THE IMPACT OF BRAND PERFORMANCE AND BRAND RESPONSE ON CONSUMER SATISFACTION: HOW DO BRAND PERFORMANCE AND BRAND RESPONSE INFLUENCE CONSUMER SATISFACTION WHEN PURCHASING BOTTLED WATER IN DURRES, ALBANIA?

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ABSTRACT

Consumer behavior is a broad and compound marketing term that deals with analyzing a customer's mindset and daily behavior. Consumer behavior is affected by several factors as the customers go through the decision-making process. The most persuasive factors are brand performance and brand response. Consequently, this study examined whether, in the case of bottled water use in the city of Durres, brand performance and brand response have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction. To understand and analyze these brand factors, extensive empirical research was conducted, and a survey research design method was applied among 303 individuals to produce viable results. The first hypothesis was proven successfully, through stating that there existed a moderate positive relationship between the two constructs, brand performance and brand response. The second hypothesis was accepted as it resulted in a positive relationship between brand performance and customer satisfaction with a high coefficient of beta, stating that the better the performance of the brand, the more satisfied the customers would be from the whole buying experience and inherently, their response. The last hypothesis was successfully tested by having the strongest positive relationship with the maximum value of beta. As a conclusion, each of the brand factors appeared to have a positive relationship with consumer satisfaction provided by any bottled water brand. The scope of this study is to put value on the existing related literature as well as to offer valuable advice to bottled water companies on how to develop their strategic marketing plans and undertake important business decisions.

Keywords: *Still Bottled Water, Brand Response, Brand Performance, Consumer Satisfaction, Positive Relationship.*

INTRODUCTION

Water is a natural resource, vital to the health of our human bodies. It is an essential nutrient with a huge impact on our health. Under Article 2 of the European Union (EU) Drinking Water Directive, water intended for human consumption is defined as *"all water, either in its original state or after treatment, intended for drinking, cooking, food preparation, or other domestic purposes, regardless of its origin and whether it is supplied from a distribution*

network, from a tanker, or in bottles, or containers" (European Parliament, 2020, pg.6). The EU focuses on its member states to supply their citizens with high-quality and safe water through its food and water legislation (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), 2018). However, Albania as a non-member of the European Union, cannot yet take advantage of this opportunity.

Tap water is the type of water that is attracting great attention due to its potential for the recent increase in demand on the market. A high tendency towards consuming bottled water despite the few disadvantages it might have for a nation's domestic population has been observed lately. The mindset of the consumers has led to high sales of non-alcoholic beverages, primarily bottled water (Linden, 2015; European Parliament, 2020). Precisely, the European bottled water market reached an approximate value of $57.2 billion in 2021 (Expert Market Research (EMR), 2022). In the context of Albania, the bottled water market segment covers 0.08 % of $ 5.47 million revenues generated in 2022, as it is also shown in Statista's Non-Alcoholic Drinks Report. This percentage has been increased compared to other previous years, leading to a higher consumption of the bottled water in Albania (Statista, 2022).

The primary purpose of this article is to address and answer questions about customer satisfaction in the Albanian city of Durres. These questions might be able to help consumers understand the factors that influence their daily bottled water purchase intentions. Furthermore, the research focuses on understanding the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Considering the equations created by the construct model, the brand response will be considered once as a dependent variable and then as independent one, brand performance will be considered only as independent variable, and customer satisfaction only as dependent variable. These variables were also studied by (Moslehpour et al., 2018 and Dash et al., 2021), for which the authors used the brand equity model to investigate the positive relationships formed among the variables mentioned above, using hypotheses and survey data. Knowing that each of us is a consumer in one way or another, making numerous daily purchases is a must. Hence, it is critical to understand what influences the personal purchasing decisions of the consumers in a certain market. One possible explanation could simply be the gratification of their necessities, while another could be the fulfillment of their needs and wants. A more detailed explanation regarding the reasons for bottled water consumption will be provided by answering the key question in this article.

The main research question that this study will answer is the following: "***How do brand factors such as performance and response influence bottled water consumer satisfaction in Durres, Albania?***" The question established for this research, the hypotheses written, and the tests performed for the study were only realized by focusing on relevant data from the previous related articles. Overall, three assumptions are built which need to be further verified. The first hypothesis is about understanding the relationship between brand performance and brand response, the second one identifies and evaluates the relationship between brand performance and customer satisfaction, and the last one, the relationship between brand response and consumer satisfaction. The hypotheses developed are mostly emphasized concerning the study's main research question.

This study covers a large contribution to bottled water-related research not only because there is a gap in this kind of research, but also because it shows the daily water purchasing behavior affected by the influence of the brand and its co-related items, such as brand factors. Besides, the companies that are part of the bottled water industry might be able to take advantage

by enhancing the customer experience through fulfilling their most physiological and nutritional needs, leading to the accomplishment of their strategic decisions, like the increase in their sales.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Research in the Area

Previous research on this topic in Albania is quite limited, making this research one of the few studies that describe the influence that marketing has on our daily purchasing behavior. Three of them describe the bottled water market in Kosovo, but none is directed toward the marketing aspect of Albanian products in the same sector. The few studies that already exist, are mainly focused on describing the chemical properties, the concentration of their chemical elements in the bottled water sold in Albania. Among these studies, we can briefly mention the research conducted by Cfarku et al. (2014) and Duka et al. (2020). The first research is focused on analyzing the dietary intakes concerning the amount of calcium and magnesium concentrations in commercial bottled water sold in Tirana during 2019. The latter analyzes the concentration of gross alpha/beta activity in drinking water in Albania. Even though these articles both study bottled water, they use different approaches in analyzing it.

In a real case study in Kosovo, Kajtazi and Reshidi (2018) analyze in great detail the factors that influence customer decisions when it comes to bottled water. Two variables can affect such a choice: the urban development that the country of Kosovo is facing especially in recent years, which would result then in a decrease in the quality of tap water, and the increase in living standards of the population in Kosovo. Individuals tend to purchase heavy and expensive bottled water to live better and stay healthy (Floqi et al., 2010; Kajtazi & Reshidi, 2018).

The brand equity model, which is also known as the brand resonance model, studies the connections that customers create between a brand and a product (Keller, 2013). According to the research led by Kajtazi and Reshidi in 2018, the term "brand" is crucial since it may often describe, succinctly and rationally, the main idea or the associations that customers create about a product. The associations include the brand image that consumers may have formed and the psychological advantages that a specific product offers in terms of its quality-related characteristics. In addition to product quality, price is a significant element in deciding whether customers will purchase bottled water or not. Price is thought to have the highest influence in a native population's segment when choosing a bottled water brand. Customers' brains are wired to think that a higher price indicates higher quality. Therefore, they frequently desire high-quality goods at reasonable prices, or at the very least, a balance between price and quality. This conclusion is derived also from the study of Ismajli et al. (2013). By taking into account "Bonita" and "Rugova" bottled water brands, in a sample size of 150 individuals, the respondents agreed that the price and quality ultimately played an important role when purchasing a specific bottled water brand (Ismajli et al., 2013). As it is commonly known but also expressed in literature, consumers would identify, select, and purchase a product that would best satisfy their psychological needs and would seem fit for daily use. After this condition is fully satisfied, the regular consumers would build more trust and repeat the product-related purchasing behavior thanks to the fair pricing, and the high quality that this product has (Kajtazi & Reshidi, 2018; Pllana & Qosa, 2018).

Ismajli et al. (2013) and Kajtazi and Reshidi (2018) also focused on the packaging of water products in their study. Both studies concluded that packaging serves as a tactic to attract

the attention of the consumers and influence how they perceive a product's quality, as in the case of the "Rugova" bottled water brand. The product's value is increased when its packaging is innovative and hence satisfies their needs. Additionally, the packaging must be recyclable, easy to transport, easy to open and store. The aforementioned parameters were studied in the research performed by Kajthazi and Reshidi (2018), in a limited period of one month, on randomly selected individuals. Overall, 500 responses had been collected. Consumers tend to prefer the bottled water brand which is the most expensive and the safest. Kajtazi and Reshidi (2018) exclusively compare the costs of bottled and tap water by carefully concentrating on them. Although there is no previous literature to base this fact on, one can infer that Albanians might prioritize a more expensive bottled brand as well, similar to their fellow natives from Kosovo. The repetitive purchasing behavior that is considered in Kajtazi and Reshidi (2018) and Pllana and Qosa (2018), is an indicator of the satisfaction that a consumer obtains and the response that is received towards a specific bottled water brand. Likewise, the price and quality in (Kajtazi and Reshidi, 2018) and (Pllana and Qosa, 2018) and packaging in (Ismajli et al., 2013) and (Kajtazi and Reshidi, 2018) are crucial indicators of the performance that a bottled water company is doing on the market. The purchasing behavior and the last-mentioned aspects, serve as proof of an existing relationship between this article and the previously-mentioned ones. Since little to no research has been conducted on the factors influencing consumer satisfaction from bottled water brands, there is a limited reference point in support of this topic in Albania (Floqi et al., 2010; Ismajli et al., 2013; Kajtazi & Reshidi, 2018; Pllana & Qosa, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Development of Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

There are certain factors that affect the customer decision-making process in the bottled water industry. For instance, Teng et al. (2007) looked into the variables influencing consumer behavior across numerous industries. The concepts of brand feeling, brand judgment, brand performance, and customer satisfaction have been used to describe a customer's purchasing process (Kotler & Keller, 2012). This study investigates the fundamental idea behind the aforementioned brand factors and applies them to the various research hypotheses. An experimental study was conducted to prove the developed hypotheses – the components influencing the consumer's discernment concerning bottled water –as this approach permits the analyst to gather information from an expansive number of people in a restricted time outline, as well as apply quantitative methods to assess the circumstance considered, and form clearing explanations.

Moreover, the construction of the conceptual framework is based on a synthesis of two previously tested models of brand perception and purchase intention in the airline industry (Moslehpour et al., 2018) and in B2C real estate marketing (Dash et al., 2021). The assumptions made in the following conceptual frameworks—if not explicitly specified otherwise—are based on Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model. Customer satisfaction is a key focus in marketing, business, and academia, but brand performance, focusing on the firm's product quality, is one of the most important concerns in the literature of service marketing. Numerous studies have already established the link between brand performance and customer satisfaction as well as the influence of brand performance on customer satisfaction (Mohtasham et al., 2017). To satisfy

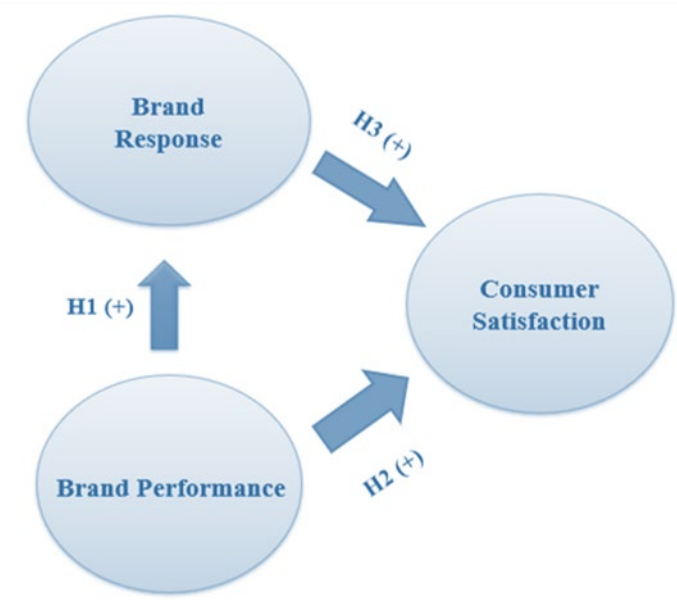
customers, it is therefore presumable that products must adhere to previously set product qualities.

According to the various research that supported Keller's Brand Equity Model (Çınar, 2020, Thanushan & Kennedy, 2020), the brand response is defined as the fusion of brand judgments and brand feelings. Brand response typically increases when a business can provide a service or product with added value. In reality, it can concur that comparing customers' pre-purchase judgments and emotions, or their expectations regarding a good or service provided, with what they actually experienced, results in customer satisfaction (Oliver, 2010). Brand performance, brand response, and customer satisfaction will also serve as variables in this article, contributing to the three hypotheses which will be further verified. Consequently, the following assumptions will be tested in light of the justifications presented above:

H1: *Brand Performance is positively related to Brand Response.*
H2: *Brand Performance is positively related to Consumer Satisfaction.*
H3: *Brand Response is positively related to Consumer Satisfaction.*

Customer satisfaction is widely acknowledged as one of the most important factors affecting a company's performance and customer retention in the competitive environment existing nowadays (Ooi et al., 2011). The scale developed by Keller (2013) was chosen as a framework to evaluate brand performance as an independent factor because it already included, at least in part, all the criteria mentioned above. Nevertheless, the Keller's model construct items only needed to be very slightly changed to make it easier for survey respondents to grasp the needed information, in correspondence to the features of bottled water. The conceptual framework model, containing the three hypotheses related to brand response, brand performance, and customer satisfaction is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
The Conceptual Framework of the Three Hypotheses for proving the relationship between Brand Response, Brand Performance, and Customer Satisfaction.



Sampling, Measurement Scale Building, and Data Collection

A survey was utilized as a research instrument in the Methodology Section for understanding how the brand response and brand performance influence the satisfaction of the customers, living in Durres when purchasing bottled water. For drafting the survey's sections and questions of this article, the authors focused on other similar research methodologies used by Shashidhar (2015) and case studies in Keller (2013). The questionnaire was conducted online using a Microsoft Form to collect data from citizens living in Durres, Albania, and it was open to everyone over the age of 18 years old.

In total, 277 of the 303 questionnaires that were distributed were indeed collected. In addition, 32 of them were eliminated after serious errors in the answer set. Finally, 245 responses were received, which may be considered adequate for this type of study, according to Parashakti and Ekhsan (2020). In addition, a pre-run of the survey was given to a sample of 30 people randomly chosen by the authors before it was finally delivered. The response rate of the questionnaire is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 RESPONSE RATE OF THE PARTICIPANTS			
Administrated Questionnaires	**Response Rate**	**Non-Response Rate**	**Response Bias**
303	277 (91,42%)	26 (8,58%)	32 (11,55%)

The questionnaire was divided into three sections: a) Socio-demographic information, b) Consumption habits regarding bottled water, and c) Branding components of Bottled Water. All the questions were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), as suggested by Birt et al. (2017).

Socio-demographic data on age, gender, place of residence, income, and similar characteristics of the participants were included in the questions of the survey conducted. 34.76 percent of the participants were men and 64.24 percent women. The age group with the highest number of participants was 18 to 24 years old. Therefore, 38.78% of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 24, which implies that the youth might be more willing to spend time completing online surveys, especially if they cover social topics that are related to environmental causes or health. The majority of participants live in urban cities (83.67 percent). Regarding their level of education, most of the participants had completed at least one master's degree (37.55%), closely followed by participants who had only completed a bachelor's degree (33.06%). Only a small number of responders (13.47 %) came from families of low income, and the majority (60.82%) were from families of above-average-income.

Table 2 SAMPLE COMPOSITION			
Category	**Feature**	**People**	**Percentage**
Age	18 – 24	95	38,78 %
	25 – 34	54	22,04 %
	35 – 44	38	15,51 %
	45 +	58	23,67 %
Gender	Male	84	33,76 %
	Female	156	64,24 %
	Other	5	1,99 %
Education	High School	69	28,16 %
	Three-year degree	81	33,06 %
	Master's degree	92	37,55 %
	Ph.D.	3	1,22 %
Area	Rural	40	16.33 %
	Urban	205	83,67 %
Family Income	0-30,000 ALL	4	1,63 %
	30,001-50,000 ALL	29	11.84 %
	50,001-80,000 ALL	58	23.67 %
	80,001-100,000 ALL	54	22.04 %
	100,001+ ALL	95	38,78 %

Evaluation of Quality Reliability of the Construct Model

A statistical method that is widely used among the literature was analyzing the gathered data to define and assess a linear regression model (Bird & Karolyi, 2017). This method enables the formalization and resolution of the difficulty in comprehending the functional relationship between variables evaluated on sample data from a particular population (Wilson & Weld, 1997). Due to their versatility and the relative ease with which the researcher may understand and analyze the generated data, linear regression models are frequently used in social sciences (Wilson, 1991). Linear regressions are usually employed to estimate the expected value of some latent variables in social research, including marketing and consumer behavior, to produce reliable, trustworthy, and generalizable results.

Since the structure or number of dimensions for the considered variables under statistical analysis is not known, the factor analysis in this study was primarily employed in an exploratory type of view. Iteratively checking the reliability of the scales and their validity led to the eventual delivery of all numbers greater than the minimum acceptable threshold. Particularly, the KMO test (>0.5, Tuan, 2020) was used to conduct the validity test. As part of the factor analysis for this research, the authors chose to use the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy, which produced a commendable value (KMO = 0.8359) when compared to the labels provided by Kaiser et al. (2013). The result indicated correlations between pairs of variables, or potential factors, which could be further explained by variables studied in another research.

Furthermore, Bartlett's test for sphericity was used to find the determinant of the matrix of the sums of products and cross-products, which the inter-correlations matrix was derived from. The determinant of the matrix S was converted to the chi-square statistic and evaluated for significance. According to the null hypothesis, the non-zero correlations of the sample matrix were caused by sampling error and the inter-correlation matrix came from a population with non-collinear variables (i.e., an identity matrix). The data derived from the reliability tests, conducted by the Stata Statistical Software is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

CRONBACH'S ALPHA RELIABILITY TEST AND KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN MEASURE OF SAMPLING ADEQUACY FOR THE SURVEY

Number of items in the scale	Average Inter-item covariance	Cronbach's Alpha	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test	Bartlett's test for sphericity		
				Chi-square	df	p
33	0.2129	86,99 %	83,59 %	2936.158	496	0.000

Before conducting hypothesis testing, Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) reliability tests were used to evaluate the accuracy of the study's construct model. The CA standard threshold level was 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006). For the KMO test and to qualify as AVE, values must be greater than 0.50, and the outcomes were meritorious values (**KMO = 0.665**) (Tuan, 2020). Scale dependability is required to be higher than 0.70, for showing an

acceptable level of reliability among the pair of variables (Hair et al., 2006). Looking at Table 4 below, it can be noticed that our data corresponds with the stated requirements, as the KMO test resulted higher than the threshold value of 0.50, which is also within the range declared by Tuan (2020). Precisely, the KMO test for Brand Performance resulted in a value of 0.84, for Brand Response in a value of 0.86, and Customer Satisfaction in a value of 0.83. Since all the KMO test values are greater than 0.5, the factor analysis is considered to be valid, and a high correlation between the pair of variables exists.

Regarding the CA Test, the Brand Performance differs slightly from the threshold value, which is also set by Hair et al. (2006). Nevertheless, the difference is negligible, considering that the construct items used to evaluate the Brand Performance, have a high reliability between each other, and consequently, the construct model is accurate. The other CA tests' values for brand response, and customer satisfaction, have passed the threshold value (0.7), emphasizing the idea that the constructed model seems to be the right one for delivering such viable results regarding the relationships between brand performance, brand response, and customer satisfaction, as shown in this article.

Table 4
QUALITY RELIABILITY OF THE CONSTRUCT MODEL

Quality Measure			**Std. Dev.**	**CA test**	**KMO test**
Threshold Value Variable	**Obs**	**Obs Sign**		**0.70 Hair et al. (2006)**	**0.50 Tuan (2020)**
Brand Performance	245	+	0.8895	0.65	0.84
Brand Response	245	+	0.8264	0.74	0.86
Customer Satisfaction	245	+	0.8309	0.78	0.83

Hypotheses Testing

Summative scales were developed by compiling answers to several survey questions that all center on the same subject and determine a score for each observation that could be used to indicate the respondents' opinions (from high scales to poor scales) on the subject under discussion. Their goal was to quantify ideas that the authors believe differ between individuals and about which, a detailed evaluation was lacking. To establish a single variable that would be the sum of the scores on each question scaled from 1 to 5, multi-item measures were constructed by integrating responses from several questions with related replies.

Table 5
HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypotheses					Result
	β	T-test	p-value	Std. Error	
H1	0.1527	9.97	0.000	0.1905	Verified
H2	0.1862	9.98	0.000	0.0106	Verified
H3	0.2846	6.96	0.000	0.0408	Verified

To construct and test the theories mentioned regarding brand performance, brand response, and customer satisfaction, equations must be built. On the first equation, Brand Response was the dependent variable and brand performance was the independent variable. On the second equation, consumer satisfaction was the dependent variable whereas Brand Response and brand performance were the independent variables. Standardized Regression coefficients (β) between variables higher than 0.2, t-values greater than 1.96, and p-values of 0.05 or smaller were selected as thresholds for the acceptance of the hypotheses stated above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

H1: *Brand Performance is positively related to Brand Response.*

According to Keller (2013), a positive relationship exists between the components of a brand's overall performance, i.e. the technology used, the price, and the unique features that give a brand a competitive edge in the market, and the other key variables of this analysis: Brand Response and Consumer Satisfaction. A moderately positive link between brand performance and brand response was also found when testing H1 (β=0.15). Additionally, since the p-value was lower than 0.05, the acceptability level was met. As a result, when people respond better to any brand, the better this brand performs in terms of technology, price, nutrition, availability, and advertising. How a brand satisfies particular needs daily directly represents the perceptions and feelings of a consumer, causing our conclusion related to bottled water industry to be logical and in accordance with the theoretical part.

H2: *Brand Performance is positively related to Consumer Satisfaction.*

With a beta of 0.18 (β= 0.18) and a p-value less than 0.05, the association between brand performance and customer satisfaction was likewise positive. Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted, implying that customers will be more satisfied with the entire purchasing experience when the brand performs better. Inherently, if a brand's attributes are satisfying the consumer's needs, this translates into a high-quality product being sold in the market, which would, in turn, increase consumer satisfaction as they are receiving a product of higher quality. The product is being evaluated in terms of its nutritional values, mineral content, pH, technical specifications such as the technology used and ecological packaging offered, and last but not least, quality and price balance. These aspects are particularly sensitive to consumption and the satisfaction that a customer receives by purchasing and drinking a bottle of water.

H3: *Brand Response is positively related to Consumer Satisfaction.*

The strongest, most substantial, and most favorable correlation was found between brand response and customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.29$). In light of this finding, H3 proves a positive relationship between brand response and consumer satisfaction. This suggests that a customer's "heart" and "brain" influence whether they are satisfied with a certain brand or not. There is also more satisfaction with the offered product if there are warm feelings associated with the brand that provides the product. However, since bottled water is not a product which could establish many feelings with the buyer, such a relationship is a little more challenging to show. Due to this fact, the customers' assessments, and opinions of the perceived value that they receive from the brands in general, will ultimately meet their demands and thus give more attention to bottled water brands. The way a customer views a brand permanently improves the quality of the product and its brand image and identity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTTLED WATER COMPANIES

This study not only puts value into the existing literature but provides further advice to bottled water companies when they are about to create strategic marketing plans and make crucial business decisions. The following is a list of some of the contributions that this research could bring to the bottled water industry.

A bottled water firm's marketing manager needs to be more vigilant and cautious while choosing the best strategies for promoting the products of a company and establishing the monthly or yearly objectives. As Morgan et al. (2018) describe in their research, a marketing strategy is an integration of numerous decisions regarding a company's product, marketing resources, and the activities that assist in the creation of value for its customers. Delivering a high-quality product and providing value to the target market are two of any company's primary goals. Furthermore, the essence of the marketing strategy highly depends on the strategic decision-making process of a business such as the product it offers and the customer groups that the company aims to target.

To stand out from the competition in the market, the company must be able to put the designed strategies into action. Any firm can build a competitive advantage in the market through consistent research, financial success, and high-quality products. One of the core components of the Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) Analysis is composed of the threats that a business might face from its rivals. These threats are related to the quality, performance, and sustainability of a firm's competitors in their operating market. As a result, the bottled water company must prioritize marketing, product pricing (which must be relatively cheaper than that of its rivals), cutting-edge technology, and the products it provides to its customers (Ghasemi & Yaghmaei, 2015).

Lastly, any bottled water company must go through marketing research, which includes a further analysis of the product it is going to deliver, the innovation that will bring in its market, and the pricing structure that is going to use. The research of other similar European markets has shown that the bottled water market is mature. Therefore, further action is required as the bottled water providers must design current and new marketing plans or other techniques to increase their sales in light of the present market conditions (Carlucci et al., 2016). Since the issue of plastic and environmental contamination is now quite prevalent, bottled water firms must begin

to act immediately in order to continue providing still water and at the same time, safeguard the environment and stay competitive in their market (Marchi et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to determine how much of an impact the aforementioned factors (brand performance and response) have on consumer satisfaction when purchasing bottled water in Durres, Albania. This research resulted in relevant findings, the most significant of which was that there is a very strong correlation between brand performance, brand response, and consumer satisfaction in the drinking water market.

This study is one of the first empirical analyses regarding customer behavior regarding bottled water brands in Albania and opens up a wide range of possibilities for future research. Prospects include further analysis of the complexities and counterintuitive findings presented here, the requirement to investigate fresh, different, and developing contexts, such as fresh regions and industries, and the requirement to keep looking into how consumers and sellers are embracing innovative technology.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the research design of this study was carefully created, it nevertheless has its own limitations. This study has been conducted for a limited period of time, specifically three months. This short period might have negatively influenced the outcome of our research. Therefore, a longitudinal study of one year or even five years could yield to more profound results.

In terms of methodology, the authors of this study were restricted to a geographical sample selection of the city of Durres rather than the entire country of Albania. A comparative study with similar regions or countries could have also been a possibility. By focusing on a larger geographical scope, the authors could get a higher response rate, and perform a more detailed research analysis, which could lead to a more profound research impact. By increasing the area of research, the reliability of the study could have also been enhanced. However, by gathering a sizable number of survey responses from the target population, the authors were able to establish a good preliminary response rate.

Following that, the questionnaire requested a substantial quantity of self-reported data, as there were a few open questions that required answers. The authors employed reverse labeled items to evaluate integrity and accuracy, and while there is no reason to assume that participants were dishonest in their judgments, it is plausible that their judgments were somewhat erroneous. With a pre-qualification study and an additional correlation analysis, the error margin could have been reduced.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study provided valuable insights into the perceptions of bottled water brands and their purchasing in the second most populous city of Albania. This can be the starting point of a more detailed analysis of this growing industry. Several opportunities for future research exist based on the study's results. First, since this study was the first one to analyze brand perceptions of bottled water and consumer behavior, future research needs to replicate this study's findings

with a different group of customers. Second, as with many studies, this one was single-regional. Future research, conducted within a singular region, would allow actual behavior data to be collected rather than examining only monolithic regions and behavior. Third, other variables could be included in the model such as actual brand performance, and consumer trust. In conclusion, this study has indicated that brand performance and brand response are the dominate factors for customer satisfaction. Consequently, future study could examine whether, other product categories in other geographical regions can show that brand performance and brand response have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction. We would like to encourage future research to create a better understanding and advance analysis about brand factors for producing qualified research results.

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