



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONSUMER PREFERENCE TOWARDS PACKAGED DRINKING WATER: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study is exploratory in nature. The paper presents a critical review of literature pertaining to previous research studies by examining consumer preference and factors expected to influence its development. This paper classifies research articles according to the determining factors of consumer preference. The study is based on secondary data which were collected from various sources like journal articles with peer-reviewed, books, government publication, conference proceedings and other relevant works. The search of literature was conducted by using major multi-purpose databases such as Web of Science (Thomson Reuters), Pro Quest, Research gate, Emerald, Science Direct and EBSCO. In particular, this study develops a conceptual model that includes five antecedents of consumer preference those affect the consumption of packaged drinking water. The literature were reviewed and an assumption was made that consumer preference towards packaged drinking water is affected by five independent variables namely; marketing factors, social influence, demographic factors, sensory factors and psychological factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Water is a prime natural resource, a precious national asset, a basic human need and the elixir of human, faunal and floral life. Experts have ranked water as second only to oxygen as essential. For life apart from aiding in digestion and absorption of food, water regulates body temperature and blood circulation, carries nutrient and oxygen to cells and removes toxins and other wastes. The availability of water however continues to remain the same. In fact, due to failure of monsoon and continued consumption for domestic and industrial purposes, the ground water table had been depleted in several parts of the country. This natural resource is becoming scarce in many places and its availability is a major social and economic concern. The failure of monsoon, non-availability of pure water has necessitated inventing packaged drinking water. Now the order of the day is to consume packaged drinking water which includes the aspects, quality, worth, affordable price and easy carrying. Today business world had accorded in large consumption of packaged drinking water as it eliminates diseases like dengue, cold, fever, metropolis attacks, dysentery and other viral infections. So, the manufacturers step in to the process of inventing packaged drinking water which is of sterilized, ultra violet treated, concrete absorption and cleaning of virus in nature.

With a rise in health awareness, increase in tourism and the easy availability of bottled water, the per capita consumption of bottled water in India is on the increase. The total market was valued at Rs.60 billion in 2013, of which the top five players accounted for 67 per cent of the market share. This market is expected to grow at CAGR of 22 percent, to reach Rs.160 million in 2020. The bottled water industry in India witnessed a boom in the late 1990s soon after Bisleri launched its packaged drinking water in the country. This significant growth was fuelled by a surge in advertising by the industry players that "bottled water was pure and healthy". Today, with a rise in health awareness, poor quality of tap water, and the ease of availability of bottled water, the per capita consumption of bottled water in India is on the increase. India's packaged bottled water industry is currently dominated by the top 5 players including Bisleri, PepsiCo, Coca Cola, Dhariwal and Parle. These companies struggle to penetrate the small cities and towns due to poor infrastructure, thus providing an opportunity for small regional players to build a presence in regional markets. Maximum sale of bottled water comes from the retail sector; but this is changing with demand coming from social functions and corporate events, especially for bulk water or bottled water cups. With the aim to capture all the segments of society, players have started foraging into packaged water pouches at low price points, but this is still in the experimental stage.

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Problem Statement: There have been many studies carried out on factors that influence the consumption behavior of packaged

drinking water in various countries like U.K. and Portugal (Doria, Pidgeon and Hunter, 2009), U.S. (Hu *et al.*, 2005), Shanghai, and China (Chen R.P. *et al.*, 2016). Although the local literature does involve studies on packaged water consumption in India, these studies are very limited. In addition, many studies focused mainly on the technical aspects of water like water quality (Tsuzuki, 2015) and its mineral composition (Baba *et al.*, 2008; Miller, M. 2006). Similarly, there evidences from previous studies where impact of different aspects on consumption of packaged drinking water have been analyzed. Similarly, product design and brand plays a significance role towards consumer preference (R. Jeya, 2007; Vijayalakshmi 2013; Sasirega and Reddy, 1999). The personal factors like age, gender, occupation, income and life style have a strong impact on consumer preference towards packaged drinking water (Kotler, 2008; Jeya, 2007). The personal factor like gender is considered to an important factor for having different perception and developing preference towards packaged drinking water (Abdullah Yasar, 2011).

Despite the fact that previous studies have been carried out in this area, the way in which various factors interact with to influence perception have yet to be completely understood. Besides that, the possible role of variables such as consumer preference is mostly understudied. In addition, even though the bottled water consumption has been growing all around the world, factors such as convenience, pricing, and promotion are also important. It is also not certain to what degree bottled water is consumed as an alternative to tap water (Anadu and Harding, 2000; Levallois, Grondin and Gingras 1999; Doria, 2006). The impact of personal factors like age, gender, income, occupation, education and life style etc. on consumer preference towards packaged drinking water are to be studied to understand the dynamics in consumer taste and preference. There are various studies highlighting the influence of psychological factors on consumer preference and purchase intention (Kotler, 2000; Claret *et al.*, 2014). Today, the consumers are quite knowledgeable and are aware of various benefits and risks associated with consuming food items (Rimal *et al.*, 2005). The relationship between perceived risk and benefits of packaged drinking water and its impact on consumer preference has to be studied in order to study the psychological aspect of the consumers. Similarly, the demographic characteristics of the consumer play an important role in setting up preference for any product (Rani, 2015; Suganya, S. and Beena, 2017).

It is also very much imperative to study the psychological aspects like attitude, perceived risks and benefits and product knowledge of the consumers on their preference for packaged drinking water. Similarly, the studies have made an effort to understand how the individual's decisions are expected to be influenced by the behaviour of people in their social network (Kahn, 2007; Lane and Potter, 2007) and social norms which can be regarded as the behaviour of the collective society (Araghi, Kroesen, Molin, and van Wee, 2014). The preference for packaged drinking water is to be studied in this angle to find out the impact of social influence on purchase preference. The sensory properties of foods and beverages are operational before, during and after an eating event. They direct us towards a food source, guide preferences, portion selection and the experience of fullness after consumption, as well as facilitating dietary learning.

The sensory factors like taste, appearance, smell and texture determine the consumer preference towards food and beverages and ultimately its consumption decisions (McCrickerd and Forde, 2015; Abdul Rahman *et al.*, 2012; Font-i-Furnols and Guerrero, 2014). The sensory appeals of the packaged drinking water are important element of the study and should be thoroughly examined to understand its influence on consumer preference.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following objectives have been considered for the literature review on Consumer preference towards packaged drinking water:

- To understand the concept and essence of Consumer preference
- To review the existing literature on factors affecting consumer preference towards packaged drinking water.

In search of relevant articles, the search will consist of journal articles with peer reviewed, books, government publication, conference proceedings and other relevant work. The search of literature will be conducted by using major multi-purpose databases such as Web of Science (Thomson Reuters), Pro Quest, Emerald, Science Direct and EBSCO. A search for more articles using the same search key words will be conducted on the Internet using Google Scholar in order to increase the coverage of the literature search. The search criterion for the publication period is up to December 2017. The initial searches revealed that a total 129 articles were found from various sources included academic and professional journals, books and other publications. Then these articles' content would be analyzed for the relevance of method or proxy used for measuring consumer preference. When the articles were found to be relevant to the study agenda, they would be assessed in more detail of its purposes, methodologies and findings. The citation criteria were applied to get the articles which are most valuable to the research topic. After the analysis, 85 relevant articles and books were chosen.

Conceptual Model: The conceptual model (Figure 1) is adapted and builds on previous related studies. It presents the conceptualized interaction among consumer preference (dependent variable) which is affected by five independent variables namely, marketing factors, subjective norms, demographic factors, sensory factors and psychological factors. This will lead to a better understanding of the processes through which the consumer develops a positive preference towards packaged drinking water and will provide a better insight for companies to develop some strategies in order to sustain in the market.

Literature Review: Literature Review is a conscious effort of reviewing the existing literature and gaining fruitful insight from the same. The studies on consumer behaviour have been in abundance and the authors had to ponder on selecting relevant and effective studies conducted across the industries. The inferences of the review have been categorized under following heads to present the learning: consumer preference, factors affecting consumer preference; impact of demography, psychological factors, sensory factors and social factors on Consumer Preferences.

Consumer Preference: Consumer preferences are defined as the subjective (individual) tastes, as measured by utility, of various bundles of goods. They permit the consumer to rank these bundles of goods according to the levels of utility they give the consumer. Elling (1983) explained consumer preference as that character of a consumer which, when the product preferred by him was not available with one dealer, made him to walk to other dealer for the same product. Rogers (1995) and Mason (1990) have explained how consumers form preferences for various goods and services using theories of adoption. Ravichandran K. and Narayan (2004) studied factors determining the brand preference of consumer durables is largely influenced by advertisements, price, quality, performance and availability of products. Kotta Kim *et al.* (2008) in their study examines the influence of extrinsic factors like price, reputation of the product and advertisements have impact on developing strong consumer preference for a product. Abdul Haneef *et al.* (2006) has investigated that consumer behaviour is influenced strongly by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors. Cultural factors include the set of basic values, perceptions, wants and behaviour learned by a member in the society from the family and other important institutions. The social factors include consumer's family, small group, social roles and status. The personal characteristics such as buyer's age, occupation, economic situation and gender influence buyer's decision. A person's buying choices are also affected by four major psychological factors; motivation, perceptions, learning /knowledge, belief and attitudes. Wee (2000) has identified several factors which are responsible for adoption of new electronic products is; relative advantage, perceived risk, complexity, compatibility, image and trail ability. Doyle (2002) has pointed out that product variety; performance, features, design, presentation and size are deciding factors for consumer buying decisions. Today there is an increasing demand for healthy and nutritional products as a consequence of consumers being better educated and more demanding; which leads to a need for new products and a more differentiated food product assortment Linnerman *et al.*, (1999). In fact, consumers want high quality products that also deliver specific benefits in terms of health, safety and environmental quality Van der Heuvel *et al.*, (2007). How consumers perceive product attributes is a critical aspect in the food choice process Kupiec and Revell, (2001). Several studies have been conducted to examine how consumers evaluate different product attributes in numerous food products. Health, nutrition, taste, price, convenience are some of the criteria consumers use to determine which product is more attractive Bech-Larsen *et al.*, (2003).

Factors influencing Consumer preference towards packaged drinking water: In the following sections will review the literature on the factors those have impact on developing a positive preference towards packaged drinking water. The factors are broadly classified as; Marketing Mix Elements, Demographics features, Sensory factors and Psychological factors.

Marketing Mix and Consumer Preference: The marketing mix comprises a set of marketing decisions that management make to implement the positioning strategy of the business and to achieve its objectives (Doyle 2002). Marketing literature identifies the four P's (4P's) (product, price, place and promotion) as the components of the marketing mix (George

2004; McCarthy 1986). Currently, with marketing more integrated into organizations and with a wider variety of products and markets, some authors have attempted to extend its usefulness by proposing an additional three P's, namely: people, processes, and physical evidence (Morrison 1996; Payne 1993; Zeithaml and Bitner 1996; George 2004). Product concept is one of the four alternative concepts under which organizations conduct marketing strategies. Kotler (2000) argues that customers will favor those products that offer the most quality, performance, and features. Management in these product-oriented organizations focuses their energy on making good products and improving them over time. Food safety has been found to be motivator of food choices. Evaluation of the research suggests that consumer perceptions of quality are based mainly upon subjective experience of water clarity, taste and odour. Previous research suggests that consumers associate the appearance, taste and odour of drinking water as a direct indication of its purity. The reasons choosing bottled water vary from person to person, but the outcome is the same: bottled water has become the most popular beverage in the U.S.A and the consumers feel a sense of safety in consuming bottled water rather than tap water (Miller, 2006). Deliza *et al.* (2003) suggested that package designers should consider consumer expectations about the product's sensory attributes when designing the labels. In order to reach consumers needs and be successful in the market, producers should try to understand the sensory and packaging characteristics of a food product (Munrray and Delahunty, 2000).

The factors like functionality, shape, capacity, general look and ecological aspect were the most important attributes that determined consumer choice of packaging (Cichon and Ucherek, 1999). At the same time giving consumer's information about food production had a positive impact on the perception (Dantas *et al.*, 2004). Consumer perception towards brand is an important aspect of marketing mix (Gabor and Contiu, 2012). Jin and Weber (2013) proposed that, brands served primarily as a way for customers to identify and recognize goods and their manufacturer. The focus of brand value creation was on individual goods whereby firms used brands to show ownership and take responsibility for their goods. This in turn helped customers identify and recognize a firm's goods on sight. Khasawneh and Hasouneh (2010) found that the product's brand name influenced consumers' evaluation and subsequently affected their buying decision (Jin and Weber, 2013).

The pricing of a product is a key component of a company's marketing strategy and planning process (Thompson and Arsel 2006). The difference in pricing can also be used to differentiate the company's different products in terms of differences in quality (Erdem *et al.*, 2006). The consumers choose good brand of packaged drinking water due to better quality in delivery, majority of the respondents considered quality, availability and price as the important factor while purchasing (Sasirega and Reddy, 1999 and Ravichandran and Narayanranjan (2004). The promotional mix consists of a variety of personal and non-personal communication techniques (Kotler 2006). The role of awareness besides the income constraint is the key determinant of demand for safe drinking water (Iftikhar Ahmad, 2010). There is a significant effect of advertisement on the sales of brands and consumers preference towards the brand and it also helps in creating an

image both by itself and in the competitive context (Deepak *et al.*, 2002). There is a positive relationship between consumer awareness, brand preference and satisfaction among the consumers of packed drinking water. Fast moving consumer goods must be widely distributed in order to maintain brand loyalty and repeat purchasing. Distribution is therefore, required to place the product within easy reach of consumers (Doyle 2002). FMCG distribution has the maximum channel partners in the Indian market (Bhojar and Nagendra, 2011). The bottled water's wide acceptability is related to the convenience and taste it provides along with the belief that it is purer than tap water, making it a healthy alternative to other beverages (Leivadara *et al.*, 2008). Availability of certain food throughout the year at conveniently located outlets will similarly affect consumers' interest in the product and their search behaviour, purchasing and continued adoption decisions (Du Toit and Crafford, 2003 and Story *et al.*, 1999).

Demographic Factors and Consumer Preference: Prabhakar and Gowthami (2012), studied the role of demographics on attitude towards branded products, tried to find out the possible link between consumer demographics and brand value with respect to consumer durables. Gender could have some influence on food choice and eating behaviour (Ares and Gámbaro, 2007). Marquis (2005) explored the effect of convenience on students' food choices and the effect of gender, time and energy on these choices. Magnusson *et al.* (2001), Lockie *et al.* (2004) and Lea and Worsley (2005) have found that a higher proportion of women than men hold positive attitudes towards organic food. At the same time, Stobbelaar *et al.* (2007) find that adolescent girls are more positive towards organic products than boys. Looking across age groups provides the possibility for detection of possible cohort effects and developmental trends for food choice (Lavin and Lawless, 1998).

Oram *et al.* (1995) also suggested the differences between the adults and younger age groups for food selection. Visual character was the most important factor among children as opposed to gustatory and olfactory for adults, when seeking information for drinking. Food choice differences between ages were also found in a study focused on functional food (Ares and Gámbaro, 2007). Family structure is considered as another factor that affects the food preference. Personal relationships with family members, relatives, and friends influence people to try food. Individuals were found to accept food advice best from those they consider as family or friends. Other influences may include opinions of reference groups or extension advisors (Khan, 1981). Sondergaard and Edelenbos (2007) studied family's decision making for food choice regarding vegetable based food choice for children. Similarly, education plays a central role in shaping food selection, and sometimes education and occupation have indirect links with each other. Binkley and Golub (2007) compared grocery purchase patterns of regular and diet soft drink consumers and investigated whether differences in purchased quantity of diet soft drinks were associated with differences in purchases of other food categories. Results indicated that consumers of diet soda tended to have somewhat more education and to have higher incomes. The higher educated consumers were more interested in healthiness for their eating behaviour. The working time of people also can have an effect on their eating behaviour. For example, in shift workers, irregular sleep and eating patterns

are common and these patterns might disrupt biological rhythms. These irregular daily patterns could have a negative influence on people's eating behaviour and seem to lead to bad dietary lifestyle such as loss of appetite or obesity, increased alcohol intake, and problems with digestion (Lennernäs *et al.*, 1993b).

Sensory Appeal and Consumer Preference: Sensory appeals, such as appearance or colour, texture and taste or smell are some of important influencing factors on the acceptance of food and in eating behaviour for consumers (Radder and Roux, 2005). Taste could influence consumers' product preference for venison. South African consumers' perceived tenderness, juiciness and flavor as primary indicators of the taste of red meat. Taste was the most significant predictor of food choice for this population. Taste was the factor most highly correlated with the frequency of consumption. Aaron *et al.* (1992) also found consumers' preferences of spreads. Consumers had more preference towards more spreadable and better mouth feel spreads. The sensory attraction of a food product and the visual appearance of its packaging are powerful influences on consumer acceptability (Tuorila and Pangborn, 1988) and Cardello 1994). Packaging attributes can persuade consumers to purchase the product, and sensory attributes will confirm if they like it. This process may be determined if the buyer will repeat the purchase (Munrray and Delahunty, 2000). Packages and labels have only a few seconds to make an impact on the consumer's mind (Dantas *et al.*, 2004); during that time, it must catch the consumer's eye, and convince the shopper that it is the optimum option on the shelf (Rowan, 2000).

Psychographic Factors and Consumer Preference: According to Kotler (2000), the Psychological factors have a significant influence on consumer buying behavior. It constitutes motivation, perception, learning, and beliefs and attitudes. Firstly, attitude refers to a person's feelings toward and evaluation of an object, person, issue or event (Fishbein and Azjen, 1975), and consequently the distinctive characteristic of an attitude is its affective/evaluative nature (Axelson and Brinberg, 1989). When a person is motivated, he/she ready to act, yet how that person actually acts is influenced by his or her perception of the situation. Attitudes and beliefs about the characteristics of a certain product and the way it is produced, handled or distributed can influence consumer perception (Claret *et al.*, 2014). Secondly, perceived risk has formally been defined as "a combination of uncertainty plus seriousness of outcome involved, and the expectation of losses associated with purchase and acts as an inhibitor to purchase behavior" (Peter and Ryan, 1976). Most scholars claim that consumers' perceived risk consists of different types, which vary according to the product (or service). Six components or types of Perceived risk have been identified: financial, performance, social, physical, privacy and time (Grewal *et al.*, 1994). McCorkle (1990) proposes resource risk, which comes from the loss caused by the dishonorable and dishonest behavior of the manufacturers or sellers. The defined feature of remanufactured products is the fact that they combine both new and restored components. Consumers' value remanufactured products less than new ones because they perceive them as being of lower quality (Ferrer and Swaminathan, 2006). Featherman and Pavlou (2003) confirm that risk perception has a direct negative impact on consumers' purchase intention.

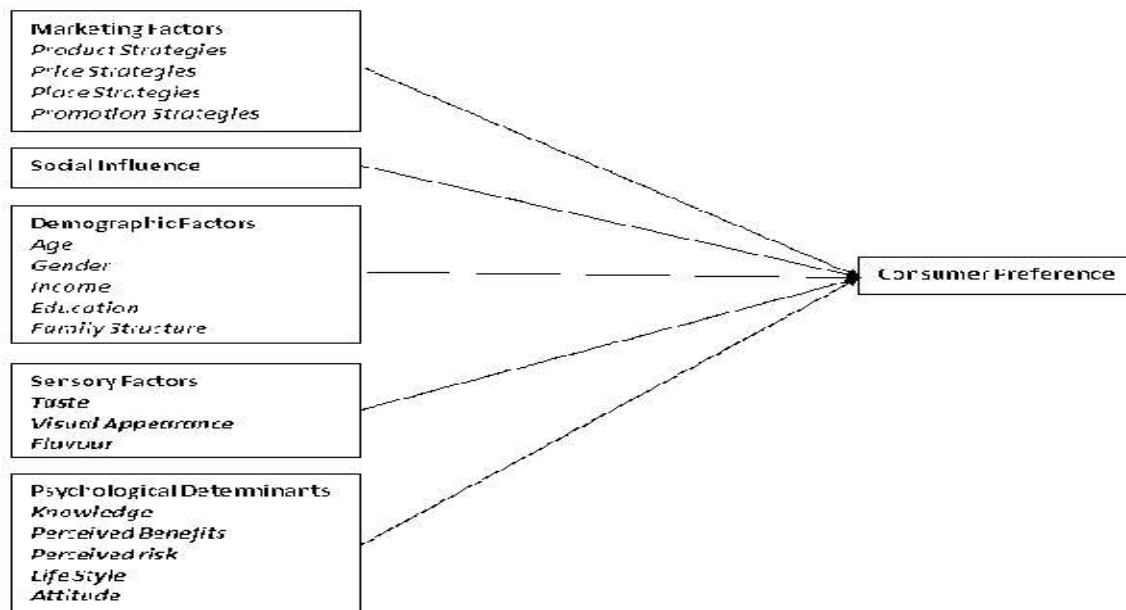


Figure 1. Conceptual model for consumer preference

Forsythe and Shi (2003) find that risk perception has a negative impact on both purchase attitude and purchase intention. Heijden (2003) models perceived risk as an indirect influence on consumer online purchase intention via consumer attitude. Thirdly, product knowledge of consumers may influence their purchase intention in multiple ways. Rao and Monroe (1988) show that product knowledge influences the information processing of consumers and consequently influences their purchasing behavior. Bettman and Park (1980) point out that product knowledge can lower risk and uncertainty. And the more knowledge that consumers have on the products, the better they can understand the product concept because they are able to assess the quality of the products, which can improve the accuracy of their purchasing decision. Fourthly, perceived benefits are considered as important determinant for consumer preference. Perceived benefit is defined as a consumer's belief about the extent to which he or she will become better off from the purchase and/or use of an object (Kim *et al.*, 2008). Perceived benefits come from a combination of attributes—including tangible and intangible, or intrinsic and extrinsic, functional and nonfunctional, direct and indirect, etc. (Forsythe, Liu, Shannon, and Gardner, 2006; Snoj *et al.*, 2004; Lee, 2009).

Perceived benefit varies depending on the consumption situation and the context of such consumption, and it is a pivotal part of a consumer's choices. The factors like taste (Haryani *et al.*, 2007; Simopoulos and Bhat, 2000; Tinker, 1999), moderate price (Winarno and Allain, 1991), quantity, quick service, accessibility (Tinker, 1999, 2003), simplicity, and menu variety (Winarno and Allain, 1991) have been often mentioned as perceived benefits for the food products. Lastly, Lifestyle is defined as “a systematic concept representing the living characteristics of a certain society or group of people, which also differ from those of other societies and groups of people” (Lazer, 1963). The findings of Han *et al.*, (1991) quoted in response to fashion involvement of consumers, that it might enhance fashion-oriented impulse buying behaviour among those who habitually wear fashion outfits. Ko (1993) reported that impulse buying behavior regarding fashion

products were associated with patterns repeated emotions as well as fashion-oriented impulse buying behaviour. Brunso, Grunert, and Bredahl (1996) defined five food-related lifestyle segments: careless, uninvolved, rational, conservative, and adventurous. The results obtained here were also proven by international lifestyle surveys (Buckley *et al.*, 2005 and Ryan, Cowan, McCarthy, and O'Sullivan, 2004).

Social influence and Consumer Preference: Social influence is an important subject in experimental social psychology (Kelman, 1961). Turner (1991) defined social influence as “the processes whereby people directly or indirectly influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of others”. An individual's decisions are expected to be influenced by the behaviour of people in their social network (Kahn, 2007; Lane and Potter, 2007) and social norms which can be regarded as the behaviour of the collective society (Araghi, Kroesen, Molin, and Van Wee, 2014). Social influence can be explained as a state where someone complies with the expectations of another or considers the information acquired from another as a sign of reality (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). In many studies, social groups and subjective or social norms were found to have a positive correlation with purchase intention and actual purchasing of green and other ethically produced products (Eze and Ndubisi, 2013; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Consumers often take expectations and behavior of others into consideration when they decide what is appropriate and social norms thus profoundly influence their preferences and behavior (Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The packaged drinking water is gradually being accepted by a large consumer base for its health benefits and packaging convenience. It has now become a common place commodity and almost a necessity in metros (Murali and Ramesh, 2007). The bottled mineral water consumption in the world is increasing by an average 7% each year, in spite of the fact that bottled mineral water has a higher price. Growing population and the population shift from rural to urban areas have

increased the consumption of bottled water worldwide (Guler, 2007). The packaged drinking water shows a tremendous potential in Indian market. It is estimated that estimates that the industry will be worth approximately INR 160bn (USD 2.67 billion) by FY 2018, growing at a rate of 22% (Value Notes, 2017). There are lots of factors that have made the packaged drinking water a preferred one in compare to the tap water. The scarcity of water in summer, poor quality of tap water, rise in health awareness, increase in tourism and the easy availability of bottled water are some major determinant for significant increase in the per capita consumption of bottled water in India. The market is witnessing an increase in the companies to cater high demand from the consumer side. In this juncture, the consumer preference towards packaged drinking water is to be analyzed thoroughly in order to ascertain their feelings, attitude and perception which in return will ensure the sustainability of the industry. Therefore, this study makes a step towards to understand the consumers' preference toward packaged drinking water through diversified angles. The study has tried to identify the important factors that have a significant influence on the consumers' preference. The conceptual models was developed by reviewing related literatures will be useful to understand the consumer preference in the context of consumption of packaged drinking water.

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