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The Effect of Manufacturers' Marketing Mixes on Brand Preferences of Bottled Mineral Water Retailers in Ethiopia: Evidence from Debre Birhan Town

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how marketing mixes of bottled mineral water manufacturers influence the brand preferences of retailers in Ethiopia. This study quantitatively examined how the four marketing mix elements (i.e., product, price, place, and promotion) affect the brand preference of retailers. To collect data, a total of 345 questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected managers in restaurants, groceries, supermarkets, and shops; and 310 usable questionnaires were employed for analysis. Descriptive and ANOVA, two-tailed t-test and multiple regression analysis were used. The finding shows that product, price, promotion, and distribution have a significant and a positive effect on retailer's preference towards bottled mineral water brands. This study suggests that bottled mineral water manufacturers should design and upgrade their marketing programs in line with the requirements of customers in order to gain acceptance in the market.

Keywords: Brand Preference, Product, Price, Promotion, Distribution, Bottled Water, Ethiopia

Background of This Study

In this competitive global business environment, retailers have alternatives to purchase products that most consumers prefer by comparing and contrasting a variety of options available in the market. Thus, marketers should struggle to gain acceptance in the mind of customers. They can do so by analysing determinant factors of consumer's brand choices and adjusting their products to customers' requirements (Kim & Kim, 2018).

The bottled mineral water market is among the fastest-growing and the most dynamic markets in the beverage industry (Ferrier, 2001). This fast rise has been seen in the emerging markets like countries of Asia, South America, and Africa (Gleick, 2004). The bottled water industry started in Ethiopia lately at the end of 1990s by a brand name called 'Highland', which still now is functional. The favourable government policies in Ethiopia towards the industrialization and privatization of the manufacturing sector create opportunities for manufactured drinking water investment to flourish in various parts of the country (Yalew, 2014). Thus, the competition at global and regional levels is also manifested in Ethiopia. This signifies the appropriateness of investigating factors influencing customer preferences in such competitive business environments.

Accordingly, prior studies confirmed that the traditional marketing mix elements (i.e., product, price, place, and promotion) have the power to shape consumer preferences, create loyalty, and brand equity (Kim & Kim, 2018; Basuki, 2015). In addition, according to Taboli (2017), the role of brands in helping customers to identify the company's products in today's growing market is undeniable. Nowadays, innovation and technical superiority are not the only fundamental factors to success. In the markets where products and services are similar, a strong brand may be the only characteristic that makes a product or service distinguished from other

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competing products and services. Therefore, companies are looking for a competitive advantage through investing in the development of strong brands.

Based on this, the study addressed the following questions: Do product attributes affect bottled mineral water retailers' brand preferences? What is the effect of price on bottled mineral water retailers' brand preferences? Does promotion have an effect on bottled mineral water retailers' brand preferences? What are the effects of distribution practices on bottled mineral water retailers' brand preferences?

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Foundation

The brand is an attribute that endows a product with intangible elements. Brand equity theory argues that through a strong brand, customers are more likely attracted and remain loyal to products/services that meet or exceed their expectations (Kegoro & Justus, 2020). According to Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, when brand elements are backed by a sound marketing program, it creates brand equity, which represents the added value that accrues to the organization (Davcik, Vinhas da Silva & Hair, 2015). Brand equity, in turn, has an effect on sustainable competitive advantage, innovation, and better market performance (Hussain et al., 2020).

Hence, according to Kato (2021) being a preferred brand or the power of a brand to attract more customers is the result of strong marketing program elements (i.e. product, price, place, and promotion). Companies are more likely to attract and retain customers through different communication platforms; they purchase products valuable to them; and associate price with the quality (Kegoro & Justus, 2020). Based on this, this study takes the view that at the heart of a great brand is a great marketing program.

Empirical Review

The positive effect of a company's marketing program on brand equity and brand preference has been widely acknowledged by prior studies in the marketing literature. For example, marketing mix strategies (product, price, distribution, and promotion) directly affect marketing performance in the Indonesian business environment (Rustandi & Wardhana, 2013). The overall marketing program has a relationship with a brand preference; and particularly the quality of services has more effect on customers' preferences (Cengiz & Yayla, 2007). Similarly, Allameh and Noktedan (2010) also conducted a study on the effect of product quality on brand preference in the Nigerian beverage industries; and found out that there was a positive and significant relationship between product quality and customer's brand preference.

Regarding the relationship between promotion and brand preference, Share and Salimeh (2010) found out that TV advertising has a influence on purchasers' attitude toward a brand; and forcing them to purchase specific products frequently. In a study conducted by Kim and Hyun (2011), distribution channel performance, promotion effectiveness, improving after-sales services, brand awareness, and perceived quality are the most important factors in customers brand preference.

According to Amofah (2015) marketing mix elements (product, price, place and promotion) have a statistically significant relationship with customer choice; whereas place has no significant relationship with customer decision to purchase in restaurants.

Beyene (2018), a study on the effect of marketing mix on customer's brand preference at St. George Brewery, shows that price has a negative effect on brand preference whereas product quality, distribution and promotion have a positive effect on brand preference by customers of the St. George Brewery. Similarly, Situmorang et al. (2016) also confirmed that the effectiveness of marketing program (i.e., product, price, place, and promotion) has a positive effect on customers' loyalty.

The other researcher, Legese Lema and Mulugeta Negash (2018), studied factors affecting the brand choice of the consumers on bottled water products. Price, product quality, brand name, advertisement, packaging, brand availability and brand image are identified as critical to the brand choice of consumers for bottled water products.

Legese Lema and Mulugeta Negash (2018) found out that consumers' preference of bottled water brands is significantly influenced by brand image, affordability of price, availability, product quality and advertisement. If

consumers have a positive perception of a brand, they tend to choose a brand, and this has a positive effect on customers repeated purchases of the brand. On the other hand, price is an important factor that was found to be a significant predictor of brand choice decision for bottled water. The participants believe that affordability and reasonable price influence their brand choice decision for bottled water products. The advertisement also is found to be the determinant factor in the brand choice decision for bottled water. Consumers prefer to buy bottled water product that is frequently exposed by advertisement. Brand availability was a significant predictor variable to brand choice decision. Since most of the bottled water brands in Ethiopia exhibit almost similar product attributes (taste, mineral content, and size), the brand which is distributed intensively can get the chance to be chosen by many consumers who look for ease of availability; products that are provided at a time that is most convenient and accessible for the customer to be chosen by users. Product quality was found to be significantly contributing factor to consumers brand choice decision for bottled water. Similarly, Raj (2012) also confirmed that price, distribution intensity, and promotion are important determinants of customer loyalty.

Silvia and Alwi (2008) found that brand image does not only enhance consumer buying decisions, but it also has a direct positive relationship with customer loyalty. However, Moon, Joo and Jeon (2009) also examined the sequential relations among service quality, customer satisfaction and customer buying decisions, using the brand image as a moderating variable between satisfactions and buying decisions. The finding reveals that some of the dimensions of service quality have a positive effect on customer buying decisions, though brand image fails to show a moderating effect.

Based on this, the following hypotheses can be posited:

H1: Product has a positive significant effect on retailer preference of bottled mineral water brands.

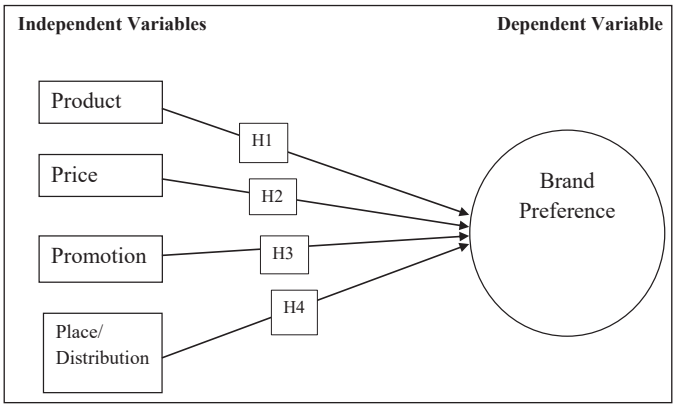
H2: Price decision has a positive effect on retailer preference of bottled mineral water brands.

H3: Promotion has a positive effect on retailer preference of bottled mineral water brands.

H4: Distribution has a positive effect on retailer preference of bottled mineral water brands.

Conceptual Framework

This study was designed to investigate the effect of the generic marketing mix elements (independent variables) on retailer's brand preference (dependent variable). Therefore, the following conceptual framework shows the relation between the 4ps (product, price, promotion, and place) and brand preference retailers.



Source: Adopted from Singh (2012) and Aaker (2003).

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

Research Approach

Kothari (2004) suggests that research can take one or a combination of exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory approaches. In this study, by taking the research objectives and nature of the study into consideration, descriptive and explanatory research designs were used. The descriptive research approach emphasizes describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group. Hence, in this study, it was used to describe the demographic and general information of the respondents as well as the study variables.

According to Kumar (2011), explanatory studies clarify the relationship between two aspects of a situation or phenomenon. Hence, this study also applied explanatory research design to explain how marketing mix elements of bottled water manufacturers influence the brand preference of retailers. This study is mainly a cross-sectional research survey in which the collection of information from the respondents is carried out at a single point in time.

Research Design

There are three basic types of research designs: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approach. The quantitative research approach is based on the philosophy of post-positivism worldview. It is also reductionist in that the intent is to reduce the ideas into a small, discrete set of ideas to test the variables that constitute hypotheses and research questions. In addition, the quantitative approach uses statistical methods in describing patterns of behaviour and generalizing findings from samples to the population of interest; and employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys (Creswell, 2009).

Hence, by taking the research objectives and questions into consideration, the quantitative research approach was used. A quantitative research approach was used as it is suitable to test relationships based on the hypothesis and research questions (Zikmund, 2003).

Data Types and Sources

The type of data collected in this study was primary because it helps a researcher to generate a clear and more detailed understanding of the problem at hand. Hence, primary data was collected from managers of retail businesses in Debre Brehan town using a semi-structured questionnaire, which contains both closed- and open-ended questions. In addition, secondary data sources such as documents, websites, magazines, reports of the Ministry of Trade were also reviewed.

Target Population and Sampling Procedure

Target Population

The target populations of the study were the registered/ licensed retailer's operating in Deber Birhan town. As per the information obtained from Deber Birhan revenue office, there are 2503 bottled mineral water retailers. The target population of this study was registered retailers (cafe and restaurants, groceries, and shops) that existed in Debire Birhan Town.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size of the study was decided using Yemane's (1967) formula as follows:

$$n = N / 1 + N (e)^2,$$

where

n = Sample Size

N = Population Size

e = error tolerance

$2503 / (1+2503(0.05)^2$

n = 345

In this study, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used in combination. We preferred the stratified sampling technique based on Kothari's (2004) statement "If a population from which a sample is to be drawn does not constitute a homogeneous group, the stratified sampling technique is generally applied in order to obtain a representative sample. In this technique population is divided into several sub-populations that are individually more homogeneous than the total population (the different sub-populations are called strata)". In this study, bottled water retailers are grouped into three strata: café and restaurant, grocers and shops.

To choose the target participants of the study, the research used stratified and simple random sampling techniques. After dividing the population into these strata and proportionately allocating the sample to each stratum, simple random sampling (lottery method) was applied to identify the actual respondents from each stratum.

Table 1: Sample Distribution

	Strata	*Population Size (N)*	*Sample from Each ni=Ni/N*365*	*%*
1	Café and restaurant	714	98	29
2	Groceries	671	93	27
3	Retailer Shops	1118	154	44
	Total	2503	345	100

Notes: *N* is the population size; *n* is the total sample size of the study; N_i is total no. of the population of each stratum.

Data Collection Instrument

We collected primary data using a questionnaire, which consists of closed-ended questions with five-point Likert scale statements, adapted from different previous studies. The questionnaire was initially designed in the English language and translated into the local language (Amharic) to facilitate responses.

Methods of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical techniques were used to describe the personal characteristics of respondents and the perception of respondents toward marketing programs of bottled mineral water manufacturers. Data related to these issues were summarized using the table, charts, frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviations.

In addition, in order to examine the proposed relationships, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regressions were used. Prior to conducting multiple linear regressions, the relevant assumptions of the statistical analysis were tested. Accordingly, the assumption of linearity, normality, multicollinearity, autocorrelation, and model fit were tested.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic Data

Table 2: Summary of the Demographic Profile of Respondents

		Frequency	*Per cent*
Sex	Male	146	24.9
	Female	164	28.0
	Total	310	52.9
Age	15–25 years	70	11.9
	26–35 years	124	21.2
	36–45 years	76	13.0
	46-–55 years	21	3.6
	56 and Above years	19	3.2
	Total	310	52.9
Educational level	Below 10 grade	76	13.0
	10/12 Completed	91	15.5
	Diploma	82	14.0
	1st Degree	53	9.0
	2nd degree & above	8	1.4
	Total	310	52.9
Experience	Below 1 year	90	15.4
	Between 1–3 year	72	12.3
	Between 3–5 years	86	14.7
	Above 5 year	62	10.6
	Total	310	52.9

Source: Researchers' survey, 2021.

Descriptive Analysis of the Study Variable

Table 3 summarizes the descriptive results of the independent variables (product, price, place and promotion) and an independent variable (brand preference). The results are presented as follows:

Table 3: Summary of the Retailers Brand Preference

Items	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation (SD)*
Product	3.7182	0.8704
Price	3.243	0.9773
Promotion	3.3414	0.9531
Distribution	3.8879	0.8975
Brand preference	3.6552	0.8539

The descriptive result indicates that the mean score for the product variable is 3.71 with an average standard deviation of 1.13. This implies that product attributes have an above-average influence to shape consumers' brand preference. Price has rated relatively lower with the mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 1.28 implying that price has less contribution to shape preference of customers. Distribution/place attributes were rated relatively higher with a mean value of 3.89 and SD of 1.09 implying that distribution can a have greater influence to shape the brand preference of consumers. Finally, the promotion has a slightly above-average role in shaping customers/ retailers preferences with a mean value of 3.34 and an SD of 1.27.

Correlation Analysis

This study examined the linear relationship between independent variables (i.e., product, price, place, and promotion) and a dependent variable (brand preference) using correlation analysis. Field (2005) suggested a guideline for the interpretation of correlational values which ranges between –1 and +1. Accordingly, the strength of the relationship between 0.1 and 0.29 shows week relationship; 0.3–0.49 is moderate; > 0.5 shows a strong relationship between the two variables.

Table 4: Correlations Analysis

		Product	*Price*	*Promotion*	*Distribution*	*Brand Preference*
Product	Pearson correlation	1				
	Sig. (two tailed)					
	N	310				
Price	Pearson correlation	0.571**	1			
	Sig. (two -tailed)	0.000				
	N	310	310			
Promotion	Pearson correlation	0.532**	0.605**	1		
	Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	0.000			
	N	310	310	310		
Distribution	Pearson Correlation	0.553**	0.465**	0.515**	1	
	Sig. (two -tailed)	0.000	0.000	0 .000		
	N	310	310	310	310	
Brand preference	Pearson Correlation	0.550**	0.566**	.537**	0.637**	1
	Sig. (two tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	310	310	310	310	310
** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (two tailed).						

The results presented in Table 4 show all the independent variables (i.e. product, price, place, and promotion) have a positive and a strong relationship with the dependent variable (i.e., brand preference) as the relationship exhibits *r*-values of > 0.5.

Testing Statistical Assumptions

Test of Normality

The test of normality examines how likely a random variable underlying a data set to be normally distributed. In this study, normality was checked using the graphic technique. The diagram shows that standard residuals are a little bit far away from the curve, many of the residuals are fairly close more to the curve and the histogram is bell shaped. The majority of scores lie around the centre of the distribution indicating that residuals are normally distributed.

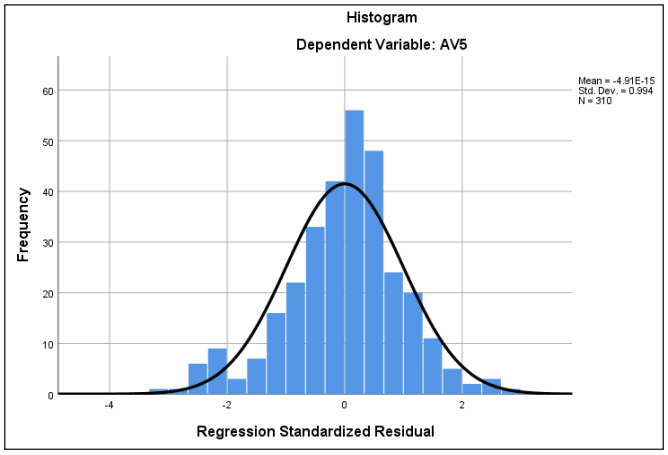


Fig. 2: Normality Test

Linearity Test

There is another useful graph that the researcher can inspect to see if a distribution is normally distributed called a P–P plot (probability–probability plot).

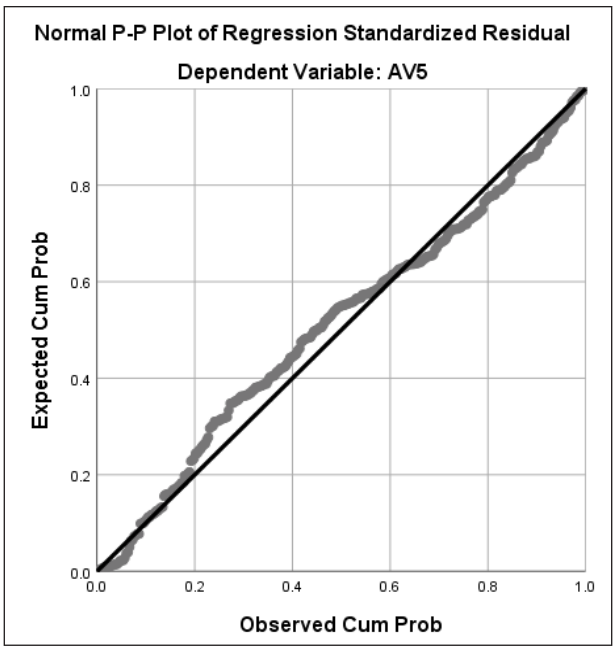


Fig. 3: P–Plot Graphs

Multicollinearity Assumption

Multicollinearity occurs when two or more of the independent variables are highly correlated and when certain mathematical operations are impossible. The two common approaches to examine Multicollinearity problems are variance inflation factors (VIF) and Tolerance (TOL). This study also applied these techniques. Values of the two techniques can be interpreted following (Hair et al., 2013), where the VIF values should not exceed 10 and TOL values should not be less than 0.1. The results are presented as follows:

Table 5: Multicollinearity Test

Items	*Co-Linearity Statistics*	
	Tolerance	*VIF*
Product	0.551	1.816
Price	0.543	1.843
Promotion	0.547	1.829
Distribution	0.621	1.611

Results of Regression Analysis

Models Summary

Table 6: Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	*R*	R^2	*Adjusted* R^2	*Standard Error of the Estimate*
1	0.722[a]	0.522	.515	.59454

[a] Predictors: Constant, product, price, promotion, distribution.
Source: Researcher's survey, 2021.

The above regression model presents how much of the variance in the measures of brand preference is explained by the underlying marketing mix variables. Hence, the model has 51.5% explanatory power.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The ANOVA table shows the overall significance/ acceptability of the model from a statistical perspective (Pedhazur, 1982). The ANOVA test results are presented as follows:

Table 7: ANOVA Table

ANOVA[a]						
Model		*Sum of Squares*	*Df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
1	Regression	117.518	4	29.38	83.115	0.000[b]
	Residual	107.811	305	02.353		
	Total	225.338	309			

[a] Dependent variable: Retailers' brand preference.
[b] Predictors: (Constant), product, price, promotion, distribution.
Source: Researchers' survey, 2021.

As indicated in the table, the *p*-value is < 0.05, i.e. 0.000 which indicates the variation explained by the model is not due to chance. So, the above ANOVA table shows the acceptability of the model.

Results of Regression Analysis

Table 8: Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Standard. Error	β		
	(Constant) (β0)	0.687	0.171		4.021	0.000
	Product (X1)	0.134	0.052	0.136	2.551	0.011
	Price (X2)	0.203	0.047	0.233	4.324	0.000
	Promotion (X3)	0.110	0.048	0.123	2.299	0.022
	Distribution (X4)	0.372	0.048	0.391	7.767	0.000
a. Dependent variable: Retailers brand preference.						

Source: Researchers' survey, 2021.

Results in the table show that the regression-standardized coefficients for the four independent variables, i.e. product, price, promotion and distribution are 0.136, 0.233, 0.123, and 0.391, respectively with *p*-value of 0.000, indicating significant relationships between marketing mix variables and retailers brand preference. Based on this, the following regression model can be formulated:

$$Y \text{ (Brand preference)} = 0.687 + 0.134\ X1 + 0.203\ X2 + 0.110\ X3 + 0.372\ X4 + \sum$$

Hypotheses Testing

Table 9: Summary of the Overall Outcome of the Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Result	Decision
H1: Product has a positive and significant effect on retailers' brand Preference of bottled mineral water.	$\beta = 0.136; p = 0.011$	Accepted
H2: Price has a positive and significant effect on retailers' brand Preference of bottled mineral water.	$\beta = 0.233; p = 0.000$	Accepted
H3: promotion has a positive and significant effect on retailers' brand Preference of bottled mineral water.	$\beta = 0.123; p = 0.022$	Accepted
H4: Distribution has a positive and significant effect on retailer's bottled mineral water.	$\beta = 0.391; p = 0.000$	Accepted

Discussion

Brands are representations of values created through the marketing program and other marketing activities of an organization. Hence, marketing mixes have the power to shape the brand preferences of customers as marketing mix elements are drivers of values.

Product quality, features, and performance are major drivers of value because product benefits are the primary reasons for buying (Lee & Nguyen, 2017). Consistent with such prior findings, the product has a significant effect on the mineral bottled water product preferences of retailers in Ethiopia. Managers of retailers also rated the product as important with a mean value of 3.72 and SD of 0.87.

Price is the monetary and non-monetary sacrifices that customers made in order to secure a product (Petrick, 2004). It is an extrinsic cue to monetary value perception and also describes the emotional experience to get a product (Yasri et al., 2020). Hence, literature widely acknowledged the effect of price perception on buyers brand preference (e.g. Yasri et al., 2020; Ebrahim et al., 2016; Hwang & Chung, 2019). Consistent with prior studies, this study also confirmed that price has a positive relationship with brand preferences of mineral bottled water manufacturers in Ethiopia.

The emergence of novel distribution channels creates opportunities for customers to contrast among brands as distribution creates such utilities as a convenience, time, passion, assortment, and others (Malik & Ullah, 2019). Hence, the distribution practices of bottled mineral water manufacturers can significantly influence the brand preference of retailers and consumers (Guissoni et al., 2021; Brezović et al., 2021; Obondi, 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Consistent with this, this study also confirmed that distribution practices of bottled mineral water producers have a positive and a significant effect on the brand preferences of retailers.

Finally, the promotional activities of manufacturers can create informational values for the customer and have also the power to shape attitudes and preferences (Yu et al., 2020; Vasudevan & Senthilkumar, 2017; Kumar & Patra, 2017). Consistent with the findings of prior studies, this study also confirmed that promotional activities of bottled mineral water manufacturers have a positive and a significant influence on the brand preferences of retailers in Ethiopia.

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

This study concludes that marketing mix strategies and programs of bottled mineral water manufacturers are major value drivers that shape the perceptions and preferences of retailers in Ethiopia. This implies that retailers are comparing and contrasting bottled mineral water brands on the basis of product quality, features, and performance; price offers; utilities from distribution practices; and the message and incentives of promotional activities.

Hence, this study has the following managerial implications: First, as the product is the major value driver, managers should work on improving product attributes to the satisfaction of retail businesses; second, since retail businesses are sensitive to price, especially in the low-priced consumer product category, managers should consciously and competitively priced their products; third, as retailers are distributors themselves, managers of bottled mineral water manufacturers should establish a good and win–win relationship with them; and finally, managers of bottled mineral water manufacturers should have a sound communication strategy in order to meet the information requirements of retailers of bottled mineral water products.

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