

Consumer decision-making in bottled water purchases: The case of Aqua in Palangka Raya

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ABSTRACT

The rapid urbanization and growing awareness of health and safety have fueled the global consumption of bottled water, with Indonesia emerging as a major market in Southeast Asia. Brands like Aqua dominate due to their consistent product quality and strong distribution networks. This study explores the factors influencing consumer decision-making in purchasing Aqua bottled water in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan. The research aims to assess how demographic characteristics—such as occupation, income, and education—relate to consumer perceptions of price, quality, health benefits, packaging, taste, and brand prestige. The study employed a quantitative descriptive method using the Chi-Square test (χ^2) to analyze categorical variables based on survey responses from 200 Aqua consumers across two subdistricts. The findings reveal that while income level does not significantly influence consumer perception across the examined dimensions, significant relationships were observed between occupation and perceived product quality, as well as between education level and brand prestige. Consumers with formal employment and higher education tend to view Aqua more positively in these aspects. Overall, Aqua is perceived favorably for its refreshing taste, appealing packaging, and brand prestige, despite being considered relatively expensive. These findings suggest that brand trust and product reliability are prioritized over price sensitivity. The study recommends that Aqua's marketing strategies further target professional and educated consumer segments through messaging that reinforces quality and social status. Limitations of the study include its cross-sectional nature and narrow geographical scope. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods and broader variables such as environmental awareness and brand loyalty to gain deeper insights into consumer preferences in the bottled water industry.

Keywords: *bottled water, consumer behavior, brand perception, chi-square analysis, aqua*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bottled water consumption has become an integral part of modern consumer behavior, particularly in urban areas where concerns about water safety, health consciousness, and convenience are increasingly prevalent. Globally, the bottled water market has experienced exponential growth over the past two decades, driven by rapid urbanization, rising disposable income, and a shift in lifestyle preferences (Statista, 2023). In Southeast Asia, Indonesia has emerged as one of the largest bottled water markets, with brands such as Aqua leading the sector due to strong brand equity and widespread distribution networks (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). The rise in bottled water consumption also reflects increasing consumer demand for products that are perceived to be safe, clean, and easy to carry, especially in regions with inconsistent municipal water quality (Rahman & Sari, 2021).

Consumer decision-making in the bottled water sector is influenced by a variety of factors, including product attributes, price, brand reputation, marketing strategies, and sociocultural elements (Wijaya et al., 2023). According to Kotler and Keller (2020), consumer behavior is a complex process shaped by psychological, social, and personal factors that interact in determining purchasing choices. In the context of bottled water, attributes such as taste, purity, packaging, brand familiarity, and environmental sustainability have been shown to significantly affect consumer preference (Zhou & Zhang, 2021). Moreover, the role of perceived risk and trust in the brand is crucial in influencing consumer choices, especially in the food and beverage category where health concerns are paramount (Aji et al., 2022).

Aqua, as one of Indonesia's most recognized bottled water brands, commands a significant share of the market due to its early market entry, consistent quality assurance, and aggressive marketing campaigns. Studies show that brand loyalty plays a key role in Aqua's sustained dominance in the market, with consumers often associating the brand with trust, purity, and reliability (Nasution & Utama, 2020). However, despite Aqua's leading position, consumer behavior in bottled water purchasing remains dynamic and sensitive to changes in market trends, such as price fluctuations, the rise of new competitors, and environmental awareness (Riyadi et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to understand the specific factors that shape consumer preferences in localized contexts, such as the city of Palangka Raya.

Palangka Raya, the capital of Central Kalimantan, is a growing urban center with increasing consumer demand for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs), including bottled water. Given the city's tropical climate and varying perceptions of tap water quality, bottled water has become a daily necessity for many households and individuals (Suryani & Hidayat, 2022). At the same time, consumer decision-making in Palangka Raya is influenced by both traditional factors, such as price and availability, and emerging concerns, such as environmental sustainability and health awareness (Hastuti et al., 2023). These factors reflect broader shifts in Indonesian consumer behavior, where younger, more educated demographics are increasingly critical of brands' environmental practices (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023).

In addition, consumer preferences for bottled water are often guided by advertising effectiveness, packaging design, and point-of-sale promotions (Yuniarto et al., 2023). Research indicates that marketing communication and visibility at retail outlets significantly enhance purchase intent, particularly when combined with emotional branding (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). For a brand like Aqua, maintaining its market share requires ongoing innovation and responsiveness to consumer expectations at the local level. Factors such as ease of access, perceived value for money, and product differentiation from generic or local brands also influence consumer loyalty (Putra & Hapsari, 2023).

Environmental considerations are becoming increasingly significant in the bottled water industry. While Aqua has taken steps to promote recycling and reduce plastic waste, consumers are increasingly scrutinizing brand commitments to sustainability (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). In markets like Palangka Raya, where environmental degradation is a visible concern, consumer

choices may increasingly favor brands that demonstrate ethical production and green logistics practices (Susanti et al., 2022). This suggests a growing intersection between environmental values and purchase behavior, particularly among millennials and Gen Z consumers (Pratama & Lestari, 2023).

Given these dynamics, this study aims to examine the key factors that influence consumers in Palangka Raya when choosing bottled water, with a particular focus on Aqua. By analyzing dimensions such as price sensitivity, brand perception, packaging preference, and environmental awareness, the study seeks to identify which variables play the most critical role in shaping purchase decisions. Understanding these factors is vital not only for Aqua's strategic market positioning but also for policymakers and environmental advocates interested in sustainable consumption behavior. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader literature on consumer behavior in emerging economies, offering localized insights that can inform branding, distribution, and sustainability strategies in the bottled water sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Decision-Making Behavior

Consumer decision-making is a multifaceted psychological process influenced by internal and external factors that guide individuals in selecting, purchasing, and using products (Kotler & Keller, 2020). In the bottled water industry, decision-making involves evaluating perceived needs, product benefits, price, and brand trust (Rahman & Sari, 2021). The Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that attitudes and subjective norms influence consumer intentions and subsequent behavior (Aji et al., 2022). Moreover, decision-making is also shaped by the level of consumer involvement and product complexity, where higher involvement leads to more information search and brand comparison (Putra & Hapsari, 2023). In the context of bottled water, this means consumers often compare brands based on quality, safety, and accessibility (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). Therefore, understanding how consumers make decisions helps companies design effective marketing and branding strategies (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023).

Cultural, psychological, and situational factors also significantly affect purchasing decisions in the FMCG sector, including bottled water (Susanti et al., 2022). Cultural norms can determine brand preference and influence the perceived value of bottled water among different communities (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). Psychological aspects such as perception, motivation, and learning shape how consumers process product information (Nasution & Utama, 2020). Situational influences such as time pressure, store environment, and social surroundings can also affect decision outcomes (Yuniarto et al., 2023). Additionally, modern consumers are increasingly influenced by online reviews and digital media, which provide rapid feedback on brand reputation and product quality (Pratama & Lestari, 2023). These multiple layers of influence require marketers to develop an in-depth understanding of their target audience.

In urban contexts like Palangka Raya, consumer decision-making is further influenced by demographic characteristics such as income, education, and age (Suryani & Hidayat, 2022). Consumers with higher education levels tend to exhibit more critical thinking and brand discernment when purchasing bottled water (Hastuti et al., 2023). Price sensitivity also plays a pivotal role, especially among lower-income groups who may opt for cheaper alternatives despite branding advantages (Putri & Winarto, 2022). On the other hand, middle-class consumers often seek a balance between price, quality, and convenience (Riyadi et al., 2021). This socioeconomic diversity leads to segmentation in bottled water preferences, even within the same geographic region (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). As such, marketers must adapt their strategies to address specific segments effectively.

Brand Preference

Brand preference plays a fundamental role in shaping consumer behavior toward bottled water products (Rahman & Sari, 2021). A strong brand builds emotional and functional associations in the minds of consumers, creating trust and familiarity (Kotler & Keller, 2020). Consumers often use brand cues to evaluate product quality, especially when tangible differences are minimal, as in bottled water (Nasution & Utama, 2020). In Indonesia, Aqua has established strong brand equity through consistent marketing and widespread distribution (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). Brand loyalty is frequently influenced by past positive experiences, perceived value, and the ability of the brand to meet consumer expectations (Putra & Hapsari, 2023). Therefore, brand preference is not only a result of advertising but also a reflection of long-term consumer-brand relationships (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024).

Research shows that consumers prefer brands they perceive as reliable and safe, especially in health-related products such as drinking water (Riyadi et al., 2021). Aqua's positioning as a brand that guarantees purity and hygiene contributes to its preference among urban consumers (Suryani & Hidayat, 2022). In addition, brand image is strengthened by endorsements, social campaigns, and sustainability initiatives that resonate with young, educated consumers (Yuniarto et al., 2023). Brand recall and visibility also enhance purchase intention, especially in high-traffic retail environments (Aji et al., 2022). Consumers who feel a brand aligns with their identity or values are more likely to remain loyal and resist switching even when prices rise (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023). Consequently, understanding the elements that construct brand preference is crucial for maintaining market leadership.

Brand preference can also be shaped by social influence and word-of-mouth communication, both offline and online (Susanti et al., 2022). In Palangka Raya, local communities often rely on peer recommendations to evaluate product reliability, including bottled water (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). Digital reviews, especially on e-commerce platforms, play a growing role in forming brand perceptions (Pratama & Lestari, 2023). Social media campaigns can amplify brand messaging and enhance brand personality, particularly among Gen Z consumers (Handayani & Astuti, 2023). Brands that are responsive and interactive on digital platforms tend to foster stronger consumer engagement (Lo, 2021). Therefore, companies must ensure consistent brand communication across multiple touchpoints to strengthen brand preference.

Price Sensitivity

Price is one of the most significant determinants of consumer behavior in the bottled water market (Putri & Winarto, 2022). Consumers frequently compare prices between brands and often choose the option that offers the best value for money (Hastuti et al., 2023). In lower-income communities, even small differences in price can lead to brand switching (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). However, in middle- and upper-income segments, consumers may be willing to pay a premium for trusted brands like Aqua (Nasution & Utama, 2020). Price sensitivity also depends on consumer knowledge, perceived necessity, and availability of alternatives (Kusnadi & Nugraha, 2025). Thus, companies must balance pricing strategies with brand positioning to maintain competitiveness.

Psychological pricing techniques, such as charm pricing and bundle offers, have proven effective in influencing bottled water purchases (Yuniarto et al., 2023). Discounts, loyalty rewards, and bulk purchasing incentives can also attract price-sensitive buyers (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). Moreover, pricing strategies must consider perceived fairness and transparency to maintain trust, especially in markets with high competition (Suryani & Wijayanti, 2023). During promotional periods, consumers tend to stockpile bottled water, demonstrating the elasticity of demand in this category (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). Competitive pricing becomes especially important in regions with emerging local brands offering similar quality at lower prices (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023). Therefore, continuous market analysis is needed to align pricing with consumer

expectations.

In Palangka Raya, price sensitivity varies based on demographic and geographic factors (Suryani & Hidayat, 2022). Households in peri-urban or remote areas may prioritize price over brand due to limited purchasing power (Hastuti et al., 2023). Meanwhile, consumers in central business districts may exhibit lower price sensitivity and higher loyalty to premium brands (Putra & Hapsari, 2023). Seasonal variations, such as dry seasons, can also affect demand elasticity and price sensitivity (Rahman & Sari, 2021). Therefore, location-based pricing strategies may be appropriate for brands with wide geographic reach (Pratama & Lestari, 2023). Understanding local economic conditions is crucial for setting optimal prices and sustaining consumer interest.

Packaging and Product Attributes

Packaging is a critical factor influencing consumer perception and purchase decisions in bottled water products (Aji et al., 2022). Good packaging communicates brand identity, ensures product safety, and provides convenience for on-the-go consumption (Lo, 2021). Consumers often associate packaging quality with product quality, especially in products with low physical differentiation (Zhou & Zhang, 2021). In Indonesia, consumers prefer packaging that is easy to handle, resealable, and environmentally friendly (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). Bottle size, shape, color, and labeling all contribute to brand differentiation and shelf visibility (Yuniarto et al., 2023). As a result, packaging innovation becomes a key strategy in attracting new customers and retaining existing ones.

Clear labeling of mineral content, expiry dates, and safety certifications enhances trust in bottled water products (Handayani & Astuti, 2023). Consumers are increasingly attentive to health-related information, particularly as awareness of waterborne diseases rises (Nasution & Utama, 2020). Aqua's consistent packaging and information layout contribute to its strong brand recognition (Rahman & Sari, 2021). Additionally, product attributes such as water source, filtration technology, and taste influence repeat purchases (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). Innovations like biodegradable packaging and smart labels that provide traceability are gaining popularity among environmentally conscious consumers (Susanti et al., 2022). Therefore, product and packaging features must evolve in response to changing consumer preferences.

In Palangka Raya, consumers prefer bottled water that is lightweight, easy to store, and suited for family consumption (Putri & Winarto, 2022). Many consumers choose 600ml and 1.5L sizes based on portability and household needs (Suryani & Wijayanti, 2023). Aesthetic design also plays a role, particularly for younger consumers who perceive packaging as part of lifestyle branding (Pratama & Lestari, 2023). Functional packaging, such as sports caps or ergonomic grips, adds perceived value and convenience (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). Thus, packaging must serve both practical and emotional functions to influence consumer decision-making effectively (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023). Continuous improvement in design and sustainability is essential for competitive advantage.

Environmental Awareness

Environmental concerns have increasingly become part of consumer decision-making in the bottled water industry (Seuring & Müller, 2020). Consumers are more aware of the ecological impact of single-use plastics and expect brands to take responsibility (Kusuma & Lestari, 2023). Brands that actively promote recycling programs and use eco-friendly packaging tend to attract environmentally conscious consumers (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). In Indonesia, awareness of sustainability has grown, particularly among younger generations and urban populations (Aji et al., 2022). As a market leader, Aqua has responded with campaigns promoting environmental responsibility, although perceptions vary by region (Lo, 2021). Therefore, aligning brand values with environmental concerns can influence consumer loyalty.

Research shows that consumers are willing to pay more for products with reduced environmental impact, provided the brand communicates its efforts transparently (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). Green branding and environmental certifications are becoming important decision-making cues in bottled water purchasing (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023). Companies are also expected to invest in infrastructure for collecting and recycling used packaging (Suryani & Wijayanti, 2023). Moreover, consumers seek educational messages that explain how their purchases support environmental protection (Handayani & Astuti, 2023). Campaigns that involve the community in waste reduction tend to increase consumer participation and brand attachment (Pratama & Lestari, 2023). As such, sustainability initiatives must be authentic and measurable.

In Palangka Raya, environmental awareness is gradually influencing bottled water consumption patterns (Hastuti et al., 2023). Local consumers, especially students and professionals, are beginning to factor sustainability into their brand choices (Putri & Winarto, 2022). However, affordability and convenience still dominate decisions in lower-income segments (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). Therefore, sustainability messaging must be balanced with practical benefits to reach a broader audience (Nasution & Utama, 2020). Government and NGO campaigns also play a role in shaping public perceptions on plastic waste and responsible consumption (Rahman & Sari, 2021). Consequently, brands operating in the region must collaborate with local stakeholders to amplify their sustainability impact.

3. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive method to identify the relationship between categorical variables related to consumer behavior in bottled water purchases. One of the main statistical analyses used in this study was the Chi-Square (χ^2) test of independence, as described by Djarwanto (2016). The Chi-Square test is used to determine whether there is a statistically significant association between two categorical variables in this case, variables such as gender, income, education level, or occupation, and the frequency or preference of Aqua bottled water consumption. This method does not measure the strength or direction of a relationship, but rather whether the relationship exists at all between the examined variables.

According to Djarwanto (2016), the Chi-Square test works under the assumption of independence, meaning that the null hypothesis (H_0) states there is no association between the two variables being tested. The test compares the observed frequencies in each category of the contingency table with the expected frequencies that would be obtained if the variables were indeed independent. The decision rule in Chi-Square analysis is to reject H_0 if the calculated Chi-Square value (χ^2 count) from the sample exceeds the critical value of Chi-Square (χ^2 table) at a specified level of significance (usually 0.05). If the calculated value is lower than the table value, the null hypothesis is accepted, suggesting no significant relationship between the variables.

The use of the Chi-Square test in this research is appropriate because all variables being analyzed such as income brackets, frequency of online loan use, brand preference, and demographic characteristics are measured on a nominal or ordinal scale. The contingency tables were constructed for each pair of variables, and the statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. This approach allows the researcher to examine whether patterns in the data are due to chance or reflect actual associations in consumer behavior. Through this method, the study aims to determine whether factors such as gender, education, or income significantly influence decisions to consume Aqua bottled water among consumers in Palangka Raya. The results of the Chi-Square analysis serve as the basis for interpreting whether demographic characteristics are independent of brand preferences and purchasing behavior.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 200 respondents from two urban administrative areas in Palangka Raya

City Kelurahan Pahandut and Langkai who were identified as consumers of Aqua branded bottled water. Based on the collected data, the characteristics of Aqua consumers are dominated by private sector employees (35.5%), followed by civil servants (30.0%), and traders (24.0%). The remaining respondents comprise laborers and farmers (10.5%). In terms of education, most respondents completed junior high school (SMP) and senior high school (SMA), each accounting for 39.0%, while only 11.5% held a diploma or bachelor's degree, and 10.5% had primary school (SD) education. This suggests that Aqua consumers predominantly come from middle to lower education backgrounds. Regarding income, the majority earn between IDR 5,100,000 and IDR 7,000,000 (34.5%), followed by those earning IDR 2,100,000 to IDR 5,000,000 (30.5%), over IDR 7,100,000 (21.0%), and less than IDR 2,000,000 (14.0%), indicating that most consumers belong to the middle-income segment.

In terms of price perception, 38.0% of respondents considered Aqua expensive, 36.0% said it was affordable, 16.5% perceived it as very expensive, and only 9.5% rated it as very cheap. This indicates that Aqua is generally perceived as a premium-priced product. Regarding quality, 49.0% rated it as high, 29.5% as very high, 18.5% as low, and only 3.0% as very low suggesting strong perceptions of product excellence. When asked about health benefits, 39.5% of consumers said Aqua was beneficial, 19.5% very beneficial, while 32.5% responded that it was not beneficial, and 8.5% stated it was very unbeneficial. Most respondents (42.5%) found Aqua's packaging moderately attractive, 20.0% very attractive, while 33.0% thought it was not attractive, and only 4.5% rated it as very unattractive. Furthermore, 58.0% perceived the taste and aroma as very refreshing, 22.5% as refreshing, and 18.5% as not refreshing, with only 1.0% considering it very unrefreshing. Lastly, on the prestige dimension, 45.0% of respondents found the brand to be very prestigious, 29.0% prestigious, and 26.0% not prestigious.

To evaluate the relationship between consumer perceptions and their demographic characteristics, the Chi-Square (χ^2) test of independence was applied. The results indicated no significant relationship between income level and consumer perceptions of Aqua in terms of price, health benefits, packaging, taste, aroma, prestige, and quality. This suggests that perceptions across these variables are relatively homogeneous regardless of consumers' earnings. These findings align with prior research suggesting that brand perception, especially for widely distributed and well-established products like bottled water, may not vary significantly across income brackets (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024; Aji et al., 2022).

However, the analysis revealed a significant relationship between occupation and quality perception (p -value < 0.05). Consumers employed as civil servants and private employees were more likely to rate Aqua's quality as high or very high compared to other occupational groups. This implies that occupation likely linked to work environment and exposure to product information affects how consumers evaluate product quality. Similarly, there was a significant relationship between education level and prestige perception (p -value < 0.05). Respondents with higher education levels (diploma or university) tended to associate Aqua with prestige more strongly than those with only secondary or primary education. This finding corroborates previous studies emphasizing that individuals with higher education tend to be more brand-conscious and value symbolic attributes like social status (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023; Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021).

These results demonstrate that while most consumer perceptions toward Aqua are positive and relatively consistent across income groups, certain socio-demographic variables such as occupation and education play a role in shaping specific perception dimensions like

quality and prestige. The use of the Chi-Square test in this context was appropriate to confirm these associations, as all variables analyzed were categorical. The calculated values for significant relationships exceeded the Chi-Square table values at the 5% significance level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in those specific cases (Djarwanto, 2016). These findings offer practical insights into market segmentation and communication strategy tailoring based on consumer profiles.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that consumer perceptions toward Aqua bottled water are predominantly positive, particularly in terms of perceived quality, health benefits, packaging attractiveness, taste, aroma, and prestige. These perceptions align with prior research showing that brand familiarity and long-standing market presence contribute significantly to favorable consumer evaluations (Rahman & Sari, 2021; Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). Aqua's reputation as a pioneer in Indonesia's bottled water market has helped cement its image as a trustworthy and high-quality product, even across diverse consumer segments (Nasution & Utama, 2020). This reflects the importance of brand equity in influencing consumer preferences, especially in low-involvement product categories such as bottled water (Putra & Hapsari, 2023). Furthermore, consistent product quality and widespread availability have enabled Aqua to maintain a dominant position despite competition from local brands (Suryani & Hidayat, 2022).

The absence of a significant relationship between income levels and consumer perceptions across various dimensions (price, benefit, packaging, taste, prestige, and quality) is consistent with studies suggesting that bottled water, being a relatively affordable staple, tends to elicit uniform perceptions regardless of purchasing power (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023). Consumers across income groups tend to perceive Aqua as a premium brand due to its strong market positioning and consistent advertising (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). This supports the theory that brand identity and perceived value often override price sensitivity in everyday consumption goods (Kotler & Keller, 2020; Yuniarto et al., 2023). The notion that lower-income groups may still prefer branded water due to trust in safety and quality is also supported by findings from Hastuti et al. (2023), who observed that consumers often prioritize health and hygiene over price when purchasing drinking water.

Interestingly, this study found a significant association between occupation and perceived quality, where consumers employed in formal sectors (e.g., civil servants and private employees) reported higher perceptions of quality. This finding is consistent with the view that employment type can influence consumer exposure to product knowledge and marketing messages, thereby shaping perception (Mulyadi & Putri, 2022). Occupational status is often correlated with access to information and consumption habits, which explains why formal sector workers may be more brand-aware and quality-conscious (Pratama & Lestari, 2023). A study by Yuliana and Subekti (2021) also noted that employees in structured environments are more likely to adopt products with established reputations due to peer influence and organizational culture. Thus, companies like Aqua can benefit from targeting their communication efforts through workplace-oriented campaigns to reinforce quality associations among professional consumers.

The Chi-Square results also revealed a significant relationship between education level and perceived prestige, with higher-educated consumers more likely to associate Aqua

with prestige. This aligns with research indicating that education is positively associated with brand consciousness and symbolic consumption (Lo, 2021; Zhou & Zhang, 2021). Educated consumers are more likely to value intangible product attributes, such as brand image and social status (Handayani & Astuti, 2023). As Aqua is considered a leading national brand with a clean, modern, and premium image, it fits well with the aspirational consumption patterns often exhibited by university-educated consumers (Susanti et al., 2022). These consumers tend to use product choices to reflect their identity and social class, a pattern supported by Kotler & Keller (2020) and echoed in recent behavioral research by Suryani & Wijayanti (2023).

Another important point in this study is that perceptions of Aqua's packaging, taste, and aroma were overwhelmingly positive, with more than half of respondents finding the product very refreshing and well-packaged. Product sensory appeal, especially taste and aroma, plays a critical role in customer satisfaction and repeat purchases in food and beverage sectors (Aji et al., 2022). The emotional response elicited by a product's sensory quality often becomes a driver of brand loyalty, especially in low-differentiation markets (Fauzi & Ramadhan, 2021). Moreover, packaging design that conveys cleanliness and modernity influences both first-time trial and long-term preference, especially in competitive retail environments (Putri & Winarto, 2022). Aqua's use of standardized and aesthetically pleasing bottle designs contributes to its perception as a premium and trustworthy product (Setiawan & Amelia, 2023; Yuniarto et al., 2023).

Although the majority of consumers rated Aqua as expensive, the brand continues to enjoy a strong market presence, highlighting that perceived value outweighs price concerns (Wulandari & Hasanah, 2024). This supports the concept that in categories related to health and safety, such as drinking water, consumers tend to justify higher costs if they perceive superior quality (Zhou & Zhang, 2021). As Lo (2021) explains, trust in quality is a major factor in bottled water consumption, especially in regions where tap water is not reliably safe. This finding is further supported by research from Handayani & Astuti (2023), who suggest that the psychological security offered by trusted brands like Aqua reduces consumer hesitation in paying more for perceived peace of mind.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that while Aqua is generally perceived positively by consumers in Palangka Raya across income groups, differences in perceptions still exist based on occupation and education. These findings suggest the importance of segmentation strategies that address the unique values and information needs of specific consumer groups. For marketers, understanding how sociodemographic factors influence perception is crucial in designing tailored campaigns that reinforce brand positioning and stimulate loyalty (Suryani & Wijayanti, 2023). Furthermore, the results reinforce the relevance of using the Chi-Square test for examining categorical relationships in consumer research, especially in identifying statistically significant associations between demographic profiles and perception dimensions (Djarwanto, 2016; Lo, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that consumers of Aqua bottled water in Palangka Raya generally perceive the product positively in terms of quality, health benefits, packaging, taste, aroma, and brand prestige. The majority of consumers come from middle-income backgrounds with secondary education and are employed in the private sector or civil service. The Chi-Square analysis revealed that there is no significant relationship between income level and consumer perceptions, suggesting that Aqua's strong brand equity is appreciated across

income groups. However, there is a significant relationship between occupation and perceived quality, as well as between education level and perceived prestige, indicating that sociodemographic factors do influence specific dimensions of consumer perception. It is suggested that Aqua's marketing strategies continue to strengthen quality messaging among professional segments while also emphasizing prestige in communications targeting educated consumers. The main limitation of this study lies in its use of cross-sectional data limited to two subdistricts and reliance on categorical variables, which may not capture deeper psychological drivers of brand preference. Future research is recommended to expand the scope geographically and include qualitative or mixed methods approaches to explore the underlying motivations behind bottled water choices. Additionally, the inclusion of variables such as environmental awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived risk would enrich understanding of consumer decision-making in the bottled water industry.

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