

Preferring e-commerce and its markets through the role of sponsored promotion of private labels in Republic of North Macedonia

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Abstract: The preference of e-commerce and its marketplaces has increased significantly in recent years, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced consumers to switch to online shopping. This trend has not only changed the dynamics of traditional commerce, but has also set new standards for branding and marketing, with an emphasis on sponsored promotion of private labels. Private labels, which are usually produced for a specific retailer and sold under its name, play a significant role in e-commerce. These labels often offer competitive prices and unique quality, which makes them attractive to consumers. By investing in sponsored promotion, these labels can reach a wide audience and gain consumers' trust. Sponsored promotion allows for private brands to stand out in a competitive market. By using digital marketing tools such as Google Ads, social networks and e-commerce platforms, labels can create entire campaigns that target specific consumer groups. But e-commerce marketplaces (platforms) allow third-party sellers to sell to potential consumers and earn a commission on sales. In recent years, these platforms have also started to target private labels themselves and offer their own sponsored advertising tools, in order to generate additional revenue for them through this mechanism. Therefore, private labels and sponsored advertising are considered to complement the improvement of profits of the e-commerce platform itself. In Macedonia, there are various e-commerce platforms, including local websites, as well as global ones such as Amazon and eBay. Many small and medium-sized enterprises have started to develop their own online stores in order for them to be competitive in the market. Private labels in the Republic of North Macedonia, especially in categories such as food, clothing and hygiene products, are becoming increasingly popular. They often offer competitive prices and unique quality, which makes them attractive to consumers. This not only increases the visibility of private labels, but also improves awareness for their products.

In addition to this, it increases awareness of e-commerce, the platforms that offer this tool and the gradual growth as new potential markets with equality of all potential stakeholders.

Keywords:

E-commerce, private labels, marketing, promotion

Field:

Social Sciences, Economics, Marketing Management

1 Introduction

The preference for e-commerce and its markets has increased significantly in recent years, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced consumers to switch to online shopping. This trend has not only changed the dynamics of traditional commerce, but it has also set new standards for branding and marketing, with an emphasis on continuous sponsored promotion of private labels. Private labels, which are usually produced for a specific merchant and sold under their name, play a significant role in e-commerce. These labels often offer competitive prices and unique quality, making them attractive to consumers. By investing in sponsored promotions, these labels can reach a wide audience and gain trust.

The preference for private labels has become increasingly popular in recent years, both in global and local markets, and especially in retail markets, including the Republic of North Macedonia. Private labels, also known as "store brands" or "private label brands", are products that are manufactured by third parties but sold under the name of a specific retailer. These labels offer several advantages and characteristics that explain why they are becoming preferred by consumers.

The easy accessibility of e-commerce markets, along with the digital software tools that are incorporated into their platforms, are becoming increasingly attractive both for the companies themselves and for consumers as well. The same applies to the RSM, but with a note about the legal framework for their functioning, although the first law on e-commerce in the RSM was adopted back in 2007. It has been amended only four times by 2021. It can be noted that progress in e-commerce is much faster than the state system, which needs to follow it and adapt.

Marketing and sponsored promotion through specific targeting, increased visibility and building trust play a key role in the success of private labels. Consumer preference for private labels is the result of a combination of competitive prices, quality, variety and marketing strategies. With the development of e-commerce and greater availability of information, private labels continue to gain popularity in the Republic of North Macedonia and on the global market. The offer of these products will continue to be an important part of the trading strategy of almost all companies in the future.

2 E-Commerce And Its Markets Through The Role Of Sponsored Promotion Of Private Labels

E-commerce is characterized by global reach, easy access to a wide range of products (breadth and depth of the same), and the ability to compare prices and product features. These factors influence consumers to be informed and make informed decisions when choosing products. In e-commerce markets, private labels are increasingly popular because they offer the same or similar qualities as brands, but at a lower price. Consumers in this context are very often guided by factors such as price, quality through previous purchase experiences, as well as the available visibility through electronic design and multimedia tools as part of the presentation or promotion of the offered services or products.

Private labels, or products, offer competitive advantages over large global brands. To increase visibility and demand for these products, many companies use sponsored promotions across a variety of channels. Social media and advertising platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads allow brands to target their ads to consumers in a personalized way, which increases the chance of consumer action. Sponsored promotions can include direct advertising of specific products, discounts, or promotions that are associated with private labels.

Sponsored promotions can significantly change consumers' perceptions of private labels. For example, consumers who are exposed to sponsored ads for private labels are more likely to choose these products over high-profile brands. Through a promotion strategy through platforms like Google Ads and social media, companies can target specific consumer interests and offer them attractive offers.

The signs of private label success are not limited to developed markets. With globalization and the rise of internet access, new markets, especially in developing countries, are embracing e-commerce and seeing private labels as an alternative to branded products. Sponsored promotions in these markets can have a significant impact on consumer habits and can create new opportunities for foreign companies to enter these regions.

3 E-Commerce And Sponsored Promotion Of Private Labels In RSM

E-commerce in Macedonia began to grow significantly after 2015, with the increased use of the internet and mobile devices. According to state statistics, the number of internet users is constantly growing, leading to a significant increase in online purchases. On the other hand, a large number of local and global companies operating in Macedonia are trying to adapt to this new way of trading. Private labels, which were traditionally popular in developed countries, are now starting to appear on the Macedonian market, as consumers start to look for products that offer similar quality to branded ones, but at lower prices.

Private labels, although new to the Macedonian market, are beginning to attract attention as an economical option for consumers seeking lower-cost products. They are produced and sold by retail chains and are identified by their own names, rather than global brands. Private labels in Macedonia are often cheaper, but can offer competitive quality, making them attractive to price-sensitive consumers. However, marketing strategies for these products need to be chosen with particular care, given the competition from big brands.

Digital marketing and sponsored promotions are important tools for attracting consumers and building awareness for private labels in Macedonia. Sponsored promotions include targeted advertising through platforms such as Google Ads, Facebook, Instagram and other channels. These advertising campaigns are specifically designed to reach consumers in a personalized way, based on their interests, demographics and previous purchasing habits. For local retailers, these platforms offer an effective means of promoting private labels and positioning them as competitors to global brands.

While the potential for growth of e-commerce and private labels in Macedonia is great, there are also challenges that need to be overcome. Some of the biggest challenges include:

- *Low awareness of private labels:* Consumers in Macedonia are traditionally accustomed to global brands and often doubt the quality of private labels.
- *Lack of trust in e-commerce:* Although online shopping is growing rapidly, many consumers still fear the security of transactions and delivery.
- *Logistical Challenges:* Developing effective and fast delivery services is critical for the success of e-commerce.
- *Building consumer trust:* Given the traditional preference for global brands, one of the key strategies for private labels to succeed will be to build consumer trust. Through better information, quality assurance, and support for local businesses, the acceptability of private labels can be increased.
- *More attention to education about the advantages of private labels:* Creating campaigns that inform consumers about the competitive advantages of private labels, such as price and quality benefits can contribute to better acceptance of these products.
- *Effective logistics solutions:* As you mentioned, one of the key challenges for e-commerce in the RSM is logistics. Developing fast, reliable, and cost-effective delivery services is essential for successful e-commerce. Incorporating local deliveries or partnerships with existing logistics companies can alleviate this obstacle.
- *Technological advances and new tools:* Stay up to date with new technologies and tools in digital marketing, such as data analytics and artificial intelligence, which can help better target and personalize campaigns, leading to greater effectiveness of sponsored promotions.

These challenges also bring opportunities for innovation, such as improving digital platforms and using advanced marketing strategies.

4 E-Commerce And Artificial Intelligence

The convergence of e-commerce and artificial intelligence has significantly redefined the digital marketplace, introducing innovations that improve user experience and increase operational efficiency. Artificial intelligence technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, and computer vision, are increasingly embedded in e-commerce platforms, enabling personalized services and automated processes.

Machine learning algorithms enable platforms to analyze vast amounts of data and predict consumer behavior, enabling personalized recommendations and dynamic pricing (Huang & Rust, 2021). Natural language processing supports conversational systems such as chatbots and virtual assistants, enabling real-time interactions (Jakkula, 2025). Computer vision technologies

enable visual search and virtual try-ons, bridging the online and physical shopping experience (Xu et al., 2024).

Artificial intelligence analyzes user data, such as browsing and purchase history, to offer personalized recommendations and content (Kumari et al., 2024). *Chatbots and virtual assistants* provide 24/7 support, answer questions, assist with orders, and offer guidance on product selection (Tax et al., 2021).

Through visual search, shoppers can upload an image to find similar products or “try on” products virtually through AR technologies (Salunke & Nichite, 2022). *Inventory and supply chain optimization* helps in demand forecasting, inventory management, and logistics, resulting in reduced costs and improved efficiency (Pallathadka et al., 2021). *Fraud detection and cybersecurity* using artificial intelligence and its algorithms can identify suspicious behavior patterns, and help prevent fraud in real time (Tax et al., 2021). The integration of artificial intelligence brings numerous benefits, such as improved user experience through personalization, operational efficiency through automation, analytical insights for decision-making, and increased revenues through improved marketing and sales strategies (Huang & Rust, 2021).

Private labels are products that are produced by a single manufacturer but sold under the retailer’s brand. In recent years, especially through e-commerce platforms, private labels have gained increasing importance. Artificial intelligence plays a key role in their development and management. By analyzing consumer data and preferences, artificial intelligence allows online retailers to identify product gaps, create targeted private labels, and position products at competitive prices (Huang & Rust, 2021; Kumari et al., 2024). Platforms such as Amazon with its “Amazon Basics” and Alibaba with its own private labels use artificial intelligence to monitor market trends and rapidly develop their own products. Through machine learning tools, they can predict which products will sell best and thereby increase profit margins through their own labels instead of relying on third-party manufacturers (Pallathadka et al., 2021).

Despite the benefits, the integration of AI also brings challenges such as concerns about data privacy, the possibility of algorithmic bias, lack of transparency in decision-making processes, and potential job losses due to automation (Adanyin, 2024). The adoption of ethical practices and policies to protect users is necessary. The future of AI in e-commerce promises advanced solutions such as hyper-personalization with real-time data, the development of voice and conversational commerce, automatic generation of product content, and environmentally optimized supply chains (Huang & Rust, 2021).

5 Ethics In E-Commerce And Its Markets Through The Role Of Sponsored Promotion Of Private Labels

One of the most significant ethical issues in modern e-commerce concerns the role of platforms in the sponsored promotion of their own private labels. Platforms such as Amazon, eBay, Alibaba, and others not only provide a space for sales, but also actively participate in the market through their own labels, such as “Amazon Basics”. This dual role causes a potential conflict of interest, as the same companies have control over search algorithms and recommendations, while at the same time promoting products that do not belong to them (Zhu & Liu, 2023). Through sponsored

advertising, their private labels often gain favorable positions on the platform – both in search results and in recommendations – which can lead to unfair treatment and trade practices of external merchants and reduced competition (Kumar & Gupta, 2022). In addition, these platforms have exclusive access to sensitive sales and shopping behavior data, which allows them to develop private products that directly mimic the best-selling brands of independent sellers (European Commission, 2021). These practices are not always transparent to consumers, which poses an ethical problem in terms of information and trust, as many users are not aware that certain products are promoted based on ownership, rather than quality or popularity (Zhu & Liu, 2023). As a result of these risks, regulators – notably the European Union – are calling on platforms to ensure greater transparency and fair access to the digital market (European Commission, 2021), while some researchers also propose a structural separation of platform and merchant functions as a long-term ethical solution (Kumar & Gupta, 2022).

In the Republic of North Macedonia, e-commerce is becoming an increasingly important segment of the economy, especially after the rise of digital shopping due to global trends and the impact of the pandemic. This also raises new ethical issues related to transparency, fair competition and consumer protection, especially in the domain of the promotion of private labels. As online sales platforms increasingly develop and promote their own brands, the question of the ethics of their role as merchants and intermediaries is raised. In the Macedonian market, private labels are becoming increasingly present on domestic e-platforms, where local retailers develop products under their own names, but place them alongside and often ahead of products from other brands. Through sponsored advertising, algorithmic product selection or visibility on websites, these products are given priority, which can distort fair competition and lead to manipulation of consumer perception. In conditions of a still insufficiently developed regulatory framework for digital marketing, such practices can cause unethical favoritism of private labels, to the detriment of independent brands and consumers who are not always aware of the commercial background of the recommendations.

Although the Consumer Protection Law and the Law on Electronic Commerce provide a basic regulatory framework, they are not specific enough regarding the promotion of own brands by e-platforms. There are also no clear rules for marking sponsored content or algorithmically selected recommendations, which leaves room for ethical inconsistency and abuse. In such conditions, it is necessary to introduce additional transparency measures, including clear marking of private labels, marking of paid promotions and access to information on the criteria according to which products appear in the top positions.

Ethically, platforms have a responsibility to ensure equal treatment of all market participants, especially when they have data on sales, trends and user habits. Without appropriate regulation and self-regulation, there is a risk of market distortion, increased information asymmetry and loss of consumer trust. To overcome these challenges, alignment with European standards for transparency and fair digital trade, as well as the development of codes of ethics by Macedonian e-commerce associations and regulatory bodies, is recommended.

6 E-Commerce Platforms As Specific Markets In The Republic Of North Macedonia And Their Private Labels

Within the digital economy in the Republic of North Macedonia, e-commerce platforms are increasingly positioning themselves as separate and independent digital marketplaces, which not only enable the exchange of goods and services, but also actively shape buyer behavior, competition, and market dynamics. Through platforms such as Grouper.mk, Setec.mk, Anhoch.mk, and the increasingly frequent use of marketplaces via social media, a new form of trade infrastructure is being formed where the platform is not only an intermediary, but also a moderator, promoter, and – increasingly – a direct participant with its own products.

In this context, the emergence of private labels is notable – products sold under the label of the platform or merchant itself, but not always with a clear indication that they are owned by the platform itself. These private labels in the Macedonian e-commerce space are most often present in categories such as electronics, cosmetics, household accessories and food. Although still at a lower level compared to developed markets, the tendency towards vertical integration – where the platform is also the seller – creates new market relations, but also ethical challenges. As digital marketplaces, platforms have the power to influence product visibility, recommendation algorithms and search results, which can consciously or unconsciously favor their own private labels at the expense of competing products.

The lack of clear regulation governing the status of platforms as both intermediaries and sellers in the Republic of North Macedonia opens the risk of a lack of transparency and distortion of fair market competition. Consumers are often not sufficiently informed whether a certain product is a private label, whether its positioning in the top is the result of paid promotion or algorithmic selection, and whether there is a commercial interest behind the recommendation. Such practices can lead to consumer manipulation, reduced trust, but also unequal treatment of small and independent sellers who use the same platforms to access the market.

To ensure the sustainable and ethical development of these new digital markets, a specific regulatory framework is needed that would regulate the status of e-commerce platforms as marketplaces, their obligations for transparency, consumer protection and clear branding of private labels. In addition, ethical codes of conduct, aligned with European directives such as the DMA (Digital Markets Act), could serve as a self-regulation mechanism, which would contribute to increasing fair conditions for all participants and trust in digital trade.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, e-commerce is experiencing significant growth, and one of the newest and most impressive platforms leading this transformation is Ananas.mk. The platform, which started as a newly opened e-commerce system, has the ambition to become an important player in the local market. Ananas.mk is a digital marketplace where sellers can list their products, and consumers can easily and quickly purchase a wide range of products, from electronics and clothing to food and home accessories. Ananas.mk is specific in that it not only allows sellers to use the platform as a marketplace, but also actively supports them with opportunities to connect their own private labels. Private labels, which are developed and placed by the sellers themselves on the platform or by the platform itself, are one of the key elements that differentiates Ananas.mk from other e-commerce platforms in Macedonia. Private labels offer competitive advantages, such as lower prices and greater control over supply, which can make them more attractive to

consumers, especially if the platform provides them with a convenient purchasing process and fast delivery. As part of its growth strategy, Ananas.mk actively promotes its private labels, which are sometimes offered with favorable discounts or exclusive offers. Private labels, such as electronic devices, home appliances and household accessories, increase competition in the market and at the same time stimulate sales on the platform. This allows consumers to get products at lower prices, while creating additional profit and competitive advantage for the platform.

7 E-Commerce In The Republic Of North Macedonia And Promotion Of Private Labels Through Numbers

E-commerce in the Republic of North Macedonia is experiencing continuous growth, driven by increased digitalization and changing shopping habits. According to data from the Macedonian E-Commerce Association (AETM), the total value of online transactions reached 649 million Euro in 2023, an increase of 18% compared to 2022 (AETM, 2024). Additionally, in the first half of 2024, online transactions worth 339.8 million Euro were realized, of which 193.1 million Euro were realized with Macedonian cards to Macedonian e-retailers (Maktel, 2024).

At the same time, the growth in the number of e-stores is also significant. According to the same source, in 2023, 1,703 virtual points of sale were registered, of which 1,293 were active, representing 75% of the total number (AETM, 2024). These data indicate an increased interest in engaging in e-commerce, as well as the expansion of the digital economy.

8 Case Studies From The World And The Republic Of North Macedonia

Case Study 1: Amazon – Global Leader in Private Labels

Amazon is a world-renowned e-commerce platform that is not only an intermediary but also an active seller through its “Amazon Basics” brand. This brand is a typical example of a private label that is promoted through algorithmic targeting, sponsored promotion, and dominance in search results. Amazon uses advanced algorithms and consumer data to identify the most sought-after products – such as phone chargers, cables, batteries – and quickly develops versions of them under its own brand. Products under “Amazon Basics” receive priority in recommendations and are often offered at discounts or as part of bundle deals. Amazon has been criticized for using data from independent sellers to launch competing products under its own brand. The European Commission even launched an antitrust investigation in 2021, which resulted in new regulations under the Digital Markets Act (DMA) (European Commission, 2021).

Case Study 2: Ananas.mk – Local example from North Macedonia

Ananas.mk is one of the newest and most dynamic e-commerce platforms in Macedonia, which simultaneously offers a marketplace model and actively develops its own private labels. On Ananas.mk, some of the products under the categories of electronics, home accessories and

cosmetics are presented as exclusive offers. Through sponsored ads on Facebook and Google, the platform actively promotes these products, which are most often under its own or partner brands. Ananas.mk supports local merchants, but at the same time positions itself as a competitor with its own private labels, which is changing the market landscape in North Macedonia (AETM, 2024). This platform not only enables promotion, but also offers logistical support, homepage visibility and special discounts – making it a direct competitor to the merchants using the platform. The table below presents the comparative analysis of two case studies, one of which refers to Amazon and the second to Ananas.

Table 1 Comparative analysis of the two case studies

Criterion	Case Study 1: Amazon (international context)	Case study 2: ananas.mk (local Macedonian context)
Focus of analysis	Promoting private labels through their own platform and algorithms	Positioning local labels and offers through e-platform
Type of private labels	Amazon Basics, Amazon Essentials – cover a wide range of products	Local labels, but also own promotions and deals from Ananas
Application of algorithms and AI	Highly developed – Amazon uses personalized recommendations, data analytics, predictive ordering	Basic automation – recommendations by category, popularity, and promotions
Transparency in promotion	Partial transparency – criticism for favoring own labels without clear labeling	Greater transparency – clear labeling of promotions and limited private labels
Regulatory context	Subject to US and EU regulations – facing investigations into antitrust behavior	Within the Macedonian legal system – e-commerce is still poorly regulated
Type of consumers	Global market, different demographics	Macedonian market, smaller user base, greater trust in local labels
Digital marketing strategies	Aggressive performance marketing, AI-driven ads, cross-selling	Social media marketing, campaigns through influencers and emotional approach
Sources of income	Selling own labels, subscriptions (Prime), commission from third-party sellers	Affiliate commission, marketing services, limited time deals

Key differences:

- Amazon operates globally and has great control over the platform and data, which successfully imposes its own labels.
- Ananas.mk operates in a limited market, but has a higher level of transparency and a focus on ethics and trust towards the local consumer.

Similarities:

- Both platforms use digital marketing and promotional mechanisms to increase sales.
- Both Amazon and Ananas.mk play a role in shaping online consumer habits, with a focus on price, availability, and trust.

Recommendations:

1. **Strengthening the legal framework:** Updating the Law on Electronic Commerce and introducing clear regulations on transparency, identification of private labels and marking of sponsored content.
2. **Greater consumer education:** Awareness campaigns about the advantages of private labels, e-commerce security, and the importance of data and algorithms.
3. **Development of logistics and infrastructure:** Supporting fast and efficient delivery systems, cooperation with local logistics companies, and digital infrastructure for tracking shipments.
4. **Codes of ethics and self-regulation of platforms:** Promoting fair competition through voluntary ethical practices, transparent algorithms, and equal treatment of all sellers.
5. **Support for domestic businesses and startups:** Encouraging the development of private labels by Macedonian companies with financial and expert support.
6. **Investing in digital tools and AI:** Training and implementation of new technologies for better market understanding, personalized offering and competitive advantage.

9 Conclusion

In the world of e-commerce, sponsored promotion of private labels plays a key role in shaping consumer preferences and increasing market competitiveness. Private labels, with the help of fully personalized and targeted advertising campaigns, are becoming more popular, and are proving to be serious competition for large global labels. As a result, consumer preferences are constantly changing, and in the future, sponsored promotion will play an even greater role in shaping these preferences.

Technology and digital platforms play a key role in the development of private labels and their ability to establish themselves in the market. With the advancement of machine learning algorithms, retailers can create much more effective advertising campaigns that precisely target the needs and interests of consumers. This creates a personalized experience that not only increases consumer loyalty, but also encourages their conversion into regular buyers. Such an

approach significantly reduces the risk of failure of new private labels and strengthens their competitiveness.

The preference for e-commerce and the role of private labels through sponsored promotion are significant trends in the Republic of North Macedonia. As consumer habits continue to change and technology advances, e-commerce and private labels will continue to play an important role in the country's economy. Sponsored promotion allows brands to stand out and create a special connection with consumers, which is key to their success in the competitive Asian environment. Private labels, which are represented through various digital channels, can boast higher growth rates and increased visibility thanks to sponsored promotion, which further boosts e-commerce in Macedonia.

E-commerce in the Republic of North Macedonia is booming, and private labels are an important part of the development of this sector. Sponsored promotion through digital channels is a key factor for the successful implementation and popularization of private labels in the Macedonian market. As technology continues to develop and consumers become more open to online shopping, e-commerce is expected to continue to grow, and the role of private labels is expected to strengthen. With this, private labels will become not only an alternative to global brands, but also equally competitive in the game for consumer attention.

The legal framework for e-commerce in the Republic of North Macedonia is important for the development of the digital economy and ensuring consumer rights. According to the laws, e-commerce operators must fulfill their obligations to create a safe and transparent environment for online shopping. With the development of technology and changes in consumer habits, it is expected that the legal framework will continue to change and adapt. This will ensure a fair and secure competitive environment for all participants in e-commerce and will encourage the further digitalization of the Macedonian economy.

Sponsored promotion of private labels is a vital factor for the growth of e-commerce and the formation of new consumer habits. In the Republic of North Macedonia, private labels, through digital advertising strategies and personalized campaigns, are becoming competitive with global brands, and this is shaping consumer preferences. This trend, together with the advancement of technology and the evolution of the legal framework, will continue to shape the future of e-commerce and the economy of the country.

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