

What is a retail brand? A systematic review of terms and definitions

Abstract

Purpose –Although many scholars have acknowledged inconsistencies in the use of the retail brand term within the existing empirical literature, no one has conducted a systematic study to clarify the confusion of terms. Aiming at unifying the use of terms, this study explores the terms that best express each retail brand concept, and discusses the definitions of proposed terms that can distinguish the connotation of different retail brand concepts.

Design/methodology/approach – Through a systematic review, 463 articles were obtained, from which retail brand terms and their definitions were further extracted. Semantic analysis and content analysis were adopted to analyze terms and definitions respectively.

Findings - Semantically, the terms that best express four levels of retail brand concepts are own product brand, store brand, platform brand and retailer brand. Six key elements to distinguish different levels of a retail brand are identified through the content analysis of definitions, and on this basis, four proposed terms are defined.

Originality/value – Noting that no study focuses on the conceptual confusion of retail brands in recent decades, the findings are expected to clarify the confusion of terms and unify the use of terms, hence facilitating the communication between scholars and the sharing of research results.

Keywords – Retail brand, Retailer brand, Store brand, Private label, Semantic analysis, Content analysis

Paper type - Research paper

1. Introduction

Operating in an increasingly competitive marketplace, retailers have turned to branding in an attempt to differentiate themselves from competitors (Burt and Mavrommatis, 2006; Coelho do Vale and Verga Matos, 2017). A retailer can build its brand at four levels, i.e., product-as-a-brand, store-as-a-brand, retail platform-as-a-brand and retail company-as-a-brand (Burt and Davies, 2010; Rodrigues and Brandão, 2021). Product-as-a-brand usually focuses on its utilitarian attributes, such as the function, quality, and price of the products (Assarzagdegan and Hejazi, 2021). Store-as-a-brand and retail platform-as-a-brand should focus more on their experiential aspects, such as product/tenant portfolio, atmosphere, service, marketing activities (Dwivedi and Merrilees, 2016; Ong *et al.*, 2012; Merrilees *et al.*, 2016). Retail company-as-a-brand often stresses its company value, such as vision, values, culture (Rodrigues and Brandão 2021; Merrilees *et al.*, 2016).

Academically, researchers have developed various terms to describe those different concepts related to retail brands. The numerous terms cause some confusions in literature in three ways. First, the same retail brand concept is represented by multiple synonyms. For example, Lacoeuilhe *et al.* (2021, p. 2) have noticed that “in the marketing literature and practice, store brands, private labels or retailer brands are all used as synonyms”, which refer to the brand of retailers’ own products. However, using synonyms to define and describe a concept, whether correct or incorrect, will lead to confusion of this concept (Singh and Thurman, 2019). Second, some terms have been used to refer to different retail brand concepts in different studies. For example, Assarzagdegan and Hejazi (2021) define store brand as being equivalent to a private label brand, both of which refer

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3 to the product owned, controlled, and sold by the retailer, while Baek *et al.* (2020) use
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5 “store brand” to represent the brand of stores where customers shop. Third, although
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7 some of these terms have been used habitually in academia and business, with the
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9 conceptual evolution of retail brands, they are no longer applicable to the retail brand
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11 concepts they originally represented, and misleading. For example, Burt and Sparks
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13 (2002, p.199) argue that it is “erroneous to continue to refer to retailers ‘own labels’ or
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15 ‘private brands’, when for a number of leading retailers, the retailer has become the
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17 brand”. In another word, it is not clear whether “own labels” or “own brands” refer to the
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19 brand of a retailer’s product(s), store(s), or its company.
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24 This problem has attracted the attention of some scholars. Burt and Davies (2010)
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26 found that “retail brand” in one study is not the same as the “retail brand” in another
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28 study. Zentes *et al.* (2008) posited that the term “retail brand” and “store brand” should
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30 be distinguished, yet literature does not always make it clear. However, these scholars
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32 only briefly mentioned this problem in their articles, without providing a systematic
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34 clarification of the various terms. In fact, from a review of the 463 articles on retail brand
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36 studies from 1990 to 2021, we were unable to find any form of systematic analysis on
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38 this issue; as such, a study of this nature is long overdue.
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43 It is necessary to clarify the conceptual confusion in retail brand studies due to the
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45 following reasons. First, the inconsistency of retail brand terms and their definitions in
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47 the literature not only makes it more challenging for academic communication (e.g.
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49 article retrieval and classification), but also increases the cost of academic research in that
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51 previous data may become unusable (Schutte, 1969). Second, clarifying the terminology
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53 confusion will help scholars recognize the essential differences between the four levels of
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3 retail brand concepts, thus opening up more research opportunities in this field. Third, a
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5 clear differentiation of terminology and definitions will enable managers to practically
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7 apply the research findings and carry out targeted branding strategies, namely, branding
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9 retailers' own products to enhance utilitarian value, branding retailers' store and/or retail
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11 platform to enhance experiential value, and branding their company to enhance value
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13 identity. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and answer the following three
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15 research questions:
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19 (1) In what ways, and to what extent, do retail brand terms cause confusion?
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22 (2) As the concept of retail brand has evolved, which terms have become
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24 semantically inappropriate and which are more appropriate?
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27 (3) What are the key elements used to define and distinguish the different types of
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29 retail brand concepts?
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31 To answer the questions, we systematically review the 463 aforementioned articles
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33 chosen from between 1990 and 2021, from which we extract the retail brand terms and
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35 their respective definitions, based on which we clarify areas of confusion among the
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37 terms, and then propose and define a set of unified terms reflecting each retail brand
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39 concept.
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42 The originality and academic contribution of this study relates to the following
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44 aspects. First, noting that no study focuses on the conceptual confusion of retail brands in
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46 recent decades, this study shines a spotlight on the issue for academics. Second,
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48 consistency in the use of terms will facilitate communication between scholars and the
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50 sharing of research results with practitioners. Third, six key elements identified from
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3 content analysis of the definitions reveal the differences exist between different levels of
4 retail brand concepts.
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7 8 9 **2. Methodology**

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11 Systematic review has the benefits of transparency, methodological rigor, exhaustive
12 literature coverage and reproducibility (Muruganantham and Priyadarshini, 2017). This
13 study adopts this method to collect relevant articles, and then extract retail brand terms
14 and their definitions from these articles.
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19 20 *2.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

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22 We follow the United States industrial classification code system (SICCODE, n.d.) to
23 identify the retail industry, and exclude the retailing aspects that exist within the purely
24 service sector, namely, the financial, banking, hospitality and education sectors. Retail
25 formats include physical formats, such as convenience stores, supermarkets, specialty
26 stores, department stores, and shopping malls, as well as online stores and multichannel
27 retailers. We exclude online individual retailing such as online celebrity retailing and
28 livestream retailing. This is because many online celebrities and live-streamers
29 demonstrate, try, recommend, or introduce the manufacturers' products to their viewers,
30 and in doing so receive commission fees from manufacturers fees (Wang and Zhang
31 2022), instead of receiving a direct payment from customers. In that sense, they are more
32 like online endorsers (Liu *et al.*, 2020), opinion leaders or influencers (Zhou and Tong,
33 2022) than retailers. However, existing literature does not give clear information about
34 their research objects – whether the online celebrities or live-streamers operate like pure
35 endorsers or typical retailers. This makes it impossible for us to accurately retrieve the
36 literature that examines online celebrity retailing or livestream retailing.
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2.2 Collection of articles

2.2.1 *Selection of journals.* Referring to the Australia Business Deans Council (ABDC) journal-ranking list, this study focused on 46 A-ranked journals in retail, marketing, brand, e-commerce, behavior and service focused journals. This was further reduced to 41 A-ranked journals, once non-relevant publications in the fields of banking, tourism and hospitality were removed. In addition, we also included 2 relevant B-ranked retail focused journals. Of these 43 A- and B-ranked journals, a final keyword search further helped remove 9 journals that had no articles relevant to our topic. This meant that 34 journals were selected for use in our study (see Table I).

-----Insert Table I about here-----

2.2.2 *Selection of keywords.* Combining words that are related to “retail” with words that are related to “brand”, we obtained 14 keywords as Table II shows. In addition, we added four commonly used terms (private label, private brand, own label, own brand) which are related to product brands that are owned by retailers, bringing the total of keywords up to 18.

-----Insert Table II about here-----

2.2.3 *Database used.* This study relied on all the relevant databases that the authors' University has subscribed to, i.e. EBSCO, Elsevier's Science Direct, Emerald and Scopus.

2.2.4 *Time scope.* To better grasp the historical progress of retail brand research, we searched for studies that were published between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2021.

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3 Following the above criteria, we searched for articles according to their title, and
4 identified 1076 articles initially. After merging duplicates, screening titles and abstract
5 and assessing eligibility by reading the full text, we obtained 463 articles for review.
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10 Figure I shows the article selection process.

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12 -----Insert Figure I about here-----
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14 15 2.3. *Collection of terms*

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17 Of the literature reviewed, 24 terms related to retail brand are used by scholars.
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19 Table III summarizes the mapping of these 24 terms across the four retail brand concepts
20 and the percentage of articles addressing each concept. Among the 463 articles, 68.7%
21 were about “product-as-a-brand”, 23.5% were about “store-as-a-brand”, 0.6% address
22 “retail platform-as-a-brand” and 7.1% address “retail company-as-a-brand”. Although
23 few articles related to “store-as-a-brand”, “retail company-as-a-brand” and “retail
24 platform-as-a-brand ”, they reflect the latest trends in the retail brand research (Burt and
25 Davies, 2010; Rodrigues and Brandão, 2021), so their terms should be rigorously defined
26 so as to be distinguished from “product-as-a-brand”.
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38 -----Insert Table III about here-----
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40 41 2.4 *Collection of definitions*

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43 We initially obtained 80 definitions that had been defined or cited by scholars. After
44 removing the duplicates, as well as definitions cited from unavailable literature, and
45 definitions that cannot be classified into any of the four levels of retail brand concepts, 42
46 definitions were confirmed. Of these, 36 definitions are related to “product-as-a-brand”
47 (85.7%), 5 are related to “store-as-a-brand” (11.9%), while only 1 definition is related to
48 “retail company-as-a-brand” (2.3%).
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3. Findings

3.1 Confusion in the use of retail brand terms in literature

Our assessment showed that 24 terms fall in to four retail brand concepts, revealing a lack of consistency in using the retail brand terms. From our analysis, there are four ways in which the terms have caused confusion.

First, the same retail brand concept is expressed in several ways. For example, “product-as-a-brand” has been referred to as “private label” (e.g. Mao *et al.*, 2021) and “store brand” (e.g. Lacoeyuilhe *et al.* 2021). In fact, the inconsistent use of terms has been observed across all four types of retail brand concepts. As shown in Table III, 12 different terms are used when referring to “product-as-a-brand”, 13 terms are used for “store-as-a-brand”, 7 terms are used for “retail company-as-a-brand”, while 2 terms are used to indicate “retail platform-as-a-brand”.

Second, the same term has been used to refer to different brand concepts in some studies. Of these 24 terms, 5 of them, including “retail brand”, “retailer brand”, “store brand”, “brand”, and “corporate brand” represent more than one retail brand concept, as shown in Table III. For example, “retail brand” is used as “product-as-a-brand” in 19 articles (e.g. Cartwright *et al.*, 2016), “store-as-a-brand” in 44 articles (e.g. Rodrigues and Brandão, 2021), and “retail company-as-a-brand” in 15 articles (e.g. Schmidt *et al.*, 2017).

Third, some terms are misleading or unspecific. For example, “store brand” should literally be the term of “store-as-a-brand”, but 88% of authors use this term to refer to “product-as-a-brand” (e.g. Jara *et al.*, 2017; Lacoeyuilhe *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, among the 12 terms of “product-as-a-brand”, “store brand” is the most commonly used one. In

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3 addition, “retail brand” is widely used by 78 authors, but it is difficult to understand
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5 whether it refers to brand of a retailer’s product(s), store(s), retail platform(s) or its
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7 company.
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10 Fourth, retail brand terms in 3 articles cannot be classified into any of the above four
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12 retail brand concepts. For example, Yang and Tsou (2017) equate manufacturer brand to
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14 “own brand”. “Retail brand” in David *et al.* (2015) includes manufacturer brands and
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16 retailers’ own product brands. “Retailer brand” in Massa and Testa (2012) includes
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18 manufacturer brands, retailer’s own product brands, generic products, and service
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20 brands¹.
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24 The widely observed confusion in the use of retail brand terms can inhibit scholars
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26 from effectively communicating, searching, and conducting retail brand research.
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29 *3.2 Semantically appropriate terms for each retail brand concept*

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31 For the 24 confusing terms mentioned above, we conduct a semantic analysis to
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33 determine the most appropriate terms for four types of retail brand concepts. From this,
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35 14 unique English words were identified from the 24 terms. Following Schutte (1969),
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37 their relevant meanings were taken from both the conceptual evolution and literal
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39 meaning obtained from the Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries.
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42 *3.2.1 Term for “product-as-a-brand”*. Excluding the above-mentioned literally
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44 misleading or unspecific terms such as “store brand, retail brand, retailer brand,
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46 distributor brand”, the commonly used terms of “product-as-a-brand” are “private label,
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48 private brand, private label brand, own brand, own label, own label brand”, and the
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50 related words include “own”, “private”, “label” and “brand”. This concept “product-as-a-
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55 ¹ These three articles were hence not included in the pool of 463 articles for our further analysis.
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brand” implies that the product is owned, controlled, and sold exclusively by the retailer (Chakraborty, 2013). “Private” is traditionally used to highlight the fact that retailers’ own product brands are only marketed and available in retailers’ own stores, as compared to manufacturers’ brands, which are marketed nationwide and available in different retailers’ stores. With the development of digital platforms, retailers advertise their own product brands on aggregator platforms and social media platforms, instead of only “privately” marketing and making it available in their own stores. “Own”, on the other hand, highlights the ownership and control that a retailer has on the product lines it develops by itself, as compared to product lines developed, owned and controlled by manufacturers. Therefore, we suggest “own” rather than “private” to describe the brand of retailers’ own products. “Label” implies a simple repackaging exercise to indicate the connection to a company, and hence is criticized for its failure to reflect the more coordinated marketing activities that are associated with branding (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003). While the term “brand” refers to a collection of associations or feelings that customers have about a certain product or service (Adamson *et al.*, 2006) and is a more appropriate word than “label”, as retailers have actively marketed the products developed by themselves so as to have an alternative brand to manufacturer brands (Burt and Davis, 1999). As a result, we suggest “own product brand” as the term of “product-as-a-brand”. Here, we add the word “product” to indicate the scope of branding.

3.2.2 Term for “store-as-a-brand”. The words “(e)-retail, (e)-retailer, corporate, shop, store and brands” are used to form the terms of “store-as-a-brand”. The essence of the concept “store-as-a-brand” is to define the branding effort at an individual retail outlet level. Of those words, the two words with the closest meaning are “store” and “shop”. In

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3 this instance, store means “a large shop that sells many different types of goods”, while
4 shop means “a building or part of a building where you can buy goods or services”. The
5 semantic difference between these two words is subtle, so both “shop brand” and “store
6 brand” are appropriate when trying to describe the “store-as-a-brand”. However, we
7 suggest the use of “store”, as scholars rarely use the term “shop brand”, with it only
8 appearing in one article we assessed.
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17 3.2.3 Term for “*retail company-as-a-brand*”. Excluding literally misleading terms
18 “store brand” and “shop brand”, the concept “retail company-as-a-brand” is expressed by
19 prior studies using words such as “retail”, “retailer”, “corporate” and “brand”.
20 Fundamentally, this concept stresses that the branding effort is made at the whole retail
21 company level or retail part of a diversified business company. “Corporate” means
22 “connected with a large business company”, which not only excludes a connection with
23 the retail industry, but is also likely to drive smaller retail players out of market.
24 “Retailer” refers to “a person or business that sells goods to the public”, includes not only
25 large and small retail companies, but also individual retailers. Although this review does
26 not include articles related to individual retailing, we acknowledge that some individual
27 online celebrities and live streamers may operate more like retailers than endorsers. So
28 we suggest using the term “retailer brand” to represent the brand of a retail company or
29 an individual retailer.
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47 3.2.4 Term for “*retail platform-as-a-brand*”. The words “mall” and “brand” are
48 incorporated in the term of “retail platform-as-a-brand”. The literal meaning of mall is “a
49 large building or covered area that has many shops, restaurants, etc. inside it” and it only
50 includes the mortar and brick (M&B) model. In recent decades, e-commerce sites, such
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3 as Taobao and Amazon, have begun to thrive and can be regarded as online platforms
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5 which host lots of different online stores. In order to include both the M&B and online
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7 platforms, we propose the use of the term “platform brand”.

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10 In addition, we propose to use “retail brand” as a general term for all different types
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12 of retail brand concepts, including own product brand, store brand, platform brand and
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14 retailer brand.

15 16 17 *3.3 Definitions for proposed retail brand terms*

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19 Another problem identified from the review is a lack of a clear and unified definition
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21 of the four retail brand concepts. We therefore conduct content analysis for those
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23 definitions and identify the key elements to characterize each retail brand concept and
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25 distinguish them from each other. On this basis, we provide clear definitions of the four
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27 proposed retail brand terms in our study.

28 29 30 31 *3.3.1 Content analysis of definitions in literature.*

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33 Content analysis has previously been used to analyze definitions in a variety of
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35 disciplines, such as “social entrepreneurship” (Wu, *et al.*, 2020) and “online learning”
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37 (Singh and Thurman, 2019). Referring to the coding scheme developed by Weber (1990),
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39 and the process of coding definitions used by Singh and Thurman (2019), we followed
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41 four steps to code the definitions. (1) *Defining the recording units.* Since the definition
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43 was a sentence, the phrase was used as the recording unit. (2) *Defining the coding*
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45 *categories.* All authors reviewed the definitions and created initial coding categories. A
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47 group meeting was then held to discuss, test, revise and define the coding categories. For
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49 coding categories that could not be agreed upon, the decisions were made only when at
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51 least two of the three authors reached an agreement. In this way, the three authors jointly
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3 created the final list of coding categories, as shown in Table IV, and reached a common
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5 understanding of the meaning of each coding category and its application in the
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7 definition. (3) *Coding all the definitions.* The first and second authors coded all the
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9 definitions using coding categories identified in step 2. Comparing the coding results of
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11 the two authors, the consistency rate was more than 90%. For definitions in which the
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13 two authors could not agree on the coding, the third author was involved and a final
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15 decision was only made when at least two of the three authors were in agreement. (4)
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17 *Descriptive analysis of the coding result.* The frequency of occurrence for each coding
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19 category was recorded. The reliability and validity of the coding was ensured by asking
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21 multiple authors to conduct the independent coding process, assessing the consistency
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23 rate of results, and the joint discussion of disagreements for final consensus.
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28 From the content analysis, 7 codes were created for the definitions of “own product
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30 brand” (see Table IV): synonyms, brand scope, ownership, availability, brand name,
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32 concept comparison, and differentiation strategy². Following the same coding steps
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34 outlined above, three codes were found for the definitions of “store brand”, i.e., brand
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36 scope, brand name and concept comparison. The coding results of the 36 definitions of
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38 own product brand and the 5 definitions of store brand are shown in Table IV. We were
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40 unable to provide coding for “retailer brand” and “platform brand” since there is only one
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42 definition given for the former and no definition given to the latter.
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54 ² We exclude the code “synonyms”, because including synonyms in the definition, while helping one relate
55 to the terms used by previous studies, may also cause some confusion (Singh and Thurman, 2019),
56 particularly when some terms carry different meanings in different studies.
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3.3.2 Discussion of the Codes

The codes obtained from content analysis of definitions reveal key elements that characterize each retail brand concept and distinguish them from each other (Singh and Thurman, 2019).

(1) *Brand scope* refers to the scope that the branding effort covers. An own product brand is the brand of a retailer's own products. A store brand is the brand of a store where customers shop. A platform brand is the brand of a retail platform on which a variety of stores operate and customers shop in these stores. A retailer brand is the brand used by a retail company as a whole or retail part of a diversified company who owns abovementioned own product brand(s), store brand(s) and/or platform brand(s). Figure II illustrates the four levels of retail brands of Lotte, Carrefour and Alibaba.

-----Insert Figure II about here-----

(2) *Brand name* refers to the names used by retailers at each level of retail brand concept. Generally speaking, retailers have three different brand naming strategies. The first one is to name a lower-level retail brand with a higher-level retail brand name. For example, as shown in Figure II, Lotte uses its retailer brand name as the brand name of its department stores (Lotte department store) and e-commerce platform (Lotte.com). Carrefour uses "Carrefour" as one of its own product brands. Consumers' perception of a retail brand at one level will have some spill-over effect on other levels, particularly if the same brand names are used at different levels of a retail brand. For example, when a consumer finds a pack of "Carrefour" facial tissues from the Carrefour Market is of good quality, the consumer will form a positive evaluation of the store brand "Carrefour Market". The second is to create a new and independent brand name. For example,

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3 Carrefour names its shopping mall “Carmila” and convenience store “Proxi”. Lotte
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5 names its own product brands “Wiselect” and “Withone”. A new brand name would
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7 reduce the possible negative spill-over effect at one level of a retail brand to the other
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9 levels. The third is to combine the above two strategies. For example, one of Fresh
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11 Hema’s (Alibaba’s grocery store) own product brands is “Hema Workshop”.
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15 (3) *Ownership* refers to who develops, owns and controls a retail brand. Ownership
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17 is the basis for defining and describing different kinds of brands in retail channel,
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19 particularly to differentiate between those that are owned by retailers and those that are
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21 owned by manufacturers (Schutte, 1969). An own product brand is owned by retailers, in
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23 contrast to manufacturer brands, which are owned by manufacturers. A store brand is
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25 usually owned by a retailer. However, with the emergence of e-commerce platform, both
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27 retailers and some manufacturers have opened their own retail stores in a retail platform
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29 (Luo *et al.*, 2021).
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34 (4) *Availability* refers to where and how customers have experience with each retail
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36 brand concept. Customers can only reach a retailer’s own product brands in their own
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38 stores (Chakraborty, 2013), unlike manufacturer brands, which are available in different
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40 retailer’s stores. Customers can access a retailer’s store brand and/or retail platform brand
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42 through a variety of channels, such as an online, offline, or multi-channel. A customer’s
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44 perception of a retailer brand is formed by contacting its own retail platform(s), store(s),
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46 product(s), as well as advertisements and environmental sustainability
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48 practices (Martenson, 2007; Miller and Merrilees, 2013; Chan *et al.*, 2017).
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53 (5) *Differentiation strategy* refers to how to build a unique retail brand at each level,
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55 and differentiate it from one’s competitors. Aligning with the branding scope, the
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3 literature suggests that the differentiation strategy for each level of retail brand
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5 concentrates on different aspects of brand attributes. The retailers typically differentiate
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7 their own product brands from manufacturer brands by positioning the quality of the own
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9 product brands near the quality of the manufacturer brands, but at a lower price
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11 (Assarzagdean and Hejazi, 2021). A store brand differentiates itself from competitors
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13 through the combination of a product portfolio, service, store atmosphere and in store-
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15 marketing activities (Dwivedi and Merrilees, 2016). A retail platform brand differentiates
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17 itself from competitors by optimizing its tenant mix, transaction support service for both
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19 customers and tenants, general shopping atmosphere and in-platform marketing activities
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21 (Ong *et al.*, 2012; Merrilees *et al.*, 2016). A retailer brand differentiates itself by
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23 optimizing their retail business portfolio, enhancing their corporate image (e.g. via CSR),
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25 and spreading their distinct vision, mission and value (Burt and Davies, 2010). For
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27 example, IKEA creates its strong corporate brand by offering a value of “a better
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29 everyday life for the many people”.
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36 (6) *Concept comparison* refers to comparing one concept with other concepts to
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38 highlight the differences between them. It might be worthwhile to stress any possible
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40 confusion that may exist when related to the following retail brand concepts. First, store
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42 brand and retailer brand. The existing literature often considers a retailer’s store brand as
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44 its retailer brand. A retailer brand emphasizes the recognition of the company’s values by
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46 many stakeholders, while a store brand places an emphasis on the perceptions that
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48 customers may have about store attributes and shopping experiences (Lin and He, 2014).
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50 Second, store brand and platform brand. Although both focus on enhancing customers’
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52 experience, the latter does not sell products or services to customers directly, as it
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3 provides a platform for the tenants to set up stores and customers to shop in a variety of
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5 stores. Moreover, a shopping mall is not only a place for trade but also a social hub
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7 within the community (Mohammad Shafiee and Es-Haghi, 2017). Third, own product
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9 brand and manufacturer brand. A clear distinction needs to be made between an own
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11 product brand and a manufacturer brand in terms of ownership (owned by a retailer or a
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13 manufacturer), availability (in a retailer's own store or many retailers' stores) and brand
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15 name (some of a retailer's own product brands carry its store's, retail platform's or
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17 company's name).
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22 We summarize the attributes of each retail brand concept, as shown in Table V. It
23
24 should be noted that although differences exist between the four levels of retail brand
25
26 concepts, they are not independent of each other. Consumer perception of a retail brand
27
28 could be co-shaped by a retailer's own product brand, its store brand, platform brand and
29
30 company brand, particularly if the retailer is using the same brand name at different
31
32 levels, as elaborated in the Carrefour's example. In addition, not every retailer has these
33
34 four levels of retail brand concepts. For example, 7-Eleven has not developed a retail
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36 platform on which other stores can operate.
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40 -----Insert Table V about here-----
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42 *3.3.3 Definitions for proposed retail brand terms*

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44 According to the attributes of each retail brand concept summarized in Table V, we
45
46 posit the following definitions. The element of brand name is not included in the
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48 suggested definitions, because the naming strategy is the same for different levels of
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50 retail brand concepts.
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3 *Own product brand* refers to a brand used by the products developed and owned by
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5 the retailers themselves, and is sold exclusively in their own retail channel, which is
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7 different from manufacturers' product brands at utilitarian level, such as function, quality,
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9 price, etc.
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12 *Store brand* refers to a brand used by the stores in a variety of retail channels, which
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14 provides a shopping experience that satisfies a customer's needs by working on the
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16 product portfolio, service, store atmosphere and in-store marketing activities,
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19 *Platform brand* refers to a brand used by retail platforms in a variety of retail
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21 channels which provides customers with an integrated shopping, leisure, and
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23 entertainment experience, by optimizing its tenant portfolio, transaction support service,
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25 shopping atmosphere and in-platform marketing activities.
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28 *Retailer brand* refers to a brand used by a retail company as a whole or retail part of
29
30 a diversified company, which creates a company identity that align with the identity of
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32 target customers through optimizing retail business portfolio, enhancing corporate image,
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34 and spreading its vision, values and culture.
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38 39 **4. Conclusion**

40
41 The terminology confusion that exists around retail brand has been pointed out by
42
43 several scholars (e.g. Zentes *et al.*, 2008; Burt and Davies, 2010; Lacoeyuilhe *et al.*, 2021).
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45 Despite this, little has been done to clarify the terms used. This study systematically
46
47 reviews terms and definitions of retail brand found in literature, in an attempt to clarify
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49 conceptual confusion of retail brand. Our findings provide important insights to the field
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51 of research in several ways.
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3 Academically, this study first shines a spotlight on the terminology confusion issue
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5 for academics. Second, the unification of terms could facilitate scholars' communication
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7 and understanding of the corresponding research. Third, the 6 key elements identified
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9 from content analysis of definitions could provide a more comprehensive understanding
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11 of these four levels of retail brand concepts and differentiate themselves from each other,
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13 which could provide further insight for researchers about future areas of study.
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17 Practically, the clarification and unification of retail brand terms and definitions
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19 highlights to managers that a retail brand portfolio consists of four different levels, thus
20
21 providing two implications. First, our definitions for the four levels of retail brand
22
23 concepts illustrates the importance of implementing more targeted brand development
24
25 strategies for different levels of retail brand presence. Second, the possible spill-over
26
27 effects exist across different levels of retail branding efforts. Synergy could be achieved
28
29 if some branding effort at one level positively influences the other levels. However, a
30
31 negative spill-over effect cannot be neglected, particularly when the same brand names
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33 are used at different levels of the retail presence. To what extent should the same brand
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35 name be used at different levels should be given careful consideration.
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40 We also acknowledge several limitations. First, we only focus on highly ranked
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42 journals, using the ABDC journal ranking list, so some of the more insightful articles
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44 published in other journals may be overlooked. Second, despite our proposal of unifying
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46 the terms for the retail brand concepts, we acknowledge that some old terms are still
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48 being used in academia and practice and as such have become conventional descriptors. It
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50 might not be easy or practical to unify the terms, but it is necessary to give an updated
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52 interpretation of those terms to incorporate the latest development. Third, we excluded
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3 individual retailing, such as livestream retailing and online celebrity retailing, from the
4 literature retrieval, due to the vague roles that live-streamers and online celebrities play
5 (endorsers or retailers). This may have resulted in our findings being less than
6 comprehensive. Future research could provide more clarification to this new retail format
7 and explore related issues such as special branding strategies of individual retailers.
8
9 Lastly, this article makes the very first step of differentiating the four levels of retail
10 brand concepts. The next step is to comb the findings from the current literature for each
11 retail concept and address some of the questions which may come from this. Such as, do
12 consumers react to different levels of a retail brand in the same way? What are the factors
13 that influence the performance levels for each level of a retail brand? How do different
14 levels of a retail brand interact with each other?
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Fig.I. Flow diagram of article selection process

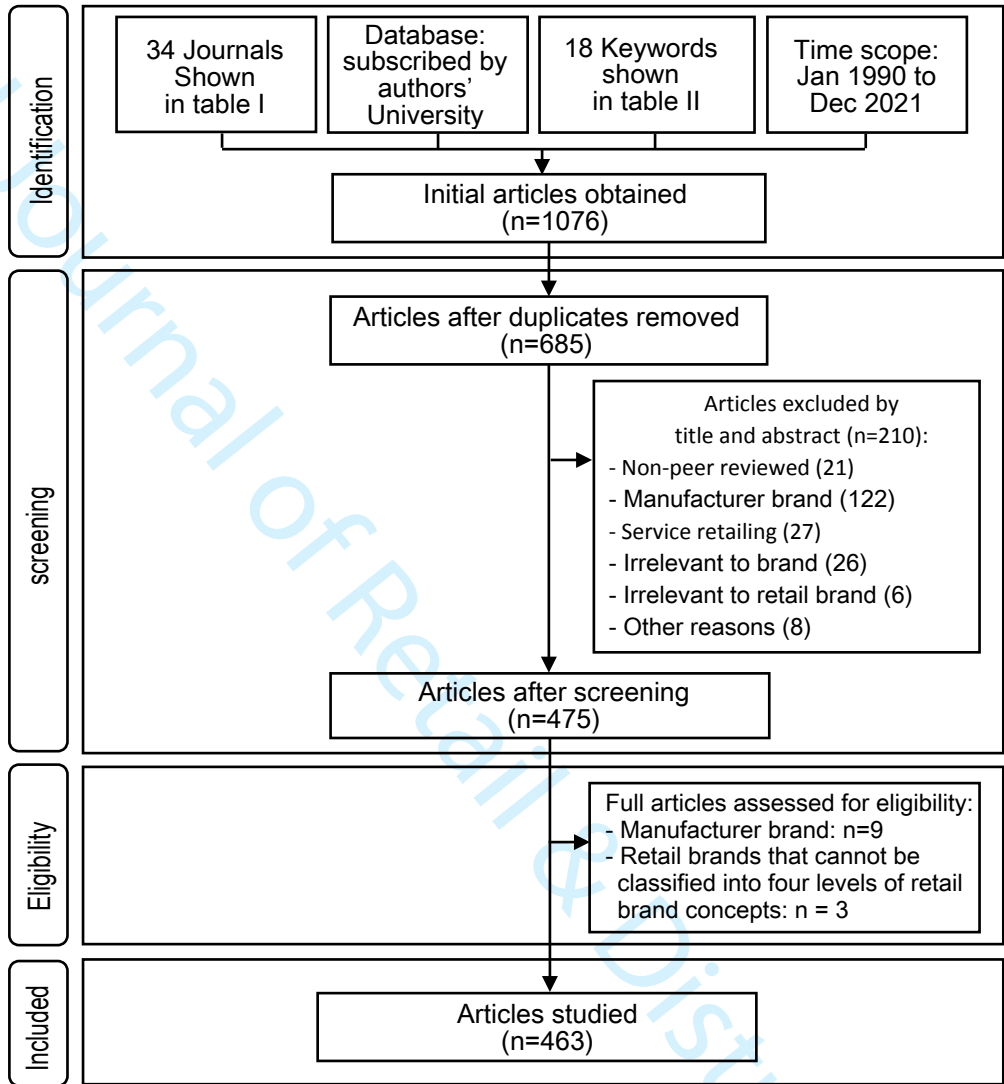


Fig.II. Four levels of retail brands of Lotte, Carrefour and Alibaba

Brand level	Brand scope	Brand names used by Lotte	Brand names used by Carrefour	Brand names used by Alibaba
Retailer brand	A retail company as a whole, or retail part of a diversified company	Lotte	Carrefour	Alibaba
Platform brand	Department Stores	Lotte department store	/	/
	Shopping mall	Lotte world mall	Carmila	Qinchengli
	E-commerce platform	Lotte.com	/	Taobao, Tmall
Store brand	Offline supermarket	Lotte Super	Carrefour Market	Freshhema
	Online Supermarket	Lotte e-super	Ooshop	Tmall supermarket, Freshhema APP
	Convenience store	Korea Seven	Proxi, Carrefour Bio	Taocafe, EGO
	Health & Beauty Store	LOHB'S	/	Ali health Pharmacy
	An electronic appliance	Lotte himart	/	/
Own Product brand	Products that are owned, controlled, and sold exclusively by a retailer	Herbon, Wiselect, Withone, Basicicon, Tasse Tasse, Gerard Darel, Choice L Gold	Carrefour, Simpl, Cookie Place, Crumbies, Montmartre coffee and De Nuestra Tierra	Tmall supermarket: Bonbater, Miaomanfen Freshhema: Everyday Fresh, Emperor Fresh, Hema Workshop, Sweet Tao village

Note: The information of brand names was collected from the websites of each retail company and its subsidiaries. These brand names are only part of the brand names they use, not all of them

Table I. Selected journals for systematic review

Journal type	Number of journals	Journal title	Number of articles
Retail related	5	International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management	95
		International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research	41
		Journal of Retail and Leisure Property (discontinued)	0
		Journal of Retailing	32
		Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	86
Electronic Commerce related	2	Electronic Commerce Research	2
		International Journal of Electronic Commerce	1
Brand related	2	Journal of Brand Management	18
		Journal of Product and Brand Management	55
Marketing related	21	Australasian Marketing Journal	11
		European Journal of Marketing	20
		Industrial Marketing Management	3
		International Journal of Research in Marketing	5
		International Marketing Review	3
		Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	2
		Journal of Consumer Marketing	14
		Journal of Interactive Marketing	1
		Journal of International Marketing	2
		Journal of Marketing	9
		Journal of Marketing Management	16
		Journal of Marketing Research	10
		Journal of Services Marketing	1
		Journal of Strategic Marketing	2
		Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	3
		Marketing Intelligence and Planning	4
		Marketing Letters	5
		Marketing Science	11
		Marketing Theory	1
		Psychology and Marketing	4
		Quantitative Marketing and Economics	3
Service related	3	Journal of Service Research	1
		Journal of Service Management	1
		Manufacturing and Service Operations Management	0
Behaviour related	1	Computers in Human Behaviour	1

Table II. Selected keywords for systematic review

	Retail	Retailer	Store	Shop	Supermarket	Mall	Platform
Brand	Retail brand	Retailer brand	Store brand	Shop brand	Supermarket brand	Mall brand	Platform brand
Branding	Retail branding	Retailer branding	Store branding	Shop branding	Supermarket branding	Mall branding	Platform branding

Table III. The retail brand terms used in literature (number of articles)

Brand terms author used	Product as a brand	Store as a brand	Retail company as a brand	Retail platform as a brand	Sum
Distributor brand	1				1
Online brand		2			2
Own brand	10				10
Own label	3				3
Own label brand	2				2
Private brand	15				15
Private label	88				88
Private label brand	57				57
Private store brand	1				1
Retail brand	19	43	16		78
Retailer brand	13	16	6		35
Store brand	103	13	1		117
E-retailer brand		2			2
Online retailer brand		1			1
E-tail brand		1			1
Brand	6	23	4	1	34
Corporate brand		3	3		6
E-retail brand		1			1
Internal brand		1			1
Retail corporate brand		2			2
Retail service brand		1			1
Shop brand			1		1
Retailer corporate brand			2		2
Mall brand				2	2
Total	318	109	33	3	463
Percentage	68.7%	23.5%	7.1%	0.6%	

Table IV. Content analysis of the definitions of “own product brand” and “store brand”

Code category	Description	Examples in definitions	Coding for own product brand		Coding for store brand	
			Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Synonyms	Similar terms used by other scholars for the same retail brand concept.	“Known as private labels or retailer brands” (Diallo <i>et al.</i> , 2017, p. 537).	15	41.7%	-	-
Brand scope	The scope that the branding effort covers, i.e., product, store, retail company, retail platform.	“Defined as products produced on behalf of retailers”(Levy and Gendel-Guterman, 2012, p.89).	15	41.7%	3	37.5%
Ownership	Who developed, owned and controlled a retail brand.	“Private label brands are brands owned by a retailer or wholesaler” (Hyman <i>et al.</i> , 2010, p.369).	25	69.4%	-	-
Availability	Where and how customers have experience with each retail brand concept.	“ Exclusively distributed inside the retailer chain” (Marques dos Santos <i>et al.</i> , 2016, p.184).	19	52.8%	-	-
Brand name	The names used by retailers at each level of retail brand concept.	“Carry the retailer’s name” (Bodur <i>et al.</i> , 2016, p.204).	14	38.9%	3	37.5%
Concept comparison	Comparing one retail brand concept with other related but different concepts to highlight the differences between them.	“As opposed to manufacturer’s brands” (Ferne and Pierrel, 1996, p.48).	3	8.3%	2	25%
Differentiation strategy	How to build a unique retail brand at each level, and differentiate it from one’s competitors.	“Differentiates them from the competitors” (Calvo-Porrall and Lévy-Mangin, 2014, p.595).	2	5.6%	-	-

Table V. Summary of the attributes of each retail brand concept

Brand concept	Brand scope	Ownership	Brand name	Availability	Differentiation strategy	Concept comparison
Own product brand	Product	Owned by a retail store.	Carrying the name of a store, a retail platform, or a retail company; a new name; or bundled.	Exclusively sold in a retailer's own store(s).	Differentiate retailers' own brand products from manufacturer's products at utilitarian level, such as function, quality, price.	Compared to manufacturer brand.
Store brand	Store	Owned by a retail platform, or a retail company, or a manufacturer.	Carrying the name of a retail platform or a retail company; or the company names of some manufacturers; a new name; or bundled.	A variety of retail channels, such as online, offline or multi-channel.	Differentiate a retailer's store from other stores through working on product portfolio, service, and store atmosphere and in-store marketing activities.	Compared to platform brand and retailer brand.
Platform brand	Retail platform	Owned by a retail company.	Usually use a retail company's name; a new name; or bundled.	A variety of retail channels, such as online, offline or multi-channel.	Differentiate a physical or online retail platform from others through optimizing tenant portfolio, transaction support service, shopping atmosphere and in-platform marketing activities.	Compared to store brand.
Retailer brand	Retail company or retail part of a diversified company	Owned by a retail company.	A retail company's name.	Contacting a retailer's own retail platform(s), store(s), product(s), as well as advertisements and environmental sustainability practices.	Differentiate a retail company from others through optimizing retail business portfolio, enhancing corporate image, and spreading its vision, values, culture.	Compared to store brand.

Definitions of retail brand terms in literature

Term used	Defined by author	Author
	<i>Own product brand</i>	
Distributor brand	A distributors' brand may be defined as one which is owned and controlled by an organization whose primary economic commitment is distribution.	Schutte, 1969
Own brand	A retailer own-brand is a product or service that either carries the brand of the retailer or a separate brand name that is controlled by the retailer.	Oxera, 2010
	An own brand can be defined simply as the "products retailers sell under their own names.	Burt, 2000
	Much of the literature on this topic uses interchangeable terms to explain products which are commissioned, marketed and owned by a retailer as opposed to manufacturer's brands which are available for all retailers.	Fernie and Pierrel, 1996
	Products sold under a retail organization's house brand name, which are sold exclusively through that retail organization's outlets.	Morris, 1979
	Retailer own-brands are traditionally referred to as retailers' own products and the term retailer own-brands is often used interchangeably with private labels, own-labels, retailer brands, or store brands.	Huang and Huddleston, 2009
Own label	Own label products are defined as consumer products produced by, or on behalf of, retailers and sold under the retailers' own name or trade mark through their own outlets.	Baltas, 1997
Private label	PLs are products which are typically manufactured by one company for offer under another company's brand.	Tsafarakis et al., 2016
	Private label products are owned by retailers, wholesalers, or distributors and are sold privately in their own stores.	Bushman BJ, 1993
	Private labels can be exclusive retailer programs; they can be developed by a third party.	Hoch and Banerji, 1993
	Private labels are to be intended as 'store brands', whose name clearly marks their identification with the retailer and which are often positioned to compete directly with manufacturers' brands.	Mauri et al., 2015
	Private labels or store brands are generally brands owned, controlled, and sold exclusively by the retailers.	Sethuraman, 1995
	Private labels, also called store brands, are brands developed by retailers.	Bao et al., 2011
	The private label is the exclusive brand for which the retailer is responsible.	Mao et al., 2021
	We denote private label as a brand owned or controlled by a downstream firm (retailer) and sold exclusively retail chain or group.	Chen et al., 2010
	Private label brands, also termed as store brands, are generally brands owned, manufactured and sold by retailers exclusively.	Mishra et al., 2021
	Retailer-owned private label brands are consumer products that are distributed exclusively by a retailer and carry the retailer's name or a brand name created by a retailer.	Bodur et al., 2016
	Private label brands are brands owned by a retailer or wholesaler.	Hyman et al., 2010
	Private label brands are those sold under retailers' (or wholesalers') own labels rather than the brand name of a national manufacturer.	Burton et al., 1998
	Private label brands may be defined as brands that are owned, controlled, marketed, and produced by a particular retailer, or according to its specifications, and sold under its specific name.	Beneke et al., 2012
	Private-label brands are those products which are fully owned, controlled and sold exclusively by the retailers, also known as own-label brands, dealer's store brands or retailer's brands.	Chakraborty, 2013

	Retail brand	The terms “retail brands” “store brands” and “private labels” are used interchangeably to describe certain brands of consumer goods that are produced in accordance to a retailer’s specifications and marketed under the retailer’s name and/or trademark through the retailer’s outlets.	Lymperopoulos et al., 2010a
		The concept of retail brand characterizes brands created, supervised and sold exclusively by a store.	Binninger, 2008
	Retailer brand	A retailer branded product (or own-label) has the name of the distributor on the package and is exclusively distributed inside the retailer chain and it is its legal property.	Marques dos Santos et al., 2016
	Store brand	Following the definition given by the American Marketing Association, store brands can be defined as the brand which identify the goods and services of a retailer and differentiates them from the competitors.	Calvo-Porrall and Lévy-Mangin, 2014
		Store Brand, or Private Label product refers to the product owned, controlled, and sold by the retailer.	Assarzagdegan and Hejazi, 2021
		Store brands are offered exclusively by the retailers that own them, which means they can differentiate the owner from other retailers.	González-Benito and Martos-Partal, 2012
		Store brands are private label brands that bear or suggest the name of a retailer.	Sheinin and Wagner, 2003
		Store brands are the only brand for which the retailer must take on all responsibility—from development, sourcing, and warehousing to merchandising and marketing.	Dhar and Hoch, 1997
		Store brands or private labels are created and controlled by retailers.	Sayman et al., 2002
		Store brands, also referred to as private labels by practitioners, are defined as products produced on behalf of retailers, and sold under the retailers’ own name or trademark, through their own outlets.	Levy and Gendel-Guterman, 2012
		Store brands, or private labels, are brands owned, controlled, and sold exclusively by a retailer.	Raju, et al., 1995
		Store brands, otherwise known as private labels or retailer brands, refer to products that belong to a retail chain, carry the chain’s name and are offered exclusively in the retail chain’s outlets, in contrast to national brands.	Diallo et al., 2017
		Store brands, termed also as private label brands or own brands, are brands owned and sold by a retailer in its own outlets.	Sprott and Shimp, 2004
		Unlike national brands which may be purchased at virtually any chain, store brands are proprietary to the chains themselves.	Richardson et al., 1996
		Store brands must be differentiated from private label brands; the former indicates products with a retailer name, whilst the latter are not typically endorsed by a retailer.	Fall Diallo et al., 2013
		Store brand	
	Retailer brand	Retailer brands are typically more multisensory in nature than product brands and can rely on rich consumer experiences to impact their equity.	Ailawadi and Keller, 2004
	Retail brand	‘Retail brand’, in this context, characterizes the name of a retail company (or specific retail channel) that develops as a brand in the consumers’ mind.	Morschett et al., 2005
		A retail brand is, then, a group of the retailer’s outlets which carry a unique name, symbol, logo or combination thereof.	Zentes et al., 2008
		The retail brand refers to “a retailer as a brand or a retail store as a brand”.	Das, 2014
	Retail corporate brand	Retail corporate brands are unique compared to product brands, comprising distinctive and varied brand associations such as product	Dwivedi and Merrilees, 2016

assortment, store layout, staff interactions, and uniquely identifiable retail environments.

Retailer brand

Corporate brand	Corporate brand image is defined as the combined effect of how the retailer as a brand, manufacturer brands, and store brands are perceived.	Martenson, 2007
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Note: In order to better summarize these definitions, we selected definitions according to the following principals: (1) for the cited definitions, we located the original definitions by reading the cited articles; (2) Some authors cite more than one definition, and we include all the different definitions cited; (3) Some definitions, as cited by multiple authors, are the same, so we deleted the duplicates. (4) Some cited definitions come from literature that is unavailable, so, they are excluded from our summary. (5) There are five definitions that cannot be classified into any of the four categories of retail brand concepts mentioned above and have therefore been excluded. For example, retailer brand, as defined by Esbjerg and Bech-Larsen (2009), incorporated the manufacturer brand. Finally, 42 definitions were obtained.