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Assessing the Effectiveness of Product Branding on Consumer Behaviour in the Bottled Water Industry: A Case Study of Bigtree Beverages, Lusaka District

[1] Innocent Siamwanja, [2] Davy Siwila
[1, 2] Department of Business Studies, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia

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Corresponding Author: **Innocent Siamwanja**

Abstract
The paper assesses the effectiveness of product branding on consumer behavior in the bottled water industry, with a case study of Bigtree beverages' Vatra mineral water, in Lusaka district. In commoditised categories such as bottled water, branding serves as a primary differentiator. This study examines how brand elements, marketing communication, and awareness influence consumer behaviour in Zambia. A mixed-method survey was administered to 40 consumers and 10 marketing staff of Bigtree beverages, to assess product branding of Vatra mineral water. Likert-scale items measured perceptions; open-ended responses provided qualitative depth. Vatra achieved 80% brand awareness and 80% satisfaction, with packaging and social media as key drivers. However, loyalty remains price-sensitive, and slogan recall is weak. Staff overemphasized technical credentials while consumers prioritised visual cues and word-of-mouth. It can be concluded that branding significantly affects purchase intent, but emotional resonance is underleveraged.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Consumer Behaviour, Bottled Water, Packaging, Social Media, Marketing

1. Introduction

The current market is snowed under a wide variety of mineral water product brands. As a result, maintaining pace with this number of various brands in the market has become difficult for the simple consumer. Organizations create brands with the most important intention to attracting and retaining consumers. The bottled water industry in Zambia has grown rapidly due to urbanization, health awareness, and unreliable municipal supply (Zulu & Mwale, 2023) [28]. However, high substitutability renders functional attributes insufficient for sustained preference. In the competitive beverage industry, effective branding can differentiate products in saturated markets, fostering consumer loyalty and driving market share. Branding is a multifaceted construct that encompasses brand awareness, brand equity, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand image, all of which influence consumer behavior. The location of the trademark is applicable only if the consumer is aware of the trademark. In memory theory, brand awareness is embedded as a vital first sstep in creating a cluster of associations associated with a brand in memory. Brand awareness is important in decision making, because it is important for consumers to remember a brand in the context of a particular product class, and awareness increases the likelihood of a brand being a member of the thinking group. Brand equity framework highlights how brand awareness, loyalty, and perceived quality enhance consumer trust and drive purchases. Studies show that strong brands, such as Coca-Cola, leverage storytelling and consistent branding to foster loyalty. Keller (2016) argues that strong brand equity, built through perceived quality and associations, drives purchase intentions.

Drawing on Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework, this study investigates how brand awareness, associations, and marketing communication influence consumer behavior using Vatra mineral water as a case study. Businesses have recognized the importance of loyal customers, because such customers usually spend more, buy more frequently, are motivated to search for information, and are more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth (Keller 2016).

A brand is a distinctive name and mark which identifies goods and services of either one seller or group of sellers and differentiates those goods and services from their competitors. Branding plays an important role in enhancing any commercial performance and can positively change people's buying behavior. A brand is a descriptor that gives consumers awareness and specific images of names and logos. It creates sensory, emotional, creative, and lifestyle relationships of the name, packaging, slogan, color and logo, with the consumers. Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers (David, 2015). Brand equity brings about ownership, often related to information that has different results from product marketing (Keller, 2016).

A commercial entity cannot operate without consumers. Consumer buying behavior is the process of searching, selecting, purchasing, and using goods and services to meet the needs and wishes of individuals. "Consumer buying behavior is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impact that these processes have on the consumer and society". Consumer behavior mainly emphasizes how consumers decide to spend their various resources, such as time and money, on different products to meet their needs and wants. Consumers choose to drink bottled water for several reasons; in many cases, it is because the consumer thinks that bottled water tastes better than tap water, which they think is a sign for better quality.

1.1 General Objective

To assess the effectiveness of product branding on consumer behaviour in the bottled water industry, a case study of Bigtree's Vatra mineral water in Lusaka District.

1.1.1 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the effect of brand awareness on consumer loyalty of bottled water.
2. To assess the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies in enhancing brand reputation of bottled water.
3. To examine the limitations of distinctive brand elements in strengthening brand recognition.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This research adopted the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, developed by Kevin Keller in 2001, which explains how brands build equity through consumer perceptions and relationships. It emphasizes that brand equity resides in the minds of consumers, shaped by their knowledge, experiences, and emotional connections with the brand. The CBBE model provides a structured, hierarchical approach to creating, measuring, and managing brand equity.

The goal of the hierarchy is to move consumers from basic awareness to deep, active loyalty, with each level requiring distinctive marketing strategies. This is a consumer-centric model which assumes that brand equity is derived from consumer perceptions, not just financial metrics. This model assumes that strong brands achieve high equity by progressing consumers through these levels, creating a "brand ladder" from recognition to advocacy. It highlights the degree to which a brand is recognised or recalled by consumers, particularly during purchase or consumption situations.

While the CBBE model faces challenges in adapting to digital and cultural shifts, it remains a cornerstone of branding strategy. By applying this model strategically, brands create meaningful, lasting connections with consumers. The CBBE model is significant in diagnosing brand health, developing strategies, measuring equity, and providing a guide for brand extensions. It can help organizations with visibility to ensure the brand is noticed, fostering resonance, which creates communities of loyal customers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Effects of brand awareness on consumer loyalty

Brand awareness is a critical construct in marketing, as it forms the foundation for consumer decision- making. It is a critical driver of consumer choice globally, especially in a $344 billion bottled water market dominated by brands like Evian and Aquafina (Statista, 2025) [27]. Brand awareness is the first prerequisite dimension of the entire brand knowledge system in the consumer's minds, reflecting their ability to identify the brand under different conditions. Brand awareness comes before any step in the buying process. The location of the trademark is applicable only if the consumer is aware of the trademark thus brand awareness is important in decision making because it is important for consumers to remember a brand in the context of a particular product class. Awareness campaigns resonate across diverse markets and can affect brand associations that form the image of a brand. While seemingly straightforward, awareness can encompass various levels from simple recognition to recall, and top-of-mind awareness. Most research, particularly in the global context, distinguishes between these levels, understanding that higher awareness often correlate with stronger brand loyalty.

Another global study by Howell *et al*. (2019) [13], explores bottled water consumption at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) markets, including developing markets. The findings indicate that brand awareness, driven by local information sources like word-of-mouth, has a limited effect on early purchase decisions but grows in importance as the brands become established. This suggests that in the global markets, sustained marketing efforts are necessary to convert awareness into loyalty, particularly in competitive bottled water markets (Howell *et al*., 2019) [13].

In India, study by Brei and Tadajewski (2015) [5] traces the socio-historical context of bottled water consumption, noting that brands like Bisleri leverage awareness through discourses of purity and health. The research, grounded in social theory, finds that institutional actors shape consumer perceptions, enhancing loyalty to brands perceived as safe alternatives to tap water. This suggests that in India, brand awareness is a precursor to loyalty when reinforced by cultural and institutional trust (Brei & Tadajewski, 2015) [5].

Another study, done in Ghana by Amoako *et al*. (2020) [2] examines factors influencing bottled water purchase decisions. The research finds that brand trust and perceived quality, bolstered by awareness campaigns, significantly enhance loyalty. Consumers prefer brands with visible certifications, suggesting that awareness of regulatory endorsements strengthens loyalty in Ghana (Amoako *et al*., 2020) [2].

According to a study by Seifu Alemayehu (2016) [25], in Ghana, who examined brand equity dimensions, they found that brand awareness significantly influences bottled water loyalty by enhancing brand recall and trust. The study suggests that consistent branding reduces consumer uncertainty in markets with variable water quality. The study used a sample size of 265 and a convenience sampling method to examine brand equity dimensions.

An Ethiopian study by Amogne (2016) [3] assesses consumer behaviour toward packaged water in Addis Ababa. The study finds that brand awareness, driven by television and radio advertising, influences purchase decisions but has a weaker effect on loyalty due to low consumer understanding of label information. Only 43% of respondents checked chemical compositions, and 85% did not understand them, indicating that awareness alone may not translate into loyalty without education (Amogne, 2016) [3].

According to Bah *et al*. (2018) [4], brand awareness is significant in fostering loyalty in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The author examines consumer perceptions of packaged water in Sierra Leone. The findings suggest that brand awareness, driven by labelling and branded messages, influences purchase behaviour but not necessarily loyalty. The author underscored that consumers prioritize perceived safety over brand familiarity, indicating that awareness must be paired with trust to foster loyalty (Bah *et al*., 2018) [4].

In Ethiopia, Amogne's (2016) [3] study highlights that while brand awareness influences initial purchases, loyalty is limited by low awareness of water quality standards. The study recommends educational campaigns to strengthen the link between awareness and loyalty, particularly in low-literacy contexts (Amogne, 2016) [3].

Muma *et al*. (2022) [19] examine factors affecting consumer behaviour towards local versus imported FMCGs in Zambia. The results indicate that quality, price, and availability influence loyalty, with brand trust playing a mediating role. While the study does not focus on bottled water, it suggests that awareness of imported water brands may drive loyalty among Zambian consumers who perceive them as higher quality (Muma *et al*., 2022) [19].

A water sector study by Kayombo *et al*. (2016) [15] explores consumer awareness of water issues in Lusaka and Kitwe. The findings show that awareness campaigns increase willingness to pay for water services but do not directly address bottled water loyalty. However, the study implies that similar awareness strategies could enhance loyalty to bottled water brands by educating consumers about quality standards (Kayombo *et al*., 2016) [15].

2.2 Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Strategies in Enhancing Brand Reputation of Bottled Water

Marketing communication strategies, including advertising, social media, public relations, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), play a pivotal role in shaping brand reputation, where product attributes are leveraged to build brand reputation. Brand reputation, a critical intangible asset, influences consumer trust, loyalty, and purchase decisions.

Batra and Keller (2016) propose a framework for integrated marketing communication, emphasizing the interplay of traditional and digital media to enhance consumer engagement. Integrated Marketing Communications is a prominent framework, advocating for consistent messaging across advertising, social media, public relations, and packaging to enhance brand equity. Their "bottom-up" communications matching model suggests tailoring messages to consumer decision stages, which is particularly effective for bottled water brands emphasizing purity and health benefits.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) [24] found that interactive social media content fosters consumer-brand engagement, enhancing brand reputation through positive electronic word-of-mouth. For bottled water, brands like Evian leverage social media to promote sustainability and premium quality, using visually appealing content to connect with health-conscious consumers. A study by Kim and Ko (2020) [17] found that luxury water brands leveraging Instagram campaigns with lifestyle influencers saw a 25% increase in brand favourability among millennials. However, global brands face challenges in standardizing campaigns across diverse cultural contexts, as cultural misalignment can damage reputation.

In Africa, marketing communication strategies for bottled water are influenced by economic constraints, cultural diversity, and limited digital infrastructure. Burgess and Malhotra (2020) [6] emphasize that African markets require customer-centric marketing due to diverse consumer preferences and low brand loyalty. Bottled water brands often position themselves as safe alternatives to unreliable public water sources, making trust and reputation critical.

CSR initiatives are particularly effective in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hinson *et al*. (2015) note that CSR activities, such as water purification projects, enhance corporate reputation by addressing local needs. In Kenya, brands like Keringet have strengthened their reputation by supporting community water access aligning with stakeholder theory's emphasis on social performance. However, Amoako (2019) [1], warns that inconsistent service quality can undermine these efforts, necessitating robust communication to maintain trust.

In Southern Africa, bottled water brands compete in a market shaped by urbanization, rising middle-class consumption, and health consciousness. Blankson *et al*. (2020) [7] argue that business-to-consumer branding in the region benefits from culturally relevant positioning, such as emphasizing family well-being and local heritage. A study by Mwamba and Qutieshat (2021) [20] note that South African bottled water brands leveraging WhatsApp for promotions saw increased consumer engagement due to its low-cost, direct nature. CSR initiatives, such as water donations during droughts, also enhance reputation, as seen with brands like Bonaqua in South Africa.

2.3 The Limitations of Distinctive Brand Elements in Strengthening Brand Recognition

Distinctive brand elements are critical drivers of brand recognition, defined as consumers' ability to identify a brand under varying conditions (Keller, 2016). These include brand names, logos, slogans, packaging, colours, and other sensory cues that create a unique brand identity. For instance, iconic logos like Nike's swoosh or Apple's bitten apple are instantly recognizable, leveraging simplicity and consistency to embed in consumer memory. Brand recognition, a critical component of brand equity, refers to consumers' ability to identify a brand under different conditions, often measured by recall and familiarity. Keller (2016) further notes that brand recognition falls on a continuum from low awareness to top-of-mind awareness, with distinctive elements accelerating this progression. In the bottled water industry, where products are often perceived as low-involvement and functionally similar, distinctive brand elements play a pivotal role in capturing consumer attention, fostering recognition, and building loyalty.

Liu *et al*. (2020) [18] conducted a systematic review, finding that brands with globally consistent elements benefit from higher recognition due to standardised marketing across markets. however, they critique the overemphasis on global standardisation, arguing that neglecting local cultural cues can weaken resonance in diverse markets. similarly, Steenkamp *et al*. (2003) demonstrate that perceived brand recognition enhances the willingness to pay through strong brand associations, but only when elements are perceived as authentic.

Brands like Nongfu Spring in China use minimalist packaging and culturally resonant imagery to enhance recognition among middle-class consumers (Liu, 2016). Foreign Language Display (FLD) theory is particularly relevant in Asian markets, where foreign brand names signal prestige and quality (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2020) [11]. A study in Thailand found that English or French brand names for bottled water were perceived as higher quality than local Thai names, enhancing recognition among urban consumers (Charinsam & Speece, 2020). According to Saffer *et al.* (2020) [22] sensory brand experiences positively influence perceived authenticity and recognition for high-tech and beverage brands, including bottled water. In Japan, brands like Lohas use eco-friendly, lightweight bottles to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, reinforcing brand recognition through sustainable design (Nie & Wang, 2021) [21].

Ikpe *et al*. (2021) [14] explore the African fashion brands in Lagos and Nairobi, noting that distinctive elements like vibrant colours and cultural motifs enhance recognition by aligning with local aesthetics. For example, Nigerian brand Maki Oh uses Adire fabric patterns in its branding, embedding cultural identity into its visual elements. This suggests a challenge for African brands, that, while distinctive elements rooted in cultural heritage can foster recognition, limited resources and global competition often constrain their reach.

According to Huang *et al*. (2015) [12], consumers' mindset measures are critical for building brand equity in African markets, where trust in product quality is paramount. For bottled water, this suggests that clear branding can enhance recognition. For example, in Nigeria, brands like Nestlé Pure Life use simple, clean packaging to signal reliability, which resonates with consumers concerned about waterborne diseases.

Sevedghorban *et al*. (2016) note that business-to-business branding in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as MTN and Dangote, relies on distinctive elements like bold logos and community-oriented slogans to build trust and recognition. For instance, MTN's yellow logo and "Everywhere You Go" slogan leverage simplicity and emotional connection to achieve top of mind brand awareness in multiple markets.

Recent work by Sakupapa (2021) [23] indirectly touches on branding through a cultural lens, suggesting that Zambian brands face challenges from global competitors with stronger marketing budgets, limiting their ability to scale distinctive elements.

2.4 Literature gap

Although extensive research has explored branding effects on consumer purchasing preferences globally and within the Asian, African, Sub-Saharan, and regional context, there remains a significant gap in studies that directly assess how branding affects consumer behaviour in the bottled water industry. Though global studies highlight the role of brand awareness, they often focus on developed markets or generic fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs), with limited attention to bottled water specifically. Additionally, the interplay of environmental concerns and brand awareness in shaping loyalty remains underexplored.

The Asian perspective lacks longitudinal studies on how evolving consumer preferences affect the awareness-loyalty link. Additionally, there is limited research on rural versus urban differences in bottled water loyalty, despite significant market heterogeneity.

African studies tend to focus on urban consumers, neglecting rural markets where bottled water penetrating is growing. Additionally, the role of counterfeit brands, which erode trust and loyalty, is underexplored despite their prevalence in African markets.

There is a significant gap in Zambia-specific research on bottled water, particularly regarding how brand awareness influences loyalty. Studies on rural consumers, who may rely on informal water sources, are absent, as are investigations into the role of local versus international brands.

This research seeks to fill this gap by focusing on how branding affects consumer purchase decisions, in a specific urban setting of Lusaka. By investigating these themes in a localized context, this study will offer a clearer understanding of the drivers of consumer purchase decisions within Zambia and contribute to a more targeted solution of satisfying consumers and increasing market share of the businesses.

3. Research Methods

A descriptive research design was adopted to conduct the study, which gave in-depth information about the phenomenon at hand. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the collection and generation of data for the 50 respondents. This means that both data and in-depth insights were used to collect data and explain findings. The quantitative approach provided statistical evidence of consumer preferences and purchasing patterns, while qualitative approach explored consumer perceptions and motivations behind their choices.

3.1 Target population

A study population is a well-defined set of people or group of things, household, community, firms, or services that or which are being investigated (Noholas, 2013). The study targeted consumers in Zambia's retail sector, with a focus on Lusaka residents who are consumers of bottled water, particularly those familiar with Bigtree beverages' Vatra mineral water.

3.2 Sampling design

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals or elements from a larger population in order to draw conclusions that are generalizable to the whole population (Noholas, 2013). The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling methods to come up with a sample for the study. Under probability sampling method, stratified random sampling was considered for selecting a representative sample, to ensure representation across age, gender, and education level in the quantitative approach. The qualitative approach under non-probability sampling method used purposive sampling to select participants with significant exposure to branding, particularly, Vatra mineral water brand.

3.3 Sample Size determination

Using Yamane's formula for determining sample size at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the study estimated a sample size of approximately 350 respondents, based on the assumed population size of 2.7 million people in Lusaka. This formula is widely used for social science research in large populations where the total number is known or can reasonably be estimated. The sample is adequate to allow for subgroup analysis while maintaining manageable data collection logistics.

$$n = \frac{Z^{\wedge}2.P.(1-P)}{E^{\wedge}2}$$

Where:

n = Sample Size
Z = Z-Score (1.96 for 95% confidence)
P = Population proportion
E = Margin of Error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{1.96^{\wedge}2 * 0.5 * (1-0.5)}{0.05^{\wedge}2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8146 * 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$\boldsymbol{n \approx 384.16}$$

Therefore, the base sample size is 384 respondents. However, due to expected time and resource constraints, the study used a sample of **50 respondents** to balance statistical correctness with feasibility.

3.4 Data collection methods

Data was collected through a survey using two structured questionnaires for both Bigtree Beverages marketing staffs and consumers, as data collection tools. The survey gathered quantitative data on demographics, brand awareness, brand loyalty, purchase frequency, and factors influencing bottled water purchases. A Likert scale was also used for measuring attitudes and behaviours.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis and descriptive statistical analysis were used to analyse data. Thematic analysis involves the classification of words and phrases that emerge from interviews and related to the same content into major themes (Bryman, 2018). Data was analysed using Microsoft Excel, employing descriptive statistics to summarize consumer demographics and purchase patterns, inferential statistics such as cross tabulations, and regression analysis to examine the relationship between branding elements and consumer behaviour. Qualitative data was coded manually to identify recurring themes and interpret contextual insights. The integration of both data types ensures comprehensive findings that are statistically robust and socially grounded.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents (Bio Data)

Table 1.1: Demographic Information

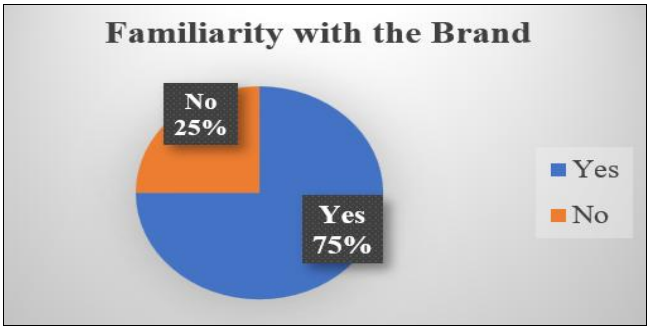
Variable	Category	%
Age	18-34	72%
Gender	Female	64%
Occupation	Employed/Self-Employed	65%
Purchase Frequency	Daily/Weekly	82.5%

Source: Field Data (2025)

Staffs accounted for part of the 72% of those aged 18-34, with 70% of them having at least a bachelor's degree, and 70% of them having worked for between 1-6 years.

Findings reveal that consumers were mostly young (72% aged 18-34), urban professionals or students (70%), and frequent buyers (82.5% daily/weekly), aligning with Lusaka's demographic where bottled water addresses urban hydration needs amid water quality concerns. Staff demographics (mostly 25-44, bachelor's holders with 1-6 years tenure) indicate a youthful, educated team capable of digital-savvy strategies.

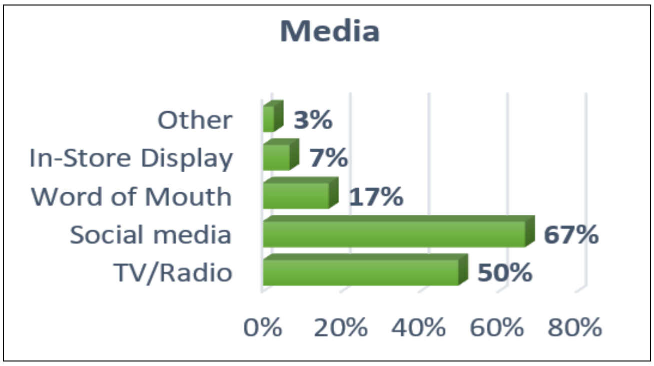
4.2 Effects of Brand Awareness on Consumer Loyalty



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.1: Familiarity with the Brand

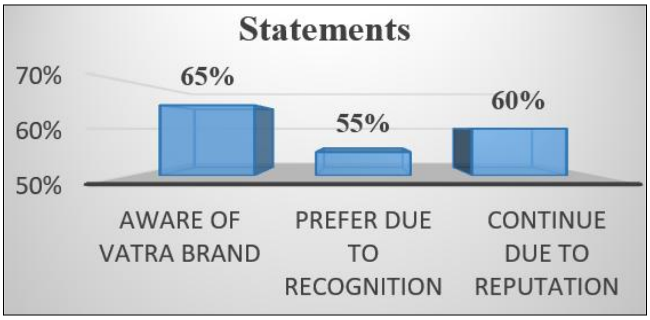
Findings revealed that 75% of the respondents were familiar with the Vatra brand, indicating strong brand awareness for Vatra mineral water in Lusaka. The strong awareness suggests Vatra has successfully penetrated the urban consumer market, but the 25% unfamiliar segment presents an opportunity for expanded outreach.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.2: Media through which respondents first learned about Vatra

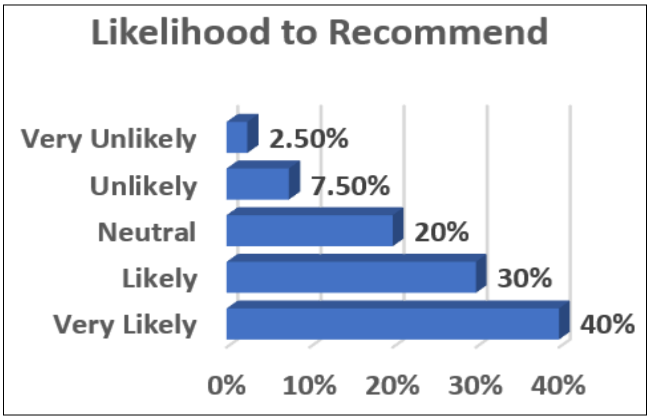
Findings indicate that most of the respondents first heard and learned about Vatra brand through social media (67%) and TV/Radio (50%). This suggests Bigtree's multi-channel strategy in creating awareness, ensuring consistency across different media, to reinforce familiarity of the brand. This also reflects Bigtree's strong digital presence, and role in mass market reach.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.3: Level of Agreement on brand awareness statements

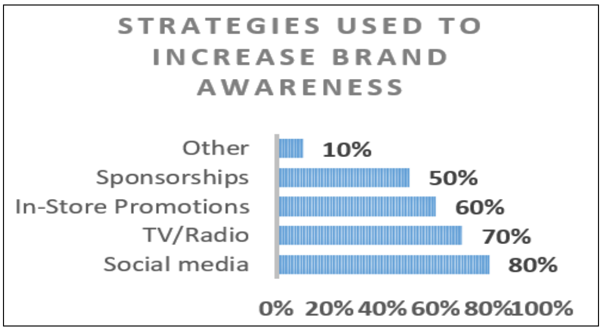
Findings reveal that 65% either agree or strongly agree that they are aware of Vatra mineral water brand, reflecting Vatra's strong market presence. Only 55% agree or strongly agree that they prefer Vatra due to recognition, indicating that while consumers recognize Vatra, brand recognition alone does not strongly drive preference over competitors or alternatives. 60% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they continue buying Vatra due to reputation, suggesting that reputation supports repeat purchases.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.4: Likelihood to Recommend Vatra mineral water

Findings reveal that of the 40 respondents, 28 (70%) of them are either likely or very likely to recommend Vatra mineral water to others, positioning it as a highly recommendable brand. This also suggests strong consumer advocacy, which is crucial for organic growth in the bottled water market. High recommendation rates indicate that Vatra's branding, resonates well with consumers, fostering loyalty. Respondents justified their feedback citing comments such as affordability, and availability. Others that were unlikely to recommend Vatra cited justification such as, "it is okay, but nothing special".



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.5: Strategies Used by Marketing to Increase Brand Awareness

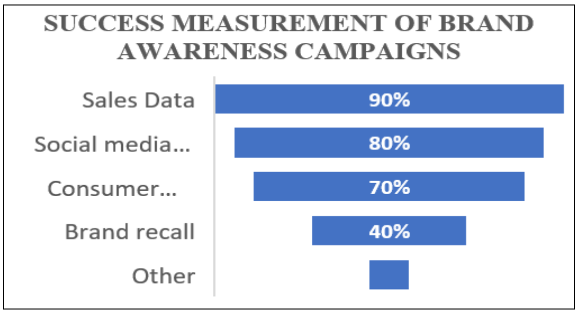
Findings reveal that Bigtree marketing use social media (80%) and TV/Radio (70%) as the cornerstone for their awareness efforts. Social media seemingly dominates likely due to cost-effectiveness and reach in urban areas, where smartphone penetration supports platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Tv/Radio complements this with a broader mass appeal, especially for older demographics. This mix suggests a balanced strategy focusing on visibility and storytelling, while leveraging traditional channels for credibility. Others specified "partnerships" as a strategy they are embarking on, referring to collaborations with creative agencies or influencers. This was justified as an emerging strategy.

Table 1.2: Level of Agreement on brand awareness marketing efforts

Statement	Frequency	Mean	% Agree ≥4
Campaigns Increase awareness	8	4.0	80%
Strategies encourage loyalty	6	3.6	60%
Monitor feedback for loyalty	7	3.9	70%

Source: Field Data (2025)

Findings show that staffs have strong confidence in the awareness campaigns (80% agree or strongly agree), reflecting success in visibility efforts. Some staffs have moderate confidence with 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing about strategies creating repeat purchases. 70% of the staffs agree or strongly agree that monitoring and showing proactive consumer engagements create consumer loyalty.

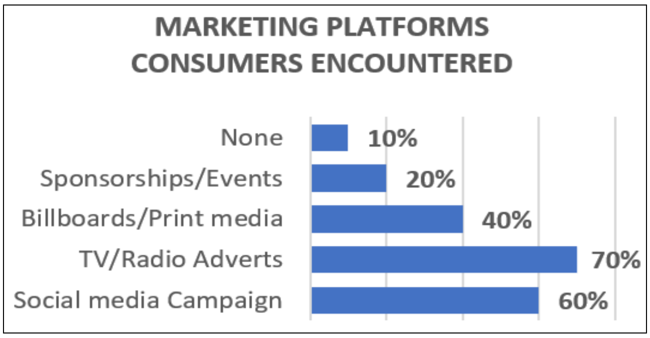


Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.6: Success Measurement of Brand Awareness Campaigns

Findings reveal that sales data (90%) is a core metric used to measure brand awareness by tracking retail performance or units sold of the Vatra mineral water. This directly links awareness to revenue, crucial in a competitive market. Social media metrics (80%) also indicates a strong reliance on digital analytics and impressions on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Consumer surveys (70%) indicate proactive efforts to directly gather consumer feedback, a consumer-centric approach, essential for understanding consumer preferences. Brand recall (40%) suggest less focus on long-term brand recognition metrics. This is a potential gap, as recall is critical for differentiation in a saturated market.

4.3 Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Strategies



Source: Field Data (2025)

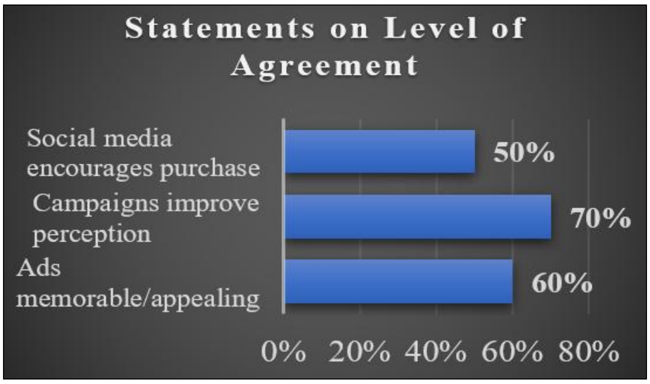
Fig 1.7: Marketing Platforms Consumers Encountered

Findings reveal that TV/Radio adverts (70%) and social media campaigns (60%) are the platforms on which most consumers encounter the marketing efforts of Bigtree's Vatra mineral water. This indicates the robust mass-media reach, offering a balanced approach which leverages Zambia's high radio listenership and TV access to complement digital efforts. Social media illustrates Bigtree's successful digital strategy, particularly among tech-savvy consumers, with platforms like Facebook and Instagram being key for this strategy, with some justifying that social media is more engaging and so they had high chances of bumping into an advert about Vatra. Respondents expressed a moderate encounter of marketing efforts through Billboards (40%), indicating a vital supporting role that can target out-of-home advertising to reinforce brand recall during daily commutes, especially in high-traffic urban areas. Respondents had a low experiential engagement with sponsorships/Events (20%), indicating limited investment or visibility in communities. This could mean a missed opportunity to build emotional connections, especially given Zambia's community-driven culture. 10% respondents that revealed they have encountered none of the marketing efforts indicates reach gaps, likely from rural areas. This is a critical gap in universal brand visibility, particularly outside urban Lusaka.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.8: Marketing campaign effectiveness in promoting Vatra

Findings reveal that 60% (extremely effective/ very effective) of respondents believe that Bigtree's marketing campaigns are effective in promoting Vatra, signalling strong success among engaged segments. Most of these justified their encounters citing memorable adverts, strong brand recall, and recommendations they received through word-of- mouth. 25% of respondents believe Bigtree's marketing campaigns are solid but not exceptional, citing the lack of standout memorability or emotional resonance, even if awareness is built. The 15% (Slightly/Not at all) reveal gaps in reach, relevance, or execution which could be as a result of low exposure, infrequent buying, and no recalls or adverts or elements as cited by some respondents.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.9: Consumer Perceptions on Marketing effectiveness strategies

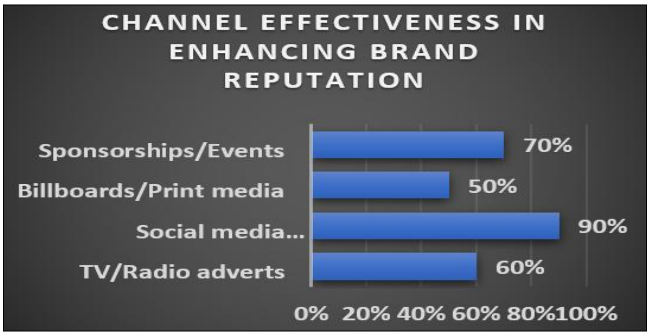
Findings reveal that 70% of the respondents agree/strongly agree, suggesting that campaigns effectively enhance brand image, likely through resonance. 60% agree/strongly agree that ads create positive impressions. Social media purchase encouragement (50%), reveal a conversion gap, where social media builds awareness but struggles to drive immediate purchases.

Table 1.3: Primary Communication Channels Used to Promote Bottled Water

Primary Channel	Frequency	Percentage
Social media	10	100%
TV/Radio	8	80%
Billboard/Print	5	50%
Email	1	10%
Other	1	10%

Source: Field Data (2025)

Findings reveal that 100% of respondents believe Bigtree primarily uses social media as a communication channel, signalling a unanimous adoption of social media as a core strategic pillar in promoting Vatra. 80% of respondents reveal that TV/Radio is also primarily used, suggesting a strong mass-media backbone to complement the digital dominance with a broad, trusted reach. The 50% billboard communication highlights Lusaka's urban spatial dominance, where Vatra is physically embedded in daily commute roads with high traffic. The email paradox (10%), reveal that staff use it, but consumers have not reported encountering it, suggesting that this may not be a consumer awareness driver, as it mainly is used for Business-to-Business interactions. 10% of respondents opted to add "Other", specifying an option of influencer partnerships. This could strike well as emotional connection and word-of-mouth driver, especially on consumers with low exposure on the brand.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.10: Channel Effectiveness in Enhancing Brand Reputation

Findings reveal that staffs believe social media (90%) is key in driving brand reputation as they see it as a real-time and measurable channel. They also believe sponsorships/Events (70%) could be utilised better as it can help create emotional connections with consumers. TV/Radio (60%) was believed to be a credible anchor, which is solid but static in the modern day, and effective for capturing the older/rural consumer, although difficult to convert into sales. Billboards (50%) has the lowest impact, as it mainly targets passive visibility, where consumers see but do not feel the impact.

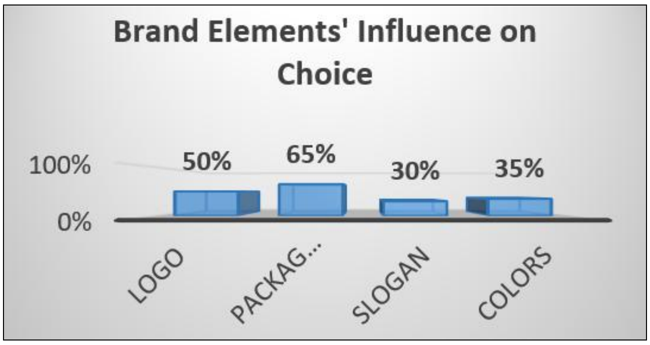
4.4 Limitations of Distinctive Brand Elements

Table 1.4: Familiar Brand Elements

Elements	Frequency	Percentage
Packaging Design	28	70%
Logo	22	55%
Brand Colors	24	60%
Slogan	16	40%
None	2	5%

Source: Field Data (2025)

Findings reveal that consumers are familiar with the packaging design (70%), brand colors (60%), and logo (55%) being stand outs, indicating that Vatra is visually strong. The slogan (40%) and None (5%), may indicate that Vatra is verbally and emotionally not strong. Consumers justified their responses, citing that the matte blue water bottle stands out, and the logo is very visible on the bottles everywhere, the blue color psychologically communicates clean and pure water.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.11: Brand Elements' Influence on Choice

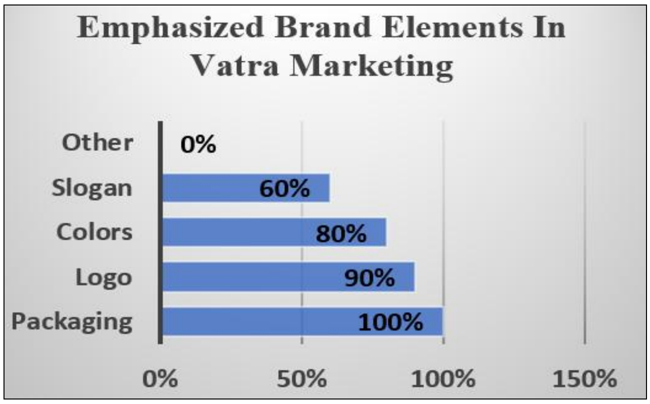
Results indicate that 65% of respondents are influenced to make a purchase due to the packaging, suggesting that consumers are likely to make a purchase due to the visual dominance of the bottle at the shelf. 50% of the respondents are likely to make a purchase choice due to the recognition of the logo. Color (35%) though clean, is not very unique and consumers cited that it does not necessarily influence their choice of Vatra. Slogan (30%), is the least influential.

Table 1.5: Agreeableness on Brand Elements statements

Statement	Frequency ≥4	Mean ≥4	% Agree
Easily recognizable	30	4.2	75%
Packaging stands out	24	3.9	60%
Conveys trust	22	3.8	55%

Source: Field Data (2025)

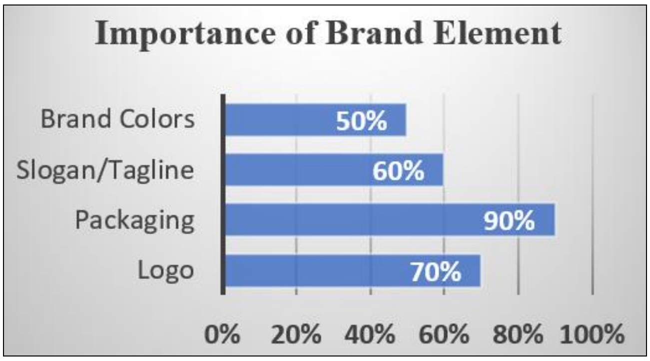
Findings indicate that consumers believe Vatra is easily recognizable (75%) suggesting that the logo is visible enough to drive purchase, and the packaging (60%) stands out with a credible trust (55%), signalling quality.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.12: Emphasized Brand Elements in Vatra Marketing

Findings indicate that packaging (100%) is a key component in Vatra marketing, suggesting that Bigtree uses the physical product itself to do the rest of the marketing. Logo (90%), is the second close shows that the logo visibility is also very key in creating product differentiation, especially in this saturated market of bottled water. Colors (80%) and Slogans (60%) offer a verbal backbone and supporting role in marketing the Vatra mineral water.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Fig 1.13: Importance of Brand Elements in Strengthening Brand Recognition

Findings indicate that staff value packaging (90%) and logo (70%) as key elements in strengthening brand recognition. Slogan and Brand colors are moderately important as they provide supporting roles in strengthening brand recognition.

Table 1.6: Agreeableness of Marketing Staff to Brand Elements Statements

Statement	Frequency ≥4	Mean ≥4	% Agree
Easily recognizable	9	4.2	90%
Differentiates from Competitors	6	3.8	60%
Conveys trust/quality	8	4.0	80%

Source: Field Data (2025)

Findings show that staff believe Vatra is known (90%) and trusted (80%), but only partly different (60%) from competitors. Staff strongly agree that the brand is visually memorable, likely indicating consistent and distinctive use of visual identity. They also agree that the brand successfully projects quality and reliability through conveyance of trust and quality. Staff also admitted that the brand stands out, but not overwhelmingly compared to competitors.

4.5 Discussion of Results

This section addresses some of the key findings and briefly gives an analysis to the study in line with the research objectives. The following are some of the major findings of the study:

The study sought to assess the effects of brand awareness on consumer loyalty, the target population in Lusaka was tested on their familiarity of Vatra mineral water brand, how they first got to hear or learn about the brand, and how likely they are to recommend the brand to the next person. This section was crisscrossed with questions gathering data from marketing staff at Bigtree beverages relating to brand awareness and marketing strategies being put in place to ensure consumers are well informed. The findings demonstrate robust brand awareness for Vatra with 75% consumer familiarity and 65% agreement/strong agreement that they are aware of the brand (mean = 3.8). Discovery channels were dominated by social media (67%) and TV/Radio (50%), aligning closely with Bigtree's strategy (80% social media and 70% TV/Radio prioritization by staff). This multi-channel coherence has established strong salience, the foundational block of Keller's (2001) CBBE pyramid, mirroring global patterns where sustained advertising drives top-of-mind awareness in commoditised categories like bottled water (Foroudi, 2019, Keller 2016).

However, awareness translates only partially into deep loyalty. While 70% of consumers are likely/very likely to recommend Vatra and 60% continue purchasing due to reputation, preference driven purely by recognition is lower (55%), with loyalty justifications centred on affordability, availability, taste, and purity rather than emotional attachment. This echoes Maziriri (2020) findings in Southern Africa that availability and quality trump emotional branding in price-sensitive markets. In Zambian context, recent work by Muma *et al.* (2022) [19] confirms that local brands like Vatra derive loyalty primarily from functional trust rather than prestige, explaining why some respondents described Vatra as "okay, but nothing special".

Critically, the 25% unfamiliarity rate and lower confidence among staff in loyalty-building strategies (60% agreement) reveal a gap at the CBBE pyramid's upper levels (Judgement, feelings, resonance). Unlike Nigerian urban markets where awareness paired with safety perceptions strongly predicts loyalty, Zambian consumers appear more transactional, consistent with Howell *et al.*'s (2019) [13] bottom-of-pyramid observations and Amogne's (2016) [3] Ethiopian findings on limited label comprehension weaknesses. Vatra has achieved Keller's (2001) "performance" level through consistent quality but lags in "resonance", leaving it vulnerable to cheaper alternatives or other brands perceived as superior (Muma *et al.*, 2022) [19].

Consumers encountered Vatra's marketing predominantly through TV/Radio (70%) and social media (60%), with 60% rating campaigns very/extremely effective due to memorable health-focused messaging. Staff unanimously prioritised social media (100%), followed by TV/Radio (80%), reflecting a digital-first shift that leverages Zambia's growing smartphone penetration. This integrated approach supports Batra and Keller' (2016) IMC framework that social media amplifies engagement and electronic word-of-mouth, evident in Vatra's strong recommendation intent (70%).

Yet, a clear channel mismatch emerges, as staff's digital optimism contrasts with consumers' heavier reliance on traditional media, underscoring Darley *et al.*'s (2015) warning that African advertising effectiveness depends on cultural congruence. TV/Radio's mass reach better suits Zambia's hybrid media landscape, where radio remains dominant outside urban centres, while social media excels among the study's young (72% aged 18-34 years) demographic. The low exposure to experiential channels (sponsorships/events at only 20%) represents a missed opportunity for resonance-building through community engagement as Nyarku and Ayekple (2018) found in Ghanaian bottled water brands gained 30% loyalty uplift through CSR and community projects. Similarly, South African brands like Bonaqua and Aquelle leverage events and sustainability narratives effectively (Blankson *et al.*, 2020; Mwamba & Qutieshat, 2021) [7, 20], an approach Vatra underutilises despite Zambia's communal culture.

The 15% of consumers rating campaigns only slightly/not effective, often citing lack of emotional depth or memorability, aligns with global critiques of standardised campaigns failing cultural resonance (De Mooij, 2017). Staff's high self-assessment versus consumer moderation highlights a perceptual gap common in African markets (Dadzie *et al*., 2019). Overall, Vatra's communication strategy excels at awareness and favourable judgements, but needs more culturally rooted, experiential tactics to climb to feelings and resonance in the CBBE Model, especially as health consciousness rises across Africa (Mintel, 2023; Euromonitor International, 2023).

Visual elements dominate Vatra's recognition; packaging (70% familiarity, 65% strong influence on choice), brand colors (60%), and logo (55%) far ahead of slogan (40%). Consumers praised the matte blue bottle for signalling "clean and pure" water psychologically. The blue palette effectively evokes purity, a global standard in bottled water, and aligns with Asian evidence that harmonious, clean designs enhance recognition in high-aesthetics cultures (Liu, 2016).

However, the slogan's weak recall (40% familiarity, 30% influence) constitutes a clear limitation. Staff emphasise packaging (100%) and logo (90%) but rate slogan only moderately important, confirming verbal elements are deprioritised. In Zambia, where many competitors also use blue, visual distinctiveness is sufficient for shelf standout but insufficient for deep differentiation.

Staff agree Vatra is known (90%) and trusted (80%) but only partially different (60%), admitting it projects quality and reliability more than uniqueness. This places Vatra firmly in Keller's (2016) "salience and performance" zone but not yet at full imagery or resonance, leaving it exposed to competitors despite high satisfaction (80%).

Consumers reported high satisfaction (80% satisfied/very) with Vatra mineral water, suggesting that branding positively affects consumer behaviour. Satisfaction mirrors Vatra's "pure" positioning. Staffs highlighted key strengths of Bigtree in the marketing of Vatra, such as, strong local identity, consistent quality, and strong social media engagements. However, they also highlighted the main challenges they face in the marketing of Vatra mineral water, such as, price wars with competitors, and low brand recalls in areas outside Lusaka. Overall, branding is a strength, particularly in packaging and social media, but competition and adaptation are key challenges.

5. Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrates that product branding significantly shapes consumer behaviour in the bottled water industry, with Vatra mineral water emerging as a well-recognized but not yet deeply loyal to brand. Key findings indicate that there is high brand salience, with 75% consumer awareness and 70% recommendation intent, confirming Vatra's strong top-of-mind position, driven by TV/Radio (70%) and social media visibility (80%). The blue bottle functions as a cognitive shortcut for purity and safety, highlighting packaging as the dominant equity driver among consumers and staff alike, outpacing logo, slogan, and colors. While 80% of consumers are satisfied, repeat purchase hinges on price and quality as highlighted by consumers, not emotional attachment. This means that loyalty is conditional, and the findings signal vulnerability to substitutes. Social media is the most effective and encountered platform, yet events and rural penetration remain underleveraged.

Based on the theoretical framework by Keller (CBBE Pyramid), Vatra achieves salience and performance, but lags in resonance as it has low emotional loyalty. Vatra is a trusted urban convenience, not a beloved Zambian icon. The visual strength compensates for verbal weakness, but without deeper experiential and community-rooted activation, resonance will remain elusive.

6. Acknowledgement

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