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EFFECTS OF BRANDING AND CONSUMER CHOICE OF BOTTLED WATER: A SURVEY STUDY OF INSTITUTIONAL CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Bottled water is becoming one of the fastest-growing markets in the beverage industry globally. Most people perceive bottled water as safe, better quality and as an alternative to other packaged beverages. This perception has seen an increased demand for bottled water, a situation which has resulted in cut-throat competition, infiltration of sub-standard and smuggled goods into the market and non-disclosure of water sources, among other challenges. This dilemma is further confounded by a lack of clarity on what determines consumer preferences. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a brand on consumer choice of bottled water amongst institutional consumers in Kericho town. The study adopted a survey design. The location of the study was Kericho town, and the target population was 74 institutions with 237 respondents. A sample size of 146 respondents was adopted. Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used in the study to sample the institutions and respondents, respectively. Data was collected using a questionnaire, which was deemed a suitable instrument for the study. The reliability of the study was ascertained by doing a pilot study in a different town believed to have the same characteristics as the location. Reliability was determined through Cronbach's Alpha method, where reliability score 0.8 was considered ideal. SPSS was utilized to analyze data that was presented using frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts. Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of data. The study found that the brand of bottled water affected consumer choice with a mean value of 0.312 ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). The study concluded that brand recalling, brand awareness and brand loyalty should be considered while branding since it contributes to consumer choice. The study recommended that manufacturers of bottled water should be more consumer-oriented through conducting consumer survey in order to enable them to brand bottled water based on customer expectation and consider setting affordable prices for all players in the market while making the bottled water products. The study will be significant to manufacturers, consumers of bottled water, government agencies and researchers.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers are overwhelmed with a vast array of choices in today's retail marketing environment. This is especially because they are exposed to so many items in the market and have to make quick decisions based on presumed quality and affordability of the items of varying brands. The decision the consumers make determines the item they select and eventually buy. The manufacturers have to be innovative and creative to ensure that customers get to pick their items for their firms to remain competitive in the market. Branding items is one of the strategies that companies ought to adopt to attract consumers to their goods and to ensure these goods get picked and re-picked. On the other hand, consumers have to go through a thorough buying process before making any purchase decisions. Consumer goods are hard to choose when there are many alternatives, but based on cues such as price, brand experience and competitors' comparison stands to be the best criteria to help the customers meet their expectations (McClure, Bialker, Neff, Williams & Karduna, 2004; Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008).

Bottled water is becoming one of the fastest emergent markets in the beverage industry globally. The fastest growth has been witnessed in the USA., Asia and South America, with the USA having the highest number of consumers of bottled water (Business Research Company, 2008). Most people perceive bottled water as safe, of better taste and quality compared to other sources such as tap, distilled or boiled (Okoe, 2015). Some consumers also perceive bottled water as a healthy alternative to other beverages such as soft drinks which might contain chemical

additives; while others opt for it in their pursuit of food security against the backdrop of food scandals in industrialized countries and waterborne diseases in the developing world (Okoe, 2015)

Bottled water business started in the UK in response to the need for water therapy in European and American countries (Zach, 2016). The first water bottling was done by Holy Well in 1621 in the UK. In America, the first commercial distribution was done in 1767 by Jackson's Spa in Boston and those who drank it back then perceived it to contain therapeutic properties that could treat common ailments. By the mid-19th century, the most popular bottlers in America was Saratoga Springs which produced more than seven million bottles annually. Today, USA is the most popular producer of commercial beverages with water and beverage dispensers located outside all leading supermarkets (Merce, 2017).

In Africa, Ghana is purported to be the leading producer of the soft drinks with Bon aqua as the leading brand. Bon aqua, which is a product of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Ghana Limited was introduced in the market in 1999 and has made its mark in the Ghanaian industry (Odoi, 2009). In Kenya, bottled water business started in 1992 with few water companies; however, over the years, many more companies have emerged. At the moment, some of the leading bottled water companies include Keringet, Dasani, Grange Park, Kilimanjaro, Passina, Highlands, Aqua mist, Bamboo, Maisha water and Honesty, among others. Initially, bottled water in Kenya was seen as a symbol of prestige in most workplaces, hotels and homes but it has now become a health

necessity (Massese, 2012). Growth in the water industry in Kenya has also been spurred by a constant outbreak of water-borne diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, cholera and bilharzia (Masese, Raburu, Mwasi, & Etiegni, 2012). In their study done at Ghana Korankye, Asante, Asirifi-Danquah and Okyere revealed that consumer choice is based on family influence, packaging, purity, availability, brand image, taste and advertisement of product. Findings further revealed that most consumers were found to be loyal to Bon aqua water brand and that Bon aqua had a bigger market share than its competitors because it was perceived to be a superior brand and therefore of higher quality than other brands.

Some studies have focused on the effect of brand on consumer purchase decisions. In Kenya, Njuguna (2014) who did a study in Nairobi's Central Business District on factors influencing consumer choice on bottled water brands found out that quality assurance, taste, and odour were the key pillars of a brand name. Most consumers were influenced by the perceived quality of bottled water rather than brand image. The preceding discussion has revealed the driving force behind the growth and needs for bottled water spanning over four centuries while several studies have been done in this field, few if any have tried to explore the relationship between perceived quality of water and consumer choice exhaustively.

The bottled water industry in Kenya started in 1992, with the entry of Keringet mineral water, which was billed as the first natural underground mineral water. The concept in 1992 was relatively new and buying and using bottled water then was seen as indicators of social and economic class. In the preceding

years, many new companies entered the market, and the perception of buying bottled water changed overtime from class to health consciousness. Currently, the demand for bottled water and many emerging companies has posed questions on how consumers will choose among many brands availed in the market.

Drinking water is a must for human life and survival. Without water, there would be no life, at least not the way we know it. In today's living condition, the need for potable water is becoming an issue for the common man (Kumar, 2004-06). In recent years in Kenya, bottled water has been made available by businesses to consumers. This is due to the inaccessibility of clean, hygienic drinking water. Coupled with this, is the distrust for tap water that is viewed as an unsafe source of drinking water. Besides, the emerging of many bottled brands, some of which are not vetted by the Standards bodies while others may be counterfeits has exacerbated the problem. Therefore, there is the need to establish the considerations that the customers make in choosing their brand of drinking bottled water.

Consequently, if the seller knows the preference of the customer's desire, then the gap will be filled. Brand choice as a factor has been tackled (Edward, 2002) under various shades of awareness, loyalty, distribution and perceived quality as a determinant for choice. However, this has not addressed branding as standalone and its influence on consumer choice. Therefore, this paper sought to investigate the effects of branding on consumer choice of bottled water.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Choice

Consumer choice is the decision consumers make in relation to buying of products or services. It is generally how consumers make choices on what product purchase taking into consideration the available alternatives. Choice is like a classical illustration of a person walking down the road who hesitates before deciding on which path to take (Saylor, 2009). The consumer choice combines the three aspects; there must be two or more choice alternatives to choose from, the choice alternatives must arouse a certain amount of conflicts and cognitive process that occurs should aim at reducing the conflict. Consumers make their choices based on the brand presentations, the value of product or services, the expected benefits drawn from the product and the quality of the products. However, others make choices under the influence of family, friends, and the social class as well as education level (Legese & Mulugeta, 2018). Besides, others use cues such as frequency of advertisement, promotion messages and slogans associated with the brand. However, consumer products such as bottled water are hard to choose from since there are many alternatives. Consumers use cues like price comparison, competitors offering and expectations (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008). The consumer will go through a buying decision process before making any choice. According to Kotler (2010), the buying process involves many players who have different roles. They include initiators, users, the influencers, deciders, and the buyers who have the authority to buy a product from selected suppliers and the last role is played by

gatekeepers who may hinder the buying process.

Consumers then evaluate among alternative brands available as they narrow down their choices (Agwu & Carter, 2014). Evaluation criteria are based on some features that consumers think are important to them such as price, colour, and size. Once the consumer has evaluated the products available responding to their need, they are able to choose the product or brand that seems most appropriate and then proceed to actual purchase itself. Marketing professionals use an informative advertisement to convince customers about the benefit (Bearden *et al.*, 2004). Consumer depends on the information on the product features and previous selection of the brand. For example, a consumer committed to the idea of buying a stereo of a well-known brand could change his decision if he has an unpleasant experience with sellers in the store. Promotions in a supermarket for bottled water brand could tip the scale for this brand in the consumer's mind who was hesitating between three brands of his evoked set.

Consumers in the post-purchase stage questions their decisions on whether the satisfaction expected has been attained by the product (Bertini & Gourville, 2012). When a product has not met the expectation, consumers suffers post-purchase dissonance where he regrets purchase decisions, on most occasions, these spreads by word of mouth to others about the experience. If the product has broad satisfaction to the consumer, they will minimize stages of information such an alternative evaluation for the next purchase in order to buy the same brand, which may produce customer loyalty. A satisfied customer

is very likely to become a loyal and regular of a brand especially for low-level involvement-fast-moving consumer goods or consumer packed good (Saylor, 2009).

Brand and Consumer Choice

Brand is the value consumer attaches to a product that is unique from all other brands available in the market. This value is determined by consumer perception and experiences with the brand. If people think highly of a brand, it has positive equity. When a brand consistently under-delivers and disappoints, consumers perceive it negatively (Shopify, 2019). A brand is seen as the way the customer thinks, feels, perceives the product along with its price and market position, brand image is very important to the consumer when making purchase decisions (Legese & Mulugeta, 2018).

Stiff competition in the business environment has exposed consumers to a variety of products in the market. As a result, organizations are trying harder to increase their brand preferences to retain customers and avoid being edged out by the competitors (Legese & Wodaje, 2018). Bottled water companies are not left out among the organizations that are branding their products for customer recognition. Branding is a tool that changes consumer-buying decision so easily; therefore, companies must strive hard to position themselves competitively in the market and the mind of the consumers.

Korankye *et al.* (2015) who did a study on consumer perception of product quality found that consumer choice is based on family influence, packaging, purity, availability, brand image, taste and advertisement. Most

consumers were found to be loyal to a specific brand of water, though they were many brands available in the Ghanaian market. The brand also commanded a bigger market share than its competitors. The study spells out the importance of brand building in the mind of the consumer, who eventually is faced with a choice to make. The study focused on the perception of consumer emphasizing on a specific brand of bottled water. This paper sought to establish the effects of branding and consumer choice of bottled water among institutional consumers.

In their study on the relationship between brand equity and consumer choice of branded bottled water, Njuguna and Muathe (2014) opined that consumers are aware of the brand and they take time to scrutinize the manufacturer of a brand of bottled water and they can distinguish well one brand of bottled water from another. Repeated advertising on certain brand helps the consumer to recognize and select the brand. They also found that brand loyalty had the least influence when the consumer is choosing bottled water while perceived quality significantly affected the choice of bottled water. Therefore, the need for investigation on branding and consumer choice of bottled water among institutional consumers.

Ogbuji, Anywanwu and Onah (2011) conducted an empirical study on the impact of branding and consumer choice. The study adopted an experimental research design with a population of 5787 and a sample size of 387 senior tertiary institutions in Southeast Nigeria. They found out that company of make and packaging plays an important role in consumer choice of bottled water. Also, the findings revealed that brand name and mark influence

consumer choice of bottled water to a great extent. However, bottled water consumption studies vary by both country and the author. Several authors gave concern on health, safety and taste to be the most frequent causes of consuming bottled water. The main deduction from the empirical literature is that consumers generally value bottled water and are prepared to pay as high as they can to consume what they see to be a “safe”, “healthy”, “tasty” or “convenient” product. This study sought to establish the effects of branding and consumer choice among institutional consumers.

Angasa and Kinoti (2011) investigated consumer perception of Kenyan manufactured laundry detergents in East African country. The findings of the study revealed that the five countries used laundry detergents. Omo was the leading brand that consumer perceived to be of higher quality and affordable, followed by Sunlight brand. Further, the study found that consumers’ perception on price, quality and country of origin varied where most of the respondents preferred Kenyan made brands, as they trusted them in terms of availability, quality and other attributes as compared to those of other East African countries. This study investigated the perception of the consumer on laundry detergents looking at price, quality and country of origin as the only factors; the current study investigated the relationship between perceived quality and consumer choice of bottled water.

Mbagaya and Mbato (2011) conducted a study on factors influencing consumption standards of bottled water in Nairobi focusing on respondents from supermarkets and water bottling companies. They found out that most consumers who take bottled water considered

taste, convenience, fashion, safety and health benefits associated with it. Further, they found that price, advertisements and availability influenced brand choice. The findings also indicated that perceived quality matched company description of quality by the consumer. The study, however, had less to reveal in relation to perceived quality and consumer choice hence a backdrop for the current study.

Khasawneh and Hasonah (2010) noted modern age brand has an important role in boosting the economy of a country. When consumers are loyal to a certain brand, the brand definitely will sell well and fetch more sales for the organization. Consumers are more careful and conscious about the brand than in the past, and they will give priority and favour to the products or services that are branded (Jibu 2017). Consumers’ recalls brand while in their buying process decisions and prefers goods with high prices because they think that branded products have a high value. The aspect of branding largely contributes to brand equity realization.

Shamsuddoha, Almgir, Nasir and Nedelea, (2010) argue that people often purchase branded cars because of the information they have on brand performance. The market information that a firm has is used to position a brand in the market place and the mind of customers. Most customers think branding is a guarantee of quality and play a major role in the consumer’s choice. Consumer must go through a buying process before making any purchase decisions, consumer goods are hard to choose when there are many alternatives, but based on cues such as price, brand experience and competitors’ comparison stands to be the best

criteria to help customer meet their expectations (McClure, Bialker, Neff, Williams, & Karduna, 2004; Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008).

Saranda and Rishidi's (2018) study on consumer factors in the selection of bottled water brands in Kosovo opined that consumer choice is influenced by quality, perception, preference, marketing and price. Jibu (2017) analyzed brand image effect on consumer preference in Bengaluru City. The study noted that brand image is crucial in enhancing consumer choice of a product; the reason for the consumer choice of branded products is satisfaction, status, peace of mind, quality and long-lasting loyalty. Njeru (2016) investigated factors that influence customer choice of bottled water brands in Nairobi. The results reveal that odour, taste and quality assurance were pillars of a brand name that influenced the choice of bottled water. Further, the study revealed that the price of bottled water preferred by customers was fair and they would choose an affordable brand; again, the results revealed that packaging influenced the purchase decision of the consumer. Advertising was seen as a factor that triggers purchase decisions. The study concluded that most predominant factors affecting consumer choice of bottled water were; customer taste, odour and quality assurance.

Njuguna's (2014) study in Nairobi on factors that influence consumer choice of bottled water brands, argued that key pillars influencing consumer choice were quality assurance, taste and odour. The study focused much on the components of brand equity which are brand loyalty, brand association and brand loyalty and the least variable analyzed in the study was

perceived quality parameters like brand recognition, brand familiarity and brand experience among others. Consumers perceive the quality of a brand with their experience they have had after purchasing the brand and how often they remember it.

Korankye *et al.* (2015) who did a study on consumer perception of product quality found that consumer choice is based on family influence, packaging, purity, availability, brand image, taste and advertisement. Most consumers were found to be loyal to a specific brand of water, though they were many brands available in the Ghanaian market. The brand also commanded a bigger market share than its competitors. The study spells out the importance of brand building in the mind of the consumer, who eventually is faced with a choice to make. Quansah (2015) investigated the factors that affect consumer purchase decisions of bottled water in Ghana. The results revealed that age, income, education level and bottled choice had a significant relationship. Further, the study revealed a relationship between perception and beliefs of consumers on bottled water consumption. They also opined that brand, price, quality, package and availability influenced consumers' choice of bottled water.

Consumer choice can be influenced by brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand familiarity, brand recognition and the image of the company manufacturing the products (Njuguna, 2014). Company's tries to keep customers informed of the brand through repeated advertising and meeting the expectations for repeat sales (Aymar & Joseph, 2019). However, many consumers have more knowledge of the perceived quality offered by

the brand and they always prefer one brand to alternative in the market. Brand image is very important when consumers are making a choice for the first time. Also, family and friends are other factors that are found by other researchers to affect the purchase decision (Baba, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey method of research was used where all institutional consumers of bottled water in Kericho town were targeted. The target population in the study included selected institutional consumers of bottled in Kericho town. The investigators used purposive sampling technique and stratified sampling to sample the institutions and respondents, respectively. The number of institutions was 74 and 237 consumers, to arrive at sample size formula proposed by Krejcie (1970) was used hence sample of 146 respondents. The data used in this study was primary data, which collected using self-administered questionnaires. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using means and standard

deviation. Linear regression models were considered appropriate as an inferential tool that established the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In response to brand and consumer choice in *Table 1*, the majority of the respondents 66 (48.9%) agreed that brand recalling influenced their choice of bottled water. 32 (23.7%) of the respondents on brand recalling disagreed that brand recalling affects the choice of bottled water that they consume while 37 (27.45%) were neutral in their response. Hence, it was concluded that brand recalling influences the choice of bottled water largely with value mean of 3.244. The findings aver with Perera and Dissanayake (2013) who found that brand recalling was significantly related with consumer decision of foreign makeup brands in female consumers with a mean value of 3.63 which slightly high than the current results.

Table 1: Brand and Consumer Choice

Brand	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Brand recalling affect the choice of bottled water	19, 14.1%	47, 34.8%	37, 27.4%	12, 8.9%	20, 14.8%	3.244
Brand awareness through advertisement has influenced the choice brand of bottled water that I buy.	22, 16.3%	35, 25.9%	42, 31.1%	19, 14.1%	17, 12.6%	3.193
Brand loyalty to only a specific brand of water based on the quality.	16, 11.9%	29, 21.5%	47, 34.8%	32, 23.7%	11, 8.1%	3.052
Consumer will take any bottled water available in the shelves despite the brand.	26, 19.3%	46, 34.1%	24, 17.8%	21, 15.6%	18, 13.3%	3.304

Brand	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Brand of bottled water is important to the consumer choice	39, 28.9%	33, 24.4%	39, 28.9%	13, 9.6%	11, 8.1%	3.563

It was found that brand awareness through advertisement somewhat influenced the choice of bottled water bought by the consumers where 57 (42.2%) of the respondents agreed that brand awareness through advertising influences their choice of bottled water, 36 (26.7%) respondents disagreed that brand awareness has any influence on choice while 42(31.1%) remained neutral. This implies that consumers take their time to scrutinize manufacturers of bottled water brand and they distinguish different brands of water, available in the market. Thus, repeated advertisement on certain brands helps them to make a purchase decision. Therefore, brand awareness has a significant relationship with the consumer choice of a product (mean of 3.193). The results concur with Perera and Dissanayake (2013) who found that brand awareness significantly influenced purchase decision with correlation values of 0.918 which was the highest among brand variable investigated which included brand awareness, brand association and brand perceived quality in female consumers' buying decision of foreign makeup products. The current study did not concentrate on brand awareness as a variable which differs from Perera and Dissanayake (2013) who investigated on brand awareness using brand knowledge, recognition, recalling and familiarity with mean results of 3.31, 3.64, 3.63 and 3.55, respectively. Also, the results agree with Njuguna and Muathe (2014) which

indicated that brand awareness had a positive significance with a mean of 4.14.

The response on brand loyalty had majority 47 (34.8%) of the respondents remained neutral while responding if they are loyal to a specific brand of bottled water, 45(32.4%) agreed that brand loyalty influenced consumer choice of bottled water while 43(35.5%) disagreed. Somehow, to a moderate extent brand loyalty to a specific brand of water was related to quality with value mean of 3.052. Njuguna and Muathe (2014) also discovered that brand loyalty influenced consumer choice of bottled water to some extent with a mean of 3.51, respectively meaning that consumers were indifferent concerning brand loyalty.

Majority of respondents 72 (53.4%) agreed that consumer could take any bottled water available in the shelves irrespective of the brand while 39 (28.9%) disagreed that consumers can take any bottled water. Therefore, some consumer took bottled water that was available on the shelves despite the brand mean of 3.304. This differs with Koranyke, Asante, Asirifi-Danquah and Okyere (2015) who argued customer cannot choose any water by pointing out that bottled water is affected by packaging, availability, brand image, taste and advertisement with 91%, 85%, 94%, 93% and 92% agreed respectively.

In response to the importance of brand in consumer choice, the majority of the respondents, 78 (57.8%) agreed that brand is very important in making a choice. This concurs with the finding of Korankye et al. (2015) who found that consumer choice is based on brand loyalty since the current study found bottled water brand was important to the

consumer choice (mean of 3.563). The findings further aver with Abugu (2018) who found that brand choice of bottled water was important based on the quality and ability of the consumer to purchase with a mean value of 4.04. Consumers and brand loyalty are inseparable; they will choose a brand based on the trust they have built over time.

Table 2: Brand of Beverage Competing with Water

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Valid	Soft Drinks	84	62.2	62.2	62.2
	Beverages	49	36.3	36.3	98.5
	Alcoholic Drinks	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 results on brands of beverage competing with water indicated soft drinks were leading with 84 representing 62.2% of entire respondents. It was followed closely by beverages, which were 49 representing 36.3% of the respondent. Water's highest competitors are soft drinks based on the functionality of

water as opposed to beverages. The results indicate soft drinks were highly consumed, followed by beverages as a substitute product of water. There are as twice as many soft drinks than beverages that compete with bottled water.

Table 3: Favourite Brand of Water

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dasani	33	24.4	24.4	24.4
	Keringet	31	23.0	23.0	47.4
	Kerimist	22	16.3	16.3	63.7
	Maisha	20	14.8	14.8	78.5
	Grange Park	17	12.6	12.6	91.1
	Mobi	12	8.9	8.9	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 relates response of favourite consumer brand, results indicate that consumers favoured brand of water according to preference, the brands that received high attention in terms selection are Dasani, Keringet, Kerimist,

Maisha, Grange Park and Mobi representing the following percentages respectively 33 (24.4%), 31 (23.0%), 22 (16.3%), 20 (14.8%), 17 (12.6%) and 12 (8.9%). These results do not show a larger variation between the brands. In

a similar study by Mbagaya & Mbato (2011) on bottled water consumption in Nairobi, Kenya, Dasani was the most preferred brand, followed by Keringet. Dasani was leading by 58.1%, and Keringet was 16.2%. The results further aver with Njeru (2016) who also found that most consumers preferred Dasani brand with 58.5%, followed by Keringet 13.6%, Aquamist with

7.6% and others taking 10.2%. This indicates that Dasani is highly preferred brand by most consumers in Kenya, followed by Keringet based on three studies made in different parts of Kenya. The reason behind this could be the company reputation since Dasani is a product of Coca-Cola that has been operational for decades.

Table 4: Frequency of Using the Brand of Water

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	35	25.9	25.9	25.9
	Twice a week	67	49.6	49.6	75.6
	Thrice a week	33	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

According to *table 4*, the favourite brand of bottled water is taken by most respondents twice a week, representing 67 (49.6%). Those who take bottled water daily were 35 (25.9%) and those who take thrice a week were 33 (24.4%). Hence, the results indicate that bottled water is one of the first moving consumer goods and it is consumed frequently. The

finding concurs with Legese and Mulugeta (2018) who found 37% of the respondents consumed bottled water more than once. Further results aver with Okoe (2015) who found that more respondents drink bottled water once a week or more with (57.1%). Bottled water consumption trend has increased immiscibly

Table 5: Features that Attracts Consumers to Brand of Water

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Function it serves	17	12.6	12.6	12.6
	Satisfaction it gives	56	41.5	41.5	54.1
	Flavor it has	26	19.3	19.3	73.3
	Association with success	36	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows the features that attract consumers to brand of bottled water included; 17 (12.6%) respondents supported the function it serves; satisfaction it gives with 56 (41.5%)

respondents; flavour it has 26 (19.3%) respondents and finally association with success with 36 (26.7%). According to the findings, most respondents preferred the brand

based on the satisfaction it gives with 41.5% of the respondents. Other factors that were close were the association with the success of the brand while flavour and function of the brand rating the lowest. Hence, there is a higher proportion of satisfaction and brand association with success having a significant relationship on consumer choice of the bottled water. Flavour and function were the factors that were rated low as affecting consumer choice of branded bottled water. The findings agree with Okoe (2015) who found that satisfaction and brand association influenced consumer choice largely.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that brand influenced consumer choice of bottled water where brand recalling, brand awareness and brand loyalty contributed to the choice of brand. Consumers make purchase decisions if they recall the experience they had with the brand when they are aware that certain brand exists in the market and they can access information on the brand delivery through advertisements. Further, consumers purchase a product based on brand loyalty they have built over time to specific products. It was also found that soft drinks are the highest competitors of branded bottled water. Consequently, many consumers make a choice based on the satisfaction they get from consuming the product or service as well as the brand association. Therefore, the brand has a significant relationship with consumer choice.

Since consumers spend less time in selecting low involvement products such as bottled water, brand recalling and recognizing reduces the purchase decision process. Therefore, the study recommends bottled water companies to

consider branding strategies, spend money on building a brand and choose carefully brand names that connect consumer emotionally and psychologically with the product. Further, the study recommends that companies need to do repetitive advertisement to create awareness, to remind consumers of their products frequently to gain a competitive edge in a dynamic marketing environment. The study finally makes a recommendation to regulatory agency authority such as Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) and International Standardization of Organization (ISO) to strictly enhance and take charge in supervising production process of bottled water companies and make sure they meet both local and international quality standards.

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