EAI Endorsed Transactions
on Smart Business and Innovation
Research Article EAI.EU

Why Do Zillennials Trust Own-Label Brands? The Role of Retailer Image in Activating Own-Label Brand Purchase Intention through the S-O-R Model

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive retailing context and amid the rising trend of own-label brands (OBs) development, retailers are compelled to continuously innovate to meet the diverse and ever-changing needs of consumers. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the degree to which store image influences purchase intention among Zillennial consumers in Ho Chi Minh City through the mediating roles of OB image, perceived OB value, and OB loyalty. Using purposive sampling, the study collected 588 valid questionnaires and employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed research model. The results indicate that store image has a positive impact on both OB image and perceived OB value, which in turn affect brand loyalty and purchase intention among Zillennials. From a theoretical perspective, the research findings enrich and broaden the conceptual framework of purchasing decision-making for OB products. Furthermore, this study provides a solid basis for retailers to formulate and implement effective strategies for the growth and improvement of their OBs.

Keywords: Own-label brand, Purchase intention, S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response), Store image, Zillennials.

Received on 05 March 2026, accepted on 18 May 2026, published on 27 May 2026

doi: 10.4108/

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1. Introduction

Own-label brands (OBs) denote brands that are owned by retailers and exclusively offered in their own establishments [1]. OBs have traditionally been perceived as low-quality alternatives whose appeal lies primarily in their lower price point compared to manufacturer brands [2]. However, today OBs are perceived as trusted and valuable brands that can compete directly with other brands [3]. In business, retailers often focus on high-profit products, where the profit margins of OBs are higher than those of other suppliers' brands, so more and more retailers tend to develop their OBs [4]. More importantly, retailers view OBs as a strategic tool to enhance sales performance and differentiate themselves from competitors [5]. Because of these benefits, retailers have shown a strong preference for their OBs, allowing them to develop far beyond the vision of manufacturer brands. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly evident as most major retailers have implemented OB campaigns across multiple product categories [3]. Prominent examples include Amazon Basics by Amazon and Great Value by Walmart in the United States, as well as Simply Nature by Aldi in Germany. In the United States, OB sales reached USD 271 billion in 2024, representing a 3.9% increase compared to 2023 and a market share growth of 0.3% over the same period [6].

The growth of OBs is not only in Western markets but also expanding to Eastern countries. According to the OB Report, the OB market in Asia has been growing steadily, with OB FMCG accounting for 6.1% of the Asia Pacific market by 2022 [6]. Additionally, consumers are now more willing to buy OB products and are satisfied to have OB product lines in the stores they shop at [7]. Due to the increasing significance of OBs, both conceptual and empirical research has broadened their focus beyond manufacturer brands to further explore these phenomena more thoroughly [2].

Since the emergence of the OB concept, numerous studies have been conducted in the expansive domain; however, existing literature suggests that private branding is an area that still requires more in-depth academic research [8-10]. Particularly, González-Benito and Martos-Partal [11] illustrate a positive relationship between price sensitivity and perceived quality in OB consumption. Besides, Dzulhijatussarah and Defrizal [12] also conducted a similar study and discovered the influence of price and quality on consumers' purchase intention (PI) toward OB products. Nevertheless, most existing studies mainly focused on price and quality and have not fully exploited the role of retail chain image as a fundamental factor affecting the intention to purchase OB products. Furthermore, according to Ravi and Prasad [13], greater research attention should be devoted to examining the processes through which retailers develop brand images and the subsequent effects on consumers' perceptions of OBs.

Indeed, there are relatively few studies elucidating the psychological mechanisms that prompt Zillennials to react to store image and OB cues within a robust theoretical framework. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) hypothesis proposed by Mehrabian and Russell [14] remains effective in elucidating how environmental stimuli influence individuals' cognitive and emotional states, which subsequently lead to consumer behavioral responses [14]. Interestingly, several studies employing S-O-R show that retailers providing quality products and services, store design, or display layout are able to trigger information processing and create responses such as satisfaction, trust, or intention to continue shopping [15, 16]. In addition, the S-O-R model has also provided a validated theoretical foundation in many contexts other than retail, from travel behavior to consumer reactions on "Black Friday" (the fourth Friday of November every year), demonstrating the model's robustness and flexibility [17, 18]. Therefore, applying S-O-R to this study is not only theoretically appropriate but also academically essential.

Furthermore, according to a report by DataReportal, the structure of Vietnam's young population shows that the 18-24 age group (Gen Z, who were born from 1997 to 2012) accounts for approximately 9.7%, and the 25-34 age group (Gen Y or Millennials, who were born between 1981 and 1996) accounts for up to 15.7%. Both of these age groups constitute the majority of Vietnam's population and account for the majority of consumption demand in Vietnam. Zillennials are increasingly recognized as a distinct microgeneration situated between Millennials and Gen Z, generally encompassing the youngest Millennials and the oldest members of Gen Z [19]. This cusp generation demonstrates distinct hybrid characteristics and cultural norms that set them apart from the broader parent cohorts, shaped by their experiences during the shift from an analog to a fully digital world [19, 20]. This intermediate position leads to hybrid generational characteristics, combining both analog and digital life experiences, and resulting in transitional behavioral patterns that navigate between these two contexts [20-22]. Due to these behavioral differences, along with the limited academic research available on this group, this study focuses on Zillennials to provide deeper insights into their unique patterns. In Vietnam, OB products in retail chains are in the emerging stage, while the level of consumer understanding and academic interest in OBs remains limited. This situation creates a clear research gap, requiring more in-depth studies on Zillennials' attitudes toward and understanding of OB products.

Based on the aforementioned literature, this study is conducted to fill the research gaps by answering the following four research questions:

1. How does store image influence OB image and perceived OB value?
2. How do OB image and perceived value of OB products affect Zillennials' loyalty and PI toward OB products?
3. How does own-label brand loyalty affect Zillennials' PI toward OB products?
4. How can retailers build a suitable OB development strategy to improve competitiveness, attract and maintain loyal Zillennial customers in Vietnam?

This study is expected to contribute to the field of OB development by clarifying the role of store image in relation to PI toward OBs. Through this study, the proposed research model will be validated to demonstrate the role of store image as one of the fundamental factors in building and developing OBs within retail stores, thereby strengthening the image and value of OBs.

In practical terms, this study is expected to provide suggestions that Vietnamese retailers can invest in their OBs by leveraging store image to reinforce trust in the quality and value of their OB products, as well as position their OBs as trustworthy brands with reasonable prices.

2. Literature review

2.1 Stimulus - Organism - Response Model

Mehrabian and Russell [14] propose the S-O-R model, which asserts that people do not react directly to environmental factors but undergo an intermediate psychological processing stage before exhibiting behavior. In accordance with this model, stimuli from the environment impact the internal cognitive-emotional state of the organism, and only when these states are activated do they lead to a behavioral response. Indeed, several studies indicate that customers often interpret environmental cues through many levels of significance rather than relying merely on the existence of

the stimulus, particularly in service and retail settings [23, 24]. Existing research has demonstrated that engagement states, values, and beliefs function as cognitive filters that aid individuals in assessing whether a stimulus is sufficiently potent to elicit behavior [25, 26]. Research employing the S–O–R framework in virtual reality, climate change, or environmentally sustainable behavior corroborates this viewpoint, as users often respond according to their interpretation of the stimulus rather than the stimulus itself [27-29]. Furthermore, Xu et al. [30] demonstrated how identifying cues or brand imagery can provide implicit suggestions of quality or reliability, thus potentially shaping consumers' initial judgments.

A theoretical model derived from the S–O–R framework is developed in this study. The store image and OB image are regarded as stimuli, representing the external cues that customers encounter when interacting with the store and the OB portfolio. After being exposed to these stimuli, consumers form two important intermediate psychological states: perceived value of OB products and OB loyalty. These two variables represent the organism, as they reflect how individuals process, assess, and internalize the store and brand cues, which is the behavioral reaction created after the external stimuli have been converted through internal cognitive and attitudinal assessments.

2.2 Purchase Intention

According to Bagozzi and Burnkrant [31], PI is the consumer's subjective willingness to pay for a product or service, which is distinct from purchase desire. From a behavioral perspective, Parengkuan [32] argues that PI represents the tendency to select a specific product when suitable conditions arise. From a more cognitive viewpoint, Sentot et al. [33] view PI as a shopping strategy that the customer actively and consciously creates.

Based on the above perspectives, PI toward OB products can be understood as the degree of consumers' willingness to select and pay for products branded by the retailer, based on consumers' perception of store image, perceived value, and trust in the retailer's brand.

2.3 Store Image

Store image is the compilation of consumer opinions regarding store attributes (e.g., layout, service, reputation, and product quality) [34]. Many studies have shown that consumers' perceptions and evaluations of OB products are directly influenced by store image. According to Collins-Dodd and Lindley [34], store layout, product variety, customer service, and retailer reputation all have significant impacts on consumers' perceptions of OBs. Consumers' perceptions of quality and PI are influenced by store image, which is vital for helping retailers differentiate their OBs.

Indeed, drawn from the existing studies, positive store image not only enhances the reputation of the retail brand but also increases the differential value of OB products, contributing to the creation of a competitive advantage [35]. Store image can also improve the credibility of OBs by increasing perceived quality, loyalty, and brand recognition [36]. For instance, AEON Mall Vietnam has successfully positioned its brand image by providing goods of Japanese quality and service standards, such as its OB, TopValu, in a modern, friendly shopping environment and using scientific display techniques, thereby leading consumers to perceive the brand as reliable.

2.4 Own-label Brand Image

Vahie and Paswan [37] define brand image as the set of associations that are retained in consumers' memory and influence how they perceive a brand. Unlike store image, which relates to the retail environment, OB image focuses on the perception of the product line itself (e.g., quality, reliability, design, and value perception). Wu et al. [38] show that when OB image improves, consumers' PI rises accordingly. OB image is positively impacted by store image [37]. Furthermore, Porral and Lang [39] indicate that the relationship between store image and consumers' PI is mediated by the image of OBs. Annas and Pramudito [40] confirmed that OB image positively impacts customer loyalty to OBs.

2.5 Perceived Value

According to Zeithaml [41], perceived value refers to consumers' overall evaluation of a product based on the total benefits received relative to the total costs incurred. Perceived value includes functional (quality/price), emotional, social, and utilitarian dimensions. In this study, perceived value is defined as the trade-off between perceived quality and perceived price. Therefore, measurement items focus on consumers' evaluation of whether the benefits received from OB products justify the monetary cost (i.e., value for money), rather than assessing quality or price independently. Numerous studies have proven the influence of perceived value/quality on consumer loyalty to OB products [35, 42]. As stated in Wang [43], PI is directly associated with perceived price, and both emotional and functional values. These robust relationships between PI and perceived value, quality, and price are also further supported by Walia and Kumar [44].

In the Vietnamese retail sector, numerous young consumers prefer TopValu (by AEON) or Co.op Select (by Saigon Co.op), with the belief that these products provide superior value regarding the cost-quality ratio. This enhances the probability of purchase and fortifies brand loyalty.

2.6 Own-label Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty denotes a customer's commitment to a brand, indicating the probability of their reluctance to transition to a competing brand [45]. As stated in Shah et al [46], the credibility of own-label brands increases customer loyalty, which subsequently exerts a direct influence on PI. As a preliminary observation of the Vietnamese retailing market, loyal customers of AEON's TopValu often repurchase due to their trust in Japanese quality standards, demonstrating a

notably strong and clearly defined relationship between OB loyalty and PI toward OBs.

Based on the existing studies' findings and the S-O-R model, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1. Store image positively affects OB image.

H2. Store image positively affects perceived value of OBs.

H3. OB image positively affects PI toward OBs.

H4. OB image positively affects consumers' loyalty to OBs.

H5. Perceived value of OBs positively affects OB loyalty.

H6. Perceived value of OBs positively affects PI toward OBs.

H7. OB loyalty positively affects PI toward OBs.

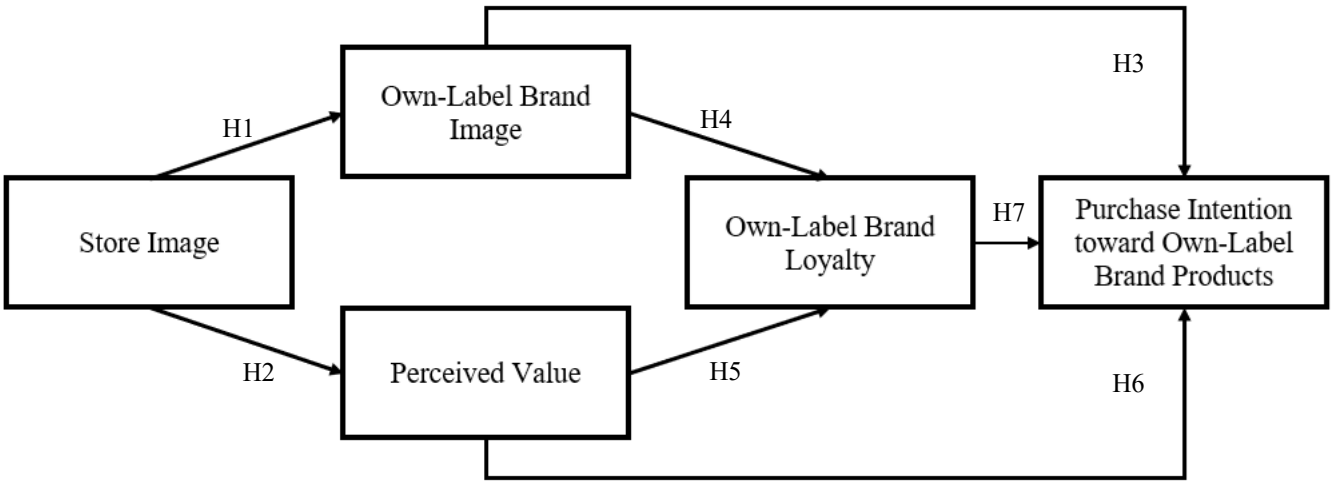

Figure 1. Research Model

3. Methodology

To assess the proposed hypotheses of this study, a quantitative approach was employed. The five-point Likert questionnaire used to collect data, developed from scales in previous studies, was administered via Google Forms and consisted of three parts, including two screening questions, nineteen main questions, and six demographic questions.

he measured constructs comprised store image and purchase intention toward OB products [47], OB image [39], perceived value [48], and OB loyalty [49]. Prior to the formal administration, a pilot study (n = 10) was conducted with participants representative of the target demographic to evaluate the instrument's face and content validity. The selection of ten participants aligns with methodological heuristics in behavioral research, which suggest that such a sample size is sufficient to identify linguistic ambiguities and structural inconsistencies. This preliminary phase aimed to ensure semantic clarity and cognitive equivalence of the items, allowing for necessary refinements in phrasing and layout. By addressing potential response biases and interpretative variances at this stage, the pilot test established a robust foundation for the structural integrity of the subsequent full-scale survey.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants from Gen Z and Millennials (collectively termed "Zillennials") in Ho Chi Minh City. This non-probability sampling design was selected to ensure that the data were elicited from respondents who possess specific consumption experiences and demographic characteristics aligned with the research objectives. Given the study's focus on OBs, this approach facilitated the inclusion of information-rich cases that are representative of the tech-savvy urban consumer base in Vietnam. Furthermore, this method was highly pragmatic for the designated data collection window (May to October 2025), optimizing resource allocation while maintaining the requisite statistical power for complex structural model analysis [50]. To enhance the reach and diversity of the sample, the survey was administered through a multi-channel digital strategy, leveraging email, mainstream social media platforms, and over-the-top communication services (e.g., Zalo, Facebook, and WhatsApp). This digital-first recruitment aligned with the habitual media consumption of the target cohorts, thereby mitigating potential non-response bias.

The study yielded 588 valid responses out of 624 total submissions, whose characteristics are presented in Table 1. The collected data were summarized and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with the SmartPLS software. Hair et al. [51] introduced the "10-times rule" which stipulates that a minimum sample size of 190 observations is necessary. The sample size of 588 satisfies all criteria for conducting PLS-SEM analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Category	Group	n	%
Gender	Male	238	40.5
	Female	350	59.5

Gen	Gen Z	451	76.7
	Gen Y	137	23.3
Average monthly income (million VND)	Below 3	124	21.1
	3 - 5	161	27.4
	5 - 10	140	23.8
	10 -15	100	17.0
	Above 15	63	10.5
Occupation	Public servant	37	6.3
	Office employee	147	25
	Freelance worker	76	12.9
	Student	309	52.6
	Other	19	3.24

In accordance with Hair et al. [51, 52], the measurement model's reliability is assessed through the metrics: outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and composite reliability (CR) as the first step of the analysis process. The average variance extracted (AVE) is used to test convergent validity, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion is utilized to examine discriminant validity [53].

Additionally, the structural model is evaluated for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The model's explanatory capability is evaluated through the coefficient of determination (R^2), while its predictive capability is measured using the Q^2 statistic, with values over 0 signifying predictive relevance. The hypotheses are evaluated using a bootstrapping approach to ascertain the validity of the proposed associations. Path coefficients (β) are employed to indicate the magnitude and direction of the impacts.

4. Results

4.1 Assessment of the Measurement Model

Table 2 indicates that all observed variables possess a factor loading of 0.7 or higher, satisfying the threshold established by Hair et al. [51, 52]. These results confirm the adequacy of the observed variables in measuring the latent constructs. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.700 to 0.884, all of which exceed the acceptance threshold of 0.6 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein [54]. This demonstrates that the indicators within the same construct have a high degree of internal consistency, accurately representing their respective constructs. In addition, composite reliability values range from 0.851 to 0.910, all exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.7 and below the recommended upper threshold of 0.95, showing that the scales achieve internal consistency reliability while avoiding redundancy among measurement indicators.

After testing reliability, the study continued to evaluate the convergent validity of the scales through the average variance extracted (AVE) index. According to Fornell and Larcker [53], a construct is considered to achieve convergent validity when AVE ≥ 0.5, i.e., the latent variable explains at least 50% of the variance of its corresponding indicators. As reported in Table 2, the AVE values of the constructs range between 0.589 and 0.769, all of which surpass the recommended threshold of 0.50. This indicates that a substantial proportion of the variance of the observed variables is explained by the latent construct they measure, thereby confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 2. Validity test of the scale

Scale	CA	CR	AVE	Outer loading
Store image	0.884	0.910	0.590	0.742 - 0.790
OB image	0.766	0.851	0.589	0.700 - 0.814
Perceived value	0.700	0.869	0.769	0.861 - 0.893
OB loyalty	0.800	0.883	0.715	0.809 - 0.863
Purchase behavior	0.795	0.880	0.710	0.799 - 0.852

As stated in Fornell and Larcker [53], the square root of the average variance extracted (√AVE) for each construct must exceed the correlation coefficients between that construct and other latent variables in the same model, indicating the presence of discriminant validity. The findings in Table 3 demonstrate that all diagonal values exceed the inter-construct correlation coefficients. For example, OB image has √AVE = 0.774, which is greater than its correlations with OB loyalty (0.661), PI (0.700), perceived value (0.615), and store image (0.609). Consequently, the test results illustrate that the latent constructs in the model achieve discriminant validity, proving that they are empirically distinct and reflect independent aspects of the research phenomenon without significant conceptual overlap.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OB image (1)	0.774				
OB loyalty (2)	0.661	0.828			
Purchase intention (3)	0.700	0.769	0.883		
Perceived value (4)	0.615	0.564	0.650	0.877	
Store image (5)	0.609	0.571	0.597	0.474	0.762

4.2 Assessment of the Structural Model

The study conducted an assessment of multicollinearity between independent variables in order to ensure the stability of the structural model. The results in Table 3 show that all observed variables in the model exhibit VIF values below the recommended threshold (VIF < 5). Specifically, the observed variables of the store image, OB image, perceived value, OB loyalty, and PI scales have VIF values ranging from 1.340 to 1.987, indicating the absence of multicollinearity among predictor constructs. Additionally, all VIFs are below 3.3, satisfying Kock's [55] criteria for ensuring the model is free from common method bias.

In the structural model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the explanatory capacity of the independent constructs with respect to the dependent constructs. R^2 values approaching 1 exhibit high explanatory power, while values near 0 indicate low explanatory power in accordance with Hair et al. [52].

The results in Table 3 show that the R^2 values of the latent variables range from 0.225 to 0.568, reflecting a moderate to substantial explanatory power. Specifically, OB image reaches $R^2 = 0.371$, showing that store image factors explain about 37.1% of the variance in OB image. OB loyalty has $R^2 = 0.476$, showing that the two factors, OB image and perceived value, together explain nearly 48% of the variance in Zillennials' loyalty to OBs. PI has $R^2 = 0.568$, which is the construct with the highest explanatory power, suggesting that OB image, OB loyalty, and perceived value are capable of explaining nearly 57% of the change in PI. Perceived value reaches $R^2 = 0.225$, representing a limited level of explanation, possibly because this factor is influenced by specific personal characteristics or consumption experiences that have not been considered in the model.

Thus, the model shows relatively satisfactory explanatory power, especially with PI, confirming the important role of store image, OB image, and OB loyalty in shaping the buying behavior of Zillennials in Ho Chi Minh City.

The model's predictive ability is tested through the Q^2 index from the blindfolding procedure. Following the criteria of Hair et al. (2019), a Q^2 value > 0 indicates a predictive model, where $Q^2 > 0.5$ represents a high level of forecast accuracy, 0.25–0.5 is average and $Q^2 < 0.25$ is weak. Table 3 shows that the Q^2 values of the latent variables are all greater than zero, ranging from 0.171 to 0.390; these results indicate that the model demonstrates adequate predictive relevance. In particular, PI reaches $Q^2 = 0.390$, indicating the strongest predictive relevance and demonstrating that the model is capable of explaining Zillennials' purchasing behavior well for OB products.

Therefore, this result confirms that the research model has reliable predictive validity, suitable for testing causal relationships in the structural model.

Table 4. R^2, Q^2, VIF

	R^2	Q^2	VIF
Store image			1.720 - 1.987
OB image	0.371	0.221	1.340 - 1.667
Perceived value	0.225	0.171	1.413 - 1.413
OB loyalty	0.476	0.321	1.441 - 1.813
PI	0.568	0.390	1.474 - 1.747

After the model was validated for reliability and validity, the study proceeded to test the structural hypotheses to determine the extent and significance of the relationships between the latent constructs. Bootstrapping results (Table 4) indicate that all path coefficients are positive and have a p-value < 0.05. The results demonstrate that all structural relationships within the model reach statistical significance at the 5% threshold.

Based on the hypothesis testing, the results show that store image plays a pivotal role by positively influencing both OB image (H1: $\beta = 0.609$, p-value < 0.001) and perceived value (H2: $\beta = 0.474$, p-value < 0.001). Next, OB image significantly influences PI (H3: $\beta = 0.241$, p-value < 0.001) and enhances OB loyalty (H4: $\beta = 0.505$, p-value < 0.001). This effect is stronger than that of perceived value. Meanwhile, perceived value also contributes to increased OB loyalty (H5: $\beta = 0.252$, p-value < 0.001), although to a lesser extent than that of OB image, and it also promotes PI (H6: $\beta = 0.231$, p-value < 0.001). Finally, OB loyalty is a key mediating variable in the model as it translates consumers' perceptions and evaluations into PI (H7: $\beta = 0.480$, p-value < 0.001).

Table 5. Hypothesis testing results

	Path	β	P-value	Decision
H1	Store image → OB image	0.609	0.000	Accepted
H2	Store image → Perceived value	0.474	0.000	Accepted
H3	OB image → PI	0.241	0.000	Accepted
H4	OB image → OB loyalty	0.505	0.000	Accepted
H5	Perceived value → OB loyalty	0.252	0.000	Accepted
H6	Perceived value → PI	0.231	0.000	Accepted
H7	OB loyalty → PI	0.480	0.000	Accepted

5. Discussion

The research findings indicate a high level of model fit between the proposed conceptual framework and the survey data, providing significant empirical support for the research topics outlined in the introduction. Firstly, the study results illustrate that store image, as a critical stimulus in the S-O-R model, strongly supports the two hypotheses regarding the influence of store image. This finding is also consistent with signaling theory [56], which claims that consumers may evaluate the quality and value of OBs based on extrinsic cues such as store layout, reputation, and the professionalism of the retailer. Besides, these study results align with previous research [34, 57], affirming that store image is a critical determinant of consumer perceptions of OBs. Furthermore, the finding indicates that store image has a stronger positive effect on OB image than on perceived value, suggesting that Zillennials are more responsive to symbolic and intangible cues than purely functional evaluations. This extends insights from signaling theory by indicating that, in contemporary retail contexts, signals such as store aesthetics, branding consistency, and perceived professionalism may shape brand meaning more than they directly communicate value. In other words, store image does not merely reduce information asymmetry but actively constructs the symbolic identity of OBs, which is particularly salient for Zillennials.

Regarding fundamental structural relationships, OB image and perceived value have a positive influence on PI, strongly supporting hypotheses H3 and H6. Particularly, OB image is more influential. With this finding, it can be suggested that Zillennials place significant value on brand image as a gauge of quality and trust in addition to functional value. The greater impact of OB image highlights a shift in consumer priorities. Rather than focusing primarily on price-quality trade-offs, Zillennials appear to interpret brand image as a proxy for trust, identity alignment, and social signaling. This finding suggests that perceived value alone is no longer sufficient to drive purchase decisions in younger segments; instead, value must be embedded within a compelling brand narrative. However, perceived value plays a critical role in enhancing Zillennials' PI toward OB items because it shows that weighing costs and benefits continues to be a major factor in consumer behavior, supporting findings from earlier research [47, 58]. In addition, OB image and perceived value serve as critical mediating variables that convert the influence of store image into PI and brand loyalty. This finding suggests that, prior to making a purchase decision, young consumers not only rely on their overall perception of the retail store but also carefully evaluate specific attributes related to the OB image and its perceived value.

Furthermore, this study provides a clear understanding of the importance of brand loyalty because it has a direct bearing on PI. This study outcome is in line with research on the significance of loyalty in consumption of OB products as demonstrated by Porral and Levy-Mangin [49]. Brand loyalty emerges as a key mediating variable in the conceptual model; thus, an intriguing finding is that the mediating level of loyalty is higher than the direct effects of perceived value and OB image on PI, implying a strong ability to translate brand perceptions into consumer behavior. This implies that even favorable brand image and value perceptions may not immediately translate into purchase behavior unless they are reinforced over time to build habitual preference and emotional attachment. In this regard, loyalty reduces cognitive effort and perceived risk, enabling more automatic and stable purchasing decisions. Moreover, a study by Jaiyeoba et al. [18] provides evidence that when customers show loyalty to OBs, they reduce their perceived risk and information-seeking behavior, which results in more stable purchase intention. This model clearly explains the role of the organism component in the scope of the S–O–R framework, in which consumers experience a psychological processing stage to form engagement after being motivated by store image, resulting in particular behavioral reactions.

Building upon the foundational research conducted by Porral and Lang [39] in a mature European context, our study provides a nuanced perspective by investigating Zillennial consumers in Vietnam's emerging market through the lens of the S-O-R model. While both studies concur that store image is a powerful antecedent to OB success, our research specifically highlights how this external stimulus activates perceived value and brand loyalty as critical internal psychological mechanisms for young Vietnamese consumers. Furthermore, unlike Porral and Lang [39], who observed an unexpected negative link between perceived quality and purchase intent, our findings demonstrate that for Zillennials, both OB image and perceived value (the quality-price trade-off) directly and positively drive loyalty and behavioral response. Crucially, our study reveals that symbolic and image-based cues carry even more weight than functional value for this specific demographic, a distinction that complements Porral and Lang's [39] emphasis on the moderating role of manufacturer identification and corporate reputation in the Spanish market. Ultimately, our work advances the existing literature by showing that in a developing economy like Vietnam, retailers must prioritize leveraging their store image to build a distinctive OB identity to effectively capture the loyalty of the emerging young consumer base.

6. Conclusion

The research has developed a five-factor conceptual model to examine the effects of store image, OB image, perceived value, and OB loyalty on Zillennials' PI toward OB products based on the S-O-R model. The research results answer the initial research questions, and demonstrate that all proposed hypotheses are statistically significant and practically relevant.

The study provided a clear explanation of how store image enhances brand loyalty and purchasing behavior through the mediating effects of own-label brand image and perceived value, as well as emphasizes the fundamental role of store image. Overall, the findings are consistent with the S-O-R model, where PI represents the ultimate behavioral response, store image and OB image act as environmental stimuli, and perceived value and OB loyalty act as psychological mediators.

Practically, since store image has a strong influence on OB image and perceived value, it can be implied that retailers should make significant investments to improve store image before developing their OB products. Besides, retailers should invest in enhancing experiential spaces to improve customer service quality and foster a cohesive, unified brand identity. Also, OB image and perceived value substantially influence OB loyalty that significantly impacts PI. It can be suggested that loyal customers may be less price-sensitive, engage in fewer comparisons; therefore they exhibit higher repurchase intention. As a result, retailers should actively encourage brand loyalty and concentrate on establishing a distinctive, unambiguous brand identity, communicating it regularly, and fostering favorable customer experiences. However, retailers must guarantee adequate quality and reasonable prices for OB products to enhance their perceived value among customers, especially Zillennials.

The study still holds several limitations. First, because the study only included Zillennials who live in Ho Chi Minh City, the findings cannot be generalized to the whole retail market. Customers in different provinces and cities might have different perceptions of value, brand loyalty, and PI toward OB products. Future research should include consumers from other large cities in the sample. Second, the data were collected at a single point in time, which makes it impossible to account for possible shifts in consumer attitudes and behavior over time. A longitudinal study approach could be used in future research to track changes over time. Third, many retailers currently adopt the concept of OBs. In actuality, every retailer uses a different approach, which results in varying customer experiences and opinions associated with each retailer. As a result, future studies might need to use techniques designed for particular retail settings.

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