usar no dia a dia, vou gastar menos, opto pelo preço. Se é para uma ocasião especial, vou pela qualidade.

Participante G: Para mim é mais qualidade e hábito, sim, posso dizer que no geral o preço fica para segundo plano.

Participante H: Eu acho que atualmente os consumidores preocupam-se com os ingredientes dos produtos. Veem se os produtos são biológicos ou não. Dá logo para distinguir pela embalagem produtos de marca própria biológica, e quem compra esse tipo de produtos, vai logo ver esses. E realmente o que acontece é que há produtos que a qualidade nutricional da marca de distribuidor é melhor, tem menos gordura ou menos açúcar, que a marca própria. Eu acho que isso sim é que define a escolha no momento da compra e não o facto de ser marca própria ou não.

Participante G: Eu quero acrescentar que as gerações mais novas, incluindo pessoas *millennials* ligam muito a fatores que não só o preço e a qualidade, como os valores que a marca transmite e a forma como a marca interage com os consumidores. Acho que isso também é muito importante, por exemplo, marcas de beleza se é *cruelty free*, ou seja, se testam ou não em animais, sinto que isso afeta muito as pessoas da minha idade e pessoas ligeiramente mais velhas, que são consideradas *millennials*, e também acho que são fatores que são tidos cada vez mais em conta por estes consumidores.

Participante D: Eu acho que a opinião do participante G é de nexo. Há muitas pessoas com essas preocupações sim, mas não é a regra. Eu também tenho um pouco essa preocupação, já tive mais na verdade, via os rótulos dos produtos, mas na altura da compra é complicado e fica um pouco para trás.

Participante B: Também gostaria de dar a minha opinião. Embalagens ecológicas, produtos *cruelty free* influenciam-me, mas não posso dizer que esteja ativamente à procura desses produtos ou sinais nas embalagens. Mas se eu vir que é, opto por comprar.

Discussão de Grupo **Conseguem chegar a um consenso dos três fatores que mais valorizam quando tomam uma decisão de compra?**

Participante F: Primeiro o preço, certo? Depois diria que a marca do produto. E não sei para os restantes, mas para mim é a promoção, acho que valem sempre a pena.

Participante C: Sim concordo as promoções influenciam as minhas compras, há produtos que só compro por estarem em promoção, principalmente os de marca de distribuidor. Não os costumo comprar, exceto se tiverem em promoção.

Participante A: Concordo com o participante F para mim as promoções influenciam, principalmente, nos produtos ou categorias que a diferença de preço é maior. Por exemplo um detergente para a roupa ou máquina de marca de distribuidor é 2 ou 3 vezes mais caro que de marca própria. Quando estes produtos estão em promoção altero a minha escolha habitual, que seria o de marca branca.

Participante E: Também concordo porque quando há descontos são descontos brutais. Vou dar um exemplo, compro gel duche da Dove, normalmente é 6€, em desconto consigo comprar por 2€. Aí aproveito e compro em maior quantidade.

Pergunta Nº2 **Sentem que existe ou existia estigma em comprar e consumir marcas próprias?**
Sentem que a vossa perceção ou conhecimento das marcas próprias se alterou nos últimos anos (últimos 7 a 10 anos)?

Participante A: Acho que nos últimos anos o estigma existente em relação às marcas próprias passou, completamente, para segundo plano. Para mim, muitas vezes há mais qualidade nas marcas próprias do que nas de distribuidor. As fábricas onde são produzidas, ambas as marcas, são as mesmas. Vou dar um exemplo, tenho um colega que trabalha numa produtora de iogurtes em Castelo Branco. Eles produzem tanto a marca Danone como produzem a marca própria para uma superfície alimentar. Portanto, só muda o rótulo. E se formos à Deco Proteste comparar os produtos e as marcas conseguimos perceber estas situações de forma mais clara.

Participante E: Eu não concordo a 100% com o participante A, eu acho que depende muito do tipo de marca própria que estamos a falar. Por exemplo, no Pingo Doce, eu compro muito a marca própria, é tudo bom. Se estivermos a falar da marca própria do Mini Preço, não compro nada, são produtos maus, sem qualidade. Portanto, neste último caso, a perceção ou estigma que tinha há 5-10 anos mantem-se.

Participante A: Completando o que o Participante E disse, obviamente, que varia de superfície para superfície. Mas a pergunta é o estigma e para mim esse estigma não existe. E a única coisa, atualmente, que eu diria que ainda limita a compra de marcas próprias, é alguns consumidores terem aquele *mindset* muito antigo que as marcas de distribuidor é que são boas. Mas para mim isso acontece em gerações mais velhas, pessoas com 50

ou mais anos. Agora para a geração que está presente neste *focus group Millennials*, acho que todos já ultrapassamos isso.

Participante C: Para mim no geral havia preconceito não por estigma mas pela falta de conhecimento, que nós consumidores tínhamos. Nos últimos tempos vê-se uma diferença enorme e por isso é que também, como o Participante E dizia, conseguimos diferenciar as marcas próprias uma das outras. Mas eu sempre consumi muito marcas próprias.

Participante G: Principalmente com a vinda do Mercadona para a área Metropolitana de Lisboa, sinto que a nossa geração, os *Millennials*, perdeu muito esse estigma. Pelo menos é o que eu ouço destas pessoas, dizem todas que passaram a comprar a marca própria de categorias que antes nunca comprariam, como produtos de higiene íntima, produtos de cabelo ou para a pele e acham sempre muitos bons.

Participante F: Posso acrescentar que para mim o fim desse estigma pode ter sido impulsionado por estarmos numa altura de crise, e, portanto, os consumidores começaram a procurar alternativas. Ao perceberem que os produtos de marca própria afinal são bons, mantêm-se.

Participante G: Concordo com o que o Participante F disse, antigamente, quando ainda vivia em casa dos meus pais comprava-se sempre leite de marca de distribuidor, atualmente já não.

Participante H: No meu caso foi igual, antes quase todos os produtos que comprava eram de marca de distribuidor, agora não penso nada assim. Na verdade, a origem dos produtos é a mesma só altera a embalagem.

Participante D: Antigamente eu importava-me muito mais em escolher produtos de marcas de distribuidor. Mas agora não faço distinção entre marcas de distribuidor versus marcas próprias. Compro pelo produto, pela qualidade. E passei a comprar muito mais produtos de marca própria.

Participante B: Eu partilho da mesma opinião da Participante D. Já não sinto qualquer preconceito em comprar marcas próprias, e também por existir uma maior oferta, compro muito mais produtos destas marcas.

Discussão de Grupo **Essa alteração mudou o vosso consumo de marcas próprias? Em que medidas?**

(A maioria dos participantes concordaram que o seu consumo de marcas próprias aumentou nos últimos anos exceto o participante C)

Participante C: Eu sempre consumi marcas próprias e nunca senti esse estigma. O exemplo da “febre” que as pessoas estão agora pelos produtos Mercadona. Esses produtos só são considerados baratos para quem antes não comprava marca própria. Porque uma pessoa que já está habituada a comprar vê que não são assim tão baratos.

Pergunta Nº3 **O pensam sobre a qualidade dos produtos de marca própria versus a qualidade de produtos de marca de fabricante?**

Discussão de Grupo **Conseguem chegar a um consenso sobre existir ou não diferenças na qualidade de ambas as marcas.**

Participante E: Foi o que já referi. Para mim a qualidade da marca própria versus a marca de fabricante depende da superfície de retalho. Eu acho que tens superfícies em que a marca própria é bastante melhor que noutras superfícies. Da minha perspetiva e da minha experiência, normalmente, a qualidade destes produtos vem de superfícies que são geridas por empresas portuguesas e que vão, na maior parte das vezes, procurar produtores

e agricultores nacionais ou espanhóis, da Península Ibérica, como é o caso do Pingo Doce. Por outro lado, cadeias como o Mini Preço, onde os produtos de marca própria não têm tanta qualidade, são maioritariamente franceses.

Participante G: Para mim a qualidade depende muito do tipo de produto. Há produtos que não compro marca própria, porque para mim não tem qualidade, e há outros que compro sempre. Depende muito do que estiver a comprar e de onde estou a comprar.

Participante H: Acho que a qualidade também depende muito do que a marca pretende construir. Os produtos das linhas económicas, o foco não é a qualidade, mas sim o preço e o consumidor também assimila isso.

Participante B: Eu acho que não consigo fazer bem a distinção de qualidade por marca própria ou de fabricante, mas por tipo de produto. Imagina, produtos de higiene íntima compro sempre de marca própria. Se for comprar bolachas ou batatas fritas por eu já ter experimentado das marcas próprias, e conseguir perceber a diferença que há na qualidade, vou para a marca de distribuidor. Mas sim há diferença na qualidade, mas como disse depende muito do tipo de produto que estamos a pensar.

Participante A: Para mim é 50-50, há categorias que as qualidades dos produtos de fabricante são melhores, noutras ganham na qualidade os produtos de marca própria e noutras é igual. Depende do tipo de produto, poderá haver fórmulas mais difíceis de replicar, como a Coca-Cola. Outros são produtos nas mesmas fábricas levam os mesmos ingredientes só muda a embalagem.

Participante F: Eu estou de acordo com a maioria, depende muito de qual é o tipo de produto e do que é que eu estou à procura. Se são compras do mês ou uma compra semanal com produtos do dia-a-dia, para mim vale a pena o que for mais barato. Se eu estou a comprar para um momento especial, para um almoço em família, geralmente eu compro produtos de marca de fabricante. Porquê? Porque eu também sei o *status* do produto. Nesses momentos não vou comprar de marca própria, compro quando é só para mim e para consumir no dia a dia. Sei que a minha mãe gosta de um produto de uma determinada marca de distribuidor por isso nessas ocasiões especiais aproveito para comprar.

Participante C: Para mim ambas as marcas têm qualidade. Como o participante H disse, penso que as categorias de marca própria onde não há tanta qualidade é por estratégia. Consegue-se distinguir esses produtos, há menos investimento na embalagem e rótulo, há menos divulgação ou conhecimento por parte dos consumidores da sua existência e mesmo o posicionamento em loja é diferente, estão em prateleiras para baixas, ou mais altas.

Participante D: Eu também diria que é 50-50. Há produtos que a qualidade não difere, portanto é muito fácil comprar a marca própria. Há outros produtos que já não é bem assim. Marcas de distribuidor muito conhecidas como a Coca-cola ou as bolachas Oreo, os consumidores já sabem ao que é que aquilo tem que saber, qual é que vai ser a textura. E a partir daí quando experimentam outras marcas e não é igual, têm mais tendência para dizer que não é bom. Isso acontece porque, primeiramente, já provaram outro produto, que passa a ser a referência.

Participante B: Completando, é o momento quando a de marca distribuidor já está tão estabelecida, que já é a *top of mind* e abaixo disso já não te satisfazes. É o caso das Pringles. Não há nenhuma marca que consiga replicar o sabor, a textura, portanto a qualidade das Pringles.

Pergunta Nº4

A categoria do produto interessa na compra de marcas próprias? Há categorias de produtos que nunca comprem marca própria ou que comprem sempre? E conseguem explicar as razões das vossas escolhas?

Participante H: No meu caso nunca compro marca própria, na categoria de higiene íntima. Compro sempre em massas, arroz e a categoria de congelados. Por exemplo, se um produto de marca de distribuidor tiver ao mesmo preço da marca própria, levo sempre o da marca de distribuidor. Faço isso inconscientemente. Mas há produtos que eu prefiro mesmo de marca própria.

Moderadora: Mesmo que ambas as marcas estejam ao mesmo preço?

Participante H: Não, lá está, aí inconscientemente, se estiver ao mesmo preço, vou levar por marca de distribuidor.

Participante G: No meu caso, comida, depende do tipo de comida, mas normalmente não compro de marca própria, nem produtos de higiene íntima. Agora, se for produtos de limpeza para casa, é tudo de marca própria. A razão é gosto pessoal e o hábito, independente do preço.

Participante D: Eu dou mais valor a produtos para cabelo, portanto esses artigos compro de marca de distribuidor. Agora, por exemplo gel de duche, produtos para a casa compro sempre de marca branca.

Participante C: Acho que sou como a participante G, no sentido em que há artigos que eu compro sempre de marca de própria, mas se a marca de fornecedor tiver em promoção, inclino-me mais para comprar essa. Mas de forma geral, opto sempre por comprar marca própria, produtos de limpeza, higiene íntima, alguns produtos alimentares. É uma questão de preferência e hábito também. Faço a minha lista de compras, já sei os preços, já estou habituada, sei o que esperar dos produtos, portanto opto pelos mesmos artigos.

Participante A: Eu, ultimamente, tenho mudado o meu comportamento, porque eu fazia isso, quando os preços eram idênticos optava pela marca de distribuidor. Agora analiso melhor os produtos, comparo o preço por quantidade. E passei a notar que para as marcas de distribuidor igualarem o preço à marca própria têm menos produto. Agora que faço esta comparação, mesmo que os produtos de marca de distribuidor estejam em desconto, opto pela marca própria.

Participante E: Sou como o participante G, há várias categorias que eu não compro marca própria. Produtos de higiene, comida para o animal ou água. Não o faço porque ou não gosto do sabor, ou da qualidade. Em determinadas superfícies de retalho como é caso do Pingo Doce acabo por ir para a marca própria. Mas no geral tenho mais restrições de categorias nas quais não compro a marca própria.

Participante F: Os três fatores que considere como os mais importantes no processo de decisão de compra: preço, promoção e marca, são as razões das minhas escolhas. Agora se o preço das marcas próprias versus marcas de distribuidor for igual, opto sempre por marca de distribuidor.

Participante B: Para mim depende do produto. Há categorias como gelados que gosto dos da marca própria e compro sempre esses, mesmo que as marca de distribuidor esteja em desconto.

Pergunta Nº5 **Após a compra de um produto de marca própria, o que vos faz voltar a comprar? Sentem que são fidelizados ou não a marcas próprias?**

Participante D: Para mim é o preço-qualidade. Principalmente a qualidade. Se noto diferença, na qualidade de um artigo, por exemplo um shampoo de determinada marca deixa o meu cabelo, notavelmente, diferente, ou que eu gosto mais, eu vou sempre comprar aquela marca, independentemente de haver outros mais baratos ou de igual preço.

Participante E: Há artigos de marca própria que compro sempre, nem sequer comparo as alternativas de outras marcas. Vou dar um exemplo, o detergente para roupa do Pingo Doce, deixa um cheiro que dura dias na roupa, e os de marca de distribuidor isso não acontece, portanto compro sempre aquele. Por outras palavras, se eu gosto do produto, independentemente, se é marca própria ou não, eu vou sempre escolher esse produto. Aí não comparo preço ou promoções.

Participante C: Eu não sou fiel a marcas, nem próprias nem de distribuidor, portanto, se outras marcas me oferecem os mesmos benefícios e é mais barato, vou alterar a minha compra, não vou estar sempre a comprar um produto só porque é da marca X. Se vir que outro produto está mais barato e vai me oferecer os mesmos atributos, não tenho problema nenhum em alterar.

Participante A: Eu percebi nesta conversa que sou fidelizado é aos produtos da marca Pingo Doce. Mas se tiver noutra superfície de retalho não me sinto fidelizado nem às marcas de distribuidor, nem à marca própria. Sinto que é experimentar, corre bem, repito, não corre bem, não volto a experimentar. Mas já experimentei bastantes marcas e por vezes corria mal, portanto agora, sinto que já tenho as marcas dos produtos que compro escolhidas e estou mais fidelizado a repetir a compra.

Participante B: Eu sou zero fidelizada. Mas no meu dia a dia compro mais marcas próprias.

Participante D: Geralmente compro marcas próprias em produtos que não valorizo tanto. Os artigos que valorizo, estou sempre à procura de melhores. Mesmo quando já é uma escolha segura, há sempre espaço para encontrar um produto melhor de outra marca. Também tenho várias marcas que eu gosto e vou alternando entre elas de acordo com o preço. E quando faço essa substituição opto por marca de distribuidor.

Participante F: Eu sou fidelizado em alguns produtos, porém, os três pontos que falei, anteriormente, preço, promoção e marca, alteram muito a minha fidelização. Por exemplo, eu adoro um vinho específico, vou ao Mini Preço, está a um preço, vou ao Pingo Doce, está a metade do preço, isso altera a minha decisão de compra. Ou, por exemplo, dois vinhos, um que eu gosto muito, o outro nunca provei, mas se esse está com uma promoção de 70%, vou experimentar.

Participante E: Eu sou uma pessoa fidelizada, mas mais a produtos de marca de distribuidor.

Participante H: Eu costumo comprar sempre as mesmas marcas, e quase sempre marca própria, exceto as categorias que já referi que compro marca de distribuidor. Das várias marcas próprias, compro específicas dependente do produto. Por exemplo, cappuccino compro sempre o de uma marca própria do Lidl, se for ao Jumbo não vou comprar o deles. Sinto que sou mais fiel às marcas próprias porque se houver uma mudança de preço no mesmo artigo nas marcas de distribuidor, vou alterar a minha escolha.

Participante C: Eu não me sinto fiel, sou fiel a algumas marcas sim, mas no geral facilmente considero outras opções, experimento, não vou estar sempre a restringir-me, a uma certa marca por achar que é a melhor. Eu posso experimentar e depois descobrir que há outra melhor. Ou seja, normalmente mantenho as minhas opções, mas existem fatores que me fazem optar por um produto de outra marca, como a oscilação de preços de cada produto, em cada semana.

Participante G: Eu acho que sou mais fiel a marcas de distribuidor. As categorias que dou mais valor, como produtos para cabelo, não compro nem uso mesmo marca própria. Também há exceções e há produtos de marca própria que vou ao supermercado de propósito para comprar, como bebida vegetal, porque sinto que há diferença, tem uma qualidade superior.

Pergunta Nº6 **Sentem que o design e/ou o branding das embalagens afetam a vossa decisão de compra (consciente ou inconscientemente)?**

Discussão de Grupo **Assim sendo, sentem que tanto marcas próprias como marcas de fabricante ganham com o “poder” da embalagem na decisão de compra?**

Participante A: Atualmente, a minha perceção é que a embalagem é só uma embalagem. Portanto, não me diz o que é o produto. Mas agora que penso em marcas próprias específicas, a embalagem, o pacote do produto tem algum peso ou influência, agora ao pensar no assunto, têm um peso negativo, têm a conotação de baixa qualidade. Já as da marca própria do Pingo Doce, que como disse anteriormente é a única marca que sou fiel, não me transmitem nenhum peso negativo em qualquer das embalagens. Eu nem percebo que é Pingo Doce à vista desarmada, se não for procurar pelo *logo*. Eu achava que não era influenciado pela “estética” do produto, mas agora corrijo o meu pensamento. Eu olho para as embalagens e para mim, se me dissessem que isto é a marca Bom Petisco, acho que não se afasta muito. Se disserem que este é Renova, a embalagem está idêntica.

Participante H: Não sinto que seja influenciada, a não ser que haja alguma indecisão. Se for comprar um novo produto, vou comparar as várias embalagens do mesmo produto, e posso decidir por isso.

Participante G: Eu acho que me influencia, principalmente, se estivermos a falar de embalagens sustentáveis, nestes casos compro pela embalagem sim. Quando compro um produto pela primeira vez, o design e formato da embalagem afeta bastante, e de forma consciente, a minha decisão. Por exemplo, geralmente associo cores mais neutras/pastel a uma marca mais premium o que me leva a optar por esse produto. Embalagens ergonómicas, como por exemplo de leite que não salpica ou que são de fácil abertura/fecho (em vez de cortar manualmente) são importantes para mim.

Participante D: Sim, eu acho influencia. No caso dos produtos de higiene, por exemplo, o que leva muitos consumidores, inclusive eu, a nem sequer experimentar, é associar a embalagem a um produto de qualidade inferior.

Participante E: Concordo com o participante D. Há embalagens, principalmente nessa categoria, que transparecem produtos fracos, sem qualidade. Portanto na minha opinião sim a embalagem afeta a minha compra.

Participante B: Na minha opinião o design dos produtos pode-me influenciar, se tiver um aspeto apelativo é mais provável que compre. Mas para mim a qualidade do produto é que se sobrepõe. Se eu souber que um produto é bom e se for de marca própria, o design do produto não irá afetar a minha compra.

Participante C: Eu tenho uma opinião contrária, não me afeta porque sei à partida que as marcas próprias têm uma embalagem mais fraca para tornar o produto com um preço mais acessível.

Participante F: Penso que sim, já que o sentido visão tem muito peso. E como tal, inconscientemente, opta-se por uma embalagem esteticamente bem conseguida. O que pode afastar os consumidores da compra de produtos de marca própria, porque algumas das embalagens são simples, sem design, não tão atrativas.

Pergunta Nº7 **Sentem que a posição em loja dos produtos de marca própria (estarem no mesmo corredor dos produtos de marca de fabricante ou estarem num corredor só de produtos de marca própria) afeta a compra?**

Participante H: Na minha opinião acho que compro mais marcas próprias se estiverem junto às marcas de distribuidor. Por exemplo, há superfícies que têm um corredor só de marcas próprias, e não me dá vontade de passar lá.

Participante E: Concordo com o participante H, os corredores que está a falar, normalmente, não são convidativos, eu também não passo de propósito por lá. Portanto, mais facilmente compro um produto de marca própria se tiver junto com os mesmos produtos de marca de fabricante.

Participante A: Para mim, a percepção que o consumidor tem de um produto de marca própria é melhor quando este está próximo das marcas de distribuidor. Quando estão separadas ou apenas marcas próprias parece que estão a querer “impingir” só pelo preço ser mais baixo. Apesar da decisão de compra de marcas própria ser muito influenciada pelo preço, parece uma decisão mais vantajosa quando se está a comparar uma massa Milanesa com uma massa Pingo Doce, do que ir para o corredor das promoções.

Participante F: Eu concordo, não me desloco a um corredor diferente para ir buscar um produto de marca própria. Agora, se por exemplo, a superfície de retalho fizesse um *trade marketing* que posiciona a marca própria numa posição específica, mais atrativa dentro de um supermercado, talvez eu estaria mais focado e atento a esse produto. Caso fosse apenas um corredor com várias marcas próprias, eu não ia passar por lá de propósito.

Participante D: Trazendo uma perspetiva diferente, se estivermos a falar de produtos da categoria saudável ou bio da marca própria eu acho que é mais vantajoso estarem todos juntos. Já sei que são bons, são em princípio mais baratos que os outros de marca de distribuidor, então estarem afastados até ajuda de certa forma.

Participante E: Concordo a 100% com o que o participante D acabou de dizer.

Participante A: Vou acrescentar o seguinte, até há pouco tempo tinha por hábito ir ao corredor das promoções, por impulso para não sentir que estava a “perder” uma boa oferta e comprava porque estava mais barato e nem sempre corria bem, tanto marcas de distribuidor como próprias. Agora já não. Tenho definido o que é que eu quero comprar, o que é que eu preciso, para já não cair na tentação de ir ao corredor das promoções levar artigos desnecessários. Vou direto a produtos que eu quero e que muitos deles, para não dizer grande parte, são de marca própria.

Participante E: Eu concordo com a Participante D. Para mim a influência da embalagem está, diretamente, relacionada com a categoria que estamos a pensar, se a standard, económica, saudável ou *premium*. Se for um corredor só de marcas próprias, todas em promoção, geralmente é a categoria económica, eu não vou passar por lá. Mas se for um corredor só de produtos saudáveis de marca própria, vou, muitas vezes, direto a essa parte antes de sequer ir a outros corredores no supermercado.

Participante B: Na minha opinião, a posição do produto afeta porque estando as marcas próprias junto das marcas de distribuidor posso comparar os preços, e como a qualidade de ambas as marcas é equiparável, influencia a minha compra sim.

Participante C: Para mim também afeta, porque se os produtos de marca própria tiverem deslocados dos outros da mesma categoria, eu não vou à procura deles. Normalmente tento que a ida às compras seja algo rápido, portanto não vou percorrer todos os corredores.

Participante G: Para mim não afeta porque já tenho planeado, pelo meu gosto e hábito, comprar certos produtos de marca própria e outros não.

Appendix D: Code List MAXQDA 2022 – 1º Focus Group

Lista de Códigos	Frequência
Lista de Códigos	113
7. PLs store positioning	0
Active in-store PLs search	0
PLs near NBs improves PLs perceived quality	5
Minimal influence of store positioning on purchase decisions	1
PLs near NBs improves perceived shopping experience	4
PLs near NBs improves direct comparison	4
6. Packaging design and branding	0
Extrinsic cues influence perceived quality	4
Recognition of eco-friendly packaging influence	1
Subconscious Influence	2
Influenced by child-oriented packaging	1
Influence on first-time purchases	3
Lack of extrinsic cues effect on purchase decision	1
5. Repurchase Motivators for PLs	0
Influence of family on repurchase	0
Store image	6
Value for money	4
Lack of brand loyalty for PLs	4
Influence of in-store NBs promotions	3
Previous positive experience	2
Product perceived quality	5
PLs product categories and purchase decisions	0
Perceived lower quality in PL sweets and biscuits	0
Preference for PLs in packaged food items and dairy category	2
Avoidance of PL purchase in soft drinks category	2
Preference for PLs in household cleaning and laundry products	3
Preference for PLs across most categories	3
Consistent brand loyalty and purchasing behavior	2
Avoidance of PL purchases for personal care and hygiene categor	4
3. PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality	0

Specific PL products of perceived higher quality	2
PLs perceived quality depends on product category	3
Specific preferences in certain categories for NBs	5
Specific PL products of perceived good quality	2
Specific PL products of perceived lower quality	2
Equivalence perceived quality between PLs and NBs	5
2. Perception and stigma of Private Labels	0
Advertisement impact	0
Economic context	3
Quality improvement	4
Offer and variety of products improvement	5
1. Purchase decision factors	0
Evaluation of product quantity versus price	1
Previous experience and product knowledge	3
Intrinsic cues	1
In-store promotions	1
Value for money	3
Product perceived quality	3
Price	4

Appendix E: Code List MAXQDA 2022 – 2º Focus Group

Lista de Códigos	Frequência
Lista de Códigos	122
7. PLs store positioning	0
PLs near NBs improves PLs perceived quality	5
Minimal influence of store positioning on purchase decisions	1
PLs near NBs improves perceived shopping experience	4
PLs near NBs improves direct comparison	4
6. Packaging design and branding	0
Extrinsic cues influence perceived quality	4
Recognition of eco-friendly packaging influence	1
Subconscious Influence	2
Influenced by child-oriented packaging	1
Influence on first-time purchases	3
Lack of extrinsic cues effect on purchase decision	1
5. Repurchase Motivators for PLs	0
Store image	6
Value for money	4
Lack of brand loyalty for PLs	4
Influence of in-store NBs promotions	3
Previous positive experience	2
Product perceived quality	5
4. Consumer preferences and considerations for PL purchases acr	0
Preference for PLs in packaged food items and dairy category	2
Avoidance of PL purchase in soft drinks category	2
Preference for PLs in household cleaning and laundry products	3
Preference for PLs across most categories	3
Consistent brand loyalty and purchasing behavior	2
Avoidance of PL purchases for personal care and hygiene categor	4
3. PLs perceived quality vs. NBs perceived quality	0
Occasion-based perceived quality assessment	1
Specific PL products of perceived higher quality	2
Perception that only extrinsic cues differ (the manufacturing p	1

PLs perceived quality depends on the product line	2
PLs perceived quality differs by retailer	3
PLs perceived quality depends on product category	3
Specific preferences in certain categories for NBs	5
Specific PL products of perceived good quality	2
Specific PL products of perceived lower quality	2
Equivalence perceived quality between PLs and NBs	5
2. Perception and stigma of Private Labels	0
Economic context	3
Quality improvement	4
Offer and variety of products improvement	5
1. Purchase decision factors	0
Extrinsic cues: Product ethical considerations (cruelty free pr	2
Evaluation of product quantity versus price	1
Previous experience and product knowledge	3
Intrinsic cues: Product ingredients	1
In-store promotions	1
Value for money	3
Product perceived quality	3
Price	4